



Office of Juvenile Justice  
and Delinquency Prevention

# COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

## PERFORMANCE REPORT

### July-December 2020

*Publication date: Fall 2022*

## WORKING FOR YOUTH JUSTICE AND SAFETY

### VISION STATEMENT

OJJDP envisions a nation where our children are free from crime and violence. If they come into contact with the justice system, the contact should be rare, fair, and beneficial to them.

### MISSION STATEMENT

OJJDP provides national leadership, coordination, and resources to prevent and respond to youth delinquency and victimization. The Office helps states, localities, and tribes develop effective and equitable juvenile justice systems that create safer communities and empower youth to lead productive lives.

This report was produced by Booz Allen Hamilton under contract number DJO-BJA-16-S-0272, awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this report are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. The accuracy of the data in this document is dependent on the precision of grantee data entry. All information included reflects self-reported data provided by OJJDP grantees.

Data during the July-December 2020 activity period was impacted by the Covid-19 global pandemic. Grantees and service providers experienced a disruption to services, which raised obstacles for service delivery and data collection. The following data reflects services adapted to and provided during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is important to note that accurate data rely on correct data tracking and entry by the grantees and those agencies reporting to grantees, as such the data and analysis findings provided reflect the information as reported. The Office of Justice Programs makes no representations as to the accuracy or completeness of the data presented, nor does it make any inferences as to the effectiveness of grant funded programs and the associated outcomes.

## INTRODUCTION

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) administers funds to support the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program to ensure abused and neglected children receive high-quality support in dependency court hearings; improve outcomes for children and dually involved youth in the child dependency system; provide effective advocacy for abused and neglected children through the court process; and build community capacity to support cultural diversity and competency for volunteer advocates. To achieve these goals, OJJDP funds one grantee, the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (NCASA). NCASA is a national membership organization of state and local CASA organizations. NCASA supplies members with training curricula, technical assistance, quality standards, and membership accreditation activities.

Additionally, NCASA provides pass-through funding.<sup>1</sup> Through subgrants, NCASA provides OJJDP funding to member organizations in order to strengthen state networks and support efforts to recruit and train volunteer advocates, manage state and local CASA programs, and strengthen state and local capacities. OJJDP requires NCASA and its subgrantees to regularly report on performance measures to demonstrate the impact of OJJDP funding. This report presents the results of NCASA's awards and its subgrantees' activities occurring between July and December 2020. The total funding available exceeds \$21.3 million.

900

Active local CASA programs



57,776

Children served by local CASA programs

20%

Children who received services for the first time



12%

New volunteer advocates recruited

70%

Children who left foster care to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship



\$21.3

Total funding (in millions)

## NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER ACTIVITIES

OJJDP funding supports NCASA program activities that benefit member organizations and subgrantee activities. NCASA activities include training state and local CASA program staff and volunteer advocates, leading national campaigns to recruit volunteer advocates, and providing members with technical assistance to increase the number of children matched with an advocate. The majority of subgrantees' activities include recruiting volunteer advocates and delivering and expanding state and local CASA services. The performance measures presented below highlight the results of both sets of activities.

<sup>1</sup> National Court Appointed Special Advocates Association. *Organizational Profile*. [http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MP1sE/b.5453887/k.7340/Organizational\\_Profile.htm](http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MP1sE/b.5453887/k.7340/Organizational_Profile.htm)

## SUPPORT OF LOCAL COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE PROGRAMS

NCASA uses OJJDP funding to award subgrants to state and local CASA member organizations to maintain existing services and to expand the number of local CASA programs available in communities across the country. During this activity period, subgrants supported 900 active local CASA programs while no new local programs were implemented (Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Number of New and Existing Local CASA Programs*



## NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES ASSOCIATION PROGRAM STAFF/VOLUNTEER ADVOCATES TRAINED

With the support of OJJDP funds, NCASA develops training resources to assist existing state and local CASA organizations. NCASA targets new state and local CASA programs serving communities with low representation rates, high numbers of abused and neglected children, and gaps in family and children’s services. Member organization training includes volunteer recruitment and retention activities, data collection and reporting, and training on CASA program standards. NCASA also trains volunteer advocates. Trainings can last from 1 to 2 days and are conducted on a variety of topics. Depending on member needs, NCASA trains staff, volunteers, board members, and community leaders. During the July–December 2020 activity period, NCASA had a total of 87,087 program staff and/or volunteer advocates. Of those, 9,543 program staff or other relevant volunteers/advocates participated in trainings (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Percentage of Program Staff or Other Relevant Volunteers/Advocates Trained*



## VOLUNTEER ADVOCATES RECRUITED

OJJDP funding supports national recruitment campaigns coordinated by NCASA to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect and to communicate the positive impact of volunteer advocates in the lives of children. During the July–December 2020 activity period, state and local CASA programs successfully recruited 3,412 new volunteers, resulting in a total of 29,389 volunteers available to advocate for children involved in dependency court (figure 3).

*Figure 3. Percentage of New Volunteer Advocates*

12% NEW volunteer advocates



## PROGRAM DIVERSITY

A key goal of OJJDP’s CASA program is to increase the diversity of volunteer advocates and match children with a volunteer from a similar racial, ethnic, or cultural background. Based on the data presented in table 1, local CASA programs saw improvements in the Hispanic/Latino, multiracial, and Native American ratios, which each decreased their ratios when compared to the previous activity period (previously the ratios were 1-to-4, 1-to-7, and 1-to-9, respectively). The ratio of African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Caucasian/Non-Latino remained steady since the previous activity period. The data continues to indicate a need for more volunteers who are multiracial, African American, Native American, and Hispanic/Latino (see number of children below).

**Table 1. Diversity Matrix**

Race/Ethnicity/ Cultural group	Number of volunteer advocates	Number of children	Ratio of volunteers to children
African American	3,167	14,550	1:5
Asian/Pacific Islander	466	503	1:1
Caucasian/Non-Latino	22,237	30,093	1:1
Hispanic/Latino	2,111	4,954	1:2
Multiracial <sup>2</sup>	496	4,558	1:9
Native American	103	385	1:4
Do not know	809	2,733	1:3
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,389</b>	<b>57,776</b>	<b>1:2</b>

## CHILD AND YOUTH OUTCOMES

Research indicates that representation by a volunteer advocate improves the lives of children involved in the dependency court system. Some of the goals of OJJDP’s CASA program are to increase the number of children matched with a volunteer advocate, keep children safe, and increase the number of children who exit a state or local CASA program due to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship changes. The performance measures in this report highlight the success of state and local CASA programs.

<sup>2</sup> Multiracial is selected if a person identifies in more than one group.

## CHILDREN SERVED

NCASA subgrantees support the ability of state and local CASA programs to provide abused and neglected children with a volunteer advocate. OJJDP funding supports recruitment activities to increase the number of children served by a CASA program. During the July–December 2020 activity period, state and local CASA programs served a total of 57,776 children. Twenty percent of the children served ( $n = 11,494$ ) received services for the first time.

**11,494**  
Children Receiving  
Services for the First Time

## SUBSTANTIATED/INDICATED CHILD ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT

During the July–December 2020 activity period, state and local CASA subgrantees served 57,776 youth who were victims of substantiated child abuse or neglect. Youth ending services 6 to 12 months prior to the current activity period experienced a drastic reduction in substantiated child abuse or neglect.<sup>3</sup> Of the 12,707 youth who ended services 6 to 12 months<sup>4</sup> prior to July–December 2020, less than 1 percent experienced a substantiated report of child abuse or neglect ( $n = 123$ ) (figure 4).

**Figure 4. Substantiated/Indicated Child Abuse or Neglect**

**100%**

of children with substantiated child abuse or neglect reports in the **short term**

57,776/57,776

**<1%**

of children with substantiated child abuse or neglect reports in the **long term**

123/12,707

## CHILDREN WHO EXITED CASA PROGRAMS TO REUNIFICATION, ADOPTION, OR LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP

OJJDP’s CASA program encourages permanent placement for children removed from the home by the dependency system because of abuse and neglect. Reunification is preferred, followed by adoption and legal guardianship. Reunification requires parental engagement and progress in meeting case goals. NCASA guidelines advocate for kinship care or adoption if a parent cannot safely care for a child, if reunification is not in the child’s best interest, or if the court sanctions permanent legal separation from the birth family. Relative or non-relative adoption requires the termination of parental rights. Permanent guardianship could be granted to a relative or non-relative if adoption is not in the child’s best interest. Guardianships do not sever birth parents’ rights and responsibilities and maintain the bond between child and family.<sup>5</sup> Of the number of youth who exited state and local CASA

<sup>3</sup> Short term includes youth tracked who received services during the activity period or youth who exited the program during the activity period.

<sup>4</sup> Long term includes youth tracked for the behavior of interest who exited the program 6 to 12 months before the start of the activity period.

<sup>5</sup> Georgia Court Appointed Special Advocates, Inc. (February 2018). *Path to Permanency: Practical Considerations for CASA*. <https://www.gacasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Path-to-Permanency.pdf>

programs during the reporting period, 70 percent ( $n = 8,941$ ) exited to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (Figure 5). The data does not include children who aged out of the child welfare system before obtaining permanency.

## CONCLUSION

Involvement in the child welfare system can be challenging and traumatic for child victims of abuse and neglect, leaving a lasting impact on their emotional, educational, and social development. OJJDP’s CASA program strives to improve the outcomes for children in the dependency system by increasing the number of children represented by a volunteer advocate (preferably from a similar racial, ethnic, or cultural background) and increasing the number of children exiting due to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship changes. OJJDP achieved its goals by funding NCASA’s delivery of training and technical assistance and subgrants to state and local CASA organizations to provide children with a volunteer advocate.

During the July–December 2020 activity period, OJJDP awarded NCASA \$21.3 million.<sup>6</sup> Subgrantees served 57,776 children, with 20 percent receiving volunteer advocacy services for the first time. The long-term impact of state and local CASA programs resulted in less than 1 percent of youth with a substantiated report of child abuse and neglect during the activity period 6 to 12 months after exiting a CASA program. Additionally, of the youth who exited state and local CASA programs, 70 percent exited due to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship changes. During the July–December 2020 activity period, the CASA program continued to ensure abused and neglected children received high-quality advocacy services, and funds were used to improve outcomes for abused and neglected children.

<sup>6</sup> Total funding equals \$21,316,661.

**Figure 5. Children Exiting CASA Programs to Reunification, Adoption, or Legal Guardianship**

