

CASA First Judicial District Annual Report 2019-2020

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 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 our founding in 1995.



Our CASA First Youth Ambassadors

This past fiscal year, CASA First staff supervised and supported more than 80 CASA First volunteer advocates who advocated on behalf of 179 foster children, both in and out of court. Our staff recruited for and conducted two 30-hour pre-service trainings. In total, we trained and swore in 21 new CASA First volunteers. We partnered with local non-profits to offer in-service trainings, including with Children's Medical Services, Las Cumbres Community Services, and Teen Court. We also participated in the Rio Arriba Imagination Express Kickoff. Unfortunately, many fewer cases closed last year, and we saw only 26 foster children's cases resolve (as compared to 61 cases last year.) Our CASA First volunteers contributed over 5,600 volunteer hours to ensure the safety and well-being of local foster children.

In addition, our Foster Youth Advocacy Program provided support to foster youth between the ages of 14 to 18 years old through visitations, check-ins, creation of resource manuals, and presentations to and one-on-one support of volunteers. We collaborated with the Youth and Children Homeless Task Force, Street Outreach, Tewa Women United and CYFD's Fostering Connections Program. We provided many resources including a "Self-Care Kit" gift drive to send tailored self-care kits to foster youth.

Some highlights from Fiscal Year 2019-2020 include:

- 179 foster children in 94 cases were assigned a CASA First volunteer advocate.
- CASA First served 81% of the children in foster care in our Judicial District.
- CASA First monitored every child welfare case, attended every hearing, and filled out an application for CVRC funding for every child in foster care, even if that child is on our waiting list and has not yet been assigned a CASA First volunteer advocate.
- CASA First conducted two 30-hour new volunteer trainings and swore in 21 new CASA First volunteer advocates.
- 26 children saw their cases close: 15 children were reunited with their families, 7 children were adopted, 3 children aged out, and 1 child was placed with a permanent guardian.
- CASA First volunteer advocates filed over 180 court reports and volunteered more than 5,600 hours to benefit CASA First and serve our foster children.
- In addition to the 60 hours of new volunteer training, and the multiple state and local trainings offered to our volunteers, CASA First organized and conducted 58 hours of in-service trainings, 90% of which included cultural competency training.
- Some CASA First trainings this year included: *What Foster Youth Want You to Know*, *Coping & the Importance of Self-Care*, *Minorities in Foster Care*, *Trauma & Promoting Resiliency in Foster Youth*, *How to Zoom*, *Communicating from Home*, *Learning Teen Court*, *Partnering with Children's Medical Services*, film showings of *The Providers* and *The Foster Documentary*, and a private screening of *Just Mercy*.
- CASA First was instrumental in developing a statewide program to support CASA programs in other Judicial Districts within New Mexico. Stronger in-state CASA organizations are helping peer agencies with experience and expertise.
- The Foster Youth Advocacy Program Coordinator served on the NM House Joint Memorial 10 Task Force, co-chaired the subcommittee focused on reunification, and made recommendations for changes to the child welfare system to support youth and their families.
- The Youth Ambassadors volunteer program expanded. Some of the youth outreach included legislative trainings and communications, published articles and radio interviews. Youth Ambassadors developed the Kindness Rocks Project, which helps spread child protection awareness while creating uplifting artistic messages.
- One of our year's highlights was celebrating CASA First's 25th Anniversary at the Governor's Mansion where we recognized some CASA First heroes for their contributions to our foster children. We presented Justice Barbara J. Vigil with an award for "Leadership for Foster Children", Dr. Tony Guiles with "The Heart of CASA" and John Salinas with the "Award for Leadership by a Former Foster Youth."



Adapting to COVID-19

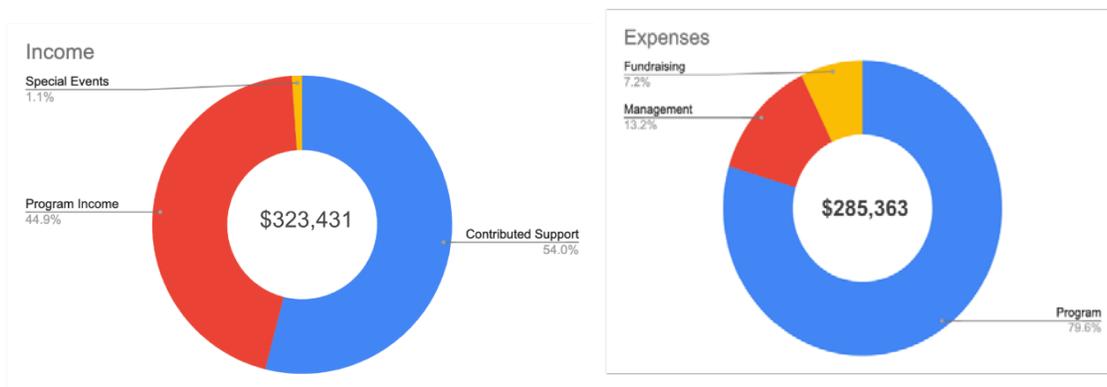
In response to the pandemic, we endeavored to adapt quickly to our changing landscape, with no disruption of operations. Due to our concern about the well-being of foster children with increased

isolation and loss of safety nets, we instituted systems to increase oversight. With crises and increased stressors, we know our children are more at risk and need us most.

CASA First staff is now monitoring and recording all phone/video contacts between volunteers and foster children and following-up, if concerned. We have changed to a data management system that is more efficient and provides immediate access to critical information. In addition to virtual visits with the children, our CASA Volunteers and staff attend all child welfare court hearings telephonically or via video. We continue to find resources for children and families and are dropping off supplies as needed. We are very proud of how quickly staff has adapted to these changes and the work they are putting in to make sure our stalwart volunteers are supported, and we can keep a close eye on our children.

Board Treasurer’s Report

- CASA First had another strong year financially, despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the fourth quarter.
- The pandemic impacted our business dramatically. At the drop of a hat, we had to convert ourselves from a small intimate office where co-workers collaborated in person to a distributed work-force communicating remotely. We had to approach our business differently in order to ensure that our clients remain supported. Through the craziness of the initial dislocation, laptops were located, and business practices were changed, but we were always there to support child victims.
- For every dollar of support contributed to CASA First, more than 80 cents support our mission directly. This conservative spending ratio shows that we run the organization on a tight budget.
- We also have a true mix of community and fee-for-service support. Over 50% of our revenues are from community support. We are humbled by the strong support of our work by our local community.
- As you would expect, we are dependent on our contractual relationship with the state courts, yet that contract accounts for only one-third of our overall revenues.
- We continue to work to diversify our income stream, and to continue to grow local individual and business support.
- Other financial goals are to ensure long term stewardship of CASA First through continuing to build our cash reserves and initiating a planned giving campaign and Legacy Society.



We are deeply thankful for all the donors who contributed this year. In addition to our Administrative Office of the Court fees, our VOCA grant, and many generous business and individual donors, we received grants from these generous foundations:

- The Brindle Foundation**
- The Doris G. Walbridge Foundation**
- The Hanuman Foundation**
- The Lineberry Foundation**
- The United Way of Northern NM**

- The Mellen Foundation**
- The New Mexico Children’s Foundation**
- The Triangle Community Foundation Inc.**
- The Santa Fe Community Foundation**

The CASA First Team



Staff

Annie Rasquin, LCSW Executive Director
Michele Harwood, Program Coordinator
Jessica Henderson, Volunteer Supervisor

Veronica Krupnick,
Foster Youth Advocacy Program Coordinator
Emily Cole, Administrative Assistant

Volunteer Staff

Miranda Saint James, Youth Ambassador Director
Ward Freeman, Technology Manager

Heather Van Cleave, CASA First Angels Chair
Julie Zimmer, CASA First Angels Assistant Chair

Two of our CASA volunteers, Miranda St James and Heather Van Cleave provided invaluable support with administrative work as well as Chairing our Youth Ambassadors and CASA First 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

Julia Lapis, JD, Vice President	Peyton Young, President	Spencer Wright, Treasurer
Julia Broggi, JD	Ryan Goodman, Secretary	Andres Paglayan
Yvonne Martinez	Tony Guiles, MD	George Flores
	Betsy Shillinglaw	Emeritus Board Member

CASA FIRST
Court Appointed Special Advocates, First Judicial District
466 W. San Francisco St. Santa Fe, NM 87501 ~ 505-820-1500

CASA Volunteer Advocates

Richard Adesso
Andrea Balter
Alice Barthel
Nancy Benkof
Barbara Benzaquen
Ellen Biderman
Stephen Black
Stuart Bluestone
Gloria Bosson,
Jim Bradbury
Suzanne Canfield
Cybele Carpenter
Elizabeth Chirdon
Barbara Clark
Stuart Cohen
Robert Collins
Patricia Conoway
Susan Daniel
Anthony DaSilva
Clark Davis
Deborah Demella
Marilyn Dillon
Tracy Donnell
Mary Erwin
Brenda Fannon
Nancy Gehman

Anne Geronimo
Cindy Geyer
Elaine Giovando
Lisa Gonzales
Ali Harper
Chris Hatfield
Jessica Hathaway
John Heinritz
Maria Higuera
Ann Hunziker
Rudolf Hunziker
Isabelle Jennings
Vivian Jones
Theodora Judge-Kret,
Diane Kell
Arlene Kemp
Jennifer Klug
Deborah Knapp
Veronica Krupnick
Karen Lawrence
Molly Leuschel
Jennifer Levi
Martin Madden
Robert Martin
Sarah Matthes
William McDonald

Jennifer McRoberts
Katherine Mertz
Ann Morrison
Sandra Osterman
Myra Rabitoy
Lynette Ranton
Suzanne Reed
Barbara Reider
Kate Rivers
Rebecca Romero
Doreen Sansom
Jodie Scheer
Rachel Scholz
Rebecca Shaw
Franco Sisneros
Betsy Starr
Anastasia Stefanowicz
Russel Stolins
Philippa Klessig
Steven Turner
Kim Udall
Heather Van Cleave
Kristin Watson
Terrell White
Lori Woodcock
Anita Worsham

Guiding Values of CASA First

- Social Justice
- Growth through Learning, Evolving, and Adapting
- Inclusiveness
- Committed, Proactive
- Kindness
- Competency
- Supportiveness
- Compassion/Love
- Ethical
- Respect of Culture and Community Relationships
- Commitment to Openness & Transparency
- Honesty & Professionalism
- Creativity
- Respect of Children and their Families
- Thankful/Appreciation
- Resiliency
- Commitment to being a model entity that others emulate – Staff/Board/Organization
- Children’s advocacy
- Commitment to Self- Education
- Collaboration
- Diversity
- Servant Leaders
- Team Members
- Commitment to Consensus

CASA volunteer advocates in their words:

CASA FIRST
Court Appointed Special Advocates, First Judicial District
466 W. San Francisco St. Santa Fe, NM 87501 ~ 505-820-1500

Volunteering as a CASA/CASITA is one of the most rewarding volunteer positions I have ever undertaken. My heart is filled with love, compassion and above all HOPE for these abused and neglected children. Having said that, it is also one sometimes filled with frustration, anger, and despair.

Over three years ago I took on my first case, a newborn with physical challenges. As his CASA, I always checked that he was getting his physical/occupational therapy because he was born with a genetic condition that impacted his movement. I got the CVRC to get a car modification which the foster parents needed but could not afford out of their own pocket. Early into this child's foster experience, there was a tragedy in the family and the foster father was killed in a motorcycle accident – I made sure that the new home he was transferred to was appropriate, safe, and nurturing. I have witnessed many of his milestones and celebrated with the foster parents as he learned to crawl, walk, and talk. I have watched over this fragile child from birth to him now becoming a happy and healthy youngster enjoying life to the full in his foster home. He is about to be adopted into this WONDERFUL family and I am excited about what the future holds for him.

I bumped into his Aunt a few months ago – she was so happy that her nephew was going to be adopted by this loving family. But, she said one thing that stopped me in my tracks -"H, my Mother and I love you...and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all you have done for J". I went to my car and cried!

I did make a difference in the life of this child and I am truly proud to be a CASITA!!

Court Appointed Infant Toddler Advocate (CASITA) H

On several occasions the foster youth I was working with was housed in a shelter or in a residential facility. This meant that there was no longer a foster parent involved. Only the Social Worker and I as a CASA were on the visitor list or call list. Generally Social Workers just don't have the time to make frequent visits. I found that the youth was eager to connect with me, in one case calling me almost every day just to chat. In another case every time I visited, the youth had made me something in a craft class that I still treasure. These were the times when I could see clearly that my presence made a difference.

CASA Volunteer Advocate N

I've been a CASA for over three years and have, in that time, experienced more than I thought was my fair share of frustrations and helping my CASA child move through the system. This little boy, who has some developmental challenges, has been available for adoption since last Summer, as his parents relinquished custody and all rights to him. During the past year, I've been the only one making sure that adoption procedures were put in place so he can find his forever family.

I have been unrelenting in making sure he has the opportunity for adoption including sending emails to everyone on his case, updating them and inquiring as to when his bio and photo would be included and available for all potential adoptive families. Even with little progress, I persisted and turned up the volume which worked! He is now listed on the Heart Wall, to search nationwide for an adoptive home. I will continue to push to make sure he has a home soon.

CASA Volunteer Advocate P

