

A solution.

CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocates – exists to make sure the abuse and neglect these children suffered at home does not continue at the hands of the overburdened family court system. As a trained advocate, a judge-appointed CASA volunteer builds a relationship with their assigned child in order to be a voice for that child in court. Volunteers meet regularly with their assigned children, make observations, ask questions, seek information, and constantly advocate for their “CASA kids” in foster homes, at school, and with caseworkers, physicians, therapists, and lawyers. CASA volunteers supplement the work of professionals, often serving as the **only constant in very turbulent lives**. The ultimate goal is to have each child placed in a safe, permanent, nurturing home where he or she may grow and thrive.

How can you help the children of Kent County?

You can help support CASA of Kent County in several ways.

Volunteer

Opportunities exist in a number of capacities. From serving as a CASA volunteer, to board and committee service, or office support, we're always eager for new faces to join our cause. We welcome and encourage volunteers from all cultures, professions, and educational backgrounds.

Donate

Because CASA is a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit, we are in need of community donations to support the children already affiliated with our program, as well as to meet the significant need for additional CASA services in our community.

Spread the Word

Our website has tools to help you spread the word about CASA to others who are passionate about helping children. You can be a catalyst for change by encouraging support for our community's most vulnerable by sharing the services we offer and the needs we have.

"I had no idea Kent County had such an effort to reach, help, and assist young people possibly lost in our court and foster care system. To have someone there for them every step of the way is very powerful. CASA is giving them the love and help they so deeply need."

- Andy Rent, Board Member



To learn more about becoming a volunteer or to donate, visit www.CASAKentCo.org or call 616.632.5311.

Join Friends of CASA, a new organization that strives to create awareness in our community, advocate for families and children at the state level, support fundraising and recruiting efforts, and more. For more information, email: Friends.of.CASA.KentCo@gmail.com

"It is an awesome responsibility and privilege to be a Court Appointed Special Advocate. And as a CASA, I feel that letting even one precious child fall through the cracks is not an option. Period."

- Deb Colvin, Volunteer



Join CASA's quest to provide an advocate for every abused and neglected child in Kent County.

www.CasaKentCo.org



A need...

Every year more than a half million abused and neglected children are in need of safe, permanent, nurturing homes. In the ten minutes it takes you to review this brochure, a report of child abuse or neglect has been made. At the close of today, an average of four children will have died due to maltreatment. In 2009, 10,601 Michigan children were confirmed as abuse or neglect and 17,723 children were placed in out-of-home care. 20% of Michigan's youth ages 0-18 live at or below the poverty level. (Source: CWLA 2011 Fact Sheet)

West Michigan is not immune to this crisis. In 2009, Kent County received over 10,912 child abuse and neglect complaints. Funding was available to serve just 201 of the 707 children in need of CASA's services. (Source: 2011 Kidscount - Data Book from The Annie E. Casey Foundation)

A typical situation.

For children whose lives have been disrupted by neglect and abuse, the child welfare system is a maze of court dates, foster homes, and a stream of overloaded caseworkers. Though they are assigned professionals like case managers and attorneys – all of whom have the best intention of trying to repair the effects of complex and tragic events – these children often feel confused, frightened, and isolated. They may move from foster home to foster home, having to adjust to new “parents,” schools, classmates, churches, and doctors every few months. Sometimes they are separated from their siblings and see them infrequently. While many children are resilient, those who suffered severe abuse may have emotional, behavioral, developmental, or health problems and lack desperately needed services and treatments.

Far reaching effects.

Children who have been involved in the court system are at risk of giving up on adults and feeling abandoned. They are susceptible to making unfortunate decisions and are at high risk for ending up in Family Court as delinquents or in jail as adults. Statistically, those who were abused and neglected as children grow up to have lower reading ability, higher rates of unemployment, lower paying jobs, and higher rates of suicide than those who grew up in safe, secure homes. The future costs to the individual, the legal system, and our greater society are beyond calculation.

Every child deserves...

a future.

The value of CASA.

- Children with a CASA volunteer are substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care (defined as more than three years in care): 13.3% compared to 27%
- CASA is effective in identifying the needs of children and parents as shown by CASA cases involving more court-ordered services
- CASA cases are twice as likely to become permanently closed – with the child not re-entering the child welfare system
- CASA volunteers spend significantly more time in contact with a child than a paid lawyer / guardian ad litem (LGAL)
- CASA volunteers are highly effective in getting their recommendations accepted in court
- A child with a CASA volunteer is more likely to be adopted



The cost to provide a year of service for a single child is just over \$1,000.

Costs include, but are not limited to:

- Recruiting, screening, training, and supervising volunteers
- In-service training for volunteers (12 hours mandated per year)
- Staff coordination and supervision during case crises
- Children's emergency needs
- Attendance at court hearings and case conferences
- Administrative costs
- Increased community awareness of child abuse and neglect

Additional costs are incurred by volunteers for travel, outings, meals with their CASA child, and individual needs as dictated by each specialized case.

"It takes just one person."

- Patty Sabin, Executive Director

"I believe if we avoid uncomfortable, even terrifying things, change will never occur. And if I don't, who will?"

- Lynette Vickery, CASA volunteer

"CASAs are an invaluable resource that the Family Division Judges rely on for an additional perspective in our most difficult cases. In many of our cases the value of a CASA is immeasurable."

- G. Patrick Hillary, Judge

A voice for the voiceless.

The purpose of CASA programs is to achieve the best possible outcome for children who are involved with Family Court due to abuse or neglect. CASA provides screened, trained, and supervised volunteers who work with one child or sibling group at a time. Each year Kent County CASA volunteers donate over 8,500 total hours of service that include:

- Developing relationships with each child and thoroughly exploring the history of the case
- Helping to facilitate a collaborative relationship among all parties in the case
- Submitting written reports to the judge before each scheduled hearing
- Attending hearings and providing recommendations as to the best interest of each child
- Staying involved to assure court-ordered services are provided

CASA volunteers focus on the children's needs and serve as their "voice" in court proceedings.

Every child deserves... a family.

