



# Biennial Report

January 2021

**KENTUCKY CASA NETWORK, INC.**

CHANGE A  
CHILD'S STORY.™





# Kentucky CASA Network, Inc. 2021 Biennial Report

## INTRODUCTION

Kentucky CASA Network, Inc. (KCN) is the state Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) association as described in Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS) 620.530(1). CASAs are trained community volunteers appointed by judges to represent the best interests of dependent, abused, and neglected children in court (KRS 620.500 et seq.). Local CASA programs are nonprofit organizations that train and supervise CASA volunteers. There are currently 23 local CASA programs and nearly 1,300 volunteers across Kentucky.

As the state association, the KCN is directed by statute to provide certain evaluations and recommendations relating to child welfare to the Supreme Court, Governor, Legislative Research Commission, and Cabinet for Health and Family Services in the odd-numbered years. Specifically, KRS 620.535(3) requires the state association to “evaluate and make recommendations” regarding:

- a. Laws of the Commonwealth and practices, policies, and procedures within the Commonwealth affecting the welfare of children and families; and
- b. The effectiveness, or lack thereof, and the reasons therefore, of local CASA volunteers advocating for placement for the children in the Commonwealth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS FOR POLICY REFORM AND IMPROVED EFFICIENCIES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IN KENTUCKY

### I. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CASA advocacy in achieving permanency for children involved in Kentucky’s child welfare system

#### a. Court Delays and Continuances

*Evaluation:* The impact that court delays have had on permanency for children during the pandemic has been immeasurable for children and families. CASA volunteers are assigned to cases that can last months or years with the delay and continuation of the pre-trial conference. During these delays, there are no court reports being submitted by either DCBS or CASA regarding the well-being of the children. For example, pre-trial conferences set for the fall of 2019 are still being continued into late 2021 and early 2022. In some counties, these continuances are due to companion criminal case proceedings being delayed that then impact the delay in the DNA case. To illustrate the impact of these delays, a new petition was in court in January 2019 and a CASA was assigned to the case in April 2019; however, the next pre-trial conference date is set for July 2021. For more than two years, the CASA volunteer has not been able to submit a written report to the court on the well-being of the children. Another example is a

case where the petition was filed in January 2018 and a CASA was assigned in June 2018; the next pre-trial date is set for July 2021.

In another county, court delays are impacting the biological parent's ability to complete their case plans. DCBS does not usually assign an ongoing worker until after disposition in the case. In this scenario, the investigations worker has created a safety plan for the parents but no case plan because the case has not yet been transferred to an ongoing worker. By delaying disposition in these cases, biological parents are not given ample opportunity to work a case plan and, in some cases, permanent custody is being given to caregivers rather than to the parents. There are also no DCBS written reports or CASA written reports being submitted at the pre-trial conference. The primary function of the CASA volunteer, per KRS 620.525(b), is to "submit a written report and recommendation to the judge for consideration in determining the best interest of the child at the dispositional hearing, dispositional review hearings, or other hearings as requested by the court."

The delays have also impacted annual permanency reviews of children, resulting in CASA volunteers not being able to share written court reports regarding the well-being of the children for whom they are advocating.

Court delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic are further impacting permanency and the well-being of abused and neglected children. CASA volunteers who are visiting children throughout these long delays are unable to meet their statutory duties of submitting court reports and the judicial system is at a disadvantage by not having the CASA volunteers' written recommendations.

#### **b. Significant Decreases in New AOC Petitions and DCBS Substantiations**

*Evaluation:* When the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a shutdown of Kentucky's schools and daycare providers in March 2020, the Commonwealth saw significant decreases in the reporting of child abuse and neglect. With these closures, the teachers and coaches who normally see children daily were not present to report any suspected allegations of abuse and neglect. This is evident in the decrease in the number of children in DCBS substantiations. In CY 2019, there were 30,349 children in DCBS substantiations but in CY 2020, that number decreased to 25,455.

The decrease may be partially explained by the focus on prevention and Kentucky's early adoption of the Family First Prevention Services Act. However, a more significant disparity exists in the number of new petitions of abuse, neglect, and dependency that were filed in CY 2020 -- decreasing from 22,373 to 16,985, or about 25%. The reduction of petitions is significant to CASA because, per statute, a CASA volunteer is only appointed on a petition that comes before the court. Over the course of three calendar years - 2018 to 2020 - the decrease in petitions statewide was roughly 36% and in some counties, this percentage was even larger. The decrease in petitions means that children who would benefit from a CASA volunteer will never be appointed to one. In CY 2020, the gap between substantiations and petitions continued to widen with only 66% of substantiations resulting in petitions, compared to 73% in 2019 and 77% in 2018.

## **II. Prioritize training on diversity, equity, and inclusion among providers and professionals in the child welfare community**

*Evaluation:* Recent reports and data shared by the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services demonstrate the increasing trend and prevalence of racial disparities and disproportionality in Kentucky’s child welfare system. These two entities are the primary partners of CASA programs and the system in which CASA volunteers navigate and advocate. Addressing and focusing on these issues will work to better CASA’s advocacy for abused and neglected children. There are specific standards required by the National CASA/GAL Association, adopted in 2020 for all CASA programs, which state that a CASA program “commits to diversity, equity, and inclusion and demonstrates these qualities in its own operations, governance, management, and quality advocacy for children.” CASA programs and, ultimately, CASA volunteers, can be most effective when the system of which they are a part also has these commitments and qualities.

*Recommendation:* Increase opportunities for trainings, data collection, and forums for child welfare workers and court personnel to further evaluate and mitigate the impact of racial and ethnic disparities in Kentucky’s child welfare system.

## **THE ROLE OF THE CASA VOLUNTEER IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IN KENTUCKY**

CASA volunteers in the Commonwealth of Kentucky play a vital role in many aspects of the child welfare system that include family and juvenile courts, DCBS, and the juvenile justice system. CASA volunteers serve as child advocates providing a much-needed voice for an abused and neglected child caught up in a complex and daunting system through no fault of their own.

CASA volunteers are objective, community-based volunteers who are appointed by judges to serve in child abuse, neglect, and dependency cases. Once assigned to a child, the volunteer has regular in-person visits with the child, researches the child’s case, reviews documents, interviews relevant people to the case, and makes a report to the court as to what is in the best interest of the child, in terms of services, placement, visitation, reunification, and permanency. CASA volunteers monitor the child’s placement, whether they are in foster care, in relative placement, or remain in their current homes with their biological parents until permanency is achieved. Volunteers are often the only constant the child knows as they move through the labyrinth of the child welfare system. This unique role is one that allows the CASA volunteer and local CASA programs to view the system with a unique lens.

### **Requirements and Description of a CASA Volunteer in Kentucky**

Volunteers are screened, trained, and supervised by professional staff at local CASA programs. Pursuant to standards from the National CASA/GAL Association for Children and Kentucky statutory provisions, volunteers are required to receive a minimum of 30 hours of initial training, engage in court observation pre-service if possible, and complete 12 hours of continuing education each year.

## STATEWIDE CASA DATA

	CY 2018	CY 2019	CY 2020
Children Served	3,514	3,818	3,574
Active Volunteers	1,112	1,313	1,275
New Volunteers Trained	430	455	360

## THE SYSTEM CASAS NAVIGATE IN KENTUCKY

	CY 2018	CY 2019	CY 2020
AOC Petitions Filed <sup>1</sup>	26,237	22,373	16,985
Children in DCBS Substantiations <sup>2</sup>	33,828	30,349	25,459

<sup>1</sup> CY 2018, 2019, and 2020 data provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts

<sup>2</sup> CY 2018, 2019, and 2020 data provided by the Department for Community Based Services

## WHERE CASA PROGRAMS ARE LOCATED IN KENTUCKY AS OF JANUARY 2021

Currently, CASA programs serve children in the following counties in Kentucky:

Anderson, Ballard, Barren, Boone, Bourbon, Boyd, Boyle, Bracken, Breckinridge, Bullitt, Calloway, Campbell, Carlisle, Carroll, Carter, Christian, Clark, Crittenden, Daviess, Elliot, Fayette, Fleming, Floyd, Franklin, Fulton, Gallatin, Grant, Graves, Grayson, Hardin, Hart, Henderson, Henry, Hickman, Hopkins, Jefferson, Kenton, Knox, Laurel, Lincoln, Livingston, Lyon, Madison, Magoffin, Marshall, Mason, McCracken, McLean, Meade, Mercer, Metcalfe, Morgan, Muhlenberg, Nelson, Nicholas, Oldham, Owen, Pendleton, Pike, Pulaski, Robertson, Rockcastle, Scott, Shelby, Spencer, Trimble, Union, Warren, Webster, Woodford

By the end of 2022, CASA programs expect to be serving children in the following counties:

Bath, Caldwell, Garrard, Jessamine, Johnson, Knott, Leslie, Letcher, Logan, Martin, Menifee, Montgomery, Perry, Rowan, Todd, Trigg

## LOCAL CASA PROGRAM DIRECTORY

### **BOONE COUNTY CASA**

Serving Boone and Gallatin Counties  
Colleen Maier, Executive Director

2989 Washington St  
Burlington, KY 41005

(859) 586-1222  
casanky.org

### **CASA BY THE LAKES**

Serving Calloway and Marshall Counties  
Angelia Boyd, Executive Director

407 Poplar St  
Murray, KY 42071

(270) 761-0164  
casabythelakes.org

### **CASA FOR KIDS SERVING KENTON, CAMPBELL & PENDLETON COUNTIES**

Serving Campbell, Kenton, and Pendleton Counties  
Nicky Jeffries, Executive Director

1650 Russell St  
Covington, KY 41011

(859) 392-1791  
casaforkidsnky.org

### **CASA OF CARROLL, GRANT AND OWEN COUNTIES**

Serving Carroll, Grant, and Owen Counties  
Julie Scott Jernigan, Executive Director

400 N Main St  
Williamstown, KY 41097

(859) 823-5069  
casaofcgo.org

### **CASA OF EASTERN KENTUCKY**

A project of Judi's Place for Kids serving Floyd, Magoffin, and Pike Counties  
Pamela Taylor, Executive Director, Judi's Place for Kids  
Morgan Carver, CASA Program Director

253 University Dr  
Prestonsburg, KY 41653

(606) 886-8520  
eastkycasa.org

### **CASA OF GRAVES COUNTY & SOUTHWEST KY**

Serving Carlisle, Fulton, Graves, and Hickman Counties  
Stephanie Floyd, Executive Director

229 W Walnut St, Ste 2  
Mayfield, KY 42066

(270) 251-2060  
casagravesswky.org

### **CASA OF KNOX AND LAUREL COUNTIES**

Serving Knox and Laurel Counties  
Debra Hauser, Executive Director

120 Broad St  
London, KY 40744

(606) 389-5968  
casaknoxlaurel.com

### **CASA OF LEXINGTON**

Serving Bourbon, Fayette, Scott, and Woodford Counties

Melynda Jamison, Executive Director

3245 Loch Ness Dr  
Lexington, KY 40517

(859) 246-4313  
casaoflexington.org

### **CASA OF MADISON AND CLARK COUNTIES**

Serving Clark and Madison Counties  
Victoria Bengé, Executive Director

101 W Main St  
Richmond, KY 40475

(859) 624-4794  
madisoncasa.org

### **CASA OF MIDWEST KENTUCKY**

Serving Crittenden, Henderson, Hopkins, Muhlenberg, Union, and Webster Counties  
Daphne Maddox, Executive Director

10 S Main St, Ste 26  
Madisonville, KY 42431

(270) 245-5112  
midwestcasa.org

**CASA OF NELSON COUNTY**

Serving Nelson County  
Kate Broaddus, Executive Director  
860 W Stephen Foster Ave  
Bardstown, KY 40004  
(502) 331-6325  
nelsoncountycasa.org

**CASA OF NORTHEAST KY**

Serving Boyd, Carter, Elliot, and Morgan Counties  
Carol Adams, Executive Director  
2800 Louisa St, Ste 300  
Catlettsburg, KY 41129  
(606) 739-2177  
casaneky.org

**CASA OF OHIO VALLEY**

Serving Daviess and McLean Counties  
Rosemary Conder, Executive Director  
415 Saint Ann St  
Owensboro, KY 42303  
(270) 683-2138  
casaov.org

**CASA OF SOUTH CENTRAL KY**

Serving Barren, Hart, Metcalfe, and Warren Counties  
Jana Sublett, Executive Director  
316 E 10th Ave  
Bowling Green, KY 42102  
(270) 782-5353  
casaofsck.org

**CASA OF SOUTHERN KENTUCKY**

Serving Lincoln, Pulaski, and Rockcastle Counties  
Lexi Foster, Executive Director  
100 N Main St, Ste 301  
Somerset, KY 42501  
(606) 425-5000  
casasky.org

**CASA OF THE BLUEGRASS**

Serving Anderson, Boyle, Franklin, and Mercer Counties  
Laura Weddle, Executive Director  
473 West Walnut St  
Danville, KY 40423  
(859) 936-3510  
casaofthebluegrass.org

**CASA OF THE HEARTLAND**

Serving Hardin County  
Norma Hatfield, Executive Director  
245 W Dixie Ave  
Elizabethtown, KY 42701  
(270) 982-2274  
casaheartland.org

**CASA OF THE RIVER REGION**

Serving Henry, Jefferson, Oldham, Shelby, Spencer, and Trimble Counties  
William Myers, President & CEO  
982 Eastern Pkwy, Box 9  
Louisville, KY 40217  
(502) 595-4911  
casariverregion.org

**CASA OF WEST KENTUCKY**

A project of Child Watch Counseling & Advocacy Center  
Serving Ballard, Livingston, Lyon, and McCracken Counties  
Janie Criner, Executive Director of Child Watch Counseling & Advocacy Center  
Stephanie Moss, CASA Program Director  
1118 Jefferson St  
Paducah, KY 42001  
(270) 443-1440  
childwatchcac.org

**CASA PROGRAM FOR BRACKEN, FLEMING & MASON COUNTIES**

Serving Bracken, Fleming, Mason, Nicholas, and Robertson Counties

Rebecca Palmer, Executive Director

100 W 3rd St  
Maysville, KY 41056

(606) 563-7431

[casaforbrackenflemingmason.org](http://casaforbrackenflemingmason.org)

**CASA PROGRAM FOR BULLITT COUNTY**

Serving Bullitt County

Dana Elkins, Executive Director

340 S Buckman St, 2nd Floor  
Shepherdsville, KY 40165

(502) 543-4554

[bccasa.org](http://bccasa.org)

**CASA PROGRAM OF CHRISTIAN COUNTY, KY**

Serving Christian County

Regina Kelly, Executive Director

302 Riverfront Dr  
Hopkinsville, KY 42241

(270) 887-4024

[casaccky.org](http://casaccky.org)

**TRI-COUNTY CASA**

Serving Breckinridge, Grayson, and Meade Counties

Lori Aldridge, Executive Director

500 Carroll Gibson Blvd  
Leitchfield, KY 42754

(502) 744-3137

[tricountycasaky.com](http://tricountycasaky.com)



## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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KY Cabinet for Health and Family Services

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Stephanie Floyd - Local Program Representative  
CASA of Graves County & Southwest KY

## **STAFF**

Andrea Bruns - State Director

Brittany Garrett - Director of Communications

Melissa Paris - Director of Training

Mary Lewis - Regional Program Capacity Specialist: Eastern KY

Kelsey Washburn - Regional Program Capacity Specialist: Western KY

Mary Turner-Scott - Administrative Assistant

Norma Thomas - Grants Specialist

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