In a system where the real parties of interest – the children – are underrepresented, I find CASA advocates are not only helpful, but essential to a good outcome.

-- Judge from Northeast Region; involved with CASA/GAL program for 3–5 years

KEY FINDINGS

- On average, 47.9% of the judges’ dependency cases are assigned to a CASA/GAL volunteer. Assignment rates are higher in jurisdictions where volunteers are “Parties to Cases” and that are situated in Rural areas, but considerably lower among Northeastern judges.

- Though judges consider a wide range of factors when assigning advocacy to a case, they are most likely to consider: instability of the current placement, conflicting case information, concerns about implementation of services, and extreme neglect, physical or sexual abuse. They are less likely to consider: parental incarceration and number of siblings.

- Judges report that CASA/GAL volunteers’ activities are very useful, that their input in informing court decisions is valued, and that volunteers are very effective in supporting court processes.

- Judges frequently incorporate CASA/GAL volunteer recommendations into the hearing court order. Over 70 percent responded to a question about this issue with a ‘4’ or ‘5’ on a five-point scale ranging from ‘1-almost never’ to ‘5-almost always’. Judges where volunteers are “Parties to Cases” are more likely to incorporate recommendations into the court order.

- There is general concern about the availability of CASA/GAL volunteers for Court caseloads. Only 5.6% of judges “strongly agree” that there are sufficient CASA/GAL volunteers to meet their caseloads.

- Judges agree that the work of the CASA/GAL volunteers has been of high quality, is beneficial to their decision making, and is beneficial to the children and families they serve.
RECOMMENDATIONS TO NATIONAL CASA

- **Continue to work with local CASA/GAL programs in providing useful and relevant services to the local jurisdictions.** Judges are highly satisfied with the work of the CASA/GAL programs and volunteers and value their input and recommendations. Work with the local programs in their efforts to improve services, expand their volunteer base and collaborate effectively with the local court jurisdictions.

- **Utilize the information about relevant factors for advocacy selection in helping local programs work more efficiently with the local jurisdictions.** There is variability in the extent to which various factors are considered in the decisions about case advocacy. Help local programs share information about what the volunteers can do for the local jurisdictions and in which situations these volunteers might be of greatest assistance.

- **Use the study findings to tailor training, communication and coordination efforts in local jurisdictions.** Local judicial systems are unique in regard to the relevant laws, procedures, processes, and statutes that influence judicial decision making. Local CASA programs and volunteers must understand as much as possible about the local environment to maintain strong connections to the local jurisdiction.

- **Continue with efforts to recruit and retain local CASA/GAL volunteers.** The only real area of dissatisfaction with local CASA programs is that there are not “sufficient CASA/GAL volunteers to meet the caseloads.” Explore ways that local programs and judicial representatives can work together to recruit and retain volunteers.

- **Examine differences in patterns among those judges working with the program using a “Parties to Cases” model versus a “Friend of the Court” model.** Judges report that volunteers who are “Parties to Cases” provide greater input to the court decisions and are more likely to have recommendations incorporated into the hearing’s court order. Determine if this distinction is important in helping local programs better serve the overall interests of the Court.

- **Encourage the development of a comprehensive national database of juvenile court dependency judges for continuing education and advocacy purposes.**

- **Expand National CASA’s knowledge of program impacts and efficacy through on-going research efforts.**

> CASA needs more financial support in order to recruit/monitor more CASAs and to sustain a larger program.

-- Judge from Mountain Plains Region involved with CASA/GAL program for 6 – 10 years