



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CASA OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN, INC.



2022 ANNUAL REPORT

"They say it takes 3 adults to love and support a child so that they can become a healthy adult. I get to be one of them."

-- Laura Richards, CASA



Our Staff

Jamie Brooks
Executive Director
Patricia Conroy
Volunteer Coordinator
Lyndsey Anderson
Volunteer Coordinator
Amy Bush
Volunteer Coordinator

Our Board

Frances P. Chickering
President
Marian Tripplett
Vice President
Audrey Salesberry
Treasurer
Amber Janowski
Member
Betty Taylor
Member
Jeralee Kunkee
Member
Ladena Clark
Member
Barbara Bungart
Member

A life of promise and possibilities is waiting.

2.6 years

The past three years have been a time of uncertainty in our community but we are heartened by our ability to work together as an organization, a system, and as a community to meet the needs of our most vulnerable so kids in care so they can and live in a world where they feel safe, every day, in every moment.

This year we built upon the incredible program growth of the past few years. In doing so we trained 9 new volunteers and increased the number of children served by 16% over fiscal 2021. Nowhere is this more impressive than with our dedicated CASA volunteers that have supported 131 spectacular children placed all over the State of Michigan. Collectively, our volunteers made over 1100 visits to “their” children providing a kind smile, a listening ear and expert advocacy. They attended every court hearing, sent thousands of emails and attended hundreds of meetings.

Our dedicated CASA Volunteers spend an average of 2.6 years with the children they serve. 2.6 years in a system that is noted for constant change. 2.6 years of consistency given to a child. 2.6 years of knowing their story, holding them close during this journey, and advocating for their best interests.

This year was successful because of you! We are grateful for the support of our dedicated funders and our community partners that financially support our work. Thank you to our "Friends of CASA" volunteer group who spend countless hours helping to raise funds and increase volunteer recruitment. We could not do this work without the leadership of our dedicated Board of Directors and expert staff. Most of all our program and our community is grateful for our dedicated, incredible CASA Volunteers who have used their time and talents serving the best interests of our most vulnerable local foster children’s best interests are served and they grow up and create a life of promise, possibilities, and permanency.

Jamie Brooks,
Executive Director

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Over 500 children in Berrien and St. Joseph County live in foster care due to abuse and neglect. In 2019, this region had 1,146 children who were confirmed victims of abuse, most under the age of 8.

Children in St. Joseph County enter foster care at nearly double the state average. Our Berrien children enter foster care at 41% higher than the state average

The number of children entering foster care declined significantly during the COVID 19 pandemic period. Children are now being identified and entering foster care in much higher rates.

CASA of Southwest Michigan stands ready to meet this increased need.



Impact of a CASA

- CASA children experienced significantly fewer foster care placement changes.
- A child with a CASA Volunteer is less likely to spend time in long-term foster care.
- A child with a CASA volunteer is less likely to reenter the child welfare system. The proportion of reentries is consistently reduced by half.
- A child with a CASA volunteer is more likely to be adopted.
- 20% more CASA children passed all courses than in the non-CASA group. CASA were significantly less (25%) likely to have poor conduct and significantly less likely to be expelled from school.



OUR VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers are the lifeblood of our work. Each CASA is thoroughly vetted, trained for over 30 hours and agrees to advocate for a child. Our volunteers meet with their assigned children weekly in most cases, until that child is in a safe, permanent and loving home or reunified with their parent. Other volunteers assist with data entry, help with outreach, fundraising, and serve on our board.

131

Children served

70

Court Appointed
Special Advocates

22

Additional volunteers

Why I volunteer...

I volunteer because I love making a difference in a child's life. Helping even one child feel safe and loved has a ripple effect and changes lives in ways we could never even expect. Every child I have served has had at least 4 different caseworkers and two different servicing organizations. I am the constant, I am the connection between each transition making sure information is not lost and the case is kept moving forward. I am smiling face each week listening and connecting to the child. I have had two sets of siblings go back home to their mom and the other set was adopted. I have helped get kids into extracurricular activities and be successful in school.

I fallen in love with every child I have been a CASA to. They are so resilient and strong and forgiving. I learn so much from each child I have come to know. They inspire to be a better person and treat others with grace and love. I have benefited as much from our relationship as they have.

Sandra Blough, CASA Volunteer since 2017



OUR IMPACT



100%

Percent of Court Hearings Attended by CASA



1,046

Child visits by CASA Volunteers



31,616

Miles driven by CASA Volunteers



3,824

Hours contributed by volunteers advocating for children



\$109,000

Value to community created by volunteer time contributions, based on accepted rate of \$28.54/hour

Why I volunteer...

I know that C.A.S.A. is an acronym for what we do, who we are. What I forgot until recently was that casa means “home” in Spanish and that is what these kiddos have never had. If YOU grew up in a home where you were loved, where you were fed, where you were not abused, where you were not neglected, you are WAY ahead of where we get these kids. I am a C.A.S.A. so that I can show kiddos what a good casa should look and feel like.

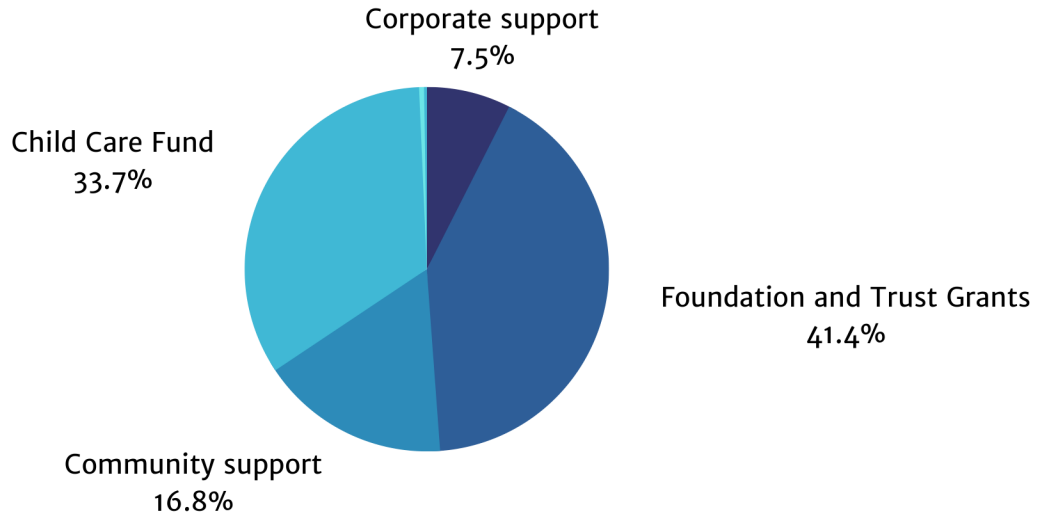
What this means to the kids I serve: *Sometimes it means a stuffed snake.* When my first CASA kiddo was taken from her home, the adults who came to pick her and her siblings up, told this 8 year old to quickly pack what she needed and to pack a bag for her baby brother as well. In her frantic rush, afraid of what was going to happen, where she would end up, where her siblings go, she left her snake. She just wanted her snake. I got that for her. *Sometimes it means being seen.* My second CASA kiddo had been so neglected that he couldn't speak, he couldn't see, he'd never been potty trained, he had rotted teeth. He was a child forgotten by a parent. We saw him, we fixed him. We loved him into becoming whole & healthy. *Sometimes it means the world.* My third CASA kiddo had spent all 8 years of his life Benton Harbor and had never seen the beach. The beach is meaningless when you have no food to eat, no potable water or electricity, no parents who cared that he existed. Now, with his basic needs met through a great foster parent, I got to show him the beach. I get to show him that there is beauty beyond the struggle. I love them. I serve them. They say it takes 3 adults to love and support a child so that they can become a healthy adult. I get to be one of them.



Laura Richards, CASA Volunteer since 2017

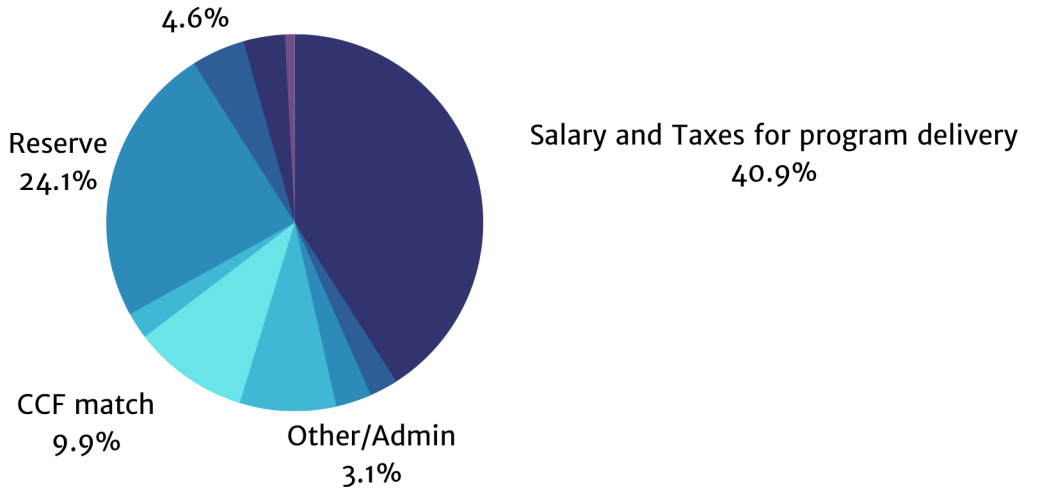
FINANCIALS

REVENUE =
\$ 225,811



EXPENSES =
\$ 234,433

Marketing and promotion (grant funded)



OUR SUPPORTERS

Three Rivers Community Foundation
The United Way of Southwest Michigan
Harbert Community Church
Michigan CASA Association
Myselcki Foundation
Watermark Brewery
United Federal Credit Union
Flagstar Bank
Kiwanais Club of Sturgis, MI
St. Joseph County United Way
Rogers Foodland
The Morris Estate
Honor Credit Union
Franks DJ Service
Gretta Volkenstein, Realtor
McLoughlin Family Foundation
Wallace Agency
GreenStone Farm Credit Services
The Toy Company
Kruggel Lawton CPA
2C Construction
Starks Family Funeral Homes & Cremation Services
Wolverine Electrical Contracting
Nelson Barrett Family Charitable Fund

And, our deepest gratitude to our auction donors, and our community donors who make our work possible.



TAKE ACTION



ADVOCATE

for the best interests of children in foster care in your community.



BECOME

a Court Appointed Special Advocate and provide invaluable help to a child navigating the foster care system.



VOLUNTEER

your time to assist CASA with fundraising, administrative support, and more.



ATTEND

local events benefitting CASA of SWMI. Follow our Facebook page for updates.



GIVE

to our program. Your support is vital to the training and administration that allows us to aid children.

<https://casaswmi.org/>