



# Annual Report

# 2023

*Change a Child's Story*





## *A message from the executive director*

2023 was a good year for CASA. I am proud to say that during this year eighty one of our CASA children were adopted or reunited with a parent or family member - a life-changing event for the children and their families.

Once again we accomplished this with the support of hundreds of people - our volunteer Advocates, our partners at both the County and State, our corporate and foundation supporters, our dedicated board and staff, and the many, many individuals whose donations of time and treasure helped to ensure that our mission remains strong. Thank You.

There is always a need for more dedicated, caring adults to support local children in foster care. Word of mouth is the number one way that people learn about becoming a CASA volunteer.

We invite you to help us spread the word! If you'd like to learn more about becoming an Advocate or how to get more involved in our work, we'd love to talk with you.

A good place to start is by visiting our website at [Casamb.org](https://Casamb.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura Wall".

Laura Wall, Executive Director

# *Board of Directors, Advisory Committee And Staff-- 2022-2023*

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Tara Rizzolo  
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## *Our History, Mission and Vision*

In 1977, a Seattle Superior Court Judge named David Soukup was concerned about trying to make decisions on behalf of abused and neglected children without enough information. He conceived the idea of appointing community volunteers to independently investigate the cases, make recommendations, and speak up in court about what was in the best interest of the child. He made a request for volunteers, 50 citizens responded, and that was the start of the CASA movement. News of the success of Judge Soukup's experiment spread like wildfire and CASA programs sprang up all over the United States. Currently there are approximately 950 CASA programs throughout the United States and CASA volunteers have helped more than 2 million children find safe, permanent homes in which they can thrive.

CASA of Mercer County became a non-profit organization in 2001. In 2011, CASA of Burlington County merged with CASA of Mercer County and the organization officially became CASA for Children of Mercer and Burlington Counties.

CASA for Children of Mercer and Burlington Counties advocates for children and youth in the foster care system to have their needs met and their rights protected. Our dedicated staff and well-trained volunteers connect each child in our care to resources that support their healthy growth and development, and advocate for the child's well-being and best interests.

CASA's vision is to be a widely recognized, financially self-sustaining organization striving to improve the lives of all Mercer and Burlington County children in out-of-home placement. We are committed to the highest quality of advocacy through trained community volunteers.



## *Strategic Plan 2023*

### GOAL: Support for Aging Out Youth

CASA-MB is moving forward with our goal of expanding services for youth aging out of the foster care system. One of the exciting things we have worked on is a focus group with members of the Department of Children and Families Youth Council. Getting feedback from young adults with lived experience will be optimal in instituting a program that provides the services the youth feel they are missing.

We have also met with CASA programs around the country to learn from and about their youth programs. One thing has stood out to us -- the benefit of additional specialized training for advocates who represent older youth. Working for teens includes mentorship, and boundaries can be hard to navigate. Specialized training in adolescent advocacy will provide our volunteers with opportunities to learn a new kind of advocacy.

Moving forward we are bolstering the services and opportunities we provide at the annual Aging Out Conference. This will include a mini job fair, on-the-spot resume writing, and assistance with filling out FAFSA.





# Highlights of Fiscal Year 2023





*Interview With Ines Ramirez, JD,  
Senior Advocate Supervisor  
(Burlington)*

**How long have you worked with CASA?**

I have been with CASA since September 2011.

**What is your position with CASA?**

When I started at CASA, I was an advocate supervisor. I am now the Director of Training.

**What changes have you seen in the Child Welfare System?**

This is such a great question. I have seen some great changes in the system. I think the biggest change from when I started it was a smaller caseload for the DCP&P caseworkers. They probably still have too many cases, but the state is working on it. I also feel the Child Welfare System is moving towards more trauma-informed care for our youth, and their parents. It is wonderful that trauma is being recognized as a large part of the problem with our families in care.

**What is the most rewarding part of the position?**

The most rewarding part of my position is that I get to meet all of these amazing people who are volunteering for CASA. While I am not the first person they interact with, I am the one who gets to meet everyone from both counties. I love seeing the passion they have for wanting to help children, and I hope that by giving them the basic tools and information to start their journey, they become amazing advocates for our youth.

**Are there challenges?**

This is a difficult question to answer because most of the challenges do not necessarily pertain to my position. Still, the challenges are intertwined between all of the departments, and they are not things that staff can necessarily solve, they are mostly surrounding outside agencies. The biggest challenge to my position is to ensure I am keeping not only new advocates engaged in the pre-service training but also ensuring our current advocates are staying engaged with the training.





## *A CCASCA Story*

### *Meet Tommy*

Recently, CASA was assigned to a teen boy in foster care. We matched him with a male Advocate who was able to develop a trusting relationship with the teen.

This is not an easy task under the best of circumstances, and these were not the best of circumstances. The teen ran away. However, when the young man was ready to come home, it was his CASA Advocate that he reached out to for support.

His Advocate facilitated the boy's return, and he is in a new foster home that supports his needs.

This is just one of CASA's many success stories.

**To sign up for an information session or learn more about volunteering for CASA,  
Please visit: [www.CASAMB.org](http://www.CASAMB.org)**



## *Our Extraordinary Advocates FY 2023*

Barbara Abrams	Ellyn Cominetto	Taheesha Horace	Christie McDade
Amanda Ackermann	Lisa Corvo	Thomas Hummel	Shane McDermott
Susan Agresto	Nancy Crocetto	Stephen Hunkins	Mystique McDonald
Pamela Ahlstrand	Elaine Davis	Chavonne Hurdle	Brandon McNeice
Vidya Preetha Anandamurali	Carla De Alvarenga	Colleen Jackson	Veerja Mehta
Jeanne Andersen	Christopher Deflece	Behroze Jaikaria	Seth Mellman
Chris Anhut	Shanere Deloach	Lizanne Jenkin	Vinessa Milando
Debra Aniano	Joann DeRosa-Sanderson	Debra Jobes	Carole Moore
Iclal Atay	Jodi Diaz	Selema Johnson	William Morad
Susan Atkinson	Lucianna DiMeglio	Antoinette Jones	Stephanie Morrison
Laticia Bailey	Karen Donnelly	Clifford Jones	Reem Nasser
Aneesh Bakshi	Peter Doyle	Christine Kanarick	Deepika Nath
Annika Barber	Debbie Drachman	Adina Kasof	Maria Neels
Christine Barranco	Patricia Dunn-Jones	Nancy Kasputis	Susan Niedrach
Susan Bartolozz	Carolyn Featherson	Debra Keeney	Dawn Novak
Madeline Bayliss	DBrickashaw Ferguson	Phyllis Kepner	Heidi O'Neil
Marlyn Bennett	Lisa Ferguson	Donald Kernan	Terry O'Neil
Mary Berridge	Kayo Flamini	Regina Kneib	Catherine O'Rorke
Marlise Bickel	Sarah Fletcher	Catherine Kolator	Karen O'Rorke
Bozena Blix	William Goodwin	Christine Kaputa	Jennifer O'Connor
Tracy Bond	Sherryl Gordon Hall	Carole Kraemer	Kimberly Owens
Kerry Bonsteel	Cybele Greenberg	Debra Kuser	Hollis Pearson
Erika Boots	William Griffith	Denise Landy	Marlene Penn
Susan Brennan	Joanne Gusweiler	Karen Larochelle	Linda Pernia
Jaimie Burnside	Kaleigh Haar	Teena Lerman	Janet Phillip
Kathleen Byers	Chris Hackshaw	Brian Levey	Julie Potthoff
Christina Byrne	Rose Haggerty	Lois Levey	Charlene Priolo
Alexandria Calabro	Merodie Hancock	Judy Levy	Felicia Rackowski
Felicia Cappuccio Schoen	Adriana Hansen	Eugeneia Lewis	Jeanne Radimer
Audrey Camel	Susan Hansen	Christine Livingston	Susanne Rainier
Janet Caniglia	Gloria Harrigan	Mui Long	Daniel Reynolds
Jennifer Capozzola	Crystal Harris	Miguel Lopez	Mary Reynolds
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Alex Chandler	Trevor Harris	Lise Mainor	Jennifer Roberts
Jennifer Closser	Mary Hayes	Charlotte Malpeso	Sandra Romano
Kyoko Coco	Archana Hegde	Tasnima Mannan-Sunya	Jeffrey Rozelle
Sandra Cohen	Victoria Hersh-Bruker	Deborah Marinsky	Patricia Russell
Kristi Cole	Nina Hoover	Laurie McConnell	Ashima Saksena

## *Our Extraordinary Advocates FY 2023*

Bessie Sanders	Dianna Wacławski
Susan Savoca	Renee Walsh
Sandra Scarlatella	Ah'ree Warren
Mary Schaeffer	Denise White
Helen Scheuring	Elizabeth White
Jackie Schnapp	Susan Wilczewski
Tara Schultz	Maria Williamson
Amy Searles	Margaret Wilson
Lori Seigal	Mary Winkelspecht
Margaret Seitter	Amy Winston
Nawal Selim	Janel Winter
Unnamalai Senthil	Carol Wolkiewicz
Christopher Shafer	Suzanne Woodard
Alyssa Sharkey	Theresa Wrobel
Aakash Sharma	Jennifer Yanka
Rachna Sharma	Chiemi York
Kathryn Shaw	
Christine Shimp	
Robin Shoblock	
Fern Silverman	
Melissa Simpson	
Wendy Simpson	
Erica Smith	
Amber Sosa	
Kathleen Spivey	
Marsha Stencel	
Wilma Stephenson	
Diane Stern	
Brian Stewart	
Crete Still	
Marilyn Tal	
Debra Taylor	
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## *Our Generous Donors FY 2023*

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### **\$25,000 and Above**

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Mercer County DHS  
Princeton Area Community Foundation  
State of NJ - Legislative  
VOCA

***CASA of Mercer and Burlington Counties is also deeply grateful for contributions from individuals and organizations (including many longtime supporters of our work) who wish to remain anonymous.***

## Revenue

**Corporate/Foundation: \$161,000**

**Government: \$537,488**

**Contribution: \$133,273**

**Contributed Services: \$279,539**

**Other: \$9,654**

## Expenses

**Program Services: \$913,394**

**Management: \$120,873**

**Development: \$86,758**

## Key Figures



**1283**  
HOURS OF TRAINING  
PROVIDED TO POTENTIAL  
VOLUNTEERS



**81**  
CASA CHILDREN  
ADOPTED/REUNIFIED



**62**  
NEW ADVOCATES  
SWORN IN



**98%**  
RECOMENDATIONS  
ACCEPTED BY COURTS



**8995**  
HOURS OF VOLUNTEER  
SERVICE TO OUR CHILDREN