

The mission of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association, together with its state and local members, is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so that they can thrive in safe, permanent homes. We work with state and local CASA and volunteer guardian ad litem programs to promote and support quality volunteer advocacy to help assure each child a safe, permanent, nurturing home. See Appendix C for more about National CASA.



This Technical Assistance Brief summarizes survey findings examining the strengths and challenges for CASA/GAL programs serving multiple counties or jurisdictions.

Strengths and Challenges for CASA/GAL Programs Serving Multiple Counties or Jurisdictions

For several years there has been a growing trend for CASA/GAL programs to serve more than a single county or court jurisdiction. As indicated in the chart below, in 2004 over one-third of CASA programs served a multi-county area. Of those, 14% served two counties and 24% served more than two. In the same year nearly one fifth of local CASA programs reported serving more than one court jurisdiction. Of that 17%, eight percent served two jurisdictions and 9% served more than two. In 2004, less than 50% of the counties in the United States were served by a CASA/GAL program.

| Percent of CASA/GAL Programs Serving More than one County | Programs Serving Two Counties | Programs Serving More than two Counties |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| 38% | 14% | 24% |

| Percent of CASA/GAL Programs Serving More than one Court Jurisdiction | Programs Serving Two Jurisdictions | Programs Serving More than two Jurisdictions |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| 17% | 8% | 9% |

The rationale for this type of development remains consistent across the country. Multi-county/jurisdiction programs are a way to reach children who would not otherwise be likely to have the services of a CASA/GAL volunteer. This model can be useful if the ability of a community to sustain a program is limited and the number of abused and neglected children to be represented is small enough that combining forces with another county or jurisdiction will create obvious economies of scale.

With increased interest in the multi-county/jurisdiction model, the National CASA Association began exploring the effectiveness and efficiency of local programs serving more than one county or jurisdiction. In this process we

collected and examined the strengths and challenges of this model and how to best develop and maintain a multi-county/jurisdiction program.

In August 2003, the National CASA Association explored the development and management of multi-county/jurisdiction CASA programs. Nine state CASA/GAL directors, one Tribal Court and 21 local program representatives were surveyed. Respondents were asked about the challenges and benefits of establishing and running a multi-jurisdictional program, including details of program governance, management and operation. See Appendix A for a list of state organizations and local programs participating in this project.

There are many reasons CASA programs decide to develop a multi-county/jurisdiction program. Some begin with a plan to serve several counties; others arrive at this decision years later when they are well-established in one area and observe the need for or benefit of adjoining with other counties or jurisdictions. The primary rationale is to reach children who would not otherwise have the services of a CASA volunteer. Where it may not be feasible to start a new program because of available resources or the ability of a community to sustain a program, utilizing a multi-county/jurisdiction model for abused and neglected children in unserved areas is often the best option.

Many CASA programs across the country are successful using the multi-county/jurisdiction model and there is increasing support on the local, state and national levels for the development of this model.

The information in this brief is intended solely to guide CASA/GAL programs that are considering expansion into contingent counties or jurisdictions. For additional assistance in deliberating options for your program, consult the state CASA/GAL organization or the appropriate National CASA regional program specialist.

Strengths of Multi-County/Jurisdiction Programs

Local program staff cited the following strengths of a multi-county/jurisdiction program:

- Larger geographical areas provide access to a greater and more diverse pool of potential volunteers, staff and board members.
- Opportunities for public awareness and resource development increase and provide a larger base from which to recruit volunteers and build long-term program sustainability.
- Rural communities can be reached effectively— because other social services operate similarly.
- Volunteers can easily follow cases that cross county/jurisdictions.
- Programs can reach children that might otherwise not be served by a CASA/GAL volunteer.

From the state association perspective, two additional strengths were cited involving conservation of their limited resources: 1) any new program development activities are either not necessary or are already being performed by the established local program, 2) having fewer programs in a state simplifies communication and providing technical assistance.

Challenges of Multi-County/Jurisdiction Programs

Respondents cited the following challenges:

- Addressing the diverse needs of each jurisdiction with regard to staff, volunteers and children served.
- Responding to the different expectations, protocols and procedures of multiple local courts, social service providers and law enforcement.
- Managing communication and coordination with (frequently larger) off-site staff as well as volunteers and board members from outlying communities.
- Accurately assessing and meeting increased administrative and program costs;
- Tracking data and finances for multiple sites.
- Raising funds and staging events in a larger geographic area.
- Securing and managing multiple facilities.
- Meeting multi-site technological needs.
- Defining resource priorities and distributing funds between multiple offices.
- Factoring in time and money for increased staff and volunteer travel.

Exploring the Option of a Multi-County/Jurisdiction Program

Step One

Before considering expansion of a local CASA/GAL program into another jurisdiction or county, the state CASA office should be consulted. The local program should find out if development activity is already occurring in that county/jurisdiction and how an expansion by a neighboring CASA program might affect the state's overall program development plan. The state organization can provide a wealth of information helpful in determining the need for expansion. Most state organizations have records of previous start-up inquiries and activities in the proposed expansion jurisdiction. The state office is generally aware of the level of interest and support from the judiciary and community and has often already collected child welfare statistics from that jurisdiction.

Step Two

A program considering expansion should conduct a needs assessment similar to one conducted prior to the development of a new program. See Appendix A for a sample needs assessment. In addition to the items in the standard needs assessment, the staff and governing entity of an existing program should answer the following questions before expanding into a new area:

- Does the judge in the expansion county want a CASA program?
- Is the expansion community ready to support a CASA program with human and financial resources? If not, how will you develop their support?
- Is the current CASA/GAL program infrastructure strong enough for expansion?
- What percentage of children in need of CASA services are being served in the current jurisdiction?

- Will the expansion stretch the program resources too thin?
- What is the number of abused and neglected children in the new county?
- Are there community members in the expansion community interested in volunteering in a CASA/GAL program?
- What financial resources exist?
- What additional expenses will be incurred?
- Will travel be reimbursed to volunteers and staff?
- Will a remote office be necessary? What will be the cost and where will it be located?
- What additional staff and services (i.e. bookkeeping) are necessary?
- How will the new county/jurisdiction feel as a part of the organization and get the support and guidance it needs?
- Are there individuals in the expansion area willing to serve as members of the board of directors?
- Will the board structure change to include members in the new area served?

Recommendations for CASA/GAL Programs Serving Multiple-Counties/Jurisdictions

Following a decision to expand into an adjoining county or jurisdiction the CASA/GAL program should carry out the activities below:

- Conduct a community forum with key individuals and assess the needs of the community to be served.
- Host a kick-off event to announce and introduce CASA to the new community.
- Develop a community presence in each area served including public awareness initiatives such as media coverage, billboards and public service announcements.
- Recruit members for and develop an advisory committee in each county the program serves. Have at least one person from each advisory committee serve as a voting member on the governing body for the CASA program.
- Recruit volunteers and staff from each county served.
- Include each county in elements of the resource development plan.
- Develop a donor cultivation program for each county.
- Conduct face-to-face meetings with staff at least monthly and make frequent and quality communication with program staff a priority.
- Rotate the location of staff and board meetings throughout the area served.
- Develop efficient methods of communicating with staff, board members and volunteers through the internet, phone systems and in-person events.
- Designate a specific staff position to gather high quality and consistent data.
- Be aware of judicial protocol and preferences in working with multiple judges.
- Develop written working agreements with each court jurisdiction and social service office.

- Designate a lead judge to maintain CASA as a priority and to advocate the program's needs to other judges.
- Ensure all judges working with the program are included in trainings, graduations, volunteer recognition events and other activities.
- Develop a strong working relationship and open communication with attorneys, social workers, foster parents and other service providers in each area served.
- When feasible and appropriate, establish a remote office in each area served.
- Provide adequate space for volunteers in each office. Some may have traveled a long distance to meet, make phone calls and conduct other CASA business.
- Utilize existing resources from your state and national associations (guides, technical assistance material, standards, etc.)
- Contact your state director or National CASA Association regional program specialist for assistance as needed.
- Identify another program in your state that is operating a well functioning multi-county/jurisdiction program and establish a relationship to share successes and challenges.
- Maintain a commitment to providing high quality advocacy for abused and neglected children throughout the expansion effort.

The mission of CASA is to assure that all our nation's abused and neglected children thrive in safe, permanent homes but CASA/GAL programs currently serve less than half the children in need. Consequently, exploring various options to increase volunteer advocacy for children is crucial. However, local programs must think and plan strategically to sustain growth. The National CASA Association hopes this technical assistance brief will assist local CASA/GAL programs in determining if multi-county or jurisdiction expansion is the right choice for their program.

Appendix A:

Sample Needs Assessment: Assessing the Expansion Community's Need for a CASA Program

The following questions will help provide information necessary to determine if the county/jurisdiction intended for expansion needs or would welcome a CASA program.

- How does the presiding juvenile court judge rate the current system in terms of advocacy for children?
- Is the judge satisfied with the information being provided to assist his/her decision making?
- Do your state statute or court rules define the role of the CASA/GAL volunteer? If yes, what is it?
- How many reports of abuse and neglect were made to child protective services last year? Of the reports received, how many were substantiated?
- How many new abuse and neglect cases were filed in court last year?
- How many children are placed in foster care?
- What is the average number of cases carried by a protective services social worker?
- What is the average number of foster care placements for each child in foster care?
- What is the average length of time children remain in foster care placement before a permanent plan is achieved?
- How many children were terminated from court involvement last year?
 - Of that number, how many were returned home?
 - How many were placed with relatives?
 - How many were placed for adoption?
- How many children in the expansion county are currently awaiting adoption?
- Is every child involved in an abuse or neglect proceeding appointed a guardian ad litem? If not, how many and which cases do receive appointment?
- What racial and ethnic groups are represented in the child welfare population and general population in the community?
- How does the percentage of minority children in foster care compare to the percentage of the minority population as a whole?

Much of this information will be a matter of public record and can be obtained through census data, the court or social services. Other information required can be obtained by interviewing child welfare and court personnel. Making contact with these individuals can provide other vital information such as advice on the local political climate, community readiness and history of child welfare and court services in the area.

Key individuals to meet with and interview include:

- State CASA/GAL organization director
- Presiding judge of the juvenile or family court
- Manager of the department of social services
- Court administrator
- County prosecutor
- Members of other child advocacy organizations in the community
- Members of civic/social/service/religious organizations who are interested in child abuse issues
- Service providers who treat children referred by the court and social service agencies
- Members of the local bar association
- Business leaders with knowledge of the community and available resources and experience in volunteer programs

Appendix B:

Survey Participants: State Organizations and Multi-County/Jurisdiction Local Programs

California

- California CASA Association
Oakland
- CASA of Del Norte
Crescent City
- Child Advocates of Santa Clara/San Mateo
Milpitas

Indiana

- Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA
Indianapolis
- Northeastern Indiana CASA
Albion
- East Central Indiana CASA
Anderson
- CASA of South Central Indiana
Columbus

Louisiana

- Louisiana CASA Association
Baton Rouge
- Child Advocacy Services
Hammond
- CASA of West Central Louisiana
De Ridder
- CASA of Northeast Louisiana
Monroe

New Jersey

- CASA of New Jersey
Trenton
- CASA of Morris and Sussex Counties
Morristown
- CASA of Atlantic and Cape May Counties
Somers Point

New York

- CASA: Advocates for Children of New York State
Albany
- CASA of Southern Tier Inc.
Elmira

- CASA of Oneida and Herkimer Counties
Utica

Oregon

- CASA State Coordination Office
Oregon Commission on Children & Families
Salem
- CASA for Children Inc.
Portland
- Crooked River CASA serving Crook & Jefferson Counties and Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
Prineville

Tennessee

- Tennessee CASA Association
Nashville
- CASA of Northeast Tennessee
Johnson City
- CASA of Sullivan County Inc.
Kingsport

Texas

- Texas CASA Association
Austin
- CASA of Trinity Valley
Athens
- CASA for the Highland Lakes Area
Kingsland
- CASA of West Texas
Midland

Virginia

- CASA Office of the Department of Criminal Justice Services
Richmond
- CASA of Central Virginia
Lynchburg
- Piedmont CASA Inc.
Charlottesville
- CASA of the New River Valley
Christiansburg

Appendix C:

Overview of the National CASA Association

Over half a million children live in the foster care system today because they are unable to live safely at home due to some form of parental abuse or neglect. It is estimated that children who suffer abuse and neglect are 53% more likely to become juvenile delinquents and 38% more likely to become violent criminals as adults. A major factor in avoiding bad outcomes for an abused child is the presence of a concerned adult in that child's life. In 2004, over 188,000 abused and neglected children were able to have at least one consistent and concerned adult in their lives, a volunteer court appointed special advocate (CASA).

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of abused children and to ensure that they do not get lost in the overburdened legal system or languish in an inappropriate group or foster home. They stay with each child's case until the child is placed in a safe, permanent home with hope for a positive future. In some states, CASA volunteers are referred to as volunteer guardians ad litem (GALs).

The National CASA Association is a national organization of 954 local and state member CASA/GAL programs and satellite offices across the country. National CASA, headquartered in Seattle, Washington, functions as a resource to support and increase the capacities of local programs to serve more abused children and serve them better. We provide state and local program staff with training and assistance in a variety of areas, including program development, volunteer recruitment and training, program best practices, quality assurance, resource development and grant writing. We also provide local and state programs with grant funds to promote both program quality and growth to better meet the needs of abused children.

For more information visit nationalcasa.org.