



The Ohio CASA/GAL Association
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First-of-its-kind study reveals detailed, positive impact CASA volunteers have on Ohio children Report shines light on outcomes for children in foster care, ways to improve volunteer training

A new report is highlighting the impact Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers are having on Ohio children in need, following months of research and data gathering.

Partnering with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ohio Department of Medicaid, the Ohio CASA/GAL Association commissioned an independent evaluation led by the Ohio Colleges of Medicine Government Resource Center (GRC), located at The Ohio State University.

The GRC research team focused on the impact appointing a CASA volunteer had on stability, health and well-being for children who had been removed from their home as a result of abuse or neglect. This study controlled for a range of other factors which could confound results. An effort of this scope has not been attempted previously.

CASA volunteers are community members of all walks of life who, after detailed training, are appointed by a judge to advocate for a child's best interest in the court system. There currently are 47 CASA programs serving child victims of abuse and neglect in 60 Ohio counties.

Case data was compared within counties, and between similar counties. This included rural, urban and more suburban areas across Ohio. Data was garnered from the Ohio Department of Medicaid, the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System maintained by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and CASA programs' case management systems.

Certain findings stand out. For example, in the within-county comparison, researchers tracked data which suggest that young people who were appointed a CASA volunteer:

- Spent less time in an out-of-home placement
- Were less likely to re-enter an out-of-home placement following discharge
- Were more likely to be reunified with family
- Were more likely to enter a permanent placement

"This study is both encouraging and gives us goals to strive for," said Ohio CASA Director of Development Kristin Gilbert. "We have seen the positive work of CASA volunteers in Ohio for decades. This identifies the next level of questions we should be asking to improve programming and the training on which to focus. It also shows us the importance of partnerships and working together."

This research also includes interviews with young people who experienced foster care in Ohio. Some had CASA volunteers, and some did not. Their perspectives provide important insight into that experience and offer context for how best to address the needs of Ohio's children in out-of-home care.

If you would like to read the report and recommendations in full, visit www.ohiocasa.org.

This study and the day-to-day work of CASA volunteers would not be possible without our partners across Ohio.

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