

A LOOK BACK

# *A Glimpse Forward*

Est. 1997



CASA OF  
NORTHWEST  
ARKANSAS



1997

20 YEARS OF ADVOCACY

2017

2017  
IMPACT REPORT





*Mission:*

To provide quality volunteer representation for abused and neglected children in the court system.

*Vision:*

To provide a CASA advocate to every child who needs one by 2020.

*Celebrating our 20th anniversary in 2017*

CASA of Northwest Arkansas speaks up for the best interests of foster children in Benton, Carroll, Washington, and Madison counties.

*Board of Directors\**

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\*Term: July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017

A special thanks to our advocates and to the children of our staff and friends for participating in a photo shoot with our volunteer, Shipman Photography. Art layout and design provided by Catherine Hunt.



# Dear Friends,

**This year marks a huge milestone for CASA of Northwest Arkansas**, 20 years of service and impact in our community. Northwest Arkansas has changed significantly during that time and is nearly unrecognizable from the community my family and I moved into 14 years ago.

CASA of Northwest Arkansas has grown as well. Because of the perseverance of our founding board members, and their unwavering vision and tenacity, our first CASA volunteers were trained and sworn to serve our area's vulnerable children in 1997. Over the years we have been able to serve thousands of abused and neglected children, who without your help, would be voiceless in our court system.

This report reflects the extraordinary work, commitment and leadership demonstrated by you; our CASA volunteers, our donors, and our board members. Thank you for your tireless commitment, from volunteering your precious time to funding our work, and all you do to support our mission and vision to serve every child. We cannot thank you enough for helping us get to where we are today.

As we look toward the next 20 years, we can only hope and pray that CASA of Northwest Arkansas won't be needed anymore. That every child will thrive in a safe and loving home. That every child will be free from abuse, fear and pain. But, until that day, I find comfort knowing that these children are far from alone. They are being lifted up every day, not just by their individual CASA volunteers but by a community of supporters who will never stop fighting for them.

I am honored to have served alongside you for the past fourteen years. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity that you have provided me, my staff, our volunteers and our children.

With gratitude,



Crystal Vickmark





# By The Numbers

Thanks to your support, in the twelve months ending in June 30, 2017, we are proud to report:

**744**  
CHILDREN SERVED

by

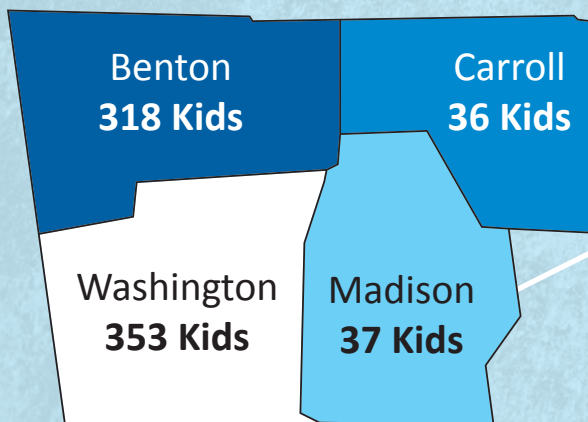
**281**  
CASA ADVOCATES

**98**  
CHILDREN REUNIFIED  
WITH THEIR PARENTS

**111**  
CHILDREN ADOPTED

**103**  
NEW ADVOCATES

## Arkansas Counties Served

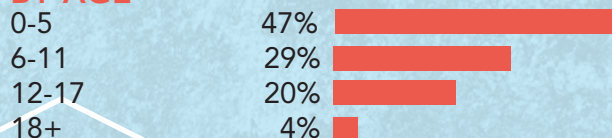


## Children Demographics:

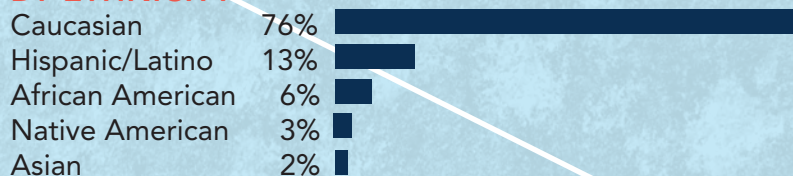
### BY GENDER



### BY AGE



### BY ETHNICITY





# A Look Back

**The first class of CASA volunteers** was trained in NWA back in 1997, but the journey of this organization began long before. Board documents date back as far as 1991 when the group was then the Washington-Madison County CASA program. Former Judge Charles Williams and his intake officers and court personnel had heard of CASA during a statewide juvenile judge meeting. Judge Williams was intrigued by the presentation from an out-of-state CASA program which touted remarkable success in achieving better outcomes for children and their families. Having at the time the largest judicial caseload in the state, Judge Williams was concerned with his court's capacity to best serve the children on his cases.

A working group, led by Mike Scott, formed with representatives from DHS, the juvenile court, attorneys, and service providers. As with any fledgling nonprofit, they worked through mission statements, office spaces, 501(c)3 incorporation, and fundraising. Dozens of volunteers, concerned with the welfare of abused and neglected children, met monthly to address such issues. By 1995, the group changed hands and took on a more regional approach as Northwest Arkansas CASA. Former Judge Terry Crabtree of Benton County had also heard of

CASA and brought it to the attention of the child welfare team in his court. As the group expanded, conversations focused on marketing, volunteer training, and fundraising.

Funding was the biggest struggle for the team. They had been turned down for several grants. The lead grant writer, Jim Smith, had told his colleagues he was "done" with grant writing as he submitted his last to the Victim of Crime Acts (VOCA) fund. Thankfully for all of us, the grant was approved, and the first Executive Director, Melodie Marcks, was finally hired in July 1997 – on a part-time basis, of course! Just a few months later, the first CASAs began taking cases in Washington County with Benton, Madison, and Carroll County courts following in the next couple of years. It's hard to imagine that 20 years later, CASA is serving 744 children across the four county region.

When researching our founding story, we were struck by the number of individuals who were tireless, even in the face of tremendous obstacles, in their efforts to ensure children have a voice in court. These volunteers spent hours of their own time, away from their families and jobs, to make sure CASA came to be. Their passion for children built something bigger than any of them could have imagined. And, we are so grateful to all of them.

I know it's easy to get discouraged, but if we give up it will never happen.

KB

**This handwritten note** by founding board member Kori Bartholomew was recovered from board notes dated October 9, 1996. These words of encouragement ultimately led to an important new chapter for foster children in Northwest Arkansas.

**A special thanks** to Judge Charles Williams, Melodie Marcks, Sharon Benton, Kori Bartholomew, Claudia Driver and Julie James Humphrey for your leadership and willingness to share your CASA story with us. **If you were part of CASA's history, we would love to hear from you. Please reach out to [colleen@nwacasa.org](mailto:colleen@nwacasa.org).**

# A Portrait of Today

Abused, homeless, disabled: children left behind. Many would run from children burdened by these labels. Ms. Janet Steencken? She runs toward them. Janet has served children in several capacities in her life, from working at an emergency shelter to foster parenting and adopting to tutoring and mentoring at-risk children. We are so fortunate her journey finally brought her to CASA of Northwest Arkansas's door in February 2005.

In her 12 year tenure with CASA, Janet has undoubtedly left her mark. **She has served 18 cases for a total of 53 children!** While most advocates take a single case at a time, it was not long before Janet proved herself capable and successful at serving multiple cases at once. She doesn't shy away from commitment or hard work. **She has taken some of our toughest cases (one with 8 siblings!) and found happy endings for so many children.**

One of those happy endings begins with a young mother, who herself had aged out

of foster care. A meth addict since she was 13, this mom lost her three young children due to a series of bad choices. To Janet's surprise, the mom didn't make excuses; she freely admitted her mistakes. Mom got clean and completed her GED, but she needed a job and a safe place to live before the family could be reunited. Janet advocated to Restoration Village for the mom and her children to be admitted. Despite all odds, the children returned to a safe and loving mother, and the rest is history!

Janet would go anywhere and do anything for her CASA kids. She has literally been around the world and then some for them, having logged an incredible 26,524 miles during her service to CASA. It will not be easy this summer when Janet will watch her longest standing client (since 2011) turn 21 and officially age out of the foster care system. While Janet may shed a tear, she must

know that her reason for being a part of CASA has been fulfilled: she indeed has done something worthwhile with her life.



Janet has literally been *around the world*

and then some for her CASA Kids, having logged an incredible

**26,524** miles during her service to CASA.





# A Glimpse Forward

CASA of Northwest Arkansas is committed to serving every child in need by 2020. But, what will the child welfare system look like then?

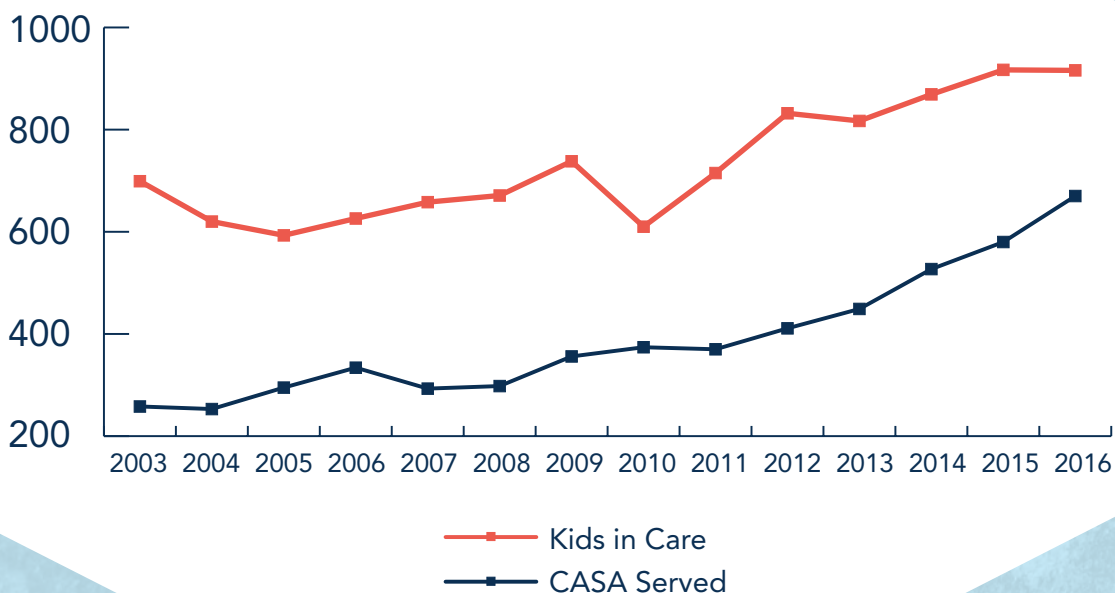
To answer those questions, we spoke with Mischa Martin, Director of the Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services. According to Director Martin, the Department of Human Services has been carefully researching the crisis that is our child welfare system. In response, the DHS is implementing a program improvement plan aimed at stabilizing the system. Not only is the DHS hiring additional case workers and increasing placement options for children, it plans to strengthen the services and support provided to the biological families in need. As foster care is a short term response, the goal is to get these children out of the system and into a permanent family as quickly and safely as possible. Ideally, that means reunification with their family of origin if the family is capable of providing an appropriate home.

Arkansas witnessed an all-time high number of children in foster care – as many as 5,196 in the system in October 2016.

Of course, there are a number of factors contributing to the increase. For those of us in Northwest Arkansas, it may be surprising that population growth isn't the most significant. In our region, the increase isn't just due to children entering the system but also a decrease in the number of children leaving. Sadly, this can be the result of an overburdened system where a high caseload for a DHS worker can impact a family's access to services and delay the ability of a child to achieve permanency.

But, this, Martin commented, is where CASA can play such a big role. Between court hearings, a CASA can push for a child to get the services he needs while carefully assessing whether a family is ready to bring their child home. Being an independent party who only has the child's best interest at heart, a CASA is a powerful voice that can expedite a child's time in the system.

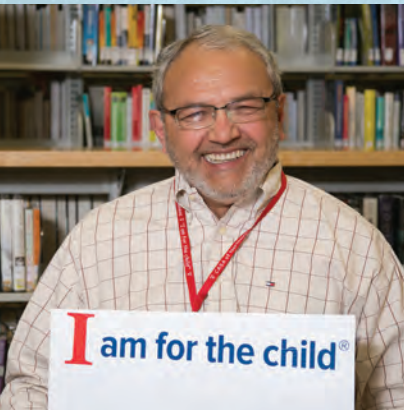
So, armed with this information, how can we best meet the future needs of the abused and neglected children in our community? Have a CASA on every case? We're happy to say, we are on our way.





# Volunteers

This year's success is due to the love and nurture our advocates bring to the cases they serve. **Thank you to these individuals who gave of themselves to make sure our children's voices were heard.**



Melanie Alecusan  
Morgan Atwood  
Kim Autry ♦  
Ron Autry ♦  
Bryn Bagwell  
Haven Bailey  
Kemetric Bailey  
Sharyl Barwick ♦  
Joe Bebout  
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Marilyn Cornwell ♦  
Amy Corritori  
Lenore Cottrell  
Courtney Cox  
Thad Crawford  
Charissa Cruze  
Linda Cudney  
Kelley Cullen  
Vince Cullipher  
Megan Culpepper  
Jamie Dale  
Eloy Davila  
Katie Davis  
Linda Davis  
Elise de Waal  
Marius de Waal  
Jane Delahoussay  
Dustin Demoin  
Pamela Denman  
Ana Deras  
Michelle DeRose  
Sherry Dixon  
Happy Douglas  
Sarah Draine (Campbell)  
Stephanie Dreves  
Susan Duke ♦♦♦  
Joanie Dyer  
Judy Eddington  
Asha Edwards

Dale Ensinger ♦  
Emily Espinosa  
Libby Estes  
Geri Felstul ♦  
Roxie Fiedorowicz  
Jessica Files  
Zach Files  
Nathan Finch  
Marla Fletcher  
Jacob Ford  
Kristyn Ford  
Katisha Fortune  
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Danielle Goonan  
Maria Goostree  
Tiajuana Gough  
Robin Griffin  
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Pam Grudek ♦♦  
Karen Grumme-Rodriguez  
Jade Gustin  
Christi Guthrie

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Wayne Hamilton  
Karen Hamrick  
Susan Hantz  
Joe Haro  
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Pam Hayden  
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Tina Hodne ♦  
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David Hogberg  
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Julia Holland  
Kacie Holliday  
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Wendy Housley  
Jeff Howe  
Lon Hudson  
Marla Hunt  
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Rachel Jardot  
Jo Johnson  
Jenna Johnston  
Britt Jordan  
Cathy Kamer  
Kristen Karpinski  
Nancy Keating



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James Keenan  
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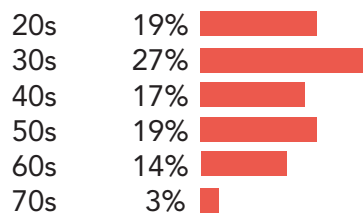
Marty McCasland  
LaDenna McCullough  
Andrea McNeal  
Jessica McNitt  
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Mallory Sanders  
Marnie Schipper  
Christine Scott  
Jeffrey Seidensticker  
Angie Shadduck  
Thomas Shaw ♦  
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Tiffany Smith ♦  
Vicki Smith  
Danise Smith  
Leslie Smith (Spisak)  
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Lauren Thompson  
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Laura Wright  
Andrea Yeager  
Dara Yeager ♦  
Tracy Young ♦

## Volunteer Demographics

### BY AGE



### BY ETHNICITY



### BY GENDER



- ♦ Celebrating 5+ years of service with CASA
- ♦♦ Celebrating 10+ years of service with CASA
- ♦♦♦ Celebrating 15+ years of service with CASA



# Financials

## EXPENSES

Administrative	5%	
Fundraising	16%	<div></div>
Program Services	79%	<div></div>

## REVENUE

Government	33%	<div></div>
Events	26%	<div></div>
Individuals	18%	<div></div>
Corporations	12%	<div></div>
Foundations	11%	<div></div>

Cost for CASA of NWA to serve  
a foster child for one year

**\$1,224**

Public cost to have a child  
in foster care for one year

**\$25,782**



# Staff

(as of June 30, 2017)

Crystal Vickmark, *Executive Director*  
 Shelley Hart, *Program Director*  
 Colleen Smith, *Development Director*  
 Arbor Buchanan, *Training Specialist*  
 Victoria Boyd, *Team Lead*  
 Kristen Cole, *Team Lead*  
 Ryan Brashears, *Advocate Supervisor*  
 Haley Carson, *Advocate Supervisor*  
 Chris Collins, *Advocate Supervisor*  
 Blair Dyer, *Advocate Supervisor*  
 Statler Kramer, *Advocate Supervisor*  
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 Nikki McDaniel, *Development Coordinator*



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