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# Research that Supports the Effectiveness of CASA/GAL Best Interest Advocacy



## PREAMBLE

The National CASA/GAL Association for Children is committed to using fact-based knowledge, building toward becoming a data-informed, evidence-based organization. This will allow the CASA/GAL network to continue to grow its efforts to ensure children and families served have the greatest opportunity to thrive.

Many independent academic studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of best-interest advocacy and the CASA/GAL network. Below is a summary of results from CASA/GAL studies selected based on their high methodological quality:

## ADDRESSING TRAUMA

- Cases assigned to a CASA/GAL volunteer tend to involve the most serious cases of maltreatment, in which the children were more at risk.
  - Caliber Associates, *National CASA Association Evaluation Project*, Caliber Associates; Fairfax, Virginia. 2004.
  - Office of the Inspector General Report, US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General. *Audit Report Results for CASA Advocacy*. Washington, DC. January, 2007.
- A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer has significantly less placements than a child without a CASA/GAL volunteer.
  - Calkins, C.; Millar, M. *The Effectiveness of Court Appointed Special Advocates to Assist in Permanency Planning*. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal. 1999.
  - Gershun, Martha, and Claire Terrebonne. *Child welfare system interventions on behalf of children and families: Highlighting the role of court appointed special advocates*. Current problems in pediatric and adolescent health care. Volume 9. 2018.
  - Leung, P. *Is the Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program Effective? A Longitudinal Analysis of Time Involvement and Case Outcomes*. Child Welfare League of America. 1996
- Judges report the impact of CASA/GAL volunteers is most pronounced in “promoting long-term well-being” (92.2%), followed by “appropriate services to child and family” (83%) and “psychological well-being” (79.9%).

- Weiner, D., Farrell, A., Gitlow, E., Small, L., Kim, K., Anderson, C., & Goerge, R. *The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program: Judicial Perspectives Survey and the Path to Evidence*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago: Chicago, IL. 2020.
- CASA/GAL volunteers are highly effective in getting their recommendations accepted in court. In four out of five cases, all or almost all CASA/GAL volunteer recommendations are accepted.
  - Caliber Associates, *National CASA Association Evaluation Project*, Caliber Associates; Fairfax, Virginia. 2004.
  - Gershun, Martha, and Claire Terrebonne. *Child welfare system interventions on behalf of children and families: Highlighting the role of court appointed special advocates*. Current problems in pediatric and adolescent health care, Volume 9. 2018.
- Over 93% of judges report a very positive overall experience with the CASA/GAL program.
  - Weiner, D., Farrell, A., Gitlow, E., Small, L., Kim, K., Anderson, C., & Goerge, R. *The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program: Judicial Perspectives Survey and the Path to Evidence*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago: Chicago, IL. 2020.

## REACHING PERMANENT HOMES

### A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer is:

- Less likely to reenter the child welfare system. The proportion of reentries is consistently reduced by half.
  - Office of the Inspector General Report, US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General. *Audit Report Results for CASA Advocacy*. Washington, DC. January, 2007.
  - Poertner, J., & Press, A. *Who best represents the interests of the child in court?* Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1990.
  - Abramson, Shareen. *Use of court-appointed advocates to assist in permanency planning for minority children*. Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1991.
  - Calkins, C.; Millar, M. *The Effectiveness of Court Appointed Special Advocates to Assist in Permanency Planning*. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal. 1999.
  - Gershun, Martha, and Claire Terrebonne. *Child welfare system interventions on behalf of children and families: Highlighting the role of court appointed special advocates*. Current problems in pediatric and adolescent health care, Volume 9. 2018.
- More likely to achieve permanency.
  - Calkins, C.; Millar, M. *The Effectiveness of Court Appointed Special Advocates to Assist in Permanency Planning*. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal. 1999.
  - Gershun, Martha, and Claire Terrebonne. *Child welfare system interventions on behalf of children and families: Highlighting the role of court appointed special advocates*. Current problems in pediatric and adolescent health care, Volume 9. 2018.
- As likely to be reunified with their birth parent as a child without a CASA/GAL volunteer.
  - Abramson, Shareen. *Use of court-appointed advocates to assist in permanency planning for minority children*. Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1991.

- More likely to be adopted.
  - Poertner, J., & Press, A. *Who best represents the interests of the child in court?* Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1990.
  - Abramson, Shareen. *Use of court-appointed advocates to assist in permanency planning for minority children.* Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1991.

## ENABLING WELL-BEING OVER TIME

- When a CASA/GAL volunteer is assigned, a higher number of services are ordered for children and families.
  - Caliber Associates, *National CASA Association Evaluation Project*, Caliber Associates; Fairfax, Virginia. 2004.
  - Office of the Inspector General Report, US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General. *Audit Report Results for CASA Advocacy.* Washington, DC. January, 2007.
  - Poertner, J., & Press, A. *Who best represents the interests of the child in court?* Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1990.
  - Litzelfelner, P. *The Effectiveness of CASAs in Achieving Positive Outcomes for Children.* Child Welfare League of America. 2000.
  - Gershun, Martha, and Claire Terrebonne. *Child welfare system interventions on behalf of children and families: Highlighting the role of court appointed special advocates.* Current problems in pediatric and adolescent health care, Volume 9. 2018.
  - Peters, C.; Claussen Bell, K.; Zinn, A.; George, R.; Courtney, M. *Continuing in Foster Care Beyond Age 18: How Courts Can Help.* Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. 2008.
- A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer is more likely to have better outcomes: children tended to perform better academically and behaviorally in school as measured by whether or not they passed all of their courses, whether or not they were expelled, and their conduct performance.
  - Waxman, H.; Houston, R.; Profilet, S.; Sanchez, B. *The Long-Term Effects of the Houston Child Advocates, Inc., Program on Children and Family Outcomes.* Child Welfare. 2009.
- Children and youth assigned a CASA/GAL volunteer reported significantly higher levels of hope. A child's hope has been linked to numerous positive outcomes such as academic success, overall wellbeing, increases in self-control, positive social relationships and optimism.
  - Stanley, Jessica, and Chan M. Hellman. *Nurturing Hope Among Children Experiencing Abuse & Neglect: Examining the Effects of CASA Volunteers.* 2019.

## RELEVANT RESEARCH STUDIES

**Abramson, Shareen.** *Use of court-appointed advocates to assist in permanency planning for minority children.* Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1991.

Describes the Fresno Program, a program of volunteer, court-appointed advocates who assist in cases of abuse and neglect involving minority families. Also describes an outcome study of the program. In the amicus group,

**significantly fewer children were placed in long-term foster care** than in the comparison group. Significantly more children were placed in adoptive families.

**Caliber Associates.** *National CASA Association Evaluation Project*, Caliber Associates; Fairfax, Virginia. 2004.

The study combines data collected through the National CASA Association's management information system with national data on the well-being of children in the child welfare system. It provides a rare glimpse into the characteristics of CASA volunteers and their training and activities. The study also compares the services received by children with and without a CASA volunteer and describes how often CASA volunteers' recommendations are followed by the court. Finally, the study compares the well-being of children in the child welfare system with and without a CASA volunteer.

The study highlights a number of strengths in the characteristics and activities of CASA volunteers. These volunteers are well-educated and likely to be employed; their recommendations to the court are very often accepted. A key strength of this study was its comparison of well-being of children in the child welfare system who had and had not been assigned a CASA. The findings of this study suggest that **children who were assigned a CASA volunteer had more severe cases and a more substantial history of prior contact with the child welfare system.**

**Calkins, C.; Millar, M.** *The Effectiveness of Court Appointed Special Advocates to Assist in Permanency Planning*. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal. 1999.

Calkins and Millar reviewed case records of children who were assigned a CASA volunteer and children who were not. It was found that CASA involvement was associated with "approximately" one-third less placements as well as statistically significant **reductions in time children spent in care**. These results align with previous case file studies that find that children with CASA volunteers tend to spend less time in the wardship of the court and receive fewer placements. Researchers also claim that CASA involvement lead to higher permanency achievement rates as well as higher rates of reunification with parents, however this result was not statistically significant.

**Gershun, Martha, and Claire Terrebonne.** *Child welfare system interventions on behalf of children and families: Highlighting the role of court appointed special advocates*. Current problems in pediatric and adolescent health care, Volume 9. 2018.

This article describes the scope of the problem in child welfare and explains how the child welfare system intervenes, including how cases are reported, how [Child Protective Services](#) (CPS) assesses the risk, how CPS determines when in-home services are appropriate or if a child should be removed from the home, how ongoing cases are managed, and the options for permanency for children in the system. The authors document how **outcomes for child victims of abuse and neglect are greatly improved when their representation includes the appointment of a CASA volunteer** to advocate for their best interests.

**Leung, P.** *Is the Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program Effective? A Longitudinal Analysis of Time Involvement and Case Outcomes*. Child Welfare League of America. 1996

The study aimed to determine the extent to which the CASA program contributes to positive outcomes and to "asses at which point during the court process CASA intervention is most effective". Leung examined cases from a single Midwestern city between 1987 and 1990 in three different groups; those with an assigned CASA volunteer, those without a CASA volunteer, and those referred to a CASA volunteer by the court but not assigned a CASA volunteer. The study outcomes support the consensus that **CASA volunteers tend to both reduce the length of out-of-home placement and minimize the number of placements**. The study also determines that **CASA volunteers tend to be most effective when assigned as early as possible in a child's case** when they are able to collect and provide valuable information to the court.

**Litzelfelner, P.** *The Effectiveness of CASAs in Achieving Positive Outcomes for Children.* Child Welfare League of America. 2000.

The study collected data from case files on 200 children over the two year period. Findings indicate that CASA best interest advocacy led to positive outcomes across all three process-related variables of interest compared to children not appointed a CASA volunteer; (1) **reduced the number of placements children received**, (2) **reduced the number of court continuances children experienced**, and (3) **increased the number of services provided to children**. However, the study found no difference in the permanency outcomes between CASA and non-CASA-assigned children. The study controlled for differences in program sites, but could not use random assignment of cases to CASA—therefore it is unlikely that CASA volunteer and non-CASA groups are otherwise equal. The sample size of 200 was also lower than the estimated amount needed for statistically significant results (n=600).

**Office of the Inspector General Report, US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General.** *Audit Report Results for CASA Advocacy.* Washington, DC. January, 2007.

In 2005, the US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of the National CASA/GAL Association, as required by Congress. The objectives of this audit report were to determine the types of activities funded by National CASA/GAL and to assess local CASA programs' performance against four outcome measures for cases involving CASA volunteers as compared with non-CASA cases.

Findings of effectiveness included: **cases assigned to a CASA/GAL volunteer tend to involve the most serious cases of maltreatment**, in which the children were more at risk; **children with a CASA/GAL volunteer are substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care**, defined as more than three years in care: 13.3% for CASA/GAL cases versus 27.0% of all children in foster care. Additionally, when a CASA/GAL volunteer was involved, **both children and their parents were ordered by the courts to receive more services**. The audit concluded that this was an indication that "CASA is effective in identifying the needs of children and parents." Lastly, cases involving a CASA/GAL volunteer are **more likely to be "permanently closed"** (i.e., the children are less likely to reenter the CWS) than cases where a CASA volunteer is not involved. Lastly, children with a CASA volunteer/GAL are more likely to be adopted and less likely to be reunified with their parents than children not assigned a CASA volunteer. The audit explains this finding as the result of **CASA volunteers serving on typically the most serious cases of maltreatment** and therefore cases where children are less likely to be reunified with their parents.

**Peters, C.; Claussen Bell, K.; Zinn, A.; George, R.; Courtney, M.** *Continuing in Foster Care Beyond Age 18: How Courts Can Help.* Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. 2008.

The study delineated the factors that influence whether youth stay in foster care beyond the age of 18. Part of this study included examining the role and value of court advocacy in these cases. Researchers analyzed administrative data, conducted a statewide survey of caseworkers, and held focus groups with affected populations, and interviewed court personnel in the state of Illinois. The study found that court advocacy contributes to children remaining in foster care beyond the age of 18 so they can continue to benefit from important supports by (1) **keeping cases open**, (2) **increasing awareness of law/policy**, (3) **increasing adult involvement**, (4) **increasing resource availability**, and (5) **changing attitudes regarding care for youth over 18**.

**Poertner, J., & Press, A.** *Who best represents the interests of the child in court?* Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. 1990.

Poertner and Press (1991) found very few statistically significant differences in case outcomes between cases represented by a lone staff attorney—the study referred to this as the Staff Attorney Model (SAM)—and those represented by a CASA volunteer not working with, or under the supervision, of an attorney. The authors concluded that **CASA volunteers not working with or under the supervision of an attorney perform "at least as well" as staff attorneys** along measures such as the number of court continuances, the number of placement

changes that a child experiences, and the number of services provided to families. This suggests that CASA volunteers working without the supervision of attorneys are no less effective than those who are teamed with an attorney.

**Stanley, Jessica, and Chan M. Hellman.** *Nurturing Hope Among Children Experiencing Abuse & Neglect: Examining the Effects of CASA Volunteers.* 2019.

A child's hope has been linked to numerous positive outcomes such as academic success, overall wellbeing, increases in self-control, positive social relationships, and optimism. Trauma-informed services understand the role past adversities contribute to distress and poor outcomes for abused children. However, incorporating a focus on hope moves trauma informed practice toward a future orientation of healing.

The purpose of the following program evaluation report is to explore the association between CASA services and hope among abused children in Oklahoma. A total of 280 children representing 21 CASA agencies in Oklahoma responded to a self-report survey. Examination of the correlational analysis found: **The belief (a child's) CASA Volunteer cares about them is associated with higher hope; having a CASA Volunteer (children) can talk to is related with higher hope; having a CASA Volunteer who listens and understands (a child) is associated with higher hope.**

Age group differences: **Older children (12 to 17 years) report significantly higher in hope than younger children (7 to 11 years).** These **older children report significantly higher in their ability to identify strategies (pathways) toward their goal.**

**Waxman, H.; Houston, R.; Profilet, S.; Sanchez, B.** *The Long-Term Effects of the Houston Child Advocates, Inc., Program on Children and Family Outcomes.* Child Welfare. 2009.

The study aimed to determine the longitudinal outcomes of the Houston Child Advocates, Inc. program on participating children. The study took place in the Harris County Court system with a population of 581 children. Findings indicate that children with court appointed special advocates **fared better along several process and outcomes variables**; they tended to **receive more social services** (which aligns with findings from previous studies) and **received fewer placements**. The study also claims that children with court appointed special advocates tended to **perform better academically and behaviorally in school that academic year**—measured by whether or not they passed all of their courses, whether or not they were expelled, and their conduct performance.

**Weiner, D., Farrell, A., Gitlow, E., Small, L., Kim, K., Anderson, C., & Goerge, R.** *The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program: Judicial Perspectives Survey and the Path to Evidence.* Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago: Chicago, IL. 2020.

Chapin Hall researchers executed a study aimed at understanding and defining the CASA/GAL intervention in local courts and communities. Highlight findings include: judges that use CASA/GAL volunteers tend to want one on every case; **over 93% of judges report a very positive overall experience with the CASA/GAL program; judges report the impact of CASA/GAL volunteers is most pronounced in “promoting long-term well-being” (92.2%), followed by “appropriate services to child and family” (83%) and “psychological well-being” (79.9%), and 79.5% of judges report lack of volunteer/program availability as the reason for not appointing CASA/GAL volunteers to cases.**

For more information, please contact [performance@nationalcasagal.org](mailto:performance@nationalcasagal.org).