

# City of Lawrence Outside Agency Annual Report For Calendar Year 2017

Reports on activity should be submitted electronically to Danielle Buschkoetter, at [dbuschkoetter@lawrenceks.org](mailto:dbuschkoetter@lawrenceks.org) by Thursday, February 15<sup>th</sup> 2018 at 5:00pm. For the following questions please refer back to your [2017 application for funding](#).

**Reporting Period:** Calendar Year 2017

**Agency Name:** Douglas County CASA

## **1. Refer to the program in which your agency received funding; provide a participant success story that helps demonstrate the accomplishments of the program.**

In 2017, Douglas County CASA received \$21,520 to recruit and train new volunteers, provide ongoing training and supervision to existing volunteers and to increase community awareness of the program and the issues related to abuse and neglect. Our volunteers collectively advocated for 155 children in foster care who were the victims of abuse and/or neglect and 35 of these children achieved permanency in 2017.

One of our 2017 success stories involves a teenage girl, “Sarah,” who came into foster care at age 13 and was in the child welfare system for 5 years before she aged out this summer. Although aging out may not traditionally be viewed as a success, for Sarah it was the best possible outcome in the aftermath of incredible trauma.

Before she was a teen, Sarah was sexually abused by her stepfather. Her mother never acknowledged the sexual abuse even though Sarah told her repeatedly. Sarah’s mother had four other children who were all removed from her custody; Sarah was the fifth child. After the sexual abuse by her stepfather, Sarah was eventually placed with her biological father. He was an alcoholic and physically abused her, so Sarah was removed from his care and came into protective custody in Douglas County.

During her time in the foster care system, Sarah had more than 15 case managers, with 10 of these case managers during a 2-year period, but she was also fortunate to have the stability of just 1 CASA volunteer. Diane was assigned as Sarah’s Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) in January of 2013, and the stability of a single CASA volunteer played a crucial role in helping Sarah triumph over significant trauma and adversity. As her CASA, Diane realized that Sarah was so much more than a victim – she was (and is) a beautiful, bright, artistic, musical, articulate, and poised young lady. In her CASA court reports, Diane advocated for therapy and for extracurricular activities that boosted Sarah’s self-esteem. She also nurtured Sarah’s love of music, went to her choir concerts, encouraged her participation in Avid and GearUp, encouraged Sarah to take PSAT prep, complete CNA training and get a part-time job, participate in the VanGo summer program, and encouraged her to work through problems with foster parents and foster siblings. Diane was Sarah’s first long-term relationship.

In her role as a CASA, Diane played a significant part in getting Sarah to graduate from high school, and Sarah even graduated a semester early and attended junior college in the spring. Diane helped Sarah face the future instead of dwelling on the past. Diane also took her for college visits and helped Sarah with her independent living skills. During her 4 ½ years as Sarah’s CASA, Diane drove thousands of miles to visit Sarah in her foster homes. After turning 18 in August, Sarah enrolled at Washburn University and is majoring in music. Diane helped Sarah move into her dorm and get the supplies she needed, and she continues to stay in touch with Sarah. Even though her official role as a CASA has ended, the bond that Diane shares with Sarah will last a lifetime.

Another success story includes “Jonathan” (now age 6) who came into custody when he was four years old, after police discovered Jonathan and his (low functioning) mother were being held captive. Jonathan

witnessed his mom restrained, physically assaulted and verbally abused. Jonathan and his mother were homeless, and it was clear that his mother lacked the capacity to care for him.

Linda was assigned to be Jonathan's Court Appointed Special Advocate in September of 2015, and was his CASA throughout his time in foster care. In the beginning of the case, Jonathan's transition was nothing less than remarkable. He was taller and more verbal every time she saw him during their weekly visits.

As his CASA, Linda advocated for Jonathan to receive a special weighted blanket that has proven to be effective in calming children who are hyperactive. She attended IEP meetings, went to his birthday parties, took him to the park, but most of the time she just showed up at his foster home to play with him. She talked to him, read books to him, they colored together, did puzzles, and she worked on his handwriting. She logged in nearly 300 hours with him in the 26 months she was on the case. She kept a soccer ball in the trunk of her car, and whenever it was nice outside, the two would go outside and play, just to release some of his pent-up energy. Jonathan called her "Miss Linda" and she always carried a toy car in her purse so he would have something to play with during hearings or case plan meetings. When he was adopted, he ran down the hallway outside the courtroom and shouted gleefully to his parents, "See! I told you she would be here!" Then he wrapped his arms around Miss Linda with a huge bear hug and a heart-warming smile.

Although her court appointed role has ended, Linda considers herself an honorary aunt to Jonathan and she hopes to remain close with the family for as long as they will have her around.

**2. Refer to your 2017 application for funding; provide a brief narrative of the activities funded with City funds.**

Our CASA volunteers served 155 abused and neglected children from 91 family groups from January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017. Thanks to the advocacy of 88 volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), children served in 2017 included 77 girls and 78 boys in foster care. These children included the following age ranges: ages 0-5: 56; ages 6-11: 54; ages 12-15: 26; ages 16-18: 19. Volunteer training classes were held in February, June and October; 30 new advocates were trained. Our CASA volunteers spent more than 6,000 hours advocating for children and drove more than 40,000 miles. Thirty-five (35) children achieved permanency in 2017 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 45 new children served during this time period, while providing staff support for volunteers to continue serving 110 children who were already on our case load. City funds were also utilized to provide and/or promote numerous in-service training workshops for volunteers, with topics including Batterer Intervention, Mental Health First Aid, Human Trafficking, Education, DCF Changes, and book discussions of "Three More Words," "Hillbilly Elegy," and "Wonder."

Our agency also provided children with essential clothing, shoes, summer activity scholarships, birthday gifts, adoption gifts, Halloween costumes, Christmas stockings, and more. In addition, our staff provided leadership with the Douglas County Child Abuse Prevention Task Force and helped coordinate Pinwheels for Prevention planting at City Hall, city and county proclamations for Child Abuse Prevention month in April, and other outreach and awareness activities.

**3. Refer to your 2017 application for funding; provide specific detail (use supportive documents, if needed) to demonstrate what progress was made toward your proposed outcomes.**

Our 2017 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 2017 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. Our CASA volunteers are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect, and they carefully monitor the child's safety and report any concerns to the DCF hotline.

- 2) Our goal of 90% of children served by Douglas County CASA will remain with the same CASA volunteer throughout 2016 was met. Four 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 97.4% 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. In addition to providing a sense of security for the child, CASA stability also offers important case history information for the constantly changing cast of professionals involved in the child welfare system.
- 3) Unfortunately, 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 not achieved. Only 80% of CASA children who achieved permanency in this time frame remained in safe, permanent homes, with 7 instances of recidivism from the 35 closed cases in 2015 reported during the past 2 years. Larger sibling groups included in this recidivism were a factor.

**4. Refer to the line-item budget provided in your 2017 application for funding; is this accurate to how your allocation was actually spent? If no, what changed and why?**

The projected budget in our application is reasonably accurate and all City funds were used as requested. However, our overall agency income and expenses in 2017 were both more than initially projected at the time of our grant application. Variables in our budget were caused by the unpredictable nature of revenue from individual donations and special events; additional expenses included higher health insurance costs for CASA employees due to more employees eligible for coverage and a premium increase at annual renewal date.