TOGETHER, we are a POWERFUL VOICE for CHILDREN.
Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Because of you, our community’s most vulnerable population, children removed from their homes because of abuse and neglect, had the powerful advocacy of a CASA volunteer last year. This past year was a period of tremendous growth for our program. We added two new Advocate Supervisors to our team, who helped us train and support more CASA volunteers. We moved both of our County offices to larger, more effective spaces. In Fulton, we’re grateful to Central Bank of Callaway County for a perfectly-located office space. In Columbia, we’re excited to be in the Community Impact Center on Ash Street.

All this development resulted in the most important growth — more children in the foster care system had the consistent, caring advocacy of a CASA volunteer this last year than during any other year of our agency’s history. The percentage of children in our communities served with a CASA increased to 38 percent in just one year! We know CASA volunteers have an impact on kids’ lives. National CASA research shows kids with a CASA are in the system on average 230 children last fiscal year, making sure our kids have the best chance at a bright, healthy future.

We are excited to grow and make a difference in more children’s lives, but as we grow, so does the number of children in our local child welfare system. We need more advocates who will make sure their needs get met and they find a safe, permanent home as quickly as possible. CASAs make an immense impact in the lives of our community’s most vulnerable children. To our dedicated advocates and supporters, would you continue to be a voice for children in need? To those on the verge of helping, we can achieve an advocate for all the children in need with your voice of time and resources. We are fervently working to reach 50 percent of the children in need by the end of 2019. Together, we are a powerful voice for children.

Sincerely,
Kelly

Letter from the Board Chair

As Board Chair of Heart of Missouri Court Appointed Special Advocates, my first request of you is to join us, and help put us out of business. When I was asked to be on the board, my understanding of CASA was minimal. After learning about its mission, serving on the board quickly shifted from a “community service” perspective to a responsibility. I didn’t think of caring for my own children as a “service,” so helping kids in our own community shouldn’t be.

The court refers children in need to CASA when their parents have lost sight of their best interest. The one constant in a child’s life during this time is a CASA. Unfortunately, our business is growing. The number of children who need a special advocate grows yearly. While CASA serves a higher percentage of kids needing assistance, our gains are diminished by the increase in need. Our goal is to be out of business. Please help us.

HOM CASA has nine board members to whom I want to extend a thank you. We agree that we are far overshadowed by the work of CASA staff and our wonderful philanthropic partner, the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority. I want to extend my very sincere appreciation to CASAs. I know CASAs wish their time was all that was required. Our board and staff visit with volunteers, and, as the spouse of a volunteer, I can assure you that the emotional agony, frustration and disbelief of experiencing what children endure from their own parents is life lasting. CASAs carry our mission to our kids in our community, and for that, I can easily donate my time and limited resources.

I started this letter with a request for you to join us and will end it the same way. Without additional staff, we cannot deploy more volunteers. In addition to professionally supporting the volunteers, we also train them. Our budget is lean but needs more to serve more. I will commit to you that every dollar we receive goes toward our mission of serving more kids ... our kids, in our community.

Sincerely,
Jorgen

homicasa.org
573-442-4670

“CASA is all about building trusting relationships, strong bonds and genuine concern for families. The relationships you form with the entire team must evolve out of a unified commitment to put the needs of the child first. Strong communication is crucial to move families forward toward reunification, never losing sight of doing what’s best for children.”

LINDA WILLIAMS
CASA volunteer

THE BOARD

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MARIAM SMITH, Boone County Advocate Supervisor
JAMIE FAULCONER, Callaway County Advocate Supervisor
DID YOU KNOW?

CASA volunteers are oftentimes the one consistent adult a child recognizes throughout their entire time in the child welfare system.

ONE YEAR of CASA advocacy costs less than ONE MONTH of foster care.

Children with a CASA achieve a safe, permanent home more quickly than children without a CASA.

Children with a CASA and their families receive more services and those services are more carefully targeted and monitored thanks to the CASA volunteer.

National CASA Association research reports children with a CASA:
- Have significantly improved educational performance
- Are HALF as likely to re-enter the system
- Are less likely to be bounced from home to home

MISSION

Our mission at Heart of Missouri CASA is to train and support volunteers to be exceptional voices for every abused and neglected child in the Boone and Callaway County Family Courts.

VISION

Heart of Missouri CASA believes that all children have the right to safe, healthy, stable homes, free from abuse and neglect.

BY THE NUMBERS: FISCAL YEAR 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Revenue &amp; Community Support</th>
<th>Total Expenses</th>
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<tr>
<td>$324,419</td>
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*In accordance with accounting rules, includes net $23,431 in pledges or grants of funds to be paid in future fiscal years.

Children Served

38% INCREASE from 167 to 230

Active CASA Volunteers

22% INCREASE from 94 to 110

Cases Closed

39% INCREASE from 46 to 64

Advocacy Hours

30% INCREASE from 5,889 to 7,664

Compared to 2016-2017 CASA Fiscal Year

CHILD STATS: FISCAL YEAR 2018

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<td>2%</td>
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Of the 640 children in the Boone and Callaway County courts due to abuse/neglect:

226 children had a dedicated CASA volunteer

4 children were served by CASA staff members but did not have a volunteer

410 still needed CASA’s advocacy
Kappa Alpha Theta
GROUP SUPPORTER
Alpha Mu, University of Missouri
Epsilon Iota, Westminster College

Nationally, CASA is extremely grateful to be the official philanthropy of the Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority. Locally, we are recipients of the enthusiastic support of two Theta chapters, Alpha Mu at the University of Missouri and Epsilon Iota at Westminster College. Since our inception in 2005, both chapters have been devoted supporters of our program. Every year, the women plan and implement creative fundraising activities, such as Flapjacks and Quarterbacks and Cupcakes for CASA, with a dedicated portion of the revenue coming back to Heart of Missouri CASA. Their efforts have provided critical funding to sustain our program’s core activities and growth. Beyond their own fundraising activities, our Thetas jump at the opportunity to help our program in any way possible. From assembling teddy bears and coloring books for the children during recruitment, to baking cookies for training classes, serving as interns at CASA, and volunteering to implement our fundraisers, we would not want to think about life without our Thetas. They’re invaluable to us and we believe they deserve an extra special “thank you” for the support!

Employees of Veterans United
CHAMPION DONOR

As a community, we are extremely fortunate to have the generosity of the Veterans United Home Loans employees in our town. Heart of Missouri CASA has been the beneficiary of this generosity several times in the recent past. Through the Veterans United Foundation, the employees of VU have provided funds that have allowed us to serve more children as they directly funded the training and retention of CASA volunteers at critical periods of our growth. We’d like to extend a heartfelt “thank you” for the support the employees of Veterans United have given us over the years. You are a powerful voice for our community’s children!

Jane E. Smith
CASA VOLUNTEER AND ADVOCATE DONOR

We are fortunate to have individuals who not only care deeply about our cause enough to serve as CASA volunteers but who also excitedly support the mission with their financial gifts. Jane Smith is one of these individuals. Jane has served as a CASA volunteer for six years and has advocated for children on four separate cases during this time period. She is dedicated to meeting the requirements of the CASA role and being a consistent voice for her CASA kids. Not only does Jane give her time every month to be a voice for our community’s most vulnerable children, she and her husband, Tom, also have been faithful financial supporters of HOM CASA for many years. Thank you, Jane, for not only being a persistent advocate for children in foster care but for being a sustaining donor as well!

“I am so proud to be associated with such a well-run organization. The training and ongoing support I receive from their staff is priceless.”

LISA EVANS
CASA volunteer

“We CAN’T thank you enough

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By Rebecca Highland

I remember where I was when CASA drifted into my thoughts, again. In January 2017 I was on my first solo retreat as a newly empty-nester. My sons, Austin and Tyler, had moved out. On this retreat, I journaled and read books; one had an exercise at the end of the chapter that made me ask myself: “When was I happiest when I was working?”

The short answer: working with children. I graduated from Columbia College with a Criminal Justice Administration degree, and I had worked at the Juvenile Justice Center. Later, I worked at a residential facility for boys who were severely neglected and abused. While journaling, I remembered those kids and wondered how they were doing and where they were.

And then I remembered CASA.

I looked into being a CASA when my youngest son was 16, but the timing wasn’t right. Over the years, I received CASA mailers.

On my retreat, I Googled CASA. I got excited at the prospect but wasn’t sure what to expect. I had learned over the past decade that fear of the unknown is what usually keeps one stuck from personal growth. So I leaned into the discomfort, and when I got back from the retreat, I spoke with some friends and family. I felt bolstered to take the next step. I made the call and spoke with my now supervisor, Leslie Rigdon.

On January 26 I interviewed with Leslie. She asked why I wanted to do this, and I explained my history of working with kids, the broken and misplaced, and that I’ve always found kids easier to understand. I left feeling like I had made a friend for life.

I received a call that CASA training would begin. That Thursday I walked into the building and again leaned into the discomfort of the unknown, and was surprised by the size of the class. I thought there might be three or four people, and I hoped I knew a couple, but it started as a group of about 12. I didn’t know anyone. GULP! I took a seat. We had an ice-breaker, and I watched a lot. There were college kids, professionals and grandparents. I thought, “This is going to be interesting to see how this all fits together.” And it was.

I looked forward to my Thursdays with the crew to learn the ins and outs of the law, CASA’s guidelines and the terminology to use in and out of court. Although it was a lot of information, the staff didn’t hesitate to answer any questions. I made it through training and was appointed by Judge Schneider as a CASA on March 20.

On April 10 I met Leslie to discuss a potential case. I was nervous but felt prepared enough to take it, so I accepted. I met my CASA child and mom the following Monday. We established who I was there, and she was glad her child had an advocate. I sensed her frustration with “the system,” but we steered the ship to be the best voice for her child. After five months of court and lots of calls to Leslie, the family was happily reunified that September. I still keep in touch with the mom on occasion to see how they’re doing.

Leslie called me in early February 2018 to ask if I wanted to take another case. On February 14 I met Leslie to discuss the case I am now serving. It is not easy, but I am the best advocate for my CASA kid. He is honest, respectful and hilarious. There are days I am heartbroken because the foster system is in such disrepair. Other days I’m glad there’s a system like CASA, and then there are days of frustration because I feel like my volunteer position isn’t respected. This case has been much harder; but I have learned how important a CASA really is because otherwise these kids fall through the cracks of our society, unheard.

As a CASA, Judge Schneider hears me. My voice. My voice for the kid to which she appointed me. She hears me in court. She reads my court reports, and she asks what my thoughts are as she does the other paid professionals. Why? Because CASAs spend more time with the child than anyone else being paid to work for them. You will laugh more with them, cry a little and get frustrated alongside them. You will smile when a case closes, and you see the mom have tears of joy when she gets her child back.

You will proudly watch when your CASA kid takes a turn for the better in school or athletics. It is an honor to walk in the courthouse and have a voice for someone who might not have one. It is a privilege to be working with the case I’m on now, and it is a privilege to serve as a CASA.

Cindy Gergen
CASA volunteer

“...
Before CASA, Nancy McKerrow never had any children or grandchildren of her own.

Now it's been seven years since her volunteer training began in the spring of 2011, and she's had nine CASA children among five cases. In each of her cases, Nancy, through her advocacy, has given gifts to each of her CASA children among five cases. In the beginning their meetings were at the girl's home, but Nancy knew she wasn't getting through to her.

Nancy decided to start meeting her teenage at school. Nancy would come twice a month and sit and talk to her. Most importantly, Nancy listened. And the girl opened up. She was bright and had dreams for her future. She wanted to be a photographer. “She had taken some good photos,” Nancy says. “They were mostly portraits, and she seemed serious about it.”

But the girl wasn't happy. She wasn't happy with the court’s supervision and her curfews. Nancy told her that attitude is everything.

“She didn’t think much of herself when I started meeting with her,” Nancy says. “She just wasn’t confident. By the time I got off the case, she had decided some things for herself.”

Nancy’s third and fourth CASA kids, a young girl and her older brother, were hesitant when they met her for the first time at their childcare center. Figuring as much, Nancy brought them each a special trinket to break the ice. It worked, and they warmed to her and her gifts.

Before every visit, Nancy would stop by a dollar store and pick up a toy car or a jumping chicken toy to give to her CASA kids. These trinkets were a simple reminder to the children that they were enough, they were loved and they could depend on Nancy to be a stable, presence in their lives.

The child moved into his new home. Nancy not only gave him the gift of a family who was warm and able to care for his needs, but also gave the the gift of the opportunity of language. When the case ended, the boy wasn’t speaking yet, but Nancy is hopeful that with more speech therapy he would soon. Nancy gave the gift of confidence to her next CASA child.

As is the case with many CASA children, the high school girl was distrustful of Nancy at first. The teenager was involved with the family court as a ‘crossover’ case, one where the youth has experienced abuse or neglect and has also committed law violations. In the beginning their meetings were at the girl’s home, but Nancy knew she wasn’t getting through to her.

Nancy watched during one visit as the child immediately recognized his speech therapist and warmed up to them. Clearly, Nancy had made the right decision to advocate for a speech therapist.

The home was filled with warmth and security. Nancy was happy to advocate for the children to stay together in the care of their father.

The siblings were thrilled and looked forward to Nancy’s visits. They began to trust Nancy and would open up to her during the visits.

Nancy told the children that as a CASA she was going to do whatever she could to help them and that they could tell her whatever they wanted

The court and their team to know. The children were unhappy in their home, and their foster parent wasn’t the best fit. Nancy advocated for guardianship with their grandmother who had stuck with the children from the beginning. The children were happiest with her.

In Nancy’s next case, she helped give the gift of a happy ending. Three school aged sisters were taken from the family home after their mother abused one of the children.

The girls’ father was devastated, and as soon as he could, he jumped at the opportunity to reunite with his children. He cut ties with the girls’ mother, never missed a CASA meeting and was adamant about doing what he needed to. Nancy knew he was committed to getting his girls back in his case.

There wasn’t a doubt that the place these girls needed to be was back with their father. Nancy would visit the girls around 4 in the afternoon. He would already be cooking dinner for his family and folding laundry and taking care of his children.

“He was their dad and wanted to be their dad,” Nancy says. “This rocked his world but he did everything to get them back.”

The home was filled with warmth and security. Nancy was happy to advocate for the children to stay together in the care of their father.

Nancy is currently advocating on her fifth case. Not only has Nancy given valuable gifts to each of her CASA children, but she has also given our community the gift of advocacy for our most vulnerable children.
The house was full and bursting with jittery, ecstatic emotion. Pitter-patter of scurrying feet echoed throughout the house. A group of siblings all moved from room to room looking for a missing shoe.

The eldest girl was headed to a graduation ceremony, but her shoe wasn’t anywhere to be found. This was not a problem, as all of her siblings were dedicated to searching the home to find it. Finally the shoe appeared, and the children could get back to their pizza. The siblings were tight-knit, and it only made sense that this was also the same night their CASA volunteers, Jayne Woods and Cindy Weable, came over for a end-of-case celebratory pizza party. Jayne and Cindy brought pizza, soda and ding-dongs to the home for all the children. No matter where the children were placed, they were doted on by their guardians. When the children were removed from their home and biological parents, they were placed in several different foster homes. Six months after coming in to the system, the siblings were assigned their first CASA, Jayne. A couple months later, Cindy joined the team. In the beginning of their case, Jayne and Cindy met with the court quarterly to discuss their CASA children, but the court was moving slowly to reunify the siblings. Thankfully, the Judge was committed to getting the children in the same home. She pushed the team members on the case to take all actions necessary so the children could live together. But this doesn’t mean it was easy to bring the children together under the same roof. While the team members worked hard to find one home for the siblings, the children had to endure being separated among different homes at various times. Jayne and Cindy knew this wasn’t the outcome the children needed. They remained faithful advocates during this time, the one constant for the children. No matter where the children were placed, they made sure to visit consistently and report back the children’s needs and hopes to the team and Judge. When Jayne and Cindy first met the children’s current guardians, there was a sigh of relief. Finally, there was the perfect fit. The coldness they felt from past guardians ceased. “They were mellow, good people,” Jayne says. “It was just in their nature. We trusted them. It’s hard to describe.” At one point, it seemed everything was ready for the children to move into the same home. The children were ecstatic. But complications arose with the necessary paperwork at the last minute and the children had to continue waiting and hoping for the day they could all be together under one roof. They were heartbroken. Jayne and Cindy continued to persistently advocate for the children to all live together in this home, and eventually all the paperwork was in place for this to happen and the Judge made the order.

“Case was a success because the guardians love these kids like they are their own,” Cindy says. “We went to bat for these kids. We fought for them. We believed in their guardians.”
and as a mother herself, it made every effort on therapy, parent aide’s well-being.” The system exhausted lot of the time,” she says, “It felt to all of the parent visits with the children to help calm their anxiety.

So when one came up with a family of four boys, and around the time her own son was 16 and about to leave home, she didn’t hesitate to take the case. “It was a no-brainer,” Tina says. “These kids needed me.”

The siblings were placed in a foster home a year prior due to concerns about their safety. By the time the children met Tina, they were a little hesitant to talk to her.

During visits with their biological parents, Tina realized the younger children were stressed around their parents. She made a point to go to all of the parent visits with the children to help calm their anxiety.

But Tina often felt frustrated. “A lot of the time,” she says, “It felt like the parental rights would come before the kids’ rights and their well-being.” The system exhausted every effort on therapy, parent aides and mental health professionals. After 3 years of being their CASA and as a mother herself, it made her heart ache because she knew her CASA children reuniting with their mother wouldn’t be in their best interest.

She found herself comparing the tense relationship between the biological mother and the children to the warmth she felt when she met with the younger boys’ foster parents, with whom they were placed from the beginning of the case. Tina Willingham-Hall

Tina Willingham-Hall remembers filling out a CASA volunteer form during her training years ago. It asked if she had a preference of age and gender. She knew she wouldn’t be picky when it came to deciding to take on cases.

There were several admirable qualities about their foster parents. Tina appreciated how lovingly and kindly they spoke about the boys’ biological parents. The couple went out of their way to host visits and accommodate the parents. They were also available to help the boys process the emotions that came with these visits. The foster parents put their wants aside and rooted for the biological parents to become healthy again.

The boys responded positively to such an environment with their foster parents. Tina says the boys were affective and comfortable, and it was very obvious they felt at home with their foster parents.

Tina built her CASA boys up. She showered them with hugs and “I love yous.” She instilled in them that she was a liaison between the court system and them. She let them voice their opinions on what they wanted to happen to them.

Ultimately, Tina knew the younger boys were happiest with their foster parents, and the eldest boy was happier back with his biological father. This is what she advocated for, and it became reality.

The case ended in adoption for the younger boys after five years. Tina knows this case has been a success. “I think each of the children are in a place where they’re going to flourish.”
Support Heart of Missouri CASA during CoMoGives!
You can give a voice to more children in foster care by giving to Heart of Missouri CASA’s CoMoGives campaign. *December 1st – December 31st, 2018*

Giving is easy
Simply visit [ComoGives.com](http://ComoGives.com)

1. Select Heart of Missouri CASA
2. Make Your Donation
   Choose how much to donate to Heart of Missouri CASA.
3. Return to Watch or Give Again
   Watch Heart of Missouri CASA and see if we win a challenge grant.