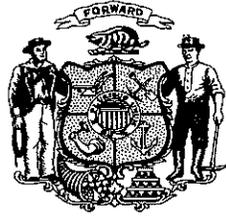


STATE OF WISCONSIN

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

MEMORANDUM

To: Members
Joint Committee on Finance

From: Senator Alberta Darling
Representative John Nygren

Date: March 26, 2020

Re: CASA Report to JFC

Attached is a report from the State Director of the Wisconsin Court Appointed Special Advocates for children (CASA), pursuant to 2017 Wisconsin Act 255.

This report is being provided for your information only. No action by the Committee is required. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Attachments

AD:JN:jm

Joint Committee on Finance
State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison WI 53708

MAR 26 2020
St. Finance



March 26, 2020

Dear Joint Committee on Finance,

Thank you! You are making a difference in the lives of thousands of Wisconsin children! As members of the Wisconsin legislature, thank you for your continued support of Wisconsin Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association. Our trained advocates work hand in hand with the legal and social welfare system to ensure children under a CHIPs (child in need of protection and/or services) order are safe while their needs and wishes are represented during the legal process.

A growing statewide reach

In 2019, eight local CASA programs served more than 1,000 children in eleven Wisconsin counties. While that's a 30% increase since 2017, there are more than 6,000 Wisconsin children waiting for quality advocacy. We are working diligently to serve the waiting children.

Thanks to the increased state funding from Assembly Bill 786, we established our eighth and ninth local CASA programs in Columbia County and in Western Wisconsin scheduled to serve the children in Barron, St. Croix, Trempealeau and Polk Counties.

Your increased funding also set us on course to establish programs in Sheboygan, St. Croix, Marathon, Racine, Langlade and Dodge counties projected to more than double the current number of children served. While this track is promising, 61 of Wisconsin's 72 counties do not have a CASA program. In order to serve as many Wisconsin children as possible, we need to continue to expand our reach.

Fiscal responsibility

Wisconsin CASA developed a cost-effective regional model, which serves more children in an efficient and fiscally responsible way. The regional model consists of one 501c3 CASA program serving children in multiple counties. This creates less overhead for operations while providing quality advocacy to more children for less money.

Wisconsin CASA passed through more than \$105,000 of its \$250,000 allocation to support the independence of two CASA programs (Rock and Manitowoc counties) and the startup of a third in Barron County. Additional funding was used for training, state office overhead and staff, statewide awareness campaigns and travel.

The state organization overhead remains low, with a small office and a two person staff. In order to keep building capacity to support our growth and serve the state CASA network, we need your continued support and financial assistance.

Cost savings

CASA advocacy costs approximately \$1,600 per child per year. A child served by a CASA is in out-of-home placement approximately one month less per year versus a child without a CASA. The decreased time in out-of-home placement saves each county approximately one month of out-of-home placement cost per year, or an average of \$3,405 - \$1,600 = **\$1805 per child per year**.

Impact

Not only is there cost savings to the county, but also more importantly is the impact on the children served by a CASA advocate. CASA advocacy benefits abused and neglected children:

- Added layer of safety
 - In addition to the social workers' once a month visits, CASA's visit their assigned child once a week providing a vital layer of safety for at risk children.
- Less likely to re-enter out-of-home placement
 - According to National CASA, a child with a CASA is less likely to re-enter foster care decreasing incidents of child trauma and saving counties thousands of dollars per child.
- Less time in out-of-home placement
 - A child served by a CASA averages one less month in out-of-home placement per year again diminishing trauma to the child while saving thousands.
- Children with a CASA are more likely to improve academically.
- Children with a CASA prove to be more resilient.
 - CASA's become the consistent adult in their lives.
 - Advocates give one on one attention to a child in need that they may not otherwise receive.
- CASA's are truly a champion for children.

The funding Wisconsin CASA has already received has been incredibly helpful in moving the needle on caring for Wisconsin's abused children. We respectfully ask for your continued financial support to move it even faster.

Sincerely,



Susan Schwartz
State Director of Wisconsin CASA Association
2701 Larsen Road
Green Bay WI 54303
920.493.4856
sschwartz@wisconsin-casa.org

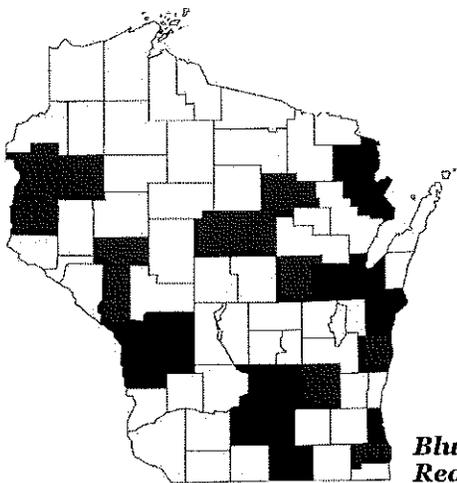
Attached: 2019 Impact Report

CASA Impact Report



The Need for CASA

The Wisconsin Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association champions the needs of abused and neglected children by supporting and expanding local CASA programs.

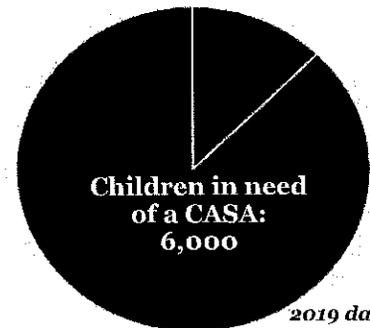


CASA Advocates are trained volunteers appointed by a judge to advocate for a child, or sibling group, who are in the child welfare system. CASA's visit their assigned child for one hour each week to get to know the child and their situation, which also offers an additional layer of child safety.

The need for CASA programs is clear. In 2019, more than 7,000 Wisconsin children were eligible for a CASA. Unfortunately, only 1,000 children were served because 60 of Wisconsin's 72 counties do not have a CASA program.

*Blue counties have existing CASA programs.
Red counties are projected to have programs in 2020 or 2021.*

Wisconsin children
Served by a CASA: 1,000



The Wisconsin CASA Association is working diligently to support current and future local programs so the 6,000 unserved children receive an Advocate.

What Sets CASA Apart

How is CASA different? Here's what sets us apart:

- ◇ CASA requires volunteers to receive **specialized training** before they are appointed by a judge to become an Advocate and serve a child. The initial training is over 30 hours, followed by 12 hours of continuing education yearly. This ensures Advocates receive the latest training and resources to best serve children.
- ◇ CASA Advocates are **supervised by professional staff**.
- ◇ Trained Advocates are **sworn officers of the court**, reporting to the judge who is overseeing the child's case; sharing the child's wishes. The Advocate continues meeting with the child until their case is closed.
- ◇ While social workers, foster parents and kinship may change, an **Advocates' consistent presence** is felt, leaving a positive, lasting impact on the child.
- ◇ **CASA works**. Studies show that children with a CASA do better in school and spend less time in the child welfare system.

In this Report

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How We Support Local Programs

The Wisconsin CASA Association supports and expands local CASA programs throughout the state, ensuring all state programs have an efficient model to recruit volunteers and serve as many children as possible.

Among the many resources provided to local programs are:

- ◊ **Wisconsin CASA portal;** an online system for communication between local programs, sharing best practices, collecting data and sending out monthly newsletters.

- ◊ **CASA C.L.A.S.S.** (CASA's Learning for Advocates, Staff and Supporters); a customized online continuing education platform.
- ◊ **One-on-one training and coaching;** collaboration with other local programs to share ideas and best practices.
- ◊ **Specialized education** opportunities for Advocate trainers.
- ◊ On-going **statewide awareness campaign.**
- ◊ Wisconsin CASA meets with local, state and federal legislators to educate them on the CASA mission; and facilitates interagency collaborations.



These efforts led to increased state funding from **Assembly Bill 786**, which helped establish two new local CASA programs serving three counties in 2020. Expansion into eight new counties is projected through 2021.

My Stuff, My Bag



MY STUFF MY BAG

Imagine being a child in foster care, moving from home to home with just a few possessions. Many of these children carry their possessions in a garbage bag. Wisconsin CASA is changing that.

My Stuff, My Bag provides CASA children with a suitcase filled with comfort items and necessities, including:

- Pillow
- Blanket
- Stuffed animal
- Pajamas
- Socks
- Underwear
- Toothbrush/paste
- Shampoo/conditioner

With support from the **Packers Give Back Celebrity Bowling Event**, this program began in June 2019.

One of the suitcases was given to a little boy who had been removed from his family of origin. The boy did not want any of his personal possessions because they triggered bad memories of his life at home.

When he received his My Stuff, My Bag suitcase, the Foster mom saw the boy smile for the first time.

Wisconsin CASA hopes to bring this positivity to every Wisconsin child removed from their family of origin. To learn more about the initiative and how to donate, visit: www.wisconsin-casa.org

My Stuff, My Bag announcement in April 2019.



Volunteers packed hundreds of My Stuff, My Bag suitcases at Lambeau Field in October 2019.

Challenges to Serving More Children



1 local program staff member



Supports up to

30 volunteers



Who serve up to

75 children

While there's promise that these numbers can change quickly (as there was a 30% increase in children served from 2017 to 2019), there are existing challenges and barriers to developing fully functioning local CASA programs throughout the state. They include:

- ◆ **Not enough staff** to supervise additional Advocates, causing waiting lists for children.
- ◆ **Children in out-of-home placements** for longer periods of time due to **addiction epidemic** (opioid, heroin, meth, etc.).
- ◆ **Time constraints:** It takes about 18 months to start a new CASA program.
- ◆ **Lack of funding** to build capacity in existing local programs as well as funding to launch new local programs in unserved counties.
- ◆ Right now, **11 counties are waiting** to develop a new program.

Additional funding would provide more resources that would decrease the timeline to develop more programs and serve more children sooner.

A New Model of Effectiveness

CASA makes a difference, not only in the lives of the children who have an Advocate, but also on the financial impact for counties and the state. Investing in CASA saves thousands of dollars in child welfare costs.

Wisconsin CASA has developed a new, cost-effective regional model to serve more children in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner.

Under the new model, one local program director will oversee multiple counties; reducing overhead costs, saving thousands of dollars per child, per year.

This allows more children to be served by Advocates for less money.

Children in the court system who have a CASA ultimately spend less time in the system and find permanency faster than without a CASA. On average, each child with a CASA spends 1.8 months less in out-of-home care than a child without a CASA.* The median length of time a child is placed in out of home care in Wisconsin is just over 400 days, so CASA saves, on average \$1,805 per child annually.**

Sources: *National CASA Association Summary Report: WI CASA Programs in 2016
**2018 Wisconsin Out-of-Home Care Report

What WI Judges are saying about CASA



"CASA is for the children who need a consistent adult in their lives; to be their friend and provide information for their protection."

*Judge James Babler
Barron County*



"CASA adds humanity to the child welfare system."

*Retired Judge Alan Bates
Rock County*



"CASAs are the stabilizing force in a child's life."

*Judge Scott Horne
La Crosse County*

Meet Our Team



Sue Schwartz
State Director

Appointed State Director in 2016, Sue Schwartz has been at the forefront of new local program creation and expansions. She serves as Co-Chair of the National CASA Leadership Council and Co-Chair of the National CASA State Leadership Council.

Additionally, Sue serves on the Wisconsin National and Community Service Board, Wisconsin Task Force on Children in Need, and serves on the Wisconsin Disaster Recovery Team.

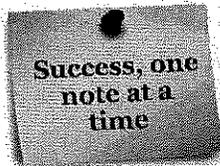


Kelly Schwartz
Director of Program
Administration

Kelly Schwartz joined the Wisconsin CASA team in 2017, leading collaboration with local CASA programs, developing CASA C.L.A.S.S. content, social media and special events.

Kelly serves on the board for Family and Childcare Resources of Northeast Wisconsin.

One Caring Adult = A Child Who Sees a Future



A Wisconsin CASA Advocate was paired with a teenage girl who would be aging out of foster care in the coming year. The young lady had been a part of the child welfare system for years, and knew she needed help getting out of a dark place emotionally.

Over the course of a year, her Advocate met with her, listened to her and encouraged her to stay in school and accomplish her goals. Each time they met, the Advocate brought her a motivational quote on a post-it note.

That small act, and the Advocate's belief in the teen, made a major difference. The teen kept all of the post-its in a notebook as inspiration and started showing progress in school.

The Advocate took her on college tours and helped her complete her college applications.

She was accepted into a 4-year college and plans to major in social work so she can help children like herself in the future. She credits her Advocate for showing her good people exist; even when her hope was lost.

Thank You to Our Major Supporters!

*Children's Court Improvement Project
Cornerstone Foundation
Green Bay Packers Give Back
KC Stock Foundation
Leonard & Finco Public Relations
National CASA Association
Office of Crime Victim Services*



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