

# City of Lawrence Outside Agency Bi-annual Report 2016

Reports on activity should be submitted electronically to Danielle Buschkoetter, at [dbuschkoetter@lawrenceks.org](mailto:dbuschkoetter@lawrenceks.org). Reports on activities from January 2016 to June 2016 are due on July 15<sup>th</sup> 2016. Cumulative reports on activities from January 2016 through December 2016 are due on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2017.

## Agency Name:

### Reporting Period (please check one):

☐ January - June  
(deadline July 15)

☒ January – December  
(deadline February 15)

1. Give a brief narrative of the activities that were funded with City funds over the reporting period checked above.

Our CASA volunteers served 143 abused and neglected children from 89 family groups from January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016. Thanks to the advocacy of 78 volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), children served in 2016 included 77 girls and 66 boys in foster care. These children included the following age ranges: ages 0-5: 51; ages 6-11: 49; ages 12-15: 25; ages 16-18: 18. Volunteer training classes were held in February, June and October; 26 new advocates were trained. Our CASA volunteers spent more than 6,000 hours advocating for children and drove more than 37,000 miles. Thirty-one (31) children achieved permanency in 2016 when their Child in Need of Care cases closed via adoption, guardianship, reintegration with a parent, or aging out of the system to independent living.

City funds were used toward training costs for new volunteers and helped support a child/advocate match for 43 new children served during this time period, while providing staff support for volunteers to continue serving 100 children who were already on our case load. Our CASA program was selected as one of eleven CASA agencies in the nation to be a pilot site for the new National CASA Volunteer Training Curriculum – updated for the first time since 2007. This required extra work by our entire staff, but we were honored for the opportunity to test the new curriculum and provide feedback to the National CASA curriculum development team to help shape the final version of the training materials, which will be released to the CASA network nationwide in 2017. City funds were also utilized to provide and/or promote numerous in-service training workshops for volunteers, with topics including *The Family Preservation Program*; *Human Trafficking*; *Services in Schools*; *The Role of the District Attorney in CINC Cases with ADA Emily Haack*; *a tour of the Douglas County Jail*; *Housing Options for Homeless Youth*; *Truancy Programs in Douglas County*; *a Zero to Three Roundtable for volunteers working with infants and toddlers*; *Working with LGBTQ Youth in Care and LGBTQ Sensitivity Training*; *Fostering Futures Program for working with older youth in foster care*; *DCF Guardianship Program*; *Book Discussion of "We Are Called to Rise" by Laura McBride*.

Our agency also provided children with essential clothing, shoes, summer activity scholarships, birthday gifts, adoption gifts, Halloween costumes, Christmas stockings, and more.

2. Provide specific detail (and supportive documents, if needed) to demonstrate progress made toward your goals/objectives.

Our 2016 CASA program objectives included: 1) Child safety; 2) CASA/Child stability; and 3) Child permanency.

- 1) Our goal of 95% of children assigned a CASA volunteer will not experience substantiated abuse or neglect in 2016 was achieved. 100% of children served during this time period remained safe and did not experience a recurrence of abuse or neglect while in care.
- 2) Our goal of 90% of children served by Douglas County CASA will remain with the same CASA volunteer throughout 2016 was met. Eleven (11) children did have a change of CASA volunteer during this time period, but the overall goal of stability in CASA assignment was achieved with a 92% rate of stability. With high turnover in KVC case managers of great concern during the past year, the stability of a CASA volunteer is especially crucial.
- 3) Our goal of 90% of children whose cases close will not re-enter the local jurisdiction of the court as a child in Need of Care within 2 years was achieved. 100% of CASA children who achieved permanency in this time frame remained in safe, permanent homes, with no instances of recidivism from 2014 reported during the past 12 months.

### 3. How have you impacted the citizens of Lawrence?

As advocates for our community's most vulnerable children, Douglas County CASA volunteers have had a tremendous impact on 143 abused and neglected children during 2016. By monitoring their safety and advocating for their medical, educational, emotional and permanency needs, our volunteers have facilitated more court-ordered services and better outcomes for children ranging from birth to age 18. These efforts have made a positive impact on our community as we strive to protect and nurture children whose parents are unable to provide this support. Facilitating safe, permanent homes for children has a positive impact on our entire community and all of its citizens.

Another important impact on the community was the leadership role that Douglas County CASA assumed to help coordinate and host meetings to plan collaborative local activities for National Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month in April. Thanks to this collaboration, 700 "*Pinwheels for Prevention*" were planted at Lawrence City Hall and the Lawrence Public Library, >50 pinwheel bouquets (with accompanying child abuse prevention tips) were distributed in area businesses and organizations, and City and County proclamations recognized April as National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Pinwheels were also planted in Eudora, Baldwin, and Lecompton, making a total of more than 1,000 *Pinwheels for Prevention* displayed in Douglas County. In addition, our agency played a key role in continuing a new community-wide award for a *Champion for Child Abuse Prevention*; the 2016 winner of this award was Mandy Nestler, case manager for the Healthy Families Program of the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department. This award helps increase child abuse prevention awareness and sends a positive message to the community as we reward one of our unsung heroes and inspire others to follow this path. At a time when local headlines include physical and sexual abuse of children and an infant left in a trash dumpster, child abuse prevention efforts are crucial throughout the year.

Our agency and the task force also hosted a child abuse prevention information table at the Earth Day festivities in South Park and at a preschool fair at the Lawrence Public Library. The Douglas County Child Abuse Prevention Task Force now has nearly 50 members (including the Lawrence Police Department, the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department, CASA, the Department for Children & Families, The Sexual Trauma and Abuse Care Center, KVC, Willow, Success by Six, Lawrence Public Schools, and many more), a website, Facebook page, and plans for continued growth and community education efforts. All of these efforts are part of a collaborative effort to keep children safe, nurture healthy families, and diminish child abuse and neglect in our community. Our CASA program also initiated an ad hoc committee and community conversations to examine the feasibility of starting a Child Advocacy Center in our community. An ongoing partnership between CASA and USD 497 has provided a "hands on" opportunity for local high school students enrolled at the new College and Career Center to design and build a CASA playhouse to assist with our agency's outreach, volunteer recruitment, and fundraising efforts. The two-story "Kansas barn" CASA playhouse that toured the Lawrence community last summer was a symbol of the safe, permanent home and happy childhood that all children deserve.

4. What barriers, if any, have you encountered?

The most significant barrier continues to be the steady increase in the number of child abuse and neglect cases reported in our community, which has continued a crucial demand for more CASA volunteers. The number of children in foster care is at an all-time high statewide and in Douglas County. There were 170 children in DCF custody in November of 2016, a sharp contrast to the average of 85 children in DCF custody in Douglas County 5 years ago. This pace has elevated our concerns regarding the increase of CINC cases in our community. Despite doubling the number of children served by our CASA program in recent years, there are still nearly 80 children on our waiting list for a CASA volunteer. Our current Advocate Coordinators are nearly at their maximum staff-to-volunteer ratio mandated by the National CASA Association. To train more volunteers to serve more children, we must maintain and increase staff hours and find the additional dollars to do so. We have also encountered difficulties recruiting enough volunteers since this type of volunteer work in the child welfare realm is so demanding, and it is especially difficult to recruit men. To address this challenge, we have increased community outreach via our Volunteer Recruitment Committee, and we are currently increasing our outreach to local churches. Because there is a shortage of foster care homes in Lawrence and Douglas County, many of our community's children who are placed in DCF custody are moved to foster homes in other counties. This causes children to change schools and requires that CASA volunteers drive long distances to visit their assigned child or sibling group at their own expense.

We are greatly concerned about continued reductions in City funding for social service agencies, since perpetual decreases in local funding will create a significant barrier to serving more abused and neglected children who desperately need a caring adult to champion for their best interests. As an agency that must raise every penny of our operating budget and provide our services free of charge, we rely on community funding and find it increasingly difficult to serve the growing number of abused and neglected children from the Lawrence area who are in need of an advocate. When resources dwindle as demand increases, the result is that more children are without the crucial advocacy of a CASA volunteer during their difficult time in a challenged foster care system.

5. Review the line-item budget you provided in your application. How much of your allocation has been spent?

We received a total allocation of \$22,780 from the City of Lawrence in 2016, and we spent the entire amount during our 2016 fiscal year (1/1/16-12/31/16).