



THE POWER OF ONE, THE STRENGTH OF MANY:
**HONORING 30 YEARS
OF ADVOCACY**

Child Advocates - Denver CASA

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

“

To be able to advocate for children during the most challenging and frightening period in their life is truly an honor. There hasn't been a case I've worked on where I haven't been thoroughly inspired by the strength and resiliency of the children I have gotten the supreme fortune of serving.

-Denver CASA Volunteer

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It sounds like the **CASA** is invaluable on this case. The caseworker court report indicated that she's a tremendous support to the youth. I want to thank the **CASA** for all the time they're giving to support her.

-Honorable Judge Gomez

”



OUR PROMISE

Today, children and youth who have experienced abuse or neglect are among the most vulnerable populations in our community. Many enter foster care carrying the weight of trauma, loss, and uncertainty, moving from placement to placement while waiting for stability and a sense of belonging. These early experiences can shape the course of their lives, increasing the risk of challenges like homelessness, incarceration, human trafficking, and unemployment. Too often, their voices go unheard in the very systems designed to protect them.

At Denver CASA, we believe in the power of one and the strength of many. For 30 years, CASA Volunteers have provided consistent advocacy for children and youth, ensuring their needs and well-being remain at the center of every decision with the ultimate goal of reuniting families whenever possible.



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

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.



A LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Thirty Years of Impact. One Clear Path Forward.

Dear Friends,

In 2025, Denver CASA marked 30 years of service to children and youth involved with the child welfare system. This milestone offered a powerful opportunity to reflect on our progress—and to chart an ambitious course for the future.

Since 1995, thousands of CASA Volunteers have advocated for over 8,000 children and youth, ensuring that their best interests remain at the center of every decision in their court case. Over three decades, our volunteers have contributed tens of thousands of hours of court-appointed advocacy, helping to improve safety, permanency, and long-term outcomes for young people across Denver County.

Last year, we strengthened our program model, expanded and diversified both our volunteer pipeline and our board of directors, and grew our Older Youth Program while improving outcomes for participants. We deepened our partnerships with community organizations, the courts, and child welfare agencies. In a commitment to operational excellence, we implemented enhanced controls and redundancies within our accounting processes to safeguard the organization's financial integrity. And we also invested in staff development supporting our teams that train, supervise and guide our CASA Volunteers daily.

But the challenges ahead are significant. Colorado continues to see rising case complexity, increased mental health needs among youth, and shifting public funding streams. To ensure long-term sustainability, Denver CASA is prioritizing:

- Enhanced volunteer training and support
- Diversified funding to reduce reliance on any single source
- Stronger internal systems that protect organizational integrity and improve outcomes

As we enter our fourth decade, our commitment is clear: every child deserves a voice, and every voice deserves to be heard. We invite you—longtime supporters and new partners alike—to join us in shaping the next chapter.

Thirty years ago, a group of committed individuals believed that a trained community of volunteers could change the trajectory of a child's life. Today, we know that belief was well-placed. With your continued support, we will keep proving it—one child, one CASA, one future at a time.

With gratitude,



Ryan Gensler (Board President)



Karen Silverman (Executive Director)



CASA SPOTLIGHT

In 2025, we proudly recognized a group of exceptional CASAs whose service went above and beyond our expectations. Through their dedication and compassion, they created opportunities for joy, built meaningful connections, and provided consistent, trusted support. We are honored to celebrate these volunteers, whose impact reflects the heart of our mission and the transformative power of advocacy.



Dave Zinger

Dave has been a CASA for over 25 years. As our longest serving volunteer, Dave has served on six CASA cases and overseen 20 CASA cases as a Peer Coordinator. Recently, Dave was honored as a Denver7 Everyday Hero for his exceptional and inspiring work with Denver CASA.



Larry Atwell

Larry is Denver CASA's 2025 Catalyst for CASA award winner. He has been involved with CASA since 2005 and has served on three cases. When asked what CASA means to him, Larry said, "Being a CASA means showing up, having fun, and creating a meaningful bond with every child so they know they matter."



Sheryl Gurrentz

Sheryl has been a CASA Volunteer and Older Youth Program Mentor since 2011. She has served on 10 CASA cases and has been a mentor on three OYP cases. Sheryl firmly believes in the Barack Obama quote, "Whatever you do won't be enough, I heard their voices say. Try anyway."



Bernadette Johnson

Bernadette has been a CASA since 2015, and since then has served on two CASA cases. About being a CASA, Bernadette shared, "It is a true honor to be a CASA. I get to have a front row seat to watch these wonderful children grow, learn, & overcome the challenges they face."



Heidi Hoback

Heidi has served on five CASA cases and served as an OYP mentor for four years since being sworn in as a CASA in 2015. As a CASA, Heidi has learned "how important it is to build trust and offer consistent support to children who haven't had many stable adults in their lives."



Louis Irwin

Louis has been a CASA since 2014, and since then has served on two of his own CASA cases. Even more impressive, Louis has supervised 28 CASA cases as a Peer Coordinator, ensuring less experienced CASAs have someone they can turn to for support and understanding.



IMPACT SNAPSHOT

\$192,047

Value of volunteer hours

188

CASA volunteers

254

Children and youth served

152

Dependency and neglect cases

50

New CASA volunteers sworn in

30

Participants in Older Youth program

7

CASA trainings

7

Peer coordinators

27

Older Youth Mentors



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

87

Community members educated at ten CASA 101s

95

Backpacks distributed at Back to School Backpacks Fair

70+

Community volunteers outside of traditional CASA programs

100+

Youth Recieved Gifts at Our End of Year Holiday Shopping Event

1000+

Community members engaged at community events, including Denver PrideFest, Cinco De Mayo, Juneteenth Fest, and Community Day at the Zoo



Are you interested in partnering with Denver CASA for a community event or becoming a CASA Ambassador?

Contact our Community Engagement Manager, Mila Garcia, to learn more!

(e): mgarcia@denvercasa.org

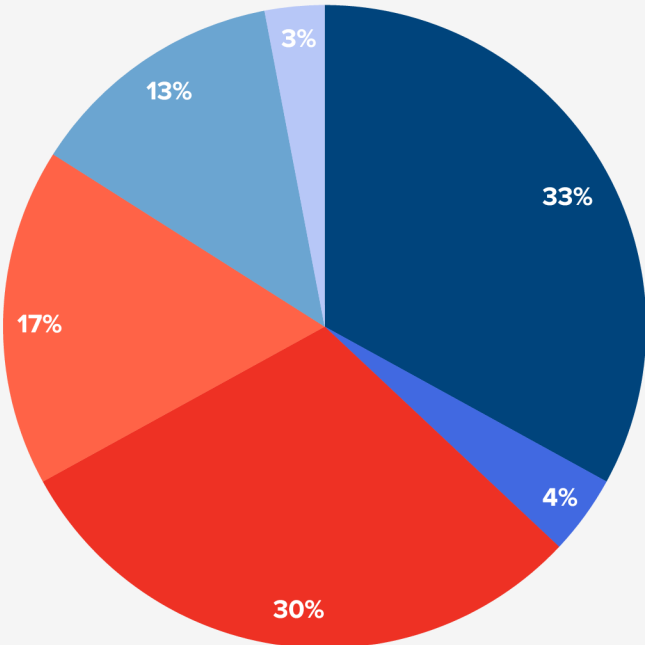
FINANCIALS

Since 1995, Denver CASA has demonstrated the profound impact one dedicated advocate can have in a child’s life, and the collective force of a community committed to ensuring every child is seen, heard, and supported. **That commitment continues today.**

In 2025, **944 cases of child abuse or neglect were substantiated in Denver**, underscoring the very real risks facing children in our community. These reports led to over 630 open cases in the juvenile court system which is a **stark reminder of the ongoing challenges and the critical need for advocacy for our community’s most vulnerable.**

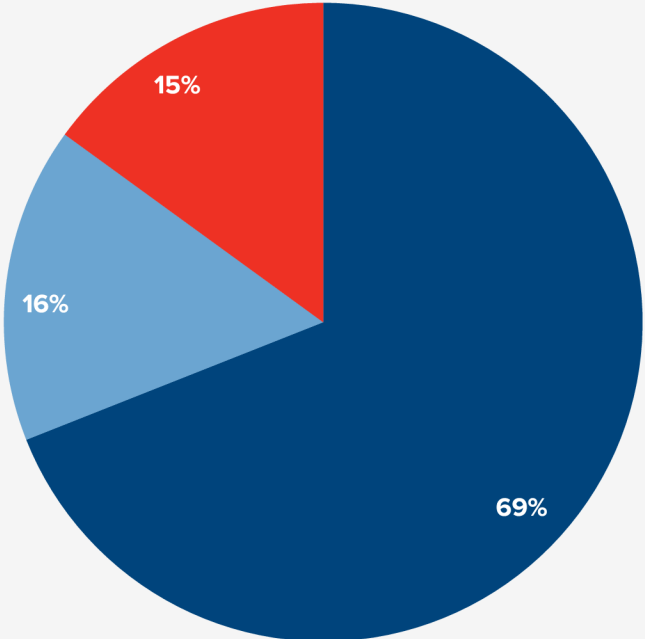
Last year, the generosity of our donors and partners sustained this work and deepened its impact. **As we honor three decades of advocacy, we renew our commitment to thoughtful stewardship, ensuring that every dollar entrusted to CASA continues to directly benefit children and families and strengthen pathways to stability and success.**

Sources of Revenue



- Government
- In Kind
- Individuals & Corporations
- Community Groups & Foundations
- Special Events
- Investments

Expenses



- Program
- Fundraising
- Management/General

Because of donors like you, one voice becomes many. One advocate becomes a movement. And one child’s story becomes a future filled with possibility.

STRONGER TOGETHER

How One Teen in the Older Youth Program Found Community in a New Country



Sharifa and her sister came to the United States as young teens without family. Sharifa knew what it meant to lose a sense of home long before she had the words to describe it. As an Afghan teenager navigating life in a new country, Sharifa was carrying the weight of profound change without the guidance of her parents. She had left behind her home, her family, her culture, and the familiarity of everything she once knew. In their place was a quiet loneliness that, over time, deepened into depression. That's when Sharifa met Hannah Ellman. Hannah served as the CASA Volunteer for both sisters, as well as their OYP mentor.

Hannah recognized that Sharifa needed help with her depression. She researched opportunities to help Sharifa rediscover joy and build meaningful connections. Together, they found outdoor programs created for girls just like Sharifa who were rebuilding their lives after great loss. Sharifa also became a regular participant at the Older Youth Program Connection Events where she formed new friendships that felt genuine and lasting. As she gained confidence in navigating new environments, Sharifa began to build community in her life.

These experiences changed the trajectory of her well-being. Her health improved. Her sense of belonging grew stronger. And her voice began to emerge.

With new found confidence, Hannah helped Sharifa find a job and advocate for herself when she wanted a raise and better hours. Recently, they have worked through critical milestones of young adulthood including learning to drive, applying for college and scholarships, and finding housing options.

Sharifa has lived in two different foster homes where she has learned more about American culture. She has also enjoyed sharing her culture with others, especially through food. Sharifa and Hannah have explored the restaurants in Denver that serve Afghan food, sharing memories of childhood and family traditions.

When asked to reflect on Hannah's influence, Sharifa said, "She is one of the best people who has helped me here in the United States. God bless her. She has been overly supportive, and I couldn't appreciate it more, she has supported me physically, mentally, and emotionally."

This spring, Sharifa graduated from high school surrounded by her friends, her mentor Hannah and current and past foster parents. With Hannah's help, she has created a community of support that cheers her victories and will be there to guide her through the next challenge. This fall, Sharifa will attend the University of Colorado Denver and looks forward to starting the next chapter of her life. We can't wait to hear about her new adventures.

“

“She is one of the best people who has helped me here in the United States. God bless her. She has been overly supportive, and I couldn't appreciate it more, she has supported me physically, mentally, and emotionally.”

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“

The Older Youth Program made me feel like I had a voice. You give us a chance and don't just look at us like we're doing something that's going to fail. Other meetings are online, from people in the system, who are meeting with me just to do their jobs but don't really care how my life turns out. This program is more about my relationships and you actually care about my successes.

”

OLDER YOUTH PROGRAM'S 2025 SUCCESS

30
Youth Served

27
Mentors Participated

7
Youth Graduated from the Program

\$19,650
Youth Incentives Disbursed

22
Youth were Hired or Retained Employment

12
Youth Engaged in Post-Secondary Education

Youth in the program accomplished a variety of self-established goals across multiple categories:



Advancing Education
(25 Youth)



Improving Mental Health
(17 Youth)



Increasing Financial Literacy
(21 Youth)



A STEADY PRESENCE, A GROWING LIGHT

Finding the right CASA Volunteer can sometimes be a challenge. Luckily, community members like Jazmin step up and help children and youth make huge strides.

Four years ago, Dash and his three siblings entered the foster care system after domestic violence and physical abuse made it unsafe for them to remain at home. Since then, **his journey has been anything but easy.** He has experienced multiple placements, transitions, and uncertainty. The complex challenges of the case, including Dash's behavioral struggles and communication barriers within foster families, made it difficult to find a CASA Volunteer that would be a good fit for Dash.

Then Jazmin stepped in.

A special education teacher by profession, Jazmin brought not only patience and expertise, but a deep commitment to seeing Dash for who he is. Jazmin and Dash share the same cultural background which helped bridge some of the communication issues he had experienced with other adults. Week after week, she showed up consistently, building a bond rooted in trust and understanding. **Slowly, that trust began to transform into growth.**

Jazmin worked alongside Dash to strengthen his reading skills and improve his social understanding (like reading social cues and recognizing emotions). With her encouragement, he began gaining confidence in both the classroom and everyday interactions.

While progress hasn't been without setbacks, Dash's behavioral improvements have been steady, a testament to the strong, supportive relationship they've built.

Dash's growth is remarkable given his circumstances.

Understanding the importance of belonging and play, Jazmin has become a fierce advocate for giving Dash opportunities to simply be a kid. She secured funding for him to play flag football and introduced him to new activities like bowling, opening doors to experiences he may never have had otherwise. Most importantly, Jazmin met Dash where he was, and allowed him to be himself.

As the Guardian ad Litem shared in court, **"Dash has been blessed with the most amazing mentor we could have asked for.** She is always there for him week after week, getting him out of the group home and into the community. She has gotten him out of his shell, and we are so appreciative of all she is doing."

In a system where change can be constant, Jazmin has become something rare and powerful: a steady presence. She has helped Dash find places where he can shine, allowing him to follow a path toward a brighter future.

SHOWING UP IN MANY WAYS

A Conversation with Sheryl Gurrentz



We spoke with Sheryl Gurrentz, a long time CASA Volunteer and Older Youth Program Mentor, about how her years of generosity, advocacy, and dedication are shaping futures for kids with a CASA Volunteer.

You've chosen to support CASA in multiple ways including online gifts, attending our fundraising gala, donating stock, and adding Denver CASA to your will. What led you to explore these different ways of giving?

Exploring all the different ways to give was simpler and smoother than expected. Flexible giving allows me to support Denver CASA at different times, in different ways, depending on my personal finances and timing. When I wanted to donate stock, I simply checked on the website whether it was an option. Through CASA's partnership with DonateStock, it was super easy! I also learned that cash donations qualify for the Colorado Child Care Tax Credit which made it even easier to increase my level of giving. When I want to support the organization through an experience, there are wonderful events and auctions to enjoy, such as the annual Light of Hope gala. Denver CASA is now first on my donation list.

What originally drew you to CASA and the children, youth, and families we serve?

My husband and I thought about fostering, then I learned about CASA and thought that would be a good way to dip my toe in the water. As soon as I got my first case, I realized how important the stability and guidance of a CASA can be to a kid in a Dependency & Neglect case. I fell in love with being a CASA. I thought at first I would do a case or two, then transition, but 15 years later, I'm still a CASA and plan to do it as long as I can!

Why do you believe diverse forms of support matters for kids with a CASA Volunteer?

When I've brought much needed resources, like new socks, school supplies or gift-cards to a CASA kid who moved into a foster home with virtually nothing, they are often shocked and thrilled that the community wants to help them. When a child or family asks if I know about community resources to help, I turn to my Denver CASA team. Volunteers, donors, and staff working together form a team that makes a very real, very tangible difference in kids' lives.

What does 'Leaving a Legacy' mean to you?

As I near retirement, I plan to do even more for this organization. I'm so confident that Denver CASA ensures my gifts make a real difference that I've included the organization in my estate plans, allowing me to continue supporting youth who have experienced abuse and neglect even after I'm gone. I couldn't be prouder of the legacy I have chosen to leave.

Why is supporting Denver CASA important to you?

Being a CASA feeds my heart and soul. I truly believe that when a child has even one person who believes in them, advocates for them, and chooses them, it changes their world, and I am so proud to be part of that. Throughout it all, the staff at Denver CASA have given me confidence that my efforts and donations are making a critical contribution to our community.

Sheryl's actions show what's possible when one person chooses to show up. When donors, volunteers, and advocates come together, children don't just get support; they gain stability, hope, and someone firmly in their corner. Every act of generosity helps build a stronger future for kids who need it most. We invite you to be part of this impact in the year ahead however you choose to give or get involved.

BE THE ONE WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

Join us in building a future where every voice is heard, and every child has the chance to thrive.

Do you know all the ways you can support Denver CASA?

Whether you are ready to give today or exploring how to leave a legacy, there are many meaningful ways to make a difference. Your support fuels our advocates to bring stability and opportunity to the children and families we serve. With thoughtful planning, your gift can also support your financial and tax goals. *Please consult your tax advisor to understand how these giving opportunities can impact your personal situation. The following should not be considered financial advice.*

Gifts to Change a Life Now

Cash Gifts

Gifts of cash to Denver CASA are eligible for the Colorado Child Care Tax Credit. Donors who make a qualifying contribution may claim a state income tax credit of 50% of the total qualifying gift.

Donor-Advised Funds (DAF)

Donor-advised funds allow you to make a charitable contribution, receive an immediate tax deduction, and recommend grants over time – so if you have a DAF, consider supporting Denver CASA with a grant recommendation today to reinvest in your community.

Appreciated Stock

Turn stock market gains into a gift to help children. If you make a donation of stock to Denver CASA, you will receive a tax deduction on the stock's full market value.

Qualified Charitable Deductions (IRA Charitable Rollovers)

If you are 70 ½ or older, save on taxes by giving your QCD directly to Denver CASA.

Gifts to Change a Lifetime

Bequests

You can designate a set amount or a percentage of your estate in your will or living trust to Denver CASA, making bequests the simplest gifts one can make to a charity.

Life Insurance Donations

Designate Denver CASA as a beneficiary in your life insurance policy or make Denver CASA the owner of a paid-up life insurance policy.

Retirement Accounts

You can also make legacy gifts by designating Denver CASA as a beneficiary or your retirement account.

Charitable Trusts

Charitable trusts can be set up to generate a guaranteed life income for you as a donor while leaving a legacy to Denver CASA in the future.

Learn more about all the ways you can give to Denver CASA by scanning the QR code or visiting denvercasa.org



THE DENVER CASA TEAM

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Savanna Phelan-Jones
Older Youth Program Manager

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS.

Scan the QR code for our complete list of Denver CASA Donors:



Every gift, every voice, every act of advocacy brings us closer to a world where no one is left behind. Thank you for being the one who stands up, speaks out, and changes lives.



Follow Us on Social Media!



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Child Advocates - Denver CASA



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