

2023
Annual
Report



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CHILD ADVOCATES DENVER CASA

Child Advocates - Denver CASA

**There Every Step
of the Journey**

Dear Friends,

Thank you for taking the time to read our 2023 Annual Report and learn more about how Child Advocates – Denver CASA continues to provide life-changing advocacy for hundreds of Denver’s children and youth. As the needs of our children and youth continue to evolve, our organization is determined to rise to the challenge of recruiting, training, and supporting dedicated volunteers for any child in need.

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer walks alongside a child who has experienced abuse and neglect, making sure they receive adequate care and encouragement no matter where their journey takes them. The child welfare system can oftentimes be overwhelming and impersonal, but for a child in the child welfare system, a CASA Volunteer can be a friendly face who shows up no matter what. Our organization serves everyone from infants to older youth transitioning into adulthood, walking alongside a child on their path to a permanent and safe home.

The Denver CASA staff works hard to make sure we are providing the high-quality advocacy our children and youth deserve. In 2023, we continued to see more severe cases that need higher levels of CASA Volunteer involvement and support. With these high-level needs, it is more important than ever that our volunteers receive exceptional training and are prepared for the challenges we see in so many of our cases. Derrick’s story, found on page 3, reminds us that a child’s journey in the system can sometimes be longer and more complicated than anyone anticipated. When things don’t work out as planned, or unexpected obstacles come up, CASA Volunteers like Andi can provide a north star of hope in a situation that feels hopeless.

Our core CASA program remains essential, but our organization is also determined to make sure youth in the system still receive support as they enter adulthood. In 2023, our Older Youth Program (OYP) continued to grow as our team found new ways to encourage goal setting and skill development for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system. After successfully scaling the program to serve 25 youth, this year we were able to introduce a new financial incentive program to support youth participation. The incentive program rewards youth for accomplishing life goals as they transition into young adulthood, with the option to earn up to \$1,000 each.

In the first year of the incentive program alone, we awarded \$12,675 to 20 youth. These funds can be used at the youth’s discretion, helping them with the common expenses that come with transitioning to adulthood like a security deposit for their first apartment or a laptop for school. It has been a privilege watching the OYP participants come into their own and build a foundation for their future. You can learn more about the impact of OYP on page 7.

This work is only possible with the incredible support of our individual, community, and corporate partners. Your generosity has allowed us serve new populations while strengthening our core CASA program. As non-profits across the country experience record declines in individual giving, our loyal supporters showed up for the children and youth who need it most. This crucial community support will matter more than ever in the years ahead, as we anticipate up to a 40 percent cut in federal VOCA funds. In a changing policy landscape, Denver CASA remains focused on providing exceptional advocacy for those who need it most.

Thank you for helping us continue to envision a world where every child can count on the support of a trusted adult. When a child feels safe and supported on their journey, they can truly thrive.

Sincerely,

Bernadette Johnson
Board President



Karen Silverman
Executive Director



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Mission, Vision, and Values

Our Mission

Child Advocates – Denver CASA advocates for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect by training diverse volunteers who create opportunities for children, youth and families to thrive.

Our Vision

Our vision is that all children, youth and families are thriving emotionally, mentally, and physically with lifelong connections to caring and responsible adults, a permanent home, and a safe and nurturing environment where they have a sense of belonging.

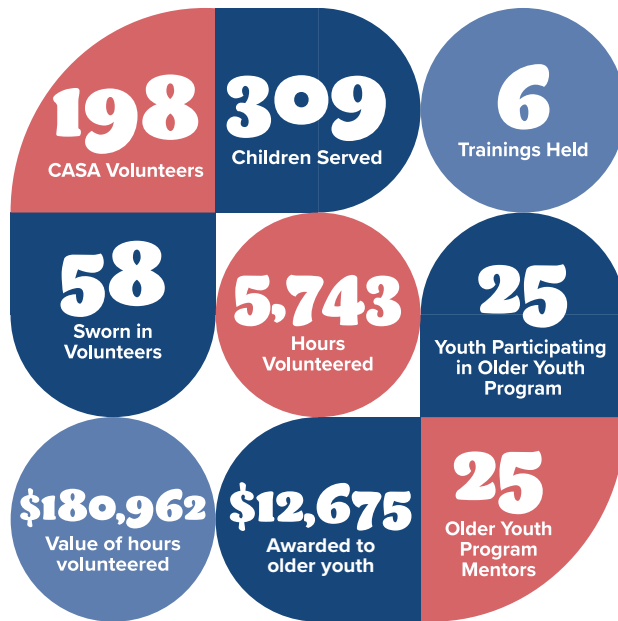
Our Promise

Children and youth who have experienced abuse or neglect are among the most vulnerable populations in America. A child in foster care may have faced physical, psychological or emotional trauma and years of uncertainty as they wait to go home or be adopted. All that chaos has long-term effects. Young people who have spent time in foster care are more likely to face incarceration, homelessness and unemployment. They are less likely to graduate high school and more likely to be victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

There is a simple and effective solution: A CASA Volunteer. CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. A CASA is a trained community member who acts as an agent of the court. They work directly with the professionals on the case to make sure that the best interests of the children and youth they serve are always front-and-center. A young person who has a CASA Volunteer has the best chance of a successful outcome.



By the Numbers



Impact

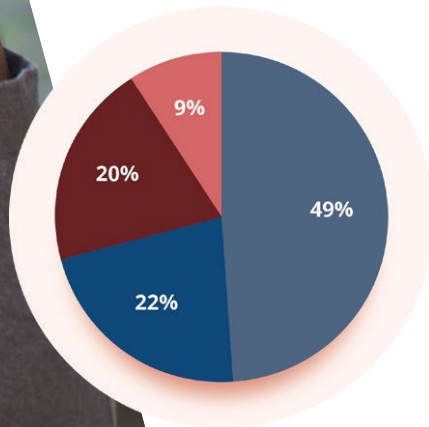
In 2023, 1,165 children entered Denver's child welfare system. As the average severity of Colorado's child welfare cases has increased and instances of acute abuse became more common, the need for passionate community advocates has never been higher.

Despite these hurdles, our 223 CASA Volunteers provided invaluable advocacy to 334 children and youth. CASAs advocated to strengthen families, pushed for healthcare and educational support, and provided critical mentorship to children ranging in ages from infancy to young adulthood.

Financials

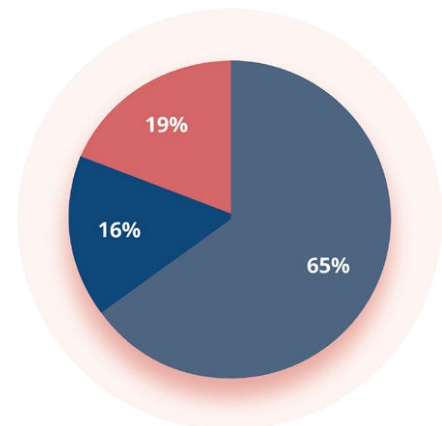
At Denver CASA, your dollars go a long way to ensuring that children and youth in child welfare are represented by passionate advocates. In 2023, 65 percent of our expenses went towards program services. Without the support of individuals, foundations, corporations, and government dollars, we would be unable to serve the children in our community. We extend our deepest gratitude to our partners, who share the Child Advocates - Denver CASA mission and successes.

Sources of Revenue*



Government Grants.....	\$754,693.73
Individuals and Corporations.....	\$343,088.47
Foundations and Community Groups.....	\$299,199.83
Special Events.....	\$144,625.18
In-Kind Donations.....	\$30,766.71
Total Revenue.....	\$1,572,283.92

Use of Funds*



Program Services.....	\$782,271
Fundraising.....	\$233,094
Management and General Expenses.....	\$188,154
Total Expenses.....	\$1,203,519

* In 2023, government funding greatly increased due to the influx of Employee Retention Credit (ERC) funds. The cost of hiring an accounting firm to complete the ERC paperwork also changed the normal expenditure ratio for 2023. Denver CASA anticipates that the ratio will return to the normal allocations in 2024.

Derrick's



Paving the

There Every Step of the Journey

Our central mission at Denver CASA is to recruit, train and support quality volunteers who provide compassionate support to children who have experienced abuse or neglect. CASA Volunteers are prepared to provide quality advocacy, no matter the case. When CASA Volunteer Andi ended up serving on a case that took an unexpected turn, she was ready for the journey that lay ahead.

Anyone who has ever worked in the child welfare system can tell you – things do not always go as planned. What can seem like a straightforward case can quickly turn into a complicated, overwhelming ordeal for a child. CASA Volunteers are tasked with navigating this chaos, ensuring that this child is able to thrive in even the most difficult circumstances.

Derrick was just nine years old when his case opened. He was shy and withdrawn. Andi had already served on a few cases with mostly younger children, but was eager to spend time with Derrick to get him out of his shell. Derrick refused to talk to Andi at first – until they went to a Rockies game together a month into the case. Derrick lit up the moment he saw the players take the mound. After that special day, Derrick felt safe with Andi and shared more every time they met.



Way to Hope

Paving the Way to Hope

Caseworkers initially thought Derrick's stepmother could provide a safe, permanent environment for him. They anticipated that after a few court sessions, this case would be closed and Derrick would be able to have a place he could call home. Just a few months in, however, the original plan rapidly fell apart. Derrick's once-abusive father was incarcerated shortly after the case opened, and his stepmother became neglectful as she lacked the time, resources, and interest in raising her stepson as a single parent.

The perfect ending is not always a guarantee in this work. Still, our CASA Volunteers know one thing we can control is never giving up on a child who has already faced far more than anyone ever should. After being separated from his stepmother, Derrick entered kinship care with his grandparents over an hour away from his childhood home. As his life plunged into uncertainty, he felt increasingly isolated from the outside world. Now more than ever, Andi

recommitted herself to her role as a stable, safe presence. She didn't know how or when Derrick's journey would end, but she was committed to fighting for him no matter what.

Andi's efforts to connect with Derrick at the beginning of the case were foundational for the turbulent years to come. Because of their close relationship, Derrick felt comfortable confessing that he was struggling in school. Andi was then able to advocate in court that he be granted an Individualized Education Program (IEP), after-school tutoring, and access to mental healthcare. During the duration of the case, Andi also ensured that Derrick's grandparents could give him a safe, loving home that would meet his needs. Raising a child with minimal preparation or warning can be incredibly difficult, and Andi's advocacy ensured that his grandparents were connected to food assistance, free public transit, and the support of the Department of Human Services.

Over the course of six years, Derrick and Andi built a deep and trusting relationship. Derrick's kinship placement became stable and strong, and he is currently scheduled to be adopted by his grandparents. Although his case may officially close in a matter of months, Andi is committed to staying in Derrick's life as long as he wants her support and guidance. They regularly meet in person, passing the time by going on long hikes, visiting amusement parks, or watching movies.

Six years ago, no one could have guessed where Derrick's journey would take him. Andi continues to walk with Derrick every step of the way, helping him navigate the new world of young adulthood. The work of CASA Volunteers is so much more than the everyday work of advocating for a child in court and connecting families with critical resources. When a CASA Volunteer shows up for a child who has experienced abuse or neglect, they can help pave the way towards a future full of hope.



“We have the best CASA. We were skeptical at first because it was another new person coming in... but she has really advocated hard for our little one so now we understand the process and they really love each other.”

- Denver foster parent

Older Youth Program

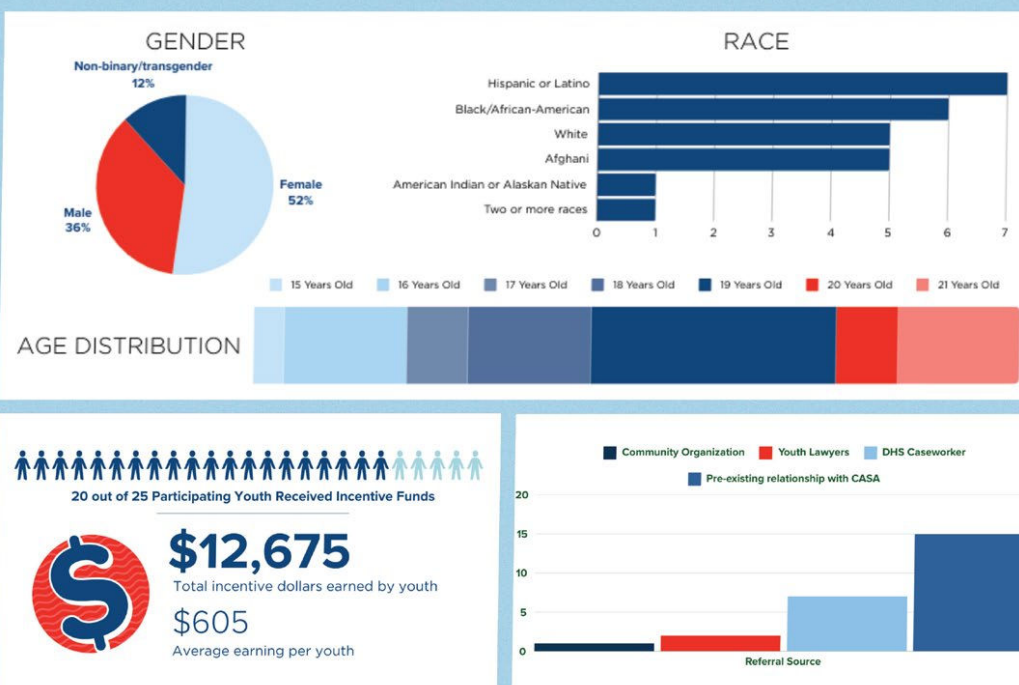
Denver CASA's Older Youth Program (OYP) was created as a pilot program in 2021 to address the dismal outcomes that too many older youth experience when they leave the child welfare system. **High rates of homelessness, incarceration, teen pregnancy, and low rates of post-secondary education** are just some of the barriers that these youth encounter when they age out of the child welfare system.

Navigating the child welfare system can be difficult for any youth or child, but making the transition to adulthood can be particularly challenging for those leaving the system.

In response to this challenge, the Older Youth Program trains Older Youth Mentors to help these youth navigate the transition. Older Youth Mentors provide guidance to their youth through skill building, supporting the youth's goals, and navigating the milestones of young adulthood.

In 2023, the Older Youth Program expanded to serve 25 youth with a wide variety of backgrounds and lived experiences. This year also marked the introduction of the incentive fund program, in which older youth received cash rewards for meeting their personal goals. 20 out of 25 participating youth were awarded a total of \$12,675. Older youth can use these funds for the down payment on their first car, rent assistance, or any other pressing financial need.

The Older Youth Program's mentorship has been invaluable. In 2023, 100% of youth who were enrolled in high school or college made educational progress, while the majority of youth gained or sustained employment. When coupled with the fact that all older youth completed at least one major life goal with the help of their mentor, the Older Youth Program demonstrates that mentorship in turbulent times can make all the difference for a young adult.





"CASAs have an ability to really let us know the nuances of a child. They're seeing the child much more often than the other professionals, and they get to know them in a very special way... [they] are absolutely vital in regards to helping the court be able to make those decisions."

-Denver Juvenile Court Judge

CASA in the Community

In 2023, Denver CASA...

- Educated 82 community members about our program at 10 CASA 101s.
- Distributed 52 backpacks and 100+ sets of schools supplies at our Back-to-School Backpack and Book Fair.
- Distributed more than 60 winter coats and 200+ holiday gifts at our End of Year Holiday Shopping event.
- Hosted two community fundraisers, our Light of Hope Breakfast and our End of Summer Soirée.
- Interacted with more than 500 community members at 20+ community partner events, including Denver PrideFest, Juneteenth Fest, and the Denver March Powwow.

Interested in partnering with Denver CASA for a community event? Contact our Community Engagement Manager, Rachael Friedman, at rfriedman@denvercasa.org to learn more!



Our Team

Board Members

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Market Intelligence VP
Enverus

Suzanne Sanchez

Former Board President
Chief HR Officer
Empower

Ryan Gensler

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CareerWise Colorado

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Training Manager

Nicole Fortenberry

Peer Coordinator Program Manager

Savanna Phelan-Jones

Older Youth Program Manager

Drea Froehle

Lead Advocate Supervisor

Jessica Batt

Advocate Supervisor

Holly Stokes

Advocate Supervisor

Mila Garcia

Volunteer Coordinator

Rachael Friedman

Community Engagement Manager

Evan Barrie-Kivel

Development Associate

How You Can Help

How to Make a Gift

When you give to Denver CASA, you show up for children and youth, ensuring equitable access to the resources and support they need. CASA Volunteers provide vital advocacy during the most turbulent period of a child's life. Through your generosity, kids can find a way home, with access to the resources they need to continue to grow into happy, healthy adults. Learn more at denvercasa.org/donate.

To give by mail:

Please make a check payable to Child Advocates-Denver CASA and send to:

Child Advocates-Denver CASA
1325 South Colorado Boulevard, Ste B-402
Denver, CO 80222

To give a gift of stock:

Visit donatestock.com/child-advocates-denver-casa

Become a CASA

CASA Volunteers are everyday people that advocate for the safety and well-being of children and youth experiencing abuse and neglect. CASA volunteers come from all backgrounds and occupations, and no special training is required to sign up. CASAs also receive comprehensive pre-service training and support from our team throughout their journey.

Learn more at denvercasa.org/volunteer

Stay Updated



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denvercasa.org/contact

Help Plant the Seeds of Hope

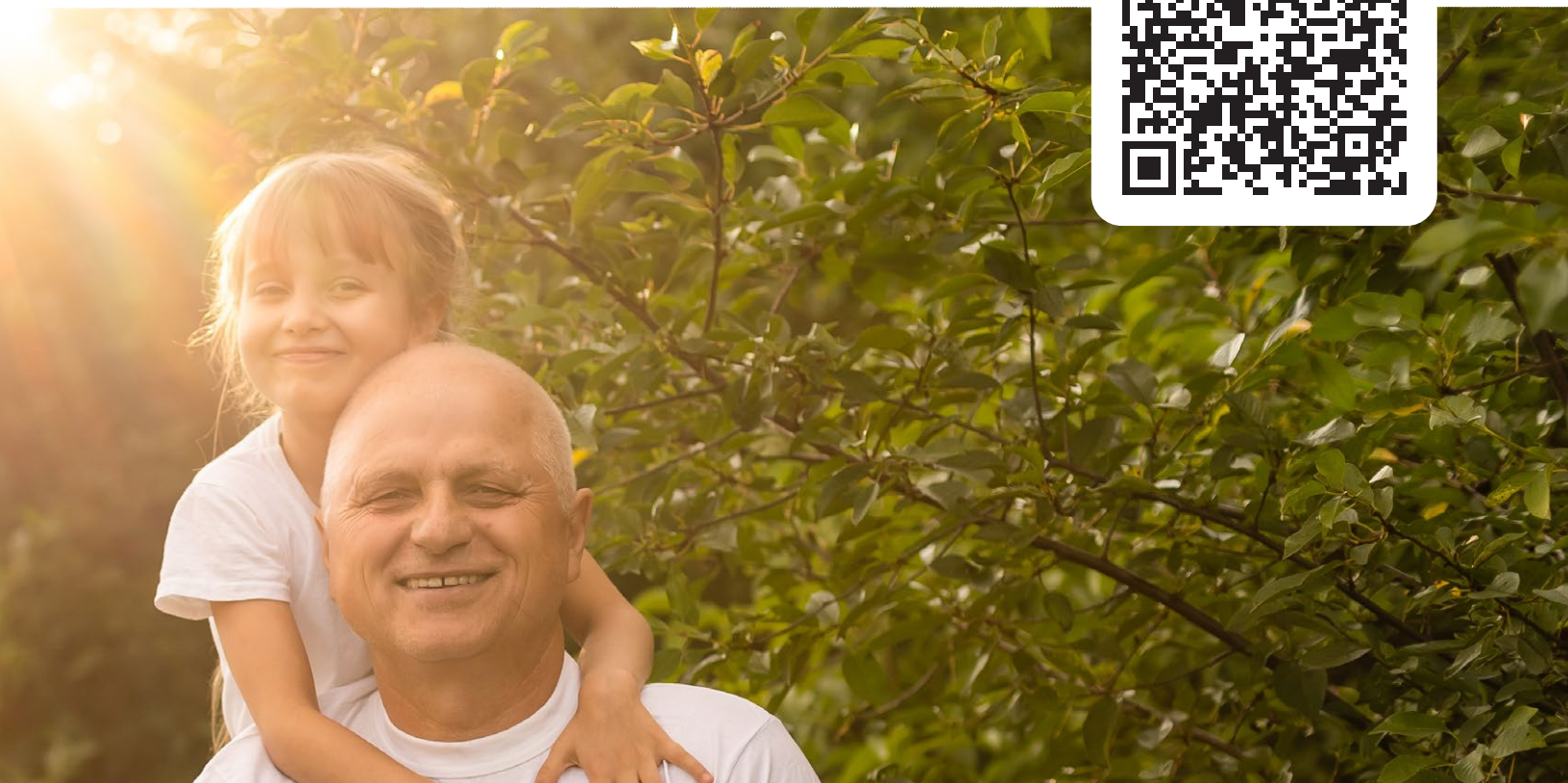
For over 25 years, Child Advocates - Denver CASA has worked tirelessly on behalf of Denver's most vulnerable children and families. You can help ensure our future by including Child Advocates - Denver CASA through your will, trust, or life insurance policy. It is also easy to name Child Advocates as a beneficiary of your IRA, charitable remainder trust or gift annuity. A gift from your estate is a simple way to leave a powerful legacy to help support children and families in Denver well into the future.

You too can help us with a legacy gift from your estate to fund an endowment or add to the Catalyst for CASA Endowment. If you are interested in learning more about the benefits and impact of an estate gift, please contact me or reach out to your financial and legal advisors.

If you have already included us in your will or are planning to do so, please let us know. We'd love to express our thanks for your transformational commitment to Denver CASA's children and families. For additional information on how to make a lasting impact, please contact:

Elizabeth Gillette
Director of Development
303-832-4592 or
egillette@denvercasa.org

For a full list of Denver CASA donors, scan the QR code:





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