

**Fairfax
CASA**

Hope is Here

**FY21
Annual
Report**





*There's
no place
LIKE
HOPE*

'21

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Dear Friends,

I begin this letter with a heartfelt thank you: To every single one of you who contributed to Fairfax CASA over the last year—whether through a monetary donation, through your valuable time or through supportive messages—thank you. FY21 was a challenging year for nonprofits, for families, for the country and for the world. Fairfax CASA made it through, and we would not have done so without your continued support and belief in our program. Thank you.

I want to publicly recognize the staff of Fairfax CASA, who went above and beyond to keep this organization afloat. They created fully functioning home offices, ensured their volunteers had everything they could possibly need to succeed, ran interference when problems arose, took part in too many Zoom and Webex meetings to count, and just maintained great attitudes when things were not always pleasant or easy. I am incredibly fortunate to work with such wonderful people, who care so deeply about the children we serve.

Fairfax CASA fulfilled its mandate in FY21, through the constant and extraordinary efforts of our volunteers. While dealing with their own COVID-19 challenges, 126 volunteers continued to see their kids, in person and over screens, conducting more than 4,000 visits over the last year. They submitted 300 comprehensive reports on time to the Court. They sat in front of their screens, sometimes for hours, waiting to be “admitted” to hearings, so they could report to the Court. The volunteers continued to advocate, provide stability and remain a safe adult to our community’s most vulnerable children.

We offered nearly 58 continuing education trainings to our volunteers over Zoom. We collaborated with community partners. We trained three classes of volunteers virtually—30+ hours of training over Zoom—and swore in 28 new volunteers. And while the majority of our children were not physically present in school for most of the fiscal year, Fairfax CASA served essentially the same number of children and families in FY21 compared to FY20: 297 children from 175 families.

As you will see in the pages that follow, Fairfax CASA continues to thrive, because of you and your support. Over the last two years, Fairfax CASA’s mandate to serve as the “eyes and ears of the court” was vital to the well-being of our community’s most vulnerable children. As we re-enter the world, and children return to school, we are prepared for an increase in cases. We are prepared as families struggle in the aftermath of COVID-19, financially, mentally and emotionally. We are prepared to serve our children and recruit and train volunteers. We will fulfill our mandate to serve the court and our community. We will continue to do what you trust us to do, and we will continue to do it with passion and competence. Thank you, for trusting us to do this work and for being a critical part of it.

With gratitude,



Darcy Hubbard
Executive Director/CEO

Staff

Darcy Hubbard

Executive Director/CEO

Corrine Cavaliere

Program & Finance Specialist

Alexis Shield

Manager of Volunteer Recruitment

Emily Rea

Training Manager & Supervisor

Dawnee Giammittorio

Supervisor

Jennifer Katac

Supervisor

Amy Prestidge

Supervisor

Paula Salguero

Supervisor

Tara Shimp

Supervisor

Ashleigh Conrad

Administrative, Marketing, and Events Associate

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair smiling at the camera. She is sitting on a couch with three young girls. From left to right: a girl with blonde hair in a braid, a younger girl with blonde hair, and a girl with long brown hair. All three girls are smiling.

our SUCCESS

Madison, Olivia, and Ruby* were removed from their mother's care due to her ongoing struggle with substance abuse. Madison had special needs and her CASA fiercely advocated on her behalf to ensure she received all the appropriate services she needed to succeed in school. When Ruby began exhibiting signs of trauma that required attention, her CASA advocated for her to receive the appropriate trauma-informed therapy.

Throughout their time in foster care, the girls' mother engaged with services to address her substance abuse, including counseling and therapy. The CASA encouraged her to focus on her sobriety and relayed the mother's progress to the judge through her court reports. When the mother had made significant progress in her sobriety, the CASA advocated for the sisters to return to her care. After an extended successful home "visit," the judge returned full custody of the sisters to their mother.

**Names changed to protect confidentiality*

our IMPACT

126
CASA volunteers served

• • • • •
297
Children from

• • • • •
167
Families in FY21

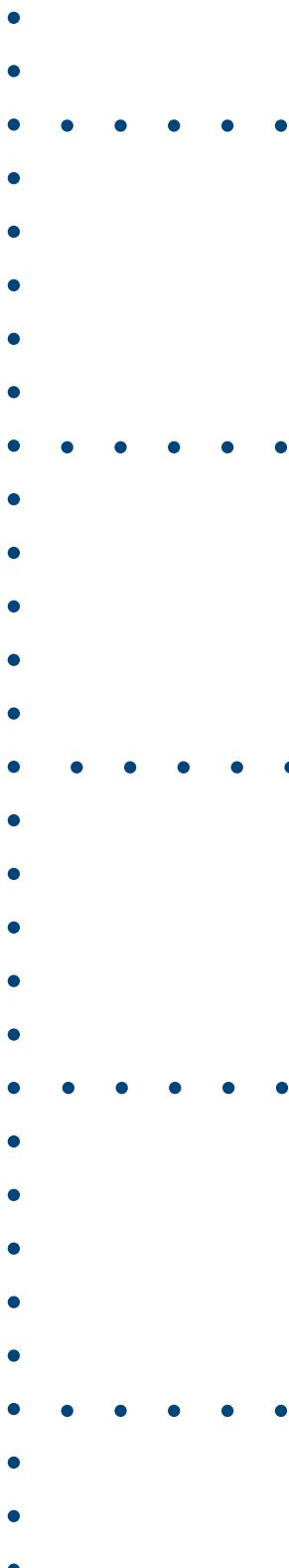
 **10%** Fairfax CASA saw a 10% decrease in the number of children served in FY21 compared to FY20, consistent with the decrease in the County's CPS calls

 **12%** Fairfax CASA saw a 12% decrease in the number of families served in FY21 compared to FY20

 **9%** Fairfax CASA saw a 9% increase in the number of new CASA volunteers sworn into service in FY21 compared to FY20

-  **18,106** HOURS spent by volunteers advocating for the children they served
-  **4,675** VISITS made by volunteers with their CASA children
-  **32,900** CONTACTS were made by CASAs with providers or parties to their cases
-  **56,863** MILES driven by volunteers in furtherance of their duties
-  **28** NEW VOLUNTEERS were trained and sworn into service
-  **300** COURT REPORTS were submitted by volunteers
-  **1,774** RECOMMENDATIONS were made by volunteers
-  **122** CASES were closed by the Court because permanency was achieved

our **MOMENTS**



OCTOBER 2020

8 new CASA volunteers gave us "High Hopes" when they were sworn in by the Honorable Judge Thomas Sotelo on October 14th. Currently, these volunteers work with 11 families and advocate for a total of 18 children.



NOVEMBER 2020

Giving Tuesday, the global movement to give back on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, was an immense success for CASA. Thanks to a committed monetary match sponsored by one of our very own CASA volunteers and a robust digital media campaign, Fairfax CASA surpassed our Giving Tuesday fundraising goal.



FEBRUARY 2021

9 new, sharp and analytical CASA volunteers, dubbed 'The Inquisitors,' were sworn in by the Honorable Todd Petit on February 24th. Currently, these volunteers work with 8 families and advocate for a total of 10 children.



APRIL 2021

This year's Run for the Children was once again held virtually with participants from 21 states, Washington D.C., the United Kingdom, Peru, The Netherlands, Switzerland, and Costa Rica. Our supporters ran a 5K throughout the month of April and raised over \$60,000 for our mission.



JUNE 2021

11 new 'Active and Astute' advocates were sworn into service by the Honorable Judge Thomas Sotelo on June 23rd. These volunteers have hit the ground running in their CASA service by taking new cases and attending continuing education sessions.

our

CONNECTIONS

The ongoing COVID-19 health crisis continued to impact our lives in FY21, and as Fairfax CASA entered the year, our team brainstormed how we could stay connected with our volunteers while prioritizing safety. While adopting social distancing guidelines, we remained committed to fostering a sense of community among our volunteers, staff, and board. Thanks to technology and creativity, we maintained our connection to the CASA volunteers by hosting engaging guest speakers, creating special social hours, and providing high quality continuing education.



Virtual Light of Hope Volunteer Appreciation Event

Our annual volunteer appreciation event was held virtually in November 2020 and featured keynote speaker Sasha Jospeh Neulinger. Sasha is the writer and director of the documentary film *Rewind* which examines his own history of surviving sexual abuse as a child through the lens of family videos. Sasha's presentation emphasized resilience and the importance of simply listening to child victims. CASA volunteers were able to participate in a robust question and answer session at the end of the presentation. Prior to the event, staff surprised the CASAs by delivering yard signs recognizing their volunteer commitment.



CASA Cafes

As social distancing protocols remained in effect during FY21, the Fairfax CASA team realized volunteers were missing opportunities to come together. The team created a new social hour dubbed the "CASA Cafe" as a way for volunteers to connect socially and just for fun. In September 2020, CASA kicked-off the Cafe series, hosting a total of 10 throughout FY21. Volunteers enjoyed their morning coffees with staff, over Zoom, engaging in conversations including best practices for supporting older youth, creative online activities to connect with children, favorite recipes and new books, and travel tips.



Continuing Education Sessions

Continuing Education sessions for our CASA volunteers are not only mandated, but critical to ensuring that the CASAs receive important updates and information, as to laws, programs and best practices. Our staff develops a comprehensive and diverse curriculum each year to best prepare volunteers. FY21 was no different, with the exception of moving all Continuing Education sessions to a virtual platform. Twenty-three Zoom sessions were held covering a variety of topics. Thanks to the flexibility of a virtual platform, CASA was able to engage a number of specialized presenters including 5 child welfare community collaborators, 4 representatives from the Department of Family Services, a Guardian *ad litem*, an INOVA nurse, and an NPR podcast host.



our SUCCESS

Dylan* was 10 years old when he entered foster care due to neglect. His mother was incarcerated, and his father was unavailable to care for him. Upon entering foster care, the judge appointed a CASA advocate to him. Almost a year later, Dylan's siblings Tyler* and Sophia* entered foster care after their grandmother could no longer care for them. Thankfully, Tyler, and Sophia were placed with Dylan in his foster home. During a visit, Dylan's CASA noticed his siblings in the home and learned that a CASA had not been assigned to them. The CASA worked with the children's Guardian ad litem to secure her appointment for Tyler and Sophia.

Dylan, Tyler, and Sophia's CASA advocated for many of their needs, including psychological evaluations for the children that had been delayed. The CASA followed up and was persistent in ensuring that the evaluations were completed. The evaluations called for the three siblings to receive much needed therapy. Today, the siblings have improved greatly in school, in spite of virtual learning during the pandemic. Thanks to their therapy, some of their behavioral issues have decreased as well. They are thriving together in their foster home and enjoy taking Tae Kwon Do classes and cooking together as a family. In May 2021, the children's foster family became their forever family when their adoption was finalized.

**Names changed to protect confidentiality*



our

COLLABORATIONS

CHILD WELFARE COMMUNITY

During this fiscal year Fairfax CASA continued to partner with private, public, and nonprofit organizations to better the outcomes of the children we serve in our community. In addition to being a founding member of the Fairfax Child Abuse Prevention Partnership, CASA is a part of the following organizations:

- Trauma Informed Community Network
- StepUp4Kids
- The Fairfax JDRDC's Children Services Forum
- Fairfax Domestic Violence Network
- Fairfax JDRDC's Best Practices Team
- NOVA Community College Great Expectations Advisory Committee
- VA CASA State Leadership Team
- Fairfax DFS Advisory Team

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Fairfax CASA continued the partnership between two of our most dedicated supporters in Fairfax City: Twins Ace Hardware and High Side. Twins Ace Hardware hosted our annual "Have a Heart" round-up campaign raising \$2,000 during the month of February. High Side, a local Asian eatery and craft beer restaurant, selected CASA to be the charity beneficiary for their anniversary celebration raffle. A CASA success story was also highlighted during the virtual anniversary celebration, raising awareness for the program and recruiting potential volunteers.

MEDIA COMMUNITY

Executive Director Darcy Hubbard engaged in two high level media spotlights during FY21. In March 2020, Darcy was recognized as a community leader by the hosts of *We Should Talk About That Podcast* and joined them for a compelling conversation on the importance of CASA's work. In May 2020, Darcy and Manager of Volunteer Recruitment, Alexis Shield, joined the morning show, *Great Day Washington*, to highlight the CASA program leading up to the DC region's annual Do More 24 event. Their conversation focused on volunteer recruitment.

our

VOLUNTEERS



SCREENING POTENTIAL CASA VOLUNTEERS

Fairfax CASA invests a great deal of time and effort into properly screening and vetting potential volunteers. Due to the intensity of CASA work and the sensitivity of the information that CASAs have access to, we are critical, careful, and thorough in assessing potential volunteers to ensure that we are selecting the right candidate for the job. We evaluate each applicant's skills, time, and dedication to carrying out their advocacy work for the children they will potentially serve. Prospective volunteers also submit to thorough background checks.

In FY21, our program received **522** inquiries about volunteering. We held **23** information sessions, the first step to becoming a CASA volunteer, for **285** attendees. **67** individuals applied to become a CASA and **28** were accepted and sworn-in to service.



42% of applicants were sworn into service

5% of those who inquire about becoming a CASA are sworn in as CASA volunteers

TRAINING CASA VOLUNTEERS

In addition to the rigorous **35** hours of pre-service training completed by Fairfax CASA volunteers, all volunteers must complete **12** hours of continuing education yearly to re-certify as active volunteers. In FY21, Fairfax CASA hosted **58** in-office continuing education sessions for our CASA's with topics including Kinship, Cultural Competency, Mental Health, Immigration Advocacy, and Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome. In addition, our CASAs participated in film, book, and podcast discussions. In total, our CASA volunteers completed **3,311** hours of continuing education hours in FY21.

Our CASA volunteers are an extraordinary group of individuals doing extraordinary things, each and every day. Here are some of their reflections on the importance and impact of their work over the past year:

- "When you raise a family, volunteer work tends to revolve around your own children and family. I realized that not all children have family who can provide what they need in some important way and I enjoy being able to give voice to children who have unmet needs." - CASA Nancy D.
- "I love every aspect of being a CASA and feel that I am able to utilize my gifts in a way that helps me be an effective CASA for the vulnerable kids in our area. It's a win-win in so many ways!" - CASA Becky K.
- "I was originally drawn to CASA because I was adopted from foster care as an infant. The foster care system can work and being a CASA allows me to help provide our children the safe, healthy and secure childhood I experienced." - CASA Melanie S.
- "We are a part of a process that seeks to heal families. The court listens to our recommendations. That is powerful, daunting, and inspiring, all at once!" - CASA Elizabeth S.
- "Working with children and families has always been my passion. It's been almost 2 years since I've been a part of this wonderful organization, and I love that I'm able to play a small part in another child's life." - CASA Hinah U.



Throughout the past year, while COVID mutated, our volunteers adapted to ensure better outcomes for the children they serve. Many went above and beyond in fulfilling their mandates.

Here are some examples of CASAs stepping up in FY21:



Number of CASA volunteers who worked two or more cases simultaneously



Number of CASA volunteers who served sibling groups of 4 or more children



Number of CASA volunteers who have remained on their case for 24 or more months



our SUCCESS

Julia* entered foster care in 2017 after disclosing that she was sexually abused by her stepfather. Since coming into care, Julia has lived in two different foster homes and experienced changes in her social workers and Guardians ad litem, but the same CASA assigned on day one remains by her side, advocating for her needs and interests.

Julia's CASA advocated for the prioritization of Julia's education, identifying services Julia needed to be successful in school, including an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Every summer since 2018, thanks in part to her CASA's encouragement, Julia has participated in the Northern Virginia Educating Youth through Employment Program (EYE Program) which matches Julia with professional opportunities to gain valuable work experience. Julia passed her Cosmetology State Board Exam in May of 2021 and went on to graduate high school a month later in June.

Julia's CASA expressed that she could not be more proud of what Julia has accomplished and that she is a resilient young woman who possesses an inner strength that drives her to achieve her goals. Currently, Julia is in the workforce and plans to become a hairstylist in the fall. While Julia remains in the Fostering Futures program, her CASA will continue to be there to support her through every milestone as she approaches adulthood.

*Name changed to protect confidentiality



our
ONGOING
RESPONSE
TO
COVID-19

While the COVID-19 health emergency stopped much of America in its tracks in March of 2020, the child welfare system and Fairfax CASA “pivoted” quickly and adjusted accordingly. Throughout the crisis, our CASA volunteers not only continued to meet their mandate of providing advocacy services to our most at-risk children, but went above and beyond in doing so. Fairfax CASA requires the CASAs to visit twice monthly with their child(ren); this standard is in excess of state and National CASA best practice standards which require one visit per month. In light of the COVID-19 safety protocols put into place, CASA volunteers were unable visit with their children in person from many months. Knowing that we could not allow our children to go "unseen," we asked our volunteers to commit to visiting their children through a virtual platform, once per week. Our volunteers quickly download apps, opened up the Facetime feature on their phones and learned how to Zoom, to ensure that they were seeing their children.

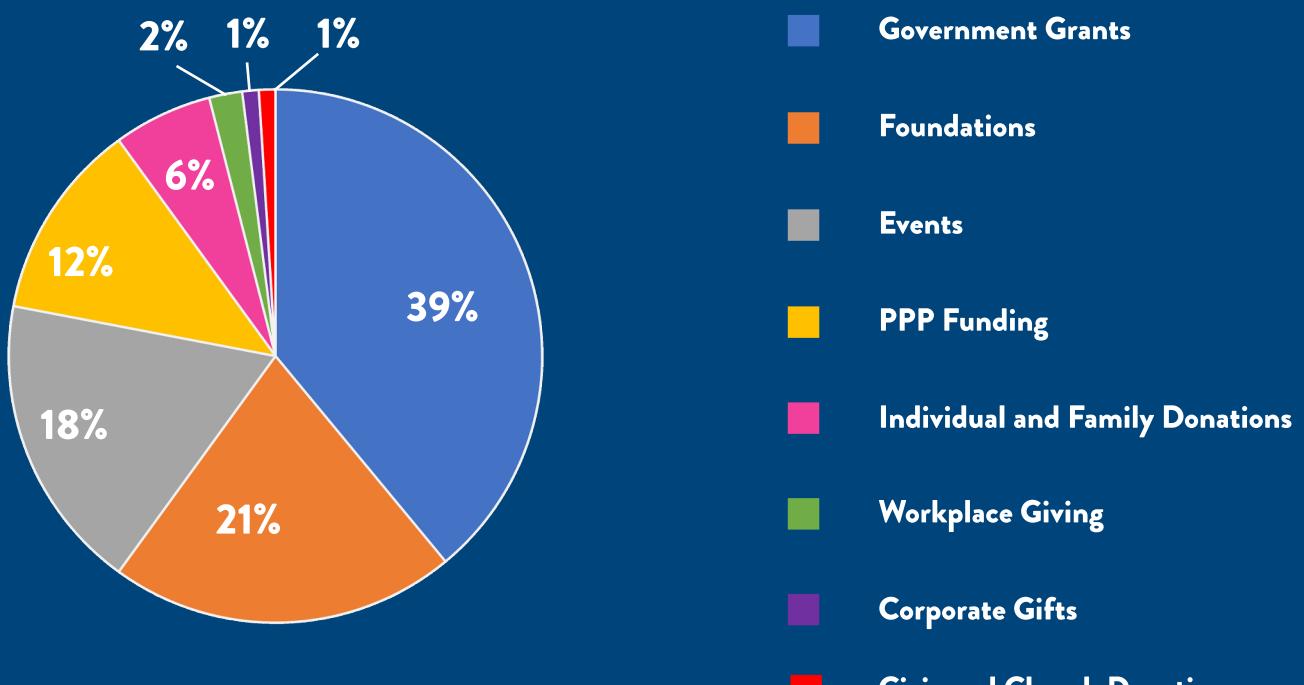
When it came to recruiting, screening, and training new CASA volunteers, our staff exhibited the same ingenuity and dedication. Fairfax CASA conducted several live video streams on Facebook to raise awareness about the program, held 23 virtual information sessions, and 3 training classes were held over Zoom, including the swearing in ceremonies with the Court. The Fairfax CASA staff did an exceptional job adapting to the platform and adjusting training to a virtual format. Continuing education, for existing volunteers, did not fall by the wayside: Volunteers were provided with monthly online learning opportunities and book discussions, with staff leading 23 virtual trainings.

The virus has had far-reaching effects beyond illness and the CASAs have been pivotal in ensuring that the families in their cases received important information about resources available. They notified families of meal programs provided by the local school systems. They raised matters in the Court when they had concerns about safety and well-being. They did their jobs--their unpaid, on their own time “job” of providing a voice to every child with an open case before the Court.

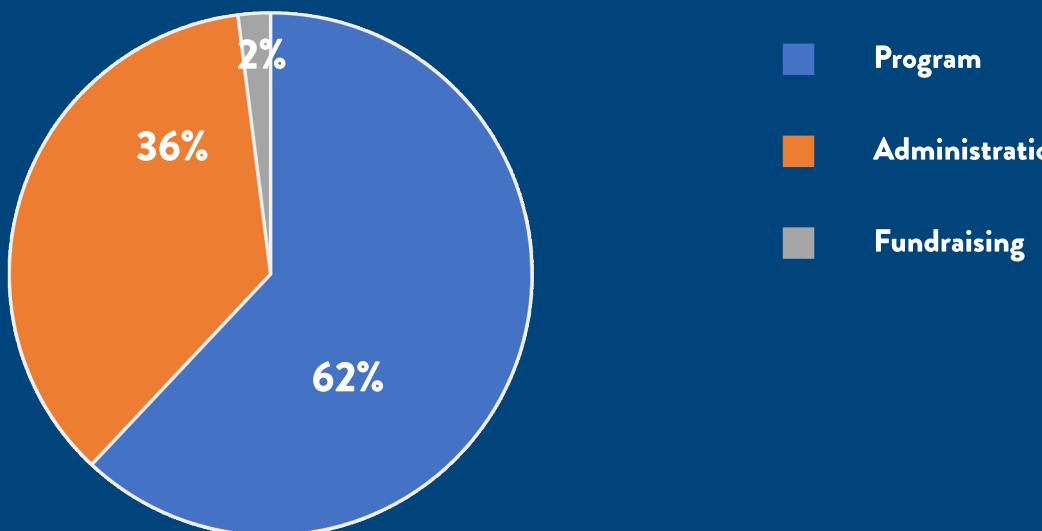
our

FINANCIALS

Total Income FY21



Total Expenses FY21



our

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