2018 IMPACT REPORT
It’s not every year that a non-profit gets to reach out to its friends and supporters and say, “Hooray!” we have conquered big dreams this year.

But for CASA of Los Angeles, FY2018 was all about conquering big dreams.

For years, CASA/LA has worked to increase the number of children we serve, not just because we wanted to reach a certain number, but also because the children in LA County’s child welfare system are in desperate need of the support and care that CASA volunteers provide. And there was one primary reason we were driven to conquer that dream: helping children heal from trauma. Children in LA County’s child welfare system experience trauma over and over again, and as science has shown, trauma doesn’t end in childhood. It has life-long physical and mental health implications. It isn’t just about supporting a child today, but about changing their trajectory to support the adult they will become tomorrow.

The sad truth is, most children served by CASA/LA first experienced trauma in their own homes and at the hands of their parents—the place they should be most safe. It’s why they entered the child welfare system initially. But then, these children and youth are torn from their homes, and far, far too often continue to experience trauma in the foster care system. They continue to experience abuse and neglect, they experience broken relationship after broken relationship. They end up in a system that some can’t escape, and the consequences are dire.

We are all responsible for these children.

Cornel West once wrote, “Justice is what love looks like in public.” That is what our CASA volunteers do. They manifest love in a system that so often feels devoid of justice. They are there for their CASA child. They advocate for them in the formal way that we train them to and then they also do genuinely human things on their behalf. They love them. They stick with them. They fight for them.

That is why on a sunny April day last year, when we reached our benchmark of serving 1,000 children in foster care, we didn’t cheer in delight because it was a number, we cheered for the justice that was being served to each of those children, and we cheered for the love that they were being offered. But that was just the beginning of our good news.

During the last fiscal year, CASA/LA served 1,124 unique children (18% more than in FY2017 and 39% more than in FY2016), we received 647 case referrals (9% more than in FY2017 and 38% more than in FY2016), we trained 402 new CASA volunteers (25% more than FY2017 and 100% more than FY2016), and appointed 931 unique volunteers (an increase of 25% from FY 2017 and 67% from FY2016). We conquered big dreams. As you will see in the following pages, the numbers are just the beginning, our CASA volunteers enhanced the lives of the children they served by improving youth outcomes around safety, permanency, and well-being, they reduced the number of placements per child from 4 to 1.7 every year, and they helped to significantly reduce the number of youth on psychotropic medications.

But what no number, statistic or database can show us, is that they conquered trauma with the greatest tool on earth. Love. They showed up for youth who are used to being abandoned. They fought for children who are used to being failed. And they brought justice to our community’s most vulnerable: children and youth who live in cycles of trauma and for whom their only way out might just be you. Their CASA volunteer or the people who support them.

Thank you for supporting us this year, and always. And here’s to conquering a new set of dreams in FY2019—we look forward to you joining us on our path!

Sincerely,

Wende Nichols-Julien
Chief Executive Officer

Louis Lucido
Chair, Board of Directors
Impact by the Numbers

3,276
Children Assisted in Court

402
Volunteers Trained

1,124
Children Served with Intensive One-on-One Advocacy

931
Total CASA Volunteers

621
Applications Generated
CASA of Los Angeles recruits, trains and guides CASA volunteers to provide intensive advocacy for children or youth in Los Angeles County’s child welfare system who have been abused and neglected.

In FY18, CASA volunteers dedicated thousands of hours in order to advocate on behalf of these children and youth in a way that no one else can. They get to know the children and their circumstances, show them that someone cares, advocate for their best interests (including making recommendations to the Court), encourage them to grow to their fullest potential, and become involved in key issues in their life, especially permanent placement, school, physical health and mental health.

Our CASA volunteers spend their time visiting the children they have been appointed to, attending court hearings, speaking and meeting with case parties that include case workers, lawyers, caregivers and countless others to ensure the child has their unique needs met, as well as writing court reports and updating CASA/LA’s online case management system.

**KEY FINDINGS**

A survey was conducted recently with court partners, Children’s Law Center (CLC), Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) and Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers (LADL) who indicated positive experiences with CASA volunteers. According to respondents, CASA volunteers’ strengths include:

- **Professionalism**
- Effectively Identifying the Needs of Children
- Practicing Strengths-Based Advocacy
- Providing the Court with Objective Information
- Cultural Competency

**1,786**

Number of Court Hearings Attended

**1,860**

Number of Court Reports Written

**9,193**

Number of Child Visits

**14,736**

Number of Meetings with Case Parties
I’ve known CASA volunteers to be tuned in to the children in a way that is personal to them and not strictly from the perspective of a social worker, lawyer, or judge. Things that may seem unimportant relative to the child’s legal case, but that have a huge impact on the child’s quality of life, are what CASA volunteers consistently relay to the parties and court. The benefits of CASA volunteers are undeniable in every case.

— Children’s Law Center Attorney
CASA/LA also trains and manages court assistants who provide “day-of-court” advocacy for children and youth who are experiencing their first time in court, or are attending court without a guardian or escort. Through the Shelter Care program, CASA volunteers have helped 3,276 children with court assistance.
Through CASA advocacy, our children are meeting more of their educational goals. They are experiencing lower degrees of risk around their mental health and medical wellbeing. They are achieving higher rates of permanency. But most importantly, every child served by a CASA volunteer is connecting with a stable adult who is helping them without ever being paid.

According to children’s attorneys and social workers, children and youth with a CASA volunteer are more likely to:

- Receive needed services in a timely manner
- Be enrolled in an appropriate educational setting
- Participate in extracurricular activities
- Have long-term connections to siblings, relatives or other support people
- Be on track to graduate high school on time
- Enroll in post-secondary education

The CASAs have been instrumental in advocating for appropriate educational services and issues with placement. As a CSW and due to our high caseloads, the CASAs help me best meet the needs of or mutual client. They help focus me, give suggestions, and help follow up with service providers.

— Social Worker with Department of Family and Social Services
Celia was only 9 years old and living in her fifth home when she met her CASA volunteer Wrenn Chais. Celia experienced extraordinary tragedy in her life being in and out of the foster care system, reunified at one point with her father and then losing him in a car accident. Faced with a life of uncertainty, it appeared Celia would spend the remainder of her childhood in foster care and age out of the system at 18. Celia had been labeled unadoptable in her case file and there were no plans to find a permanent home for her. After securing a number of medical services for Celia that were discovered after the car accident with her father, Wrenn began to question why Celia was labeled unadoptable. She immediately advocated to have a court assign an adoption social worker. Not wanting to lose any more time finding a home for Celia, Wrenn did her own research and discovered a program called Kidsave that hosts events focused on the adoption of children over the age of 8. It was at a Kidsave event where Celia met Trish and Andy, who both made a connection with her. After several get-togethers, Celia was placed in Trish and Andy’s home. In December 2017, Trish and Andy formally adopted Celia in a touching ceremony attended by loved ones, including many of her father’s friends.
Children and youth in foster care face risks to their safety. They may not have a safe place to live or may have a mental health challenge that puts them in harm’s way. A CASA volunteer can work with the child’s care team to ensure that he or she has all the support and services to keep them safe and stable.

At the time CASA volunteer Cameron was assigned to James’ case, he was one of nine children removed from his mother’s care. James was in a nonpublic school and was possibly being bullied. He was also taking a long list of prescription medications due to trauma and living in a group home. Cameron was immediately assigned educational rights and was able to work together with James’ school under his individualized education plan (IEP) so that James could get the services he needed.

In reviewing James’ case file, Cameron found out about an adult half-brother, Michael, who lived in Las Vegas who might be available to help. When Cameron spoke to Michael, he was a bit apprehensive but agreed to visit James and attend a school meeting with Cameron. While he was there, Michael could see how much his little brother needed a stable family member to care for him. After all, Michael had been through a similar situation.

After several months of visits, Michael moved to Los Angeles so that he could become James’ guardian. Cameron also transitioned educational rights to Michael and is continuing to monitor James’ therapeutic and supportive services. After 11 months of taking care of his brother, Michael has started the adoption process so that James can finally feel safe and thrive.
Education is an important part of any child’s life. When a child or youth is in foster care, they may experience disruptions in their education and may not have a stable adult to oversee their education planning. CASA volunteers provide assessment, support and advocacy services that address a child’s specific educational issues and needs — from preschool to college graduation. CASA volunteers frequently hold the educational rights of the youth they serve to ensure these valuable services are implemented.

When CASA volunteer Nila met Joshua* for the first time, she played a game of basketball with him to break the ice. She soon found out that he was on probation and was placed in a lower grade level. Joshua let Nila know that although he enjoyed school, he was frustrated with his situation. Nila realized she needed to have educational rights so she can serve as the point-person for all decisions around Joshua’s academic and developmental needs.

After receiving Joshua’s educational rights, Nila began attending all of his school meetings — working with Joshua’s probation officer and teachers to ensure his individualized education program guidelines were met. Soon after, Joshua was finally transferred into the appropriate grade level and he is now earning A’s and B’s.

*child’s name has been changed
Many young people in the foster care system experience the mental health impact of trauma, neglect and abuse. CASA volunteers assist the child’s team by ensuring that they have the access to the mental health assessments and services that they need to heal. CASA volunteers are also instrumental in monitoring and evaluating psychotropic medications that are prescribed to youth in care.

At their first meeting, Mary Jane let 9-year-old Josie* know that she was there to help make sure she had everything she needed. That’s when Mary Jane realized Josie was drooling. Her eyes rolled back to the back of her head and Josie curled up in Mary Jane’s lap and went to sleep.

Mary Jane realized that Josie was so drugged she was almost nonfunctional, so Mary Jane’s first order of business was to get Josie’s drug regimen under control. According to her files, Josie was on four psychiatric medications. It took Mary Jane several visits with doctors and many appearances at court to remove all but one of the medications.

Josie is now 18 years old and has a baby of her own.

Through it all, Mary Jane helped her get into schools that didn’t want to accept her, worked with social workers to get Josie and her baby the services they needed, and has been the only person who has ever been to a back-to-school night for her.

*child’s name has been changed
Children in foster care comprise some of our most medically at-risk and vulnerable children. In some cases, a child and youth may not have access to the full medical services or treatments that are needed to live a healthy life. CASA volunteers encourage timely responses for the children they serve, connecting them with vital medical services, and overseeing their preventative, planned and crisis care.

CASA volunteer Christie was assigned to David when he was only two months old. David was in the NICU (neo-natal intensive care unit) at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles with a number of physical health concerns. He was connected to oxygen and needed heart surgery. Christie began to visit David in the hospital and knew he needed lots of love and care. Because of his condition, David required 24-hour care and had his first heart surgery at 12 months old. Christie immediately began to work with Regional Center, acquiring educational rights so that David could get occupational therapy. David began to get stronger and healthier — finally sitting up and crawling at 14 months. David was living in a facility for medically fragile children and children with disabilities. Christie and the court discovered there were no family members who were able to take on David’s care. An adoption worker on the case soon discovered a family who expressed interest in fostering David. After almost a year in their home, David’s foster family was able to adopt him. He is now thriving in a family that includes four other adopted children.

84% of the children we served had improved physical health outcomes
The CASA volunteer kept an open mind and did a good job assessing the case issues. She encouraged the mother, who was being inaccurately portrayed to stay on course. The CASA volunteer did not present as being on anyone’s side.

— Los Angeles Dependency Lawyer
CASA VOLUNTEERS

Ernie Acosta
Gloria Adams
Sheri Adams
Valerie Addas
Jill Aguilar
Joseph Ahbodoot
Bruce Albert
Marla Alders
Trent Allen
Glen Alpert
Loretta Altamirano
Alexandra Alvarez
Jeffrey Ames
Soafa Ames
Kris Amon
Kate Andersen
Cathy Anderson
Elizabeth Anderson
Scott Anderson
Tyrone Anderson
Eyonna Andreatte
Natalie Andres
Nannina Angioni
Marjorie Annapav*
Wayne April
May Arakaki*
Anita Aratow
Daniel Araujo
Daniella Arias
Talia Arica
Barbara Arlow
Aur Armas
Christine Armenta
Trudy Armer*
Jacquelyn Armstrong
Terri Arnold
Melissa Arson
Samia Arslane
Katelyn Ascencio
Heidi Ashcraft
Paul Ashmore
Kimberley Askew
Kelly Attwood
Jerry Auerbach
Lovette Austin
Sarah Avallon
Laura Aversano
Galina Babadzhanyan
Bette Jo Babcock*
Ann Bailey
Katie Bain
Rachel Baker
Bobak Bakhhtiari
Toni Balch
Cory Bales
Alison Ball
Polly Bamberger
Julie Bank
Eve Banuelos
Samuel Barragan
Ron Bar-Zion
Sadie Bascom
Lisa Baskin
Sharon Batiste
Sarah Baumann
Nicole Bautista
Judith Beckmen*
Amber Becerra
Cadena Bedney
Christine Bellinson
Jane Belanger
Carolyn Belcher
Mary Ann Bell
Thomas Bell
Jane Belzberg
Rae’s Mishka Benjamin
Nicola Berlinsky
Erin Berman
Jodi Berman Levine
Keith Bernstein
Samuel Bernstein
Hari Berrier
Bud Betts
Gayatri Bhasin
Aishwarya Bhave
Renne Bilson
Pamela Bingham*
Pam Birmingham*
Jan Black*
Heather Blades
Janet Blair
Xaris Bloxham
Christy Boardman*
Meghan Boehman
Honor Boone
Karen Bowles
Pamela Bowman
Catherine Boyd
Harriet Boyd
Sheri Brady
Caren Bramhall
Emily Branam
Luciana Brancorsini
Rebecca Brandes
Susan Brandler*
Jody Brandt
Nancy Brashears
Laurence Braude
Beth Braunstein
Maria Brenes
Claire Brian
Claudia Bright
Sarah Bromell
Jacolyn Bron
Liese Brown
Rocky Brown
Timothy Brown
Barbara Bruner
Lois Brunet
Robyn Buecker
Lizzy Bultema
Patricia Burkholder
Rinarda Burnley
Paul Bustrum
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Alexis Butler
Jill Cady
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Claudia Cano
Alice Cao
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Kamille Carruthers
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Rachel Carter
Rita Carton
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Adele Chadwick
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Aaron Chan
Aster Chang
Hana Chang
Courtney Chatterton
Charlie Chavez
Leticia Chavez
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Elisie Cheng
Victoria Childs
Stefanie Chin
Talia-Farah Chism
Camrin Christensen
Holly Clark
Jane Clausen
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Edward Coe
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Bruce Danziger
Cindy Darden
Karen Darling
Joel Dauten
Billy Davidson
Denis Davis
Tamara Davis
Vicki Davis
Simone Deblasio
Debra Debose
Cara Delcher
Paul Del Rosario
Mandy Denaux
David Denning
Tessa Dent
Cynthia De Nuno
Robert DeRing
Marie De Varennes
Jessyca Dewey
Christie Diaz
Marta Dimchenko
Aaron Dinsdale
Sonum Dixit
Barbara Dixon
Emily Dixon
Erika Dizon
Alison Doherty
Kelly Dollens
Fang Ming Michelle Dong
Candice Dottin
Susan Douglass
De Anna Dove
Melissa Dragge
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Gary Duboff
Monica Duke
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Raina Duncan
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Kelton Durham
Linda Dutcher
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Don Eklund
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<td>Marie Zondler*</td>
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<td>Tami Zussman</td>
<td>Harold Zuckerman</td>
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