

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CONNECTICUT



A letter from the Executive Director & Board President

INSIDE THIS REPORT

Letter from Leadership

Mission • Vision • Values

Our Impact

Our Gratitude

Advocacy in Action

Advocate Stories

Financial Snapshot

Our Board of Directors

Join Our Movement!

Connecticut CASA trains volunteers who are appointed by judges to work with children placed under court supervision because of abuse and/or neglect. The mission of our volunteers is to determine the best interests of the child and then advocate for those interests in the courts, with state agencies, in the school system, or wherever else the child's voice needs to be heard.

Five years ago, in March 2020, what is now Connecticut CASA received its first case appointment. From that first case, in the New Haven juvenile court, the program has expanded to seven courts in only four years (with an eighth court added in 2025)! This organization has endured a pandemic, executed a productive merger with local CASA organizations to achieve efficiencies, and leveraged state and national developments to grow and evolve our network. At every inflection point, our focus has remained on the children we serve, who find themselves in what can be a bewildering child welfare system through no fault of their own.

This annual report reflects Connecticut CASA's activities during the 2024 calendar year, with some 96 volunteer Advocates serving 192 children. As part of a national movement for children who have experienced abuse or neglect, Connecticut CASA's volunteers do many things in concert with professionals from social workers and attorneys to educators and health providers. From reporting to judges and connecting children and families to resources, to building relationships that promote youth resilience, our advocates play a vital role.

The Connecticut CASA movement is a community of volunteers and staff, advancing the best interests of children. Thank you to the many volunteers, friends, and partners who made our work possible in 2024! We look forward to doing much more together, for children and families, in the years ahead. We welcome more of you to join us.

With gratitude,

Josiah Brown
Executive Director

David Bayne
Board President



Our Mission

Connecticut CASA empowers a statewide network of caring, consistent volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates to advance the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect—so every child has a safe, permanent home to thrive.

Our Vision

Connecticut CASA envisions a world where every child who has experienced abuse or neglect receives an opportunity to thrive in a safe and loving home.

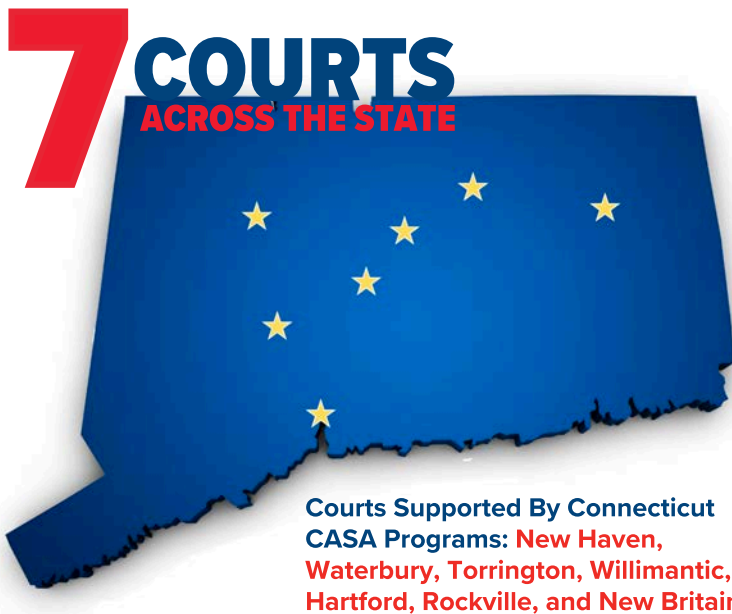
Our Values

The Connecticut CASA movement is a community of volunteers and staff, rallying community resources for children and their families. We pursue our mission with adaptability, collaboration, integrity, respect, quality, service, and stewardship.

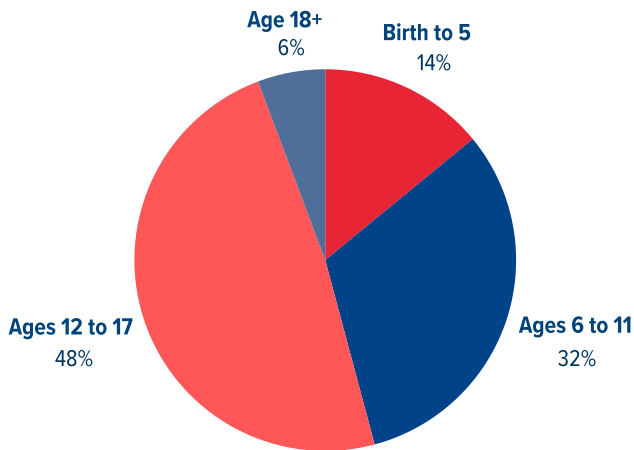
THE **5** Rs of CASA Advocacy

- **Reporting** regularly to judges, to inform decisions about children's safe, permanent homes and best interests
- **Resources** identified to fulfill needs ranging from birth-to-three, to special education, after-school care, health, mental health, and summer jobs
- **Relationship**-building, through visits at least monthly, and cases that can extend for years
- **Resilience** promoted, to help children and youth overcome adversity
- **Results** that have seen this program grow rapidly, from a single court in New Haven in 2020 to 7 of the state's 10 child protection courts through 2024

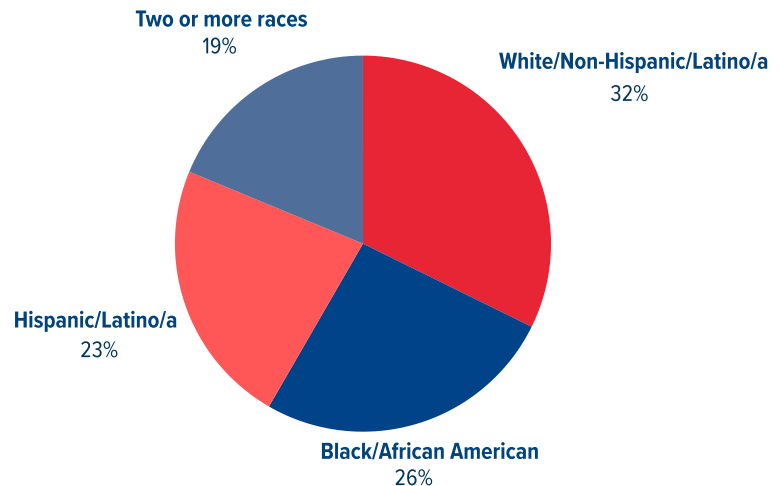
Our Impact



CHILDREN SERVED • BY AGE



CHILDREN SERVED • BY ETHNICITY



“Those most vulnerable in our society—children—are best served by a team of caring adults. We remain appreciative of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and their partnership to ensure the best interests of children and families remain at the forefront of all our efforts within local communities.”

—Vannessa Dorantes, Former Commissioner, CT Department of Children and Families

“I am a clinical social worker and a licensed foster parent. I was lucky enough to work with a CASA volunteer during one of my recent foster care placements and found her support to be the most valuable resource in the entire process.” **— CT Foster Parent**

Our Gratitude

Connecticut CASA is grateful for all of its partners, grantors, and donors -- public as well as private. In 2024, our public sources of support included the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), via a re-grant from the National CASA/GAL Association, as well as the State Judicial Branch through Federal VOCA/ARPA. We extend special thanks to the Amour Propre Fund for its \$10,000 matching challenge and to the family of the late Sharon M. Clemons for directing a \$5,000 grant from the fund in her memory at the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (CFGNH). Thank you for strengthening our ability to show up in meaningful ways for children and families across our state.

\$25,000+	Everette E. Dennis (in memory of Emily T. Smith) ForGood Fund	\$2,000+	Richard & Irene Q. Brown Kristen & John Burns Christopher Cesare Claire's Corner Copia Sheryl Culotta Ira & Deborah Katznelson Delia Kulukundis M&T Bank Charitable Foundation Amber & Anthony Paquette Lisa & John Salvatore Andrew & Ronni Smulian Kappa Alpha Theta (Theta Pi chapter, Sacred Heart U.) Kappa Alpha Theta (Gamma Zeta chapter, UConn) Yale University
\$10,000+	Amour Propre Fund/LindyLee Gold McCance Foundation NewAlliance Foundation Sarah Weingarten Fund/NY Community Trust		
\$5,000+	Sara J. Batchelder David Bayne Mario Chiappetti Sharon Clemons Fund/Community Foundation for Greater New Haven Eder Family Foundation/Wesley and Courtney Eder Lauren & George Messner Kappa Alpha Theta (Eta Xi chapter, Quinnipiac U.)		
\$1,000+	James & Martha Alexander Robert Berman John Brady Mark Casey John Finley Laurel Grodman Joan Annexy Lopez Rory MacFarquhar Edmund Polubinski William Rosa Sahar Usmani-Brown Yale New Haven Children's Hospital	up to \$200	Rebecca Allen Mary Ann Attianese Marie-Jose Babouder-Matta Ozan Bahtiyar Gary Banks Oscar Gonzalez Barreto Carolyn Bayne Elizabeth Bayne Jonathan Bayne Angela Beach Abie Quinones Benitez David Berkowitz Jennifer Bird Karen Bogle Sarah Boone Erica G. Bradley Kristen Brandenburg Preston Britner Athena Brown Deborah Brown Josiah Brown Nicholas Brown Rachel Kline Brown Richard S. "Rick" Brown Elsie Chapman Caroline Chiappetti Christopher Chiappetti Nancy Clayton Ronald Coleman Brad Collins Mackenzie Collins Lizanne Cox Mark DeFrancisco Carmen Desiato Basil Dufallo Ann & Dan Fisher Jacob Galloza Enna Garcia Andrew Giering Ellen Trombly Gold Valencia Goodridge Sarah Greenblatt Boris Greenshpun Maria Harlow Peter Hawes
\$500+	Natalie Drucker First Church of Guilford Shelley Geballe Joseph Gitchell Christine Hall Sharma Joseph Eileen Palarino Charles Pillsbury Better Rhodes Billie Gastic Rosado Rachel Sondheimer David Thompson Christopher Trombly Aisha Usmani		Suzannah Hoisenbeck Tanya Hughes Rebecca Iannantuoni Leslie Kern Carolyn Kinder Saryn Koche Joan Kreiger Ferentz Lafargue Pedro Mendia Landa Toni Ligon Anne Marseille Linda Mayes Denise McNair Kim Hutchins Millar MaryAnn Morelli Julie Nemeth Tracey Neuberger Ifeoma Nwokoye Jeffrey Ogbar Deborah O'Neil Jodie Oshana Kevin Palmer Harold and Lorraine Panciera Lori Perillo Louis Perno Ronald Perry Brent Peterkin Michele Potvin-Piecuch Sarah Prown Shari Rahamim Nicholas Ramirez Peter and Penelope Rebuzzini Tamara Remy Denise Risley Chaney Robinson Evelyn Robles Randi Rubin Rodriguez Lauren Ruth Paul Sabin Joan Salmons Mark and Ieke Scully Benjamin Seelig Igor Sikorsky
\$200+	Kevin Antaya Barbara & Chris Aubin Merle Berke-Schlesel Mike Duggan Thierry Emonet Miriam Ingber Chris & Betsy Isles Matthew Jacobson Susan Kerley Michel Ledizet Noah Messing Patrick Murphy Rolando Navarro Kristina Rath Laurie Ruderfer T. Reginald Solomon Paul Van Tassel Audrey Williams		Amos L. Smith Robert Smithers Brynne Sorrentino Victoria Stob Dolores Strode Yukari Sugiyama Sarah Taylor Mary Beth Thompson Harriet "Kyn" Tolson Bridget Torres Sandra Trevino Catherine Trombly Joseph Trombly Qamar Usmani Tasneem Usmani Diana Vesely Donna Violante Elizabeth Whitney Ann E. Withey Brian Wysolmerski

Advocacy in Action

CASA volunteers are required to complete our 30-hour pre-service training program and submit to screening and background checks. Volunteers are assigned to only one or two children or sibling groups at a time to allow for high-quality connections and focused attention. Our volunteers stay involved in the case from the time of appointment until the child achieves permanency.



1,170 Pre-Service Training Hours for 39 New Volunteer Advocates Trained



96 volunteers assigned to cases



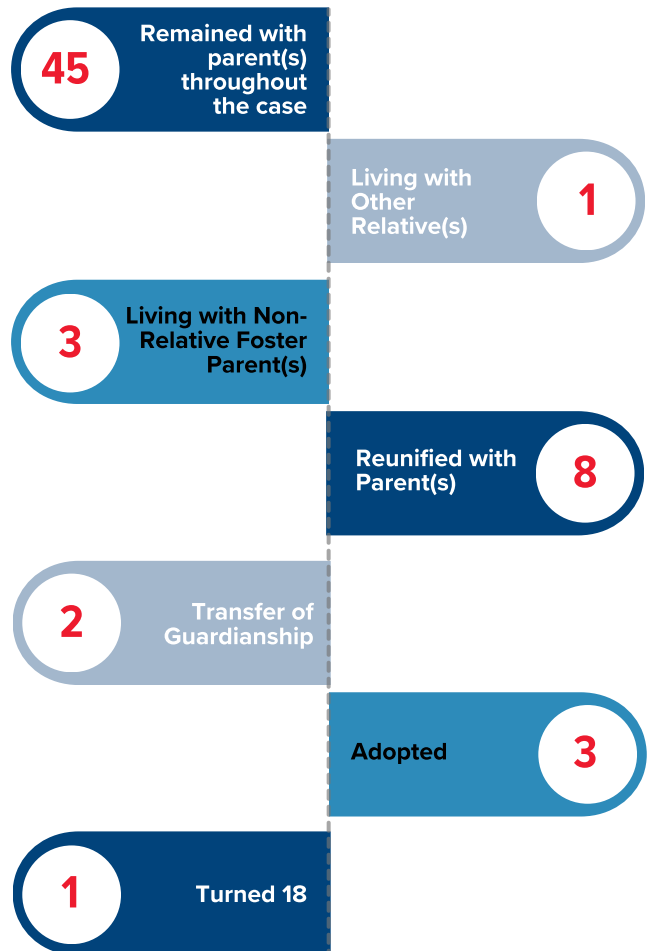
284 court hearings attended



169 court reports submitted

Outcomes of Our Advocacy

63 CHILDREN whose cases closed



How Can a Child in Connecticut Obtain a CASA Volunteer?

Under Connecticut's **2016 CASA statute**, any child with a case involving the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for Child Protection in the Juvenile Court is eligible for a CASA volunteer. Any of the following can make a motion requesting an appointment of a CASA volunteer:

- The Assistant Attorney General (AAG) on behalf of DCF
- The Attorney for the Minor Child (AMC)
- The attorney for the mother or the father could do so

After a motion is made, the judge appoints a CASA volunteer. Any judge in Juvenile Court can also appoint a CASA at any time on the judge's own initiative.

Connecticut CASA does not work in the Family Court, the Probate Court, or on the "delinquency" side of the Juvenile Court.

Advocate Stories



Dwayne Jackson
Volunteer since June 2020

Solutions and support within reach

Darryl*, aged 12 and his 10-year-old twin sisters Sabrina* and Sarah*, live with their mom and two teenage sisters. Their father is prohibited from visiting the home due to past domestic violence. CASA was assigned to Darryl and the twins with focus placed on their school attendance since they were absent most of the previous year.

Mom informed CASA during initial home visits that the children's absenteeism was primarily due to mom's fear that their father might approach them at the morning bus stop or return from school in the PM. CASA assisted mom in enrolling the children in summer school and a new school for the fall, which involved changes in their commute. CASA also advocated for continuing therapy for mom.

Mom's fear of the father engaging the children persisted, with school attendance only marginally improving. Home visit discussions with mom and children revealed that the maternal grandparents were highly engaged with the children, prompting CASA to visit them to explore how they might support improving the children's attendance.

Within its pre-hearing report to the court, CASA included that the grandparents were open to taking custody of the children to ensure regular school attendance, which CASA recommended be pursued. While in court waiting for the case to be called, the grandparents, mom, and attorneys discussed and reached an agreement on the recommendation, which the judge approved in session.

Consistent care, lasting impact

The first time I met Mark*, he was 15 years old and living in a residential treatment facility. He walked into the room, muttered a quick "Hi," then sank into a swivel chair, where he began spinning furiously in an effort to avoid eye contact.

I introduced myself as his court-appointed advocate, someone independent from DCF, whose role was simply to get to know him and be of help when needed. Mark answered my questions with one-word responses, and within five minutes, declared, "There's nothing you can do for me," before standing and dashing from the room.

Fast forward more than two years—we've spent holiday seasons and birthdays together. These days, Mark and I enjoy lengthy, lively conversations. When our time together is nearly up, he often asks if I can stay just a bit longer.

Disappointment and turmoil are no stranger to him. Over the years, he's been moved between three different state facilities and has had multiple DCF caseworkers. But one thing has remained constant: I am still here. I show up when I say I will—always with his favorite snack in hand—and we chat about whatever is top of mind for him.

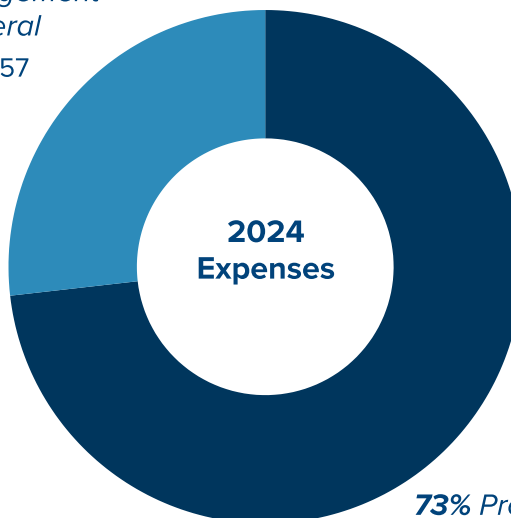
These days, our conversations often turn to the future. He shares both his hopes and his fears about turning 18. And while the road ahead won't be easy for Mark, he knows he doesn't have to face it alone. He knows, maybe for the first time, that there is something someone can do for him: show up, stand by him, and help him find his way.



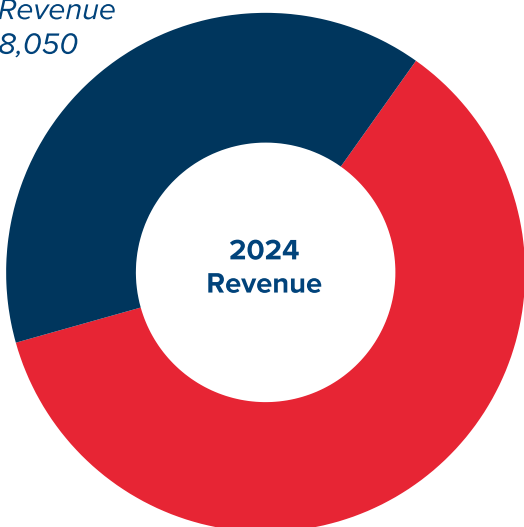
Debbie Marconi
Volunteer since March 2022

Financial Snapshot

27% Management & General
\$106,257

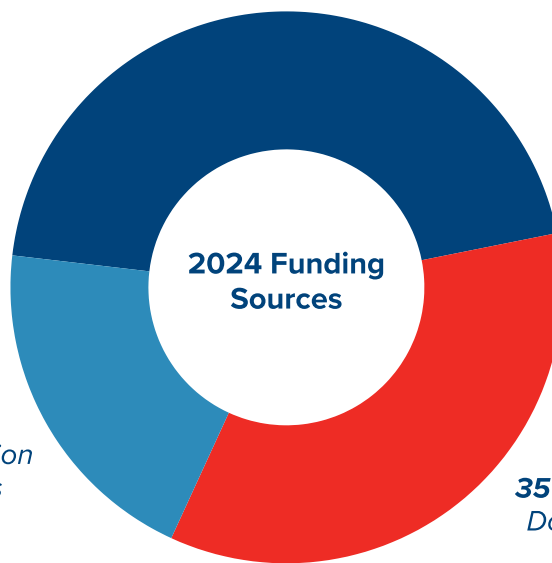


39% Donations & Other Revenue
\$168,050



61% Grants (Public & Private)
\$257,904

45% VOCA and other Federal Funding



20% Foundation Grants

35% Private Donations



to review full financial reporting
from Connecticut CASA

Our Board of Directors

Following the merger of three CASA entities and their boards in 2021, what is now Connecticut CASA continued to develop its governance in 2022 and 2023, with several key additions. That process of growth and evolution culminated in 2024 with the addition of ten new members to the Board of Directors, including a new treasurer. These additions bring diverse expertise and leadership to the organization’s work—enhancing our capacity to advocate for children across the state.



First row: David Bayne, President • Marcus Stallworth, Vice President • Kristen Brandenburg, Treasurer*
• Christopher Trombly, Secretary

Second row: Elizabeth Burns* • Christopher Cesare* • Mario Chiappetti • Allison D. Good • Laurel Grodman*

Third row: Miriam F. Ingber • Sharma E. Joseph* • Lauren “Toni” Ligon* • Joan Annxy Lopez*

Fourth row: Linda C. Mayes* • Lauren G. Messner* • Brent Peterkin* • Andrew M. Smulian

* Indicates new board member in 2024

In addition to our Board and the committed volunteers who serve children directly, Connecticut CASA benefits from the service of those who lend their time and expertise as members of the Advisory Council, and our Ambassadors—along with several other individuals, including Bianca Herlitz-Ferguson, Erin Hill, and especially Varsha Tantri, our volunteer bookkeeper—who have made in-kind donations of time, thought, and skill. Thanks to all!

Join Our Movement

VOLUNTEER! As a **CASA** advocate, you become a reliable and consistent resource of support—a constant during turbulent times in a child’s life when foster parents, judges, and social workers can change at any given time.

Our volunteers represent a diverse range of cultural, professional, and socio-economic backgrounds, bringing their expertise and compassion to the mission of Connecticut CASA. These are conscientious adults who commit roughly two years to getting to know a child in need of a consistent, caring advocate to listen, learn, and amplify their voice.

As a volunteer you will:

- Receive more than 30 hours of training before being appointed to a case, with 12 hours of continued education required annually
- Receive ongoing support from CASA staff to advocate effectively on a child’s behalf
- Visit your child monthly
- Devote 10-15 hours a month of your time
- Stay involved on the case from the time of appointment until the child achieves permanency.

CASA Best-Interest Advocacy



DONATE! Every donation strengthens our capacity, builds upon our grant funding, and demonstrates increasing awareness and belief in our mission.

Unrestricted gifts make an especially meaningful difference. They give our team the flexibility to recruit, train, and support additional advocates—ensuring more children have someone in their corner.

When you give, you’re not just contributing; you’re joining a community committed to brighter outcomes for Connecticut’s children.



CASA Volunteers Nick Ramirez and Alex Porter at a November 2024 celebration in honor of LindyLee Gold and the Amour Propre Fund



to donate and support
Connecticut CASA!





CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates

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