

CASA Fund Year-End Report July 31, 2025

Nebraska CASA issues this report to the Foster Care Review Office, Clerk of the Legislature, and the Governor regarding the Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Fund. The CASA Fund was established by the 2011 Nebraska Legislature to recruit and train CASA volunteers, to develop new CASA programs or expand current CASA programs into areas not currently served and to create new and innovative programming for CASA.

Twenty-one local CASA programs in 55 Nebraska counties recruit, screen, train and supervise volunteers who are appointed by Judges to speak in court for the safety and best interest of children who have been abused or neglected. The Nebraska CASA Association partners with these local CASA programs providing leadership, quality assurance, training, technical assistance, and funding. The information in this report pertains to fiscal year July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025.

The CASA Fund continues to move toward its goal to provide a CASA volunteer for every Nebraska child who needs one. Nebraska State Statutes and the National CASA/GAL Association for Children Standards require a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training before a volunteer is assigned to a case. In addition, State Statutes require a minimum of 10, and National CASA Standards a minimum of 12, annual hours of continuing education for volunteers.

Local programs continue to use all forms of advertising, public events, community presentations, posters, local media advertising and stories, websites, social media, newsletters, yard signs, and word of mouth to recruit volunteers. Local programs have experienced fewer people interested in becoming CASA volunteers in the last three years. Virtual and in-person methods are used to train new volunteers. CASA increased presentations at local and statewide civic, religious, and other groups and events this year, there were 160 new volunteers who were screened, trained, and sworn in as CASA advocates during the fiscal year. This is 27 less than last year.

Recruitment is vital to local CASA programs. New volunteers need to be recruited to serve additional children's cases and to replace retiring or redirected volunteers. Volunteers are asked to serve for at least one year after completing new volunteer training and to remain with a child until her or his court case is closed. Almost all volunteers fulfill both of those obligations and more.

Not all volunteers who are recruited are able to complete the training and assigned to a child. In addition to background criminal screening, interviews, and reference checks, local CASA programs use our 30 hours of CASA new volunteer training as part of the screening process to ensure volunteers are appropriate for the job of serving as an advocate for abused and neglected children.

Nebraska has seen an 87% growth in volunteers serving children since the CASA Fund began. This year's challenges included lost federal funding and less people stepping forward become volunteers.

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| • 421 volunteers for FY 2011/12 | • 886 volunteers for FY 2018/19 |
| • 480 volunteers for FY 2012/13 | • 957 volunteers for FY 2019/20 |
| • 663 volunteers for FY 2013/14 | • 938 volunteers for FY 2020/21 |
| • 726 volunteers for FY 2014/15 | • 960 volunteers for FY 2021/22 |
| • 770 volunteers for FY 2015/16 | • 931 volunteers for FY 2022/23 |
| • 815 volunteers for FY 2016/17 | • 797 volunteers for FY 2023/24 |
| • 820 volunteers for FY 2017/18 | • 794 volunteers for FY 2024/25 |

During this fiscal year, 101 volunteers left the program—three fewer than last year, indicating a relatively steady retention rate following a significant loss of 45 additional volunteers the year before. Many of this year's departures were due to stress and frustration with the delays and lack of services for children, with some volunteers taking extended breaks between assignments. CASA continues to implement its Reflective Practice program to strengthen communication between staff and volunteers and support retention. This year also marked the start of a focused effort on staff retention, including surveys aimed at identifying strategies to reduce burnout.

New and Expanding Programs

CASA Connection – This program began serving Platte County in 1992 and Colfax County in 2000. Three years ago, Nance County was added to their service area and volunteers from other counties offered to serve cases. This year the program served 66 children in these 3 counties.

SENCA CASA– Formerly known as Otoe County CASA, this program became one of Southeast Nebraska Community Action's (SENCA) programs in August of 2019. This partnership was created to determine if non-profit programs such as a community action agency could serve as an umbrella organization for local CASA programs in counties that have few children in care. Under SENCA's management CASA services have expanded into four unserved southeast Nebraska counties, Johnson, Richardson, Nemaha, and Pawnee. The program advocated for 42 children in the last fiscal year.

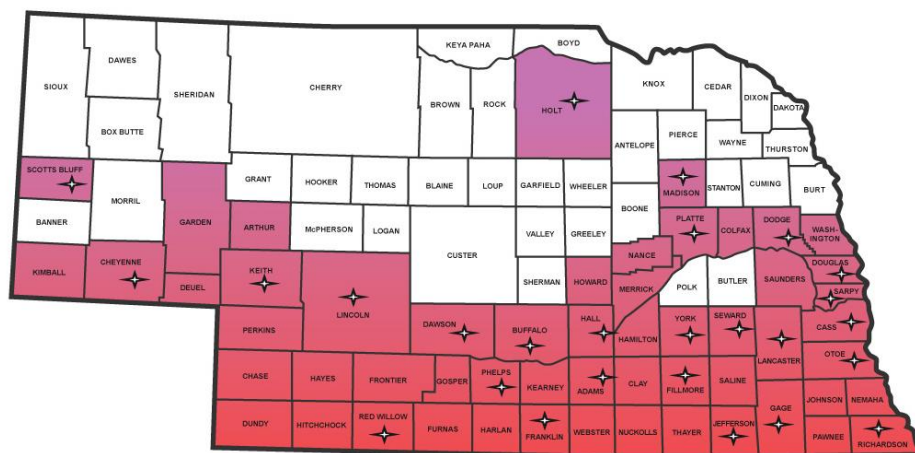
CASA of Elkhorn Valley- CASA of Northeast Nebraska was established in 1997 to serve Madison County Court. CASA of NorthCentral Nebraska was established in 2020 to serve Holt County Court. Facing ongoing challenges, including limited budgets and difficulties hiring and retaining qualified staff, these agency boards voted to merge the programs and expand services to include Antelope and Pierce Counties. A new executive director and program director have been hired, and additional volunteers have been trained and assigned to cases. As of the end of the fiscal year, the legal process to dissolve the former 501(c)(3) organizations and establish the new agency is underway.

CASA of the Midlands- This program was formerly the CASA Project of Dodge County housed within the County Attorney's office. The program only served 3 to 5 children per year. The program became a 501(c)(3) agency with a board of directors, director, and volunteer coordinator, the program is increasing the number of volunteers to serve children in Dodge County and has expanded into Saunders and Washington Counties. This year 39 volunteers advocated for 81 children.

CASA served 55 courts during the year. This has been an increase of 23 counties since the CASA Fund began. Local CASA programs served the county courts:

Adams	Gosper	Nuckolls
Arthur	Hall	Otoe
Buffalo	Hamilton	Pawnee
Cass	Harlan	Perkins
Chase	Hayes	Phelps
Cheyenne	Hitchcock	Platte
Clay	Holt	Red Willow
Colfax	Howard	Richardson
Dawson	Jefferson	Saline
Deuel	Johnson	Saunders
Dodge	Kearney	Scotts Bluff
Dundy	Keith	Seward
Fillmore	Kimball	Thayer
Franklin	Lincoln	Washington
Frontier	Madison	Webster
Furnas	Merrick	York
Gage	Nance	
Garden	Nemaha	

Local CASA programs also serve the separate juvenile courts in Douglas, Lancaster, and Sarpy Counties. **2,014 Children were served by CASA volunteers in 55 counties during the fiscal year.**



Financial Report

Local Program Grant Funding	Recruitment and Training	New & Expanding
CASA Connection	15,321.00	
CASA for Douglas County	46,585.00	
CASA for Lancaster County	32,764.00	
CASA of Gage County	12,612.00	
CASA of Midlands	16,616.00	16,000.00
CASA of Northeast Nebraska	12,271.00	
CASA of NorthCentral Nebraska	14,863.00	9,673.00
CASA of Scotts Bluff County	15,623.00	
CASA of South Central Nebraska	22,358.00	
CASA of York County	12,998.00	
Cass County CASA	11,763.00	
Dawson/Gosper County CASA	18,560.00	
Heartland CASA	15,016.00	
Kearney/Buffalo County CASA	24,738.00	
Lincoln County CASA	12,843.00	
Phelps/Harlan County CASA	14,160.00	
PlainsWest CASA	15,498.00	
Prairie Plains CASA	15,426.00	
Sarpy County CASA	12,500.00	
SENCA CASA	15,482.00	11,684.00
Southeast Nebraska CASA	17,486.00	
Trails West CASA	14,012.00	
TOTAL	\$389,495.00	\$37,357.00

Basecamp software was partially funded and is utilized on a statewide and local level for training, network sharing, volunteer recruitment tools, and other educational resources for our statewide network to cost effectively recruit, screen, train and support volunteers. Zoom was also utilized to provide training that is accessible to volunteers across the state. Partial cost for this was software funded in this project at \$3,774.83.

The Nebraska CASA Association's Training Director provided training for all new local program staff members to become a facilitator for the required 30-hour CASA volunteer training, as mandated by the National CASA/GAL Association for Children. The Training Director also planned and led a statewide conference for all CASA volunteers and staff

and conducted three additional volunteer training sessions when local programs were unable to do so promptly, helping retain interested volunteers. The CASA Fund covered \$45,505.17 in salary and travel expenses for the Training Director.

An expenditure of \$109 for adult and child abuse background checks for new volunteers.

This fund provided \$720 for statewide volunteer recruitment marketing costs.

1. STORIES: Stories of a volunteer affecting the life of a child served by CASA. (All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.)

A CASA volunteer, Stephanie, worked with a family with 4 children. The 3 oldest were boys, and the youngest was a girl. The children were in 2 foster homes, with the oldest 2 boys in one, and the youngest boy and girl in another. Parental rights had been relinquished, and both foster homes said they were willing to adopt.

As the adoption day grew closer, Stephanie started to notice changes in the foster home of the youngest children. The youngest boy had been the primary target of his parents' abuse. He had a long road ahead with many therapies and interventions. Stephanie noticed that his foster parents made comments like, "We're not sure we can afford his therapy once DHHS is gone." and "Things are so much calmer at the house when he is gone." Stephanie raised her concerns to the Child and Family Services (CFS) staff and the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). CFS reassured Stephanie that it's common for adoptive parents to worry, but that they were so close to the finish line, there was no need to disrupt things. CFS and the GAL wanted to move forward with the adoption. Stephanie was not comfortable with this, she felt this child's needs wouldn't be met, and that the foster parents were already expressing resentment towards him and his higher needs.

After a second and third attempt to raise concerns to CFS and the GAL, which were unsuccessful, Stephanie scheduled a meeting with the county attorney. She brought in printouts of her emails and text messages with the foster mother and shared details of her conversations. The county attorney, with all of CASA's evidence in front of him, could see this was a big problem. He set a status hearing for the following week, at which point Stephanie was able to share her concerns with the judge. It wasn't until this hearing that CFS and the GAL conceded that this was a problem, and search for alternate permanency arrangements began.

This resulted in the same family adopting him and his older brothers. The three boys have frequent visits with their little sister. The adoptive mother of the little girl now openly admits she could not have handled him in her home permanently.

It was thanks to the observations of CASA that this boy was able to be adopted by a loving family who was willing and able to meet his needs and be with his brothers. If

CASA had not spoken up, the case parties had full intentions of powering through with the adoption, which by the foster mother's own admission, would have been unsuccessful. This child was spared from further trauma and rejection, all because CASA was willing to have the difficult conversations and fight for what was in the child's best interest.

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When a youth first entered the child welfare system, he was just a toddler, quiet, withdrawn, and developmentally behind his peers. He had been removed from his home due to concerns of neglect, and while placed with his aunt, Mary. The uncertainty in his life was overwhelming.

That's when a CASA volunteer stepped in. A long-time CASA volunteer advocate was assigned to Adam's case. Having previously worked with his siblings, she already understood the family's history. CASA became a consistent presence; visiting regularly, attending team meetings, advocating for early childhood intervention services, and ensuring Adam's voice was heard in court.

Thanks to CASA advocacy, Adam was connected with speech therapy, play-based learning, and a supportive team of professionals. Over time, he began to thrive in his aunt's care, smiling more, speaking in full sentences, and making steady developmental gains.

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This case began as an Alternative Response case due to lack of resources and the oldest child not being enrolled in school. Because the mother would not respond to CFS, it escalated, and evidence surfaced that the children were being left with unapproved adults including a convicted sex offender. The children's home was uninhabitable. The children were removed from the home and for a while, all three were in the same foster home. However, the needs of the oldest child were different from the younger children, and the twins were moved to a new foster home. CASA volunteer Renee visited the children frequently, usually 2 to 3 times a month even though two children were placed in another county.

Renee attended school and sports events and stayed in touch with the children's schools regarding special educational needs. She developed supportive relationships with the foster homes and encouraged sibling visits. She tried to contact the biological mother who soon began missing visits and, did not respond to any team members or engage in services. Parental rights were terminated 15 months into the case. All three children were adopted approximately two years (662 days) after the case began. Renee remains in periodic contact with the adoptive homes, and the children are doing well.

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In 2023, Erin, CASA Volunteer, was assigned to a case involving four children. One of the youth, Ashley, had previously been adopted into the family but endured years of emotional and physical abuse. Isolated and treated differently by her adoptive parents, Ashley faced immense challenges.

Throughout the case, Erin remained a steadfast advocate for Ashley, even when it felt like no one else was listening. Despite resistance from multiple parties, Erin never gave up. Over time, Ashley began to trust Erin, and their bond deepened.

Eventually, Ashley was placed in a kinship foster placement with one of her teachers—a turning point in her life. With the support of her new foster parents and Erin, Ashley began to heal and thrive.

Last month, Ashley was officially adopted by her former teacher. In a touching tribute to the woman who never stopped fighting for her, Ashley chose to take Erin's name as her new middle name—symbolizing the unbreakable bond they now share.