



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

MERCER

BURLINGTON

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

Every Child Needs a Champion!

**CASA FOR CHILDREN
OF MERCER AND BURLINGTON COUNTIES**





CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

MERCER

BURLINGTON

Mission Statement

Our mission is to train and supervise community volunteers, appointed by the Family Court, to advocate for the best interests of children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and/or neglect. Our dedicated volunteers strive to ensure the emotional, physical and educational well-being of these children while they reside in foster homes or residential facilities. The ultimate goal of our volunteers is to help establish a safe, stable and permanent home for each child we serve.

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Dear Friends of CASA,

COVID-19 has been tough for all of us, but it's been even tougher for the children we serve -- those who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and/or neglect. Throughout this year, however, the volunteer advocates, donors, supporters, board and staff of CASA of Mercer and Burlington have been steadfast.

Through it all, *together* we continued to advance CASA's vital mission. And despite the challenges that Covid and the sudden shutdown brought, we:

- supported children who suddenly needed to do schoolwork online but lacked the ability to do so, by providing tablets and laptops.
- started a "virtual book club" for our Advocates, providing the opportunity to meet their required training hours while connecting with their peers.
- quickly adapted our recruitment and training efforts to an online format and continued to train new volunteers. Working closely with the court system, we arranged for new volunteers to be sworn-in virtually.
- worked closely with the Mercer and Burlington Courts, and the Division of Child Protection & Permanency (DCP&P), on case assignments to ensure we serve as many children as possible.

Our Advocates worked so hard this year under very difficult circumstances. They are what CASA is all about. And *your* generosity makes it all possible. Thank you for being there in these tough times and ensuring that CASA's important work continues.

Sincerely,



Laura Wall,
Executive Director

Interview With CASA Advocate Carole Moore

1) Why did you decide to become a CASA Advocate?

While serving on the board of an organization that gives grants to local and state non-profits, I first heard about CASA. I was immediately taken when I read the description: "A CASA serves as the eyes and ears of the court and often acts as the arms and legs of an overworked child protective system. From helping siblings find permanent homes together, to helping a child access needed services, to uncovering information that helps reunite a loving family, volunteer advocates make an incredible difference to the lives of abused and neglected children." It grabbed me. This was something I wanted to do. This was something I needed to do.



2) What's been the most rewarding part of the experience?

One of the most rewarding parts of being a CASA is making a personal connection with a child. This does not happen immediately. It takes time. Sometimes it takes a lot of time, and a lot of patience. CASA children often have many adults who they see while in foster care. And sometimes their caseworkers or therapists change. Letting the child know that your role as a CASA is "to be there for them" is huge. CASA volunteers make a difference to a child by listening and not judging, by being consistent in their visits, by being honest in their interactions -- through this, you develop a trusting relationship. And when their eyes brighten when they see you or when they give you a little wave in school, it's very rewarding.

(continued on next page)

Interview With CASA Advocate Carole Moore

(continued from page 4)

I think that one of my most successful moments I've had was getting an IEP for a child who was struggling and failing in school. Getting to the point where this child was placed in a learning environment that addressed his needs took almost two years of persistent requests, phone calls, emails, and meetings. I meant a lot to know that as his CASA Advocate, I had facilitated his educational path forward.

3) Are there challenges?

The road to reconciliation (with a child's birth family) or adoption has many twists and turns and can be very long and drawn out. A CASA's work is to provide services in a sometimes very imperfect system.

4) What advice would you offer to someone considering becoming an Advocate?

Involvement in CASA has provided me the opportunity to share my time, talents, and concerns for the most vulnerable in our society -- children who have suffered abuse and neglect. What must children feel when taken from their homes and placed with foster parents?

To advocate for a child's needs when they are the most vulnerable and confused, can make a real and lasting difference in their lives. This work is important. It is necessary. All children deserve to be in a safe and nurturing, permanent home.



CASA STORIES

Meet LeAnne



When her CASA Advocate first met LeAnne, the little girl was in a class for children with behavior and educational issues – and she was struggling.

LeAnne's Advocate worked very closely with her school securing important educational services. The school even agreed to try the little girl in a "regular" class for a short while and it went well. Slowly but surely LeAnne moved to "regular class" full time.

Even though LeAnne changed foster homes several more times, her schoolwork stayed consistent. She continues to receive educational support – and the caring consistency provided by her CASA Advocate.

LeAnne's story had a happy ending -- she was adopted this fall, and her CASA Advocate attended the (due to Covid, virtual) ceremony.

This year, as the pandemic closed schools, the danger of children falling behind was very real. But CASA was there advocating for educational services, providing hands-on support, including computers, to do school work and much more.

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PROVIDED TO
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VOLUNTEERS**



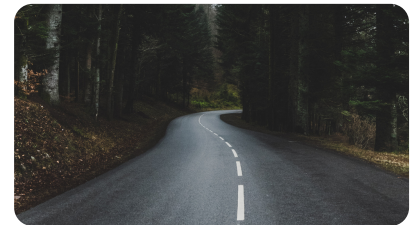
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**CASA CHILDREN
ADOPTED**



33

**NEW ADVOCATES
SWORN IN**



43,786

**MILES OUR VOLUNTEERS
TRAVELED**



10,430

**HOURS OF
VOLUNTEER SERVICE
TO OUR CHILDREN**



99%

**RECOMENDATIONS
ACCEPTED BY
COURTS**

Revenue

Corporate/Foundation: \$129,500

Government: \$641,684

Individuals: \$85,733

Special Events: \$82,877

Contributed Services: \$329,367

Expenses

Program Services: \$1,113,743

Management: \$119,489

Development: \$83,497



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

MERCER

BURLINGTON

You Can Be a Champion for a Child!

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