



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates

FOR CHILDREN

THE NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED
SPECIAL ADVOCATE ASSOCIATION

A Powerful Voice for Vulnerable Children

When a child's future hangs in the balance, a court-appointed volunteer can make all the difference.





Walk in Their Shoes

If you were a child who experienced abuse or neglect, you would be facing a difficult path ahead, one likely defined by physical, psychological or emotional trauma and the long-term consequences that come with it.

Chances are, by the time you turn 21, you will have at least one psychiatric disorder. And you will have spent two years or more in a constant state of toxic stress while you waited to go home, be adopted or simply see what happens next.

You will have moved three times, had several caseworkers and caregivers, and attended nine different schools.

As you grow up, you are at risk of grade repetition and substance abuse. You are 900 percent more likely to be involved in criminal activities. And if you never find a permanent home and age out of the child welfare system altogether, you have a 20 percent chance of being homeless before age 19.



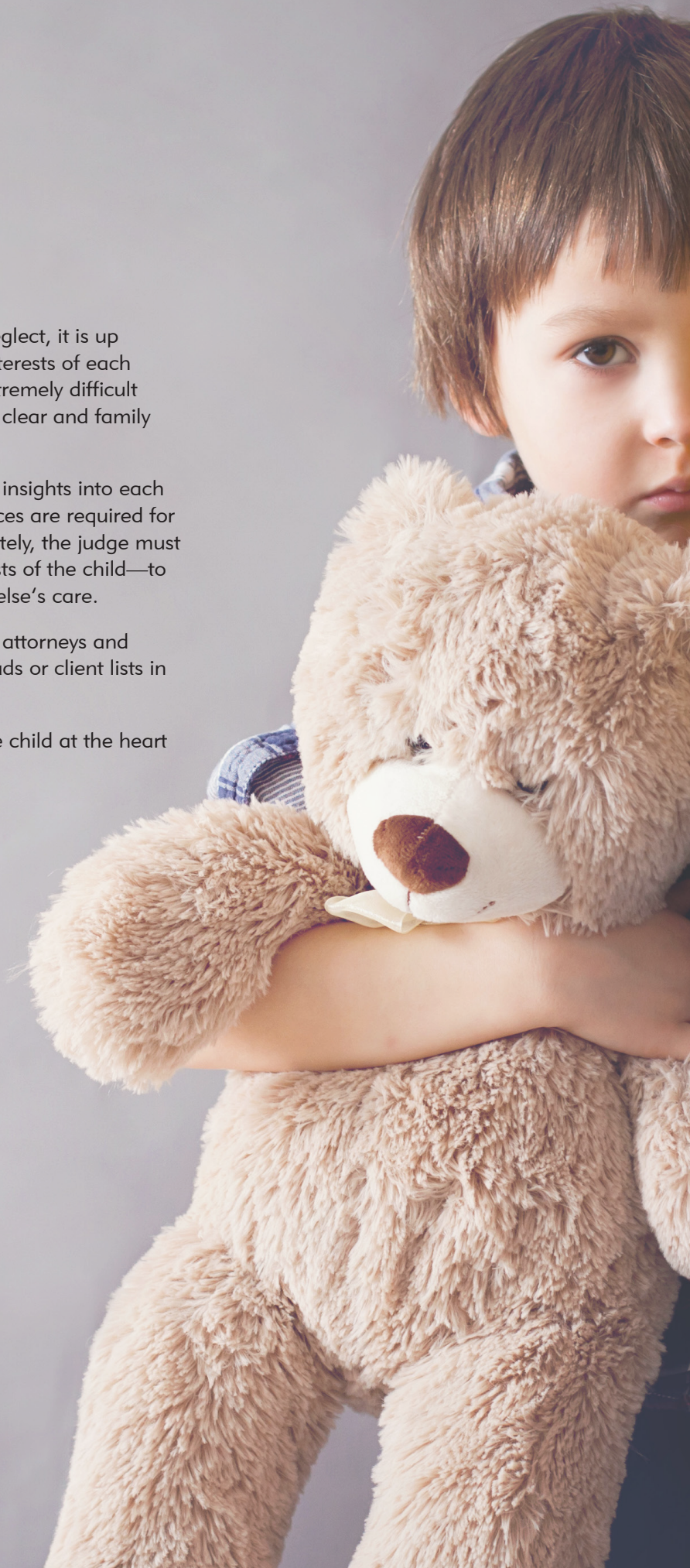
What Is Best?

In heartbreaking situations of abuse or neglect, it is up to a judge to decide what is in the best interests of each child who comes before the court—an extremely difficult task considering that facts are not always clear and family dynamics are as unique as each child.

To be fair and effective, judges must gain insights into each child's life. They need to know what services are required for both the child and the family. And, ultimately, the judge must decide if it is safe—and in the best interests of the child—to return home or to be placed in someone else's care.

The judge gets input from social workers, attorneys and other professionals—all who have caseloads or client lists in the dozens, or even hundreds.

The judge needs someone who knows the child at the heart of the case.





The Makings of a Movement

National CASA's roots go back to 1977 when Seattle Judge David Soukup grew frustrated as he looked around the courtroom. In cases involving children who were abused or neglected, lawyers represented parents, and caseworkers represented their agency, but no one was there advocating exclusively for the child's best interests.

After countless sleepless nights wondering whether he had made the right decisions, Judge Soukup decided that something needed to change. He needed more information about each case and someone to make recommendations unique to each child.

Judge Soukup realized volunteers from the community could be trained to be the child's voice in court. The first CASA program was born.

In the years that followed, likeminded people across the country came together to build a nationwide movement that speaks for and benefits children in need, eventually reaching 49 states and the District of Columbia.

Today, CASA and Guardian ad Litem (GAL) programs serve children and youth in thousands of communities—from our largest cities to the most rural counties.

"When I was eight years old, my mom decided she didn't want to be a mother anymore. Thirty minutes later, I'm in the system. That was tough for me. That was very tough. I'm glad I meet my CASA. He turned the light on. He was there for me in court, he was there for me at school, and he is there for me now."

**ALONZO, FORMER FOSTER CHILD
BOSTON COLLEGE GRADUATE
INVESTMENT BANKING TRAINEE**

The Power of Partnership

The National CASA Association supports a nationwide network of more than 900 CASA and GAL programs that recruit, screen and train thousands of volunteers each year. Volunteers advocate for children's best interests in court and help judges make well-informed decisions that will define the rest of a child's life.

Growing the network to serve more children

National CASA raises awareness of the need for volunteer advocates across the country and helps create new programs in underserved communities. We also provide grants and pass through federal funding to the programs in greatest need and those that can make the largest impact.

Rigorous, state-of-the-art training programs and tools

National CASA requires that all volunteers are screened and participate in a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training that is built on real-world case studies and covers the role of the volunteer in court, child development issues, trauma-informed care and bias awareness, among other topics.

National quality assurance standards and best practices

We ensure each program across the country meets the highest standards for working with and serving vulnerable children. National CASA provides ongoing technical assistance and best practices so all programs, regardless of size, can provide what children need to thrive.





Our Volunteers Change Lives

Our highly trained, volunteer advocates are recruited from the community to build a caring one-to-one relationship with children impacted by abuse or neglect. They become a caring, consistent adult in a child's life and gather important information for the judge through a variety of approaches:

- Spending time with and listening to the child at least once a month
- Reviewing a host of records to understand what services and resources the child needs
- Interviewing the adults in the child's life—from parents, relatives and temporary caregivers to teachers, caseworkers and medical professionals

All the time and attention volunteers spend learning about the child paints a more complete picture of the case. Volunteers recommend services to help the child—and family—to heal and thrive.

A volunteer's perspective is invaluable to judges, who see dozens of cases each day. But the most important thing CASA and GAL volunteers provide is consistency for a child going through the most traumatic experience of their life. And they stay with the children or as long as it takes them to find safe, permanent homes.

"When I was 7, I remember my mom waking me up. She is grabbing our stuff and she is screaming, 'the cops are coming.' I hear the sirens, and all the yelling. I was hiding under a car and a policeman pulled me out and I watched as my mom faded away.

*To me my CASA means a trusted advocate, friend. When you're young no one listens to you and when you're in the foster care system people **really** don't listen to you. To give a child a CASA is to give them a voice. To give them a voice is to give them hope. To give them hope is to give them the world. I believe that with all my heart. I don't know what I'd do without my CASA. I don't want to know."*

**PAMELA, FORMER FOSTER CHILD
EARNED 4-YEAR COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP
SHE HOPES TO BECOME A U.S. AMBASSADOR**



Collective Impact



938

State & Local
Member Programs



283,970

Children Served



4.7 million

Volunteer Hours



87,865

CASA & GAL
Volunteers



93,107

Cases our volunteers helped
close in 2017



25% faster

How quickly the children we serve find
safe, permanent homes



\$528 million

Saved last year on foster care alone
because the kids we served spent less
time in foster care







The Work Ahead to Serve Every Child

The National CASA Association is driven by the belief that every child who has been abused or neglected should have a court-appointed volunteer so they can find a safe and permanent home with the opportunity to thrive.

Today, we are providing support to communities that need our help most and growing our volunteer movement; but the number of children in foster care continues to grow. Most years, our network is able to serve 40 percent of all the children who need our help. To move closer to our goal of serving every child who needs a CASA/GAL volunteer, we plan to implement these strategies:

SCALE THE IMPACT of state and local CASA/GAL programs to serve children in every corner of the country. We are assessing coverage gaps and capacity, forecasting needs and developing blueprints for growth in cities, towns and counties.

RECRUIT AND RETAIN VOLUNTEERS, including more volunteers of color and more male volunteers to reflect the diversity of the children we serve. We use best practices to keep volunteers engaged and connected to the movement. Recognizing that our volunteers are our greatest asset and best ambassadors, we are investing in new strategies for recruitment.

RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS about the needs of the vulnerable children we serve and the challenges they face. We are giving the issues of child abuse and neglect a national platform, educating the public on the transformative impact of volunteer advocates and offering new ways for community members to engage with us to spark meaningful change.

DEVELOP NEW, EVIDENCE-BASED TRAINING components to leverage our state-of-the-art curriculum and incorporate the latest research in mental health, child development and trauma-informed care. We are committed to a culture of continuous learning and improvement throughout our staff and volunteer workforce to better support children and families.

STUDY WHAT WORKS BEST for children in the foster care and court systems to help them reach safe, permanent homes and thrive into adulthood. Working with more than a quarter of a million children, we are building new, evidence-based knowledge through performance measurement and evaluation, sharing breakthroughs and key learnings with practitioners nationwide.

Join Us

Serving every child who needs a volunteer is possible.
But we can't do it alone.

Our movement is more than just volunteers and program staff. It includes people, organizations and corporations that believe children who have been abused or neglected deserve the best chance in life. Whether your interest is in giving your financial **support**, your **time** or your **voice**—there are many different ways to **get involved!**

*Join our movement **TODAY:** casaforchildren.org/join*

