

CASA Impact Report

2020 edition



The Need for CASA

The Wisconsin Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association champions and gives a voice to abused and neglected children by supporting and growing local CASA programs. CASA's are trained citizen volunteers appointed by a judge to advocate for the best interest of children in the child welfare system. Through weekly visits with their assigned child, CASA's provide an additional layer of safety while amplifying the voice of vulnerable children.

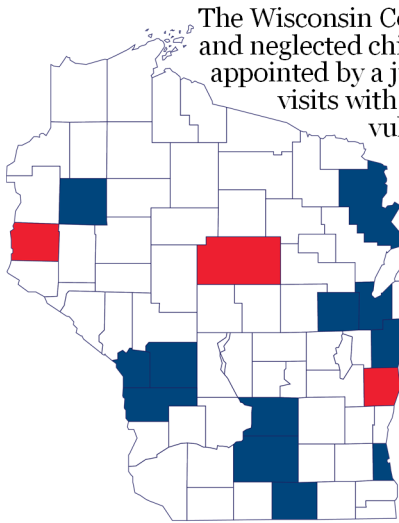
The need for CASA programs is clear. In 2020, more than 7,000 Wisconsin children were eligible for a CASA. Statewide, 545 Advocates volunteered more than 20,000 hours to serve 935 children. Local CASA programs serve 12 of the 72 Wisconsin counties, leaving great opportunities for growth.

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

Blue counties have existing CASA programs.

Red counties are projected to have programs in 2021 or 2022, including the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe.

2020 data



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. The initial training is 30 hours. Each year CASA's participate in 12 hours of continued education to ensure up to date access to trending issues and resources.
- ◇ CASA Advocates are **supervised by professional staff**.
- ◇ Trained Advocates are **sworn by the court**, reporting to the judge presiding over the child's case. The Advocate continues to share the child's wishes until the CHIPS order concludes.
- ◇ While social workers, foster parents and kinship may change, an **Advocate's consistent presence** leaves a positive, lasting impact on the child.
- ◇ **CASA works**. Studies show that children with a CASA do better in school, spend less time in the child welfare system and are less likely to return to out of home placement.

How We Support Local Programs

The Wisconsin CASA Association supports and expands local CASA programs throughout the state, ensuring all local 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 network communication, data collection, sharing best practices and monthly newsletters.
- **20th anniversary webinar series:** continued education for Advocates and staff on trending topics.
- **Bi-Monthly Trainings:** network collaboration 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.

What the Judge has to say



"Advocates are the one constant in a child's life during the time they are involved in a Minor in Need of Care case. Being removed from one's home is especially traumatizing for a child and CASA often fills the void when a friendly face is needed."

"My job as the Tribal Judge would be so much more gratifying if I had access to a well written CASA report as it offers another view into the child's life while placed out of the home. As a former CASA in Texas, it was my honor to serve the children and to know that my voice was important to the Judge."

*- Judge Elaine Smith,
Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe*

Expansion into nine new counties is projected through 2023.

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Challenges to Serving More 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 providing high quality advocacy to all eligible children throughout the state.

They include:

- Children in out-of-home placements for longer periods of time due to **addiction epidemic** (opioid, heroin, etc.).
- **Lack of funding** to build capacity in existing local programs as well as funding to launch new local programs in unserved counties.
- **Time constraints:** It takes about 18 months to start a new CASA program.
- **Need for additional staff** to supervise additional Advocates, causing waiting lists for children.
- Right now, **9 counties and the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe are waiting** to develop new local programs.

Additional funding provides more resources, decreasing the timeline to develop more programs and serve more children.



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 with the My Stuff, My Bag (MSMB) initiative.

MSMB provides CASA children with a suitcase filled with comfort items and necessities, including a pillow, blanket, stuffed animal, pajamas, socks, underwear, toothbrush/paste, shampoo and conditioner. The suitcases provide a way to carry their belongings while offering a sense of ownership and pride.



2020 packing event

The program began in June 2019 with support from the Green Bay Packers Give Back Celebrity Bowling Event. To date, thousands of items have been donated by Wisconsinites for the suitcases.

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.

Advocate Answers

Fascinating, fun, frustrating, hopeful, inspiring and joyful. That's how Jennifer from Manitowoc would describe her first eight years as a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

In 2013, Jennifer's own children were in high school and becoming more independent, allowing her time to explore volunteer opportunities in her community. She saw a flyer for CASA at work and began researching the child advocacy organization, instantly intrigued by spending time with and helping children in need while receiving the formal training and report-writing.

"I really enjoyed the initial training, learning about child protective services and foster care systems, and hearing from social workers, law enforcement, judges and Advocates who shared their knowledge and experiences with CASA," said Jennifer.



Jennifer, CASA of East Central WI Advocate

An Advocate for CASA of East Central Wisconsin, Jennifer has served six CASA cases to-date, working with boys and girls from 11 months to 9 years old. She's let the children lead which activities they do together during their weekly visits, sometimes playing with Play Doh or Legos, blowing bubbles or creating their own game.

While she loves spending time with the children and making a difference in their lives, what's surprised Jennifer the most over the years is the impact she's left on the child's caregivers, lending an ear and listening to their concerns.

"That's what makes CASA unique; volunteering while providing a service to an entire family," she added. "On paper that might sound intimidating, but once you've gone through the training and become an Advocate, it's not as difficult or time-consuming as you might have thought. There's a lot of flexibility as an Advocate...you don't need to be a social butterfly or expert report writer. You just need to be YOU!"



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