

CASA First Status Report 2018-2019

The mission of CASA, First Judicial District is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that abused and neglected children in foster care from Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Los Alamos Counties can be safe, have a permanent home, and thrive.

CASA First vision: CASA First envisions a safe, positive, and loving future for all children in our community. CASA First has helped protect thousands of abused and neglected foster children from Santa Fe, Rio Arriba and Los Alamos Counties since 1995.

Our Board of Directors and staff, at their strategic plan meeting articulated the guiding values of CASA First:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committed to Social Justice ▪ Grow, Learn, Evolve, and Adapt ▪ Inclusive ▪ Committed ▪ Kindness ▪ Competency ▪ Supportive ▪ Compassionate/Loving ▪ Proactive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respect for Culture, Community, Relationships ▪ Openness/Transparency ▪ Honesty/Professionalism ▪ Creative ▪ Respecting Children and Families ▪ Thankful/Appreciative ▪ Building Resiliency ▪ Being a model entity that others emulate – Staff/Board/Organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prioritize Children ▪ Committed to Education of ourselves ▪ Collaborative ▪ Committed to Diversity ▪ Servant Leaders ▪ Work as a team ▪ Commitment to Consensus ▪ Ethical |
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CASA First has had a productive year and are ending 2019 with the highest number of volunteers and children served in many years, with 62 CASA Volunteer Advocates representing 130 foster children.

Some of our accomplishments in Fiscal Year 2018-2019 include:

- 175 foster children in 94 cases had a CASA Advocate. (In FY2017-2018 we served 171 children in 91 cases.)
- We served 81% of the children in foster care (compared to 76% last year) and served 80% of the open child welfare cases in our district.
- Even if they are on our waiting list and do not currently have a CASA, we monitor every case, attend every hearing, and fill out an application for CVRC funding for each child in foster care.
- We held two 30-hour new CASA training classes and trained and swore in 19 new Volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates
- 49 children saw their case close: 16 were reunited, 30 were adopted and 2 aged out. One child was released to a supervised group home.
- Volunteers contributed 5495 hours working directly on cases with 6908 total volunteer hours contributed, an increase of 20% from the previous year.
- 215 court reports were filed and 267 court hearings were attended (compared to 169 reports and 237 hearings last year.)

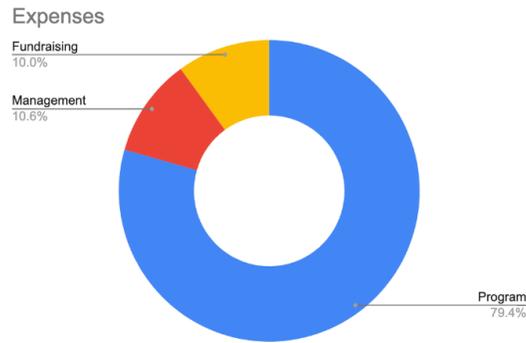
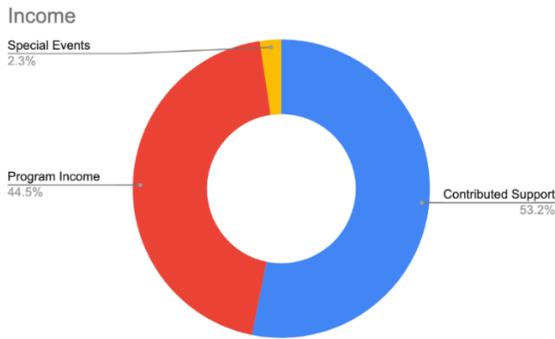
- In addition to 60 hours of CASA Volunteer Advocate pre-services we held, and the multiple state and local trainings offered to our volunteers (we were on planning committee of some), CASA First organized and held over 50 hours of in services.
- We refined our vision and clarified our values, which ground everything we do and our service to foster children and their families.

We have worked hard to expand and improve our trainings. Some of our in-service trainings this past year included:

- In service in Rio Arriba County with CYFD office there so CASAs heard the procedures and met with workers from in-home services, investigations, permanency and placement departments. Also visited Hoy Recovery, and Espanola inpatient addiction program where many of the parents we work with receive services.
- Monthly peer support group led by Doreen Sansom designed so that CASAs have a safe place to find community resources, look for solutions during their case and discuss frustrations.
- CASITAS in-service titled 'Trauma Affects in Infants, Toddlers and Young Children' gave valuable information about how very young children are traumatized, what it may look like, that they do remember and how it may present later in a child's life.
- Due to the number of ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) cases, three in services throughout the year included screening of Dawnland, a documentary of the struggles Native Americans have endured for the past century, an in-service presented by TEWA Women United explaining their scope of services and purpose to help families of Native American heritage and an in-service by Veronica titled 'Overview of Historical Trauma in the Native Populations'
- An in-service titled 'Healing Voices' where CASAs heard from survivors of domestic violence and viewed 2 short videos on the subject.
- An in-service for CASAs to learn more on advocating for youth who are dually involved with child welfare and juvenile justice systems.
- An in-service touring Bernalillo Academy and learning about their intensive, inpatient psychiatry care for some of our children in foster care.

Financials

- CASA First had an excellent year, financially. We saw significant support from the community as well as increased income from our court contracts. Our expenses remained modest and we ended our year with positive balances.
- For every dollar donated to CASA, over 80 cents supports our mission directly. That conservative spending ratio is important to our funders as it shows that we run the organization on a tight budget. We have a mix of community and fee-for-service support. This shows that we are supported by our community at large and are not 100% dependent on fee revenues.
- We continue to work to diversify our income stream, and grow local individual and business support. Other financial goals are to ensure long term stewardship of CASA First through continuing to build our reserves and to initiate a planned giving campaign and Legacy Society.



Staff

CASA First’s Executive Director, is Annie Rasquin, who has 15 years’ experience working with traumatized children and their families, and has managed multiple behavioral health programs. Our Program Coordinator Michele Harwood was a previous CASA Advocate and has over a decade experience in early childhood intervention and working with local families. Our Volunteer Supervisor Jessica Henderson is bi-lingual, and has extensive nonprofit and court experience with high risk families impacted by addiction and domestic violence. One addition last year has been our Foster Youth Advocate Veronica Krupnick who is increasing our supports of older foster youth (14—18) at risk of aging out as well as enhancing our understanding of the perspective and needs of foster children. Two of our CASA Volunteers; Miranda St James, and Heather Van Cleave provide invaluable support with administrative work as well as Chairing our Youth Ambassadors and CASA Angels, respectively. Both groups are key for special events and community outreach and are helping the broader community learn about CASA First and the needs of foster children.

CASA First Board of Directors

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Emeritus Board Member

George Flores

CASA Volunteer Advocates

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| Rick Adesso | Ellen Biderman | Suzanne Canfield |
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Tamara Rigaud
Kate Rivers
Rebecca Romero
Doreen Sansom
Rachel Scholz
Rebecca Shaw
Betsy Starr
Anastasia Stefanowicz
Russel Stolins
Steven Turner
Kimball Udall
Heather Van Cleave
Kristin Watson
Terrell White
Anita Warsham

Outcomes

At the end of each fiscal year, we survey our CASA Volunteer Advocates to assess the challenges our foster children face, the impact we are having on the foster children we advocate for, and learn how we may improve. We had 65% of our Volunteers respond and over 80% reported that their foster child was safer by virtue of them being on the case. Following are some of their comments:

“Our Judge takes our CASA reports very seriously and as we notice an area of concern the Judge may build on that as a team.”

“A CASA can see red flags and document these concerns for the Judge.”

“The CYFD supervisor and attorneys on the team ...simply did not have the time available that I did as a trained CASA volunteer to delve into the details of the case file and visit frequently enough with the children...My more comprehensive understanding of the family and the children’s experiences, perspectives, and needs led me to advocate for specific, essential services—medical, educational and psychological counseling. My visits at the foster placement improved the children’s safety. The resources available to CYFD and the attorneys are so limited, and the volume and severity of abuse and neglect cases so overwhelming, that CASAs are critical to ensuring children’s well-being and safety.

“With the frequent personnel turnover in CYFD, I have been the only person consistently reporting to the Judge from the beginning of this case. My reports have included information not covered in the CYFD reports.”

“Yes. When the first foster mom died, I convinced CYFD to place child in a respite home where child had been previously. Now, that respite foster mom is adopting the child.”

“It has been possible to provide some things for this youth that might not have happened otherwise: sibling visits, birthday parties, the consistency of being with her from the start, seeking funding for orthodontic work denied by insurance.”

“We just completed a special hearing on a motion to oppose a change of plan submitted by the GAL. I clearly had more information than anyone else and submitted two reports to the Judge—

CASA FIRST

**Court Appointed Special Advocates, First Judicial District
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one prior to the hearing, and one prior to the continuation of the hearing. The Judge ruled ...in favor of what the GAL and I had recommended was in the 'best interest' of the children. In explaining his decision, the Judge cited information from my report as substantial reasons for his decision."

"My CASA kid has led a rough life. His biological parents have had their legal rights to him terminated. His brother and sister were adopted and he has not been allowed any contact with them. In the last 4+ years, he has been in 12 different placements. At least I have been a contact/friend he knows keeps caring about him."



Our CASAs

