



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 ¹	26,237	22,373	16,985
Children in DCBS Substantiations ²	33,828	30,349	25,459

¹ CY 2018, 2019, and 2020 data provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts

² 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 Benge, 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

Daphyne 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

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

CASA PROGRAM OF CHRISTIAN COUNTY, KY

Serving Christian County

Regina Kelly, Executive Director

302 Riverfront Dr
Hopkinsville, KY 42241

(270) 887-4024

casaccky.org

TRI-COUNTY CASA

Serving Breckinridge, Grayson, and Meade Counties

Lori Aldridge, Executive Director

500 Carroll Gibson Blvd
Leitchfield, KY 42754

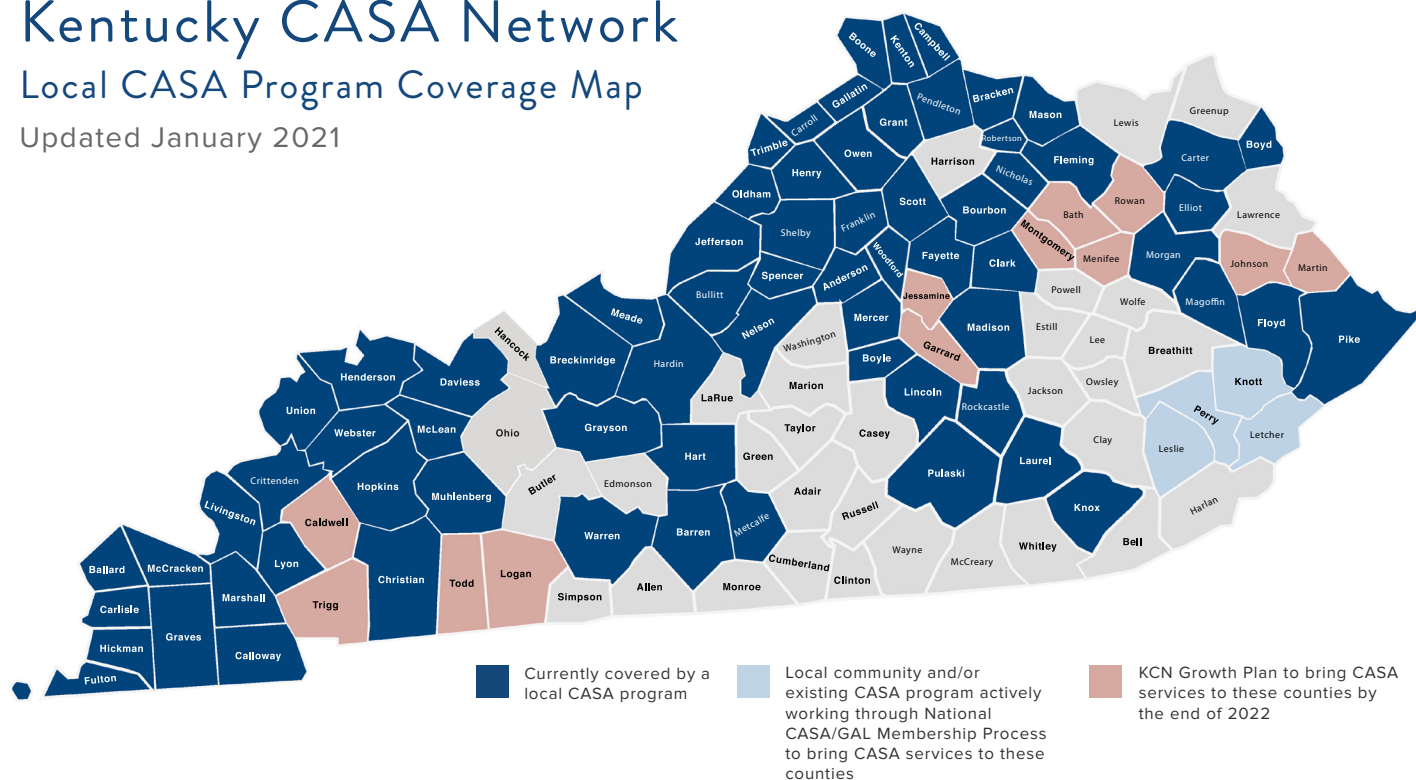
(502) 744-3137

tricountycasaky.com

Kentucky CASA Network

Local CASA Program Coverage Map

Updated January 2021



ABOUT THE KCN

Kentucky CASA Network, Inc. (KCN) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, governed by a board of directors, that provides ongoing development, training, technical assistance, and resources to local CASA programs across Kentucky. The KCN also advocates for the needs and interests of CASA programs and volunteers with industry stakeholders in Frankfort, participates on state child welfare policy-making committees, and advances the CASA mission statewide.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the KCN is to support the development, growth, and continuation of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) programs in Kentucky. CASA programs recruit and train volunteers to advocate on behalf of children who have come into the court system as a result of dependency, neglect, or abuse.

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