

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

MAKINGA DIFFERENCE

2015 IMPACT REPORT | July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015



MISSION

he mission of CASA of Northwest Arkansas, Inc. is to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children in court. Founded in 1997, CASA of Northwest Arkansas promotes and supports quality volunteer representation for children to ensure each child a safe, permanent and nurturing home in Benton, Carroll, Washington, and Madison counties.



DEAR FRIENDS.

For the past twelve years, I have had the privilege of leading this great organization. The number of families for whom we have been able to provide a quality, trained advocate has increased by more than 225% and the number of volunteers by 246%. With your support, this strategic growth has allowed us to serve more than two-thirds of the foster children in our community.

Thank you.

Sadly, as the years go by, the stories and number of abuse cases in Northwest Arkansas are not improving. Last year alone, there were more than 1,000 confirmed cases of child abuse in the region. More than 800 of these children were placed in emergency shelters, foster homes or residential treatment centers. While we were able to provide a CASA volunteer for 580 of these victims, approximately 250 of these precious children navigated this system alone.

With the staff and board of directors, we have made a promise to these children - to provide an advocate for each and every one of them by 2020. While this goal may seem aggressive to many, we simply cannot let these children fall through the cracks! We cannot let one more child leave the foster care system at 18 without somewhere to call home. We cannot let one more child be so heavily medicated that they suffer from irreversible brain damage. We cannot let one more sibling group be torn apart and placed in different foster homes across the region. We simply cannot stand by and do nothing.

To meet this vision in five years, we will need to increase the number of volunteers and our budget by 50%. We have already hired a new advocate supervisor for FY2016 and have plans to add a second as funding becomes available later this year.

Looking back at our past growth, I feel this is something that we can do. **Something we must do.**

Upon reading the stories and accomplishments shared in this impact report, we hope you have a better understanding of the value of your investment in CASA. Likewise, we hope you become inspired to continue this fight alongside our board, staff, and advocates. Because, like the children we serve, we cannot do this alone.

With our gratitude,

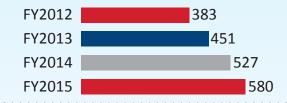
instrevichment

Crystal Vickmark Executive Director



FY2012 - FY 2019

FOSTER CHILDREN SERVED



PROJECTION OF FOSTER CHILDREN SERVED



BY THE NUMBERS

Thanks to your commitment, in the twelve months ending June 30, 2015, CASA of Northwest Arkansas:

Advocated for 580 foster children with 208 CASAs

Assisted with the successful reunification of **93** children with their parents

Trained 75 new advocates

Supported the adoption of 58 children

Assigned CASAs to 269 new children

Championed for 7 foster teens as they graduated high school

CHILDREN DEMOGRAPHICS:

BY GENDER

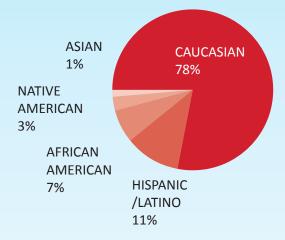
GIRLS

47%

BY AGE



BY ETHNICITY



ON AVERAGE IN BENTON AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES:



One JUDGE is responsible for 292 KIDS



One DHS
CASEWORKER
is responsible for
55 KIDS



One CASA is responsible for 2.5 KIDS





magine being 20 years of age, having newborn twins and another son who was not quite a year old. Sarina Lewallen may have been overwhelmed, but she wanted nothing more than to be a good mother to her baby boys. Now imagine being at the hospital with one of your three-month-old twins, Micah, following an accident at home when the doctor accuses the baby's father of abuse. Within moments, all three of her children were removed from her care, and an investigation ensued.

Immediately, a CASA, **Morgan Hill**, was assigned to the case. At the court hearing, Micah's dad Cody was presumed guilty of physical abuse, and the children were placed in two different foster homes. While Sarina felt this was a mistake, she felt she had to follow the court's case plan in order to get her kids back. To Sarina, Morgan arrived to the scene with no judgment. She was sweet, caring, and refreshing and wanted to assist Sarina in bringing the boys home. Over the next eight months, Sarina blew the case plan out of the water. She had to get a job and independent housing, so she went to school to finish her high school degree, become a medical assistant and later an

LPN. She had to attend 16 hours of parenting classes, so she attended 34. As Sarina continued to surpass her goals, Morgan stood beside her the entire time. Morgan advocated for more visitation between the boys and their mom as attachment develops intensely during the first three years of life. She also served as a liaison between Sarina and the DHS caseworker.

In the end, Sarina's commitment to the case plan on top of findings from an evaluation (that Morgan requested of the court) convinced the judge to throw out the abuse charges and close the case. The children were immediately placed back in Sarina's care. Since then, the entire family has been reunited. When asked about Morgan, Sarina said

I love her. No one else put in as much effort. We were just another case file to everyone but her. Honestly, I didn't always see the positive that year. I would not have been emotionally able to keep fighting without her.



ricia and Barry Kitterman heard a calling to become foster parents. With three older children at home and no intent to adopt, they agreed to foster one schoolaged boy in hopes to make a difference in his life. Four persistent calls from the Department of Human Services later, they heard a new calling and opened their home to a sibling pair, David (age 4) and Maddison (age 3).

Life had not been easy for the siblings. David has cerebral palsy, and Maddison, at the ripe age of three, had been her brother's primary caretaker as their parents had succumbed to drug problems. Right after the children were placed in the Kitterman home, a kind CASA named **Cassie** was assigned to the case.

David and Maddison were thriving as a part of the Kitterman family, yet there was lingering talk of a relative in another state who may seek custody of the kids. After thirteen months, against Cassie's recommendations and the children's wishes, David and Maddison were tearfully placed in the care of a relative in California. The entire time, Tricia and Barry stayed in contact with the kids and grew

increasingly concerned for David's health and both of their safety. Nine months had gone by without a state official checking in on the pair. While the case was essentially closed in Arkansas, Cassie and her CASA supervisor Laura never gave up either. Laura called on her CASA colleagues in California to check on the children. Sadly, Tricia and Barry's suspicions were quickly confirmed.

On December 16, 2013, Tricia boarded an airplane with DHS to retrieve her children. While members of their family since day one, David and Maddison became official Kittermans on adoption day, November 18, 2014 (following 973 days in foster care). When asked what would have happened if there hadn't been a CASA on her case, Tricia stated, amidst tears, that

When everyone at the state level said it was over - the case was done, **CASA never gave up on my kids.** I could never repay them for what they did. We literally wouldn't be our family today if it hadn't been for CASA?



ging out. One of the most dreaded phrases in CASA's vocabulary. As teenagers tread closely to leaving the foster care system, many face a hopeless system. But, not so for the **94 older youth** (ages 14 – 21) whom CASA served in FY2015.

Working with a young person who risks entering adulthood alone is a special type of advocacy. Think mentor, job coach, cheerleader, educational advocate, and friend. Instead of a one or two year commitment, CASAs who volunteer to serve older youth are in it for the long haul. They agree to support their youth until they exit the system - a five year journey for some. To assist these valiant volunteers, CASA has created special trainings to help them navigate Individualized Educational Plans (IEP), Transitional Life Plans, Medicaid

My CASA is easy to talk to and gives me good advice. He's very understanding. — Cameron, age 18

waivers, and the Transitional Youth Services offered through the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Empowering our CASAs was step one. Empowering these resilient young people to take charge of their lives was step two. CASA has partnered directly with the DHS to offer Independent Living Program classes at our Springdale facility. Every month, CASA brings in volunteers from around the community to teach these bright young people about budgeting, higher education, problem solving, interview skills, civic engagement, and even how to cook simple meals.

The investment is paying off. In May 2015, seven of the deserving young people we serve graduated high school. They were the only seven to do so in our DHS service area. Each one of them is headed off to higher education – community college, cosmetology school, or technical school/Job Corps. While their journey is far from over, CASA is confident their navigation will be easier with the roadmaps they've learned along the way and with the best GPS a person could ask for . . . their CASA.

VOLUNTEERS

Last year, these individual volunteers selflessly gave their time and love to remind these special children they are not alone. We celebrate and share in their direct impact. **Thank you.**

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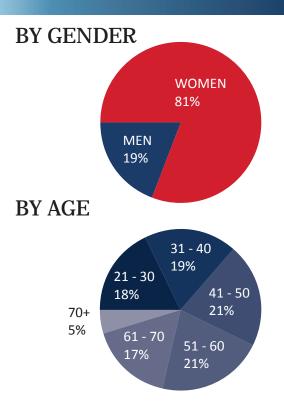
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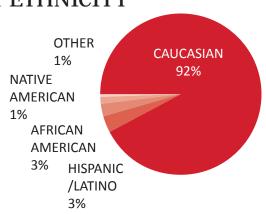
*Celebrated five or more years of service to CASA this year.

†Remembered for their dedication to their CASA kids.

VOLUNTEER DEMOGRAPHICS



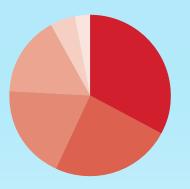
BY ETHNICITY



FINANCIALS

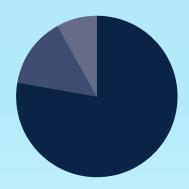
REVENUE*

EVENTS 33%
GOVERNMENT 24%
FOUNDATIONS 19%
INDIVIDUALS 16%
CORPORATIONS 5%
OTHER 3%



EXPENSES*

PROGRAM SERVICES 78%
FUNDRAISING 14%
ADMINISTRATIVE 8%



*These numbers represent unaudited financials for the FY2014-15, ending June 30, 2015. For most recent audited financial information, visit www.guidestar.org.

Cost to serve one child per year: \$1,182





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Kristen Cole - Advocate Supervisor

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Tim & Dara Yeager
Tod Yeslow
Kevin Yingst
Philip & Rita Young
Kathie Zank
Leslie Zanoff

Honorable Stacey Zimmerman

CASA of Northwest Arkansas is grateful for the compassion and generosity of its donors. This report honors all who have given annual gifts of \$25 or more from July 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015. We strive to ensure this list is complete and accurate. If we have made a mistake, please contact Colleen Smith (colleen@nwacasa.org) and accept our sincere apologies.





UNITED BY ONE VISION, THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW!

To serve every child in foster care in Northwest Arkansas by 2020, CASA needs the help of you, your friends and relatives, and employers. Please consider the variety of ways you can play a role in this vital mission.



Become a CASA! The first step in becoming a volunteer advocate is attending a CASA 101 informational meeting at our Springdale facility. These meetings are held every third Thursday of the month at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Discover family connections for our older foster children by becoming a Life Long Links volunteer. To learn more about this new family finding program, visit http://www.nwacasa.org/volunteer/life-long-links/





Invite your employer to engage as a sponsor of CASA through our In Good Company membership, Light of Hope event, or their matching-gift programs.

Make a gift of stock to CASA of Northwest Arkansas and save on capital gains taxes while achieving your charitable goals.





Provide in-kind services (photography, graphic design, printing, catering) for the organization or much-needed resources (new toys, school supplies, books, or gift cards) for the children we serve.

Leave a legacy for the abused and neglected children of our region. Name CASA of Northwest Arkansas as a beneficiary of your will, trust, retirement account, or life insurance policy.



Ready to further your impact? Visit www.nwacasa.org or call us at (479)725-2213. Tax-deductible donations may be made online or by mailing a check to CASA of Northwest Arkansas, 3825 Cawood Lane, Springdale, AR 72762. **Thank you!**







children in Northwest Arkansas still needed a CASA volunteer last year.