



Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2024

**BE THEIR
VOLUNTEER
HOPE
CHAMPION
VOICE
ADVOCATE...**

SO THEY CAN BE KIDS.

**Court Appointed
Special Advocates
of Kent County
provides a voice
for every child.**

Mission

To empower community members to advocate for abused and neglected children by being their voice in court.

Vision

A voice for every child.

Partners

Michigan CASA
National CASA/GAL Association for Children
Heart of West Michigan United Way

Contact us

casa@kentcountymi.gov
casakentco.org
616.632.5311

180 Ottawa Ave. NW, Suite 5200
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Visit casakentco.org



A note from Executive Director Stephanie Sheler

My nine-year-old nephew Milo and I often play board games together. Recently, we learned a new game, and a series of spirited competitions followed. Milo—a naturally strategic thinker—often wins! When he was younger, though, his favorite game was a cooperative one where we worked together to succeed as a team.

That cooperative spirit is a perfect metaphor for CASA of Kent County's work in child welfare. Our Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) are at the heart of the work. They build strong, trusting relationships with the children they serve. Through advocacy, they ensure that each child's voice is heard in court and that their best interests are central to every decision.

But CASAs aren't alone in this mission. Our Board of Directors plays a key role by providing strategic direction, fiduciary oversight, and thoughtful guidance. The Board helps shape the vision of CASA of Kent County and makes sure we stay true to our mission of advocating for children in foster care.

We are also supported by generous donors and grantors who give not just their resources but also their trust and commitment. Thanks to them, we can recruit and train volunteers, provide ongoing advocacy, and ensure that children and families have a voice in life-altering decisions. Their support is an investment in brighter futures for children in our community.

CASA of Kent County also works alongside a wide network of child welfare stakeholders—foster care caseworkers, judges, court-appointed attorneys, and other community partners. Everyone brings something valuable, and together we strive to serve vulnerable children and their families.

Much like a cooperative board game, success relies on everyone working together. When we all team up, we achieve more than any one of us could alone. This annual report showcases the impact of CASA of Kent County's work, from the dedication of our CASAs to the generosity of our donors and the support of our partners. Thank you for being part of this journey and for helping us create a community where every child can thrive.



Stephanie Sheler

*Name changed to protect confidentiality.

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Advocate Supervisor

CASA Children and Teens

During fiscal year 2024, 599 children in Kent County lived in foster care due to abuse or neglect at home. Many of them were burdened by profound trauma and uncertainty and referred to CASA by concerned judges, attorneys, foster care workers, or foster parents.

Among these referrals was a toddler with bruises and scratches on her face and burns on her body, a young boy whose parents were unwilling to care for him anymore, and a teenage boy who experienced physical and sexual abuse and inadequate nutrition.

In an overwhelmed child welfare system, these children and others like them had the unwavering support of a Court Appointed Special Advocate. These caring adults stood by their side, spoke up for their needs, and helped guide them toward a safer, more stable future.

180

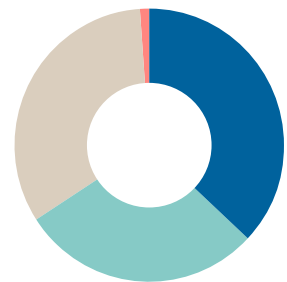
Children served

51% male

49% female

66

Closed cases



Age

37% 0 – 5 years

35% 6 – 12 years

26% 13 – 18 years

2% 19 – 21 years

Race

51% Caucasian

31% African American

12% Hispanic

4% Multiracial

1% Asian

<1% Native American

2023 Financials

FY24 Revenue

\$740,644

35% Court

14% Foundations and Grants

35% Donations

16% Other

Donors

373

Individuals/
Households

32

Businesses

5

Foundations

6

Court/Churches/
Nonprofits

FY24 Expenses

\$731,123

58% Program

26% Management

16% Fundraising

FY24 Endowment Contributions

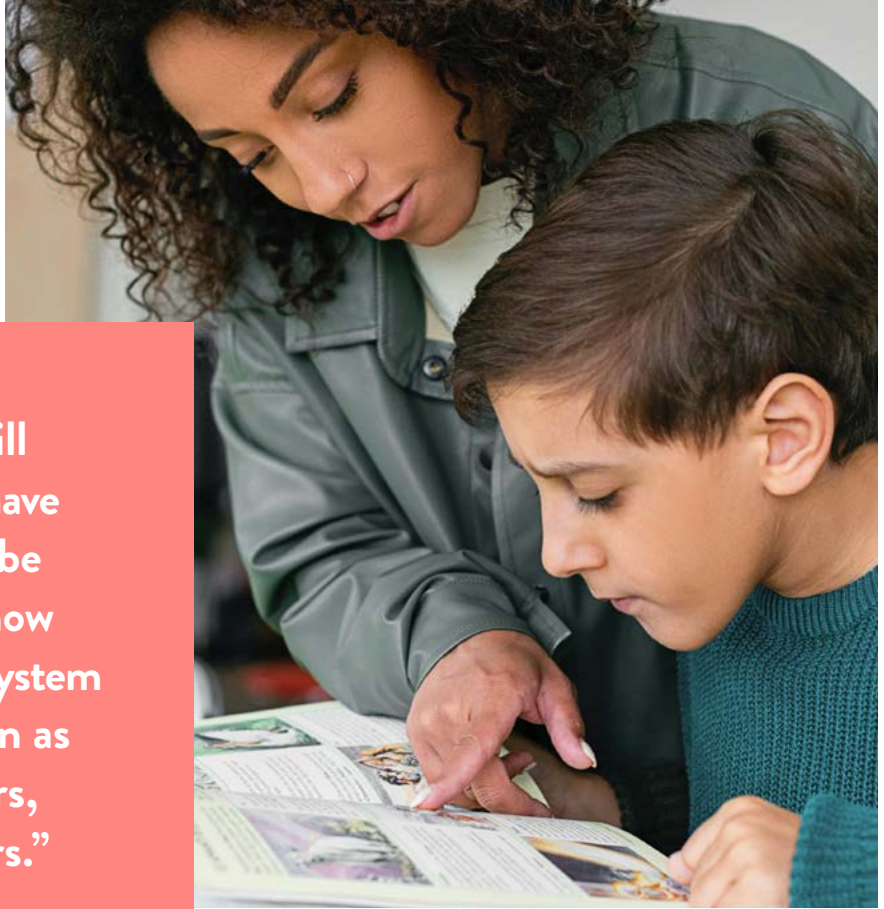
\$8,292

FY24 Endowment Balance
Ending 9/30/2024

\$199,559

“Volunteering with CASA will change you deeply. You will have your heart broken. You will be humbled when you realize how complicated the foster care system is. You will see hope in action as you work with case managers, attorneys, and social workers.”

CASA Volunteer



CASA Volunteers

Every day, CASA volunteers prove themselves to be extraordinary advocates to children in foster care. The CASA volunteer journey begins with a detailed application and interview process followed by 30 hours of specialized training and then a formal swearing-in before a 17th Circuit Court Family Division judge. CASAs choose their case and are assigned to a child or sibling group, often staying up to three years, supporting and advocating for them throughout the legal process.

These incredible volunteers are everyday people who have decided to make a difference in the lives of children in our community. In fiscal year 2024, they ranged in age from from 24 to 85 and came from a wide variety of personal and professional backgrounds. Some worked full time; others were retired; most had no prior child welfare experience. Their diversity made them even more effective, as all volunteers bring a unique perspective to their role, ensuring every child benefits from a compassionate and consistent advocate.

100

Active volunteers

84% female
16% male

39

Newly trained volunteers

Years of service

22% < 1 year
41% 2 – 3 years
16% 4 – 5 years
10% 6 – 9 years
11% 10+ years

CASA Outcomes



42%

Adopted

18%

Reunified with parents

14%

**Discharged from
CASA early**

8%

**Placed in
guardianship**

6%

**Remained with parents
throughout case**

6%

Aged out

6%

**CASA volunteer did
not fulfill commitment**

For children removed from their parents due to abuse or neglect, the child welfare system is daunting. During fiscal year 2024, CASA volunteers worked closely with judges, attorneys, and social workers to protect the well-being of children and their families. While the main goal is to reunite children with their parents, other options, like adoption or guardianship are considered if going home is not possible. Sadly, some older teens “age out” without finding a permanent family. Sometimes, CASA needs to withdraw before the court case officially ends.

In fiscal year 2024, the court closed the cases of 66 children who had a dedicated CASA, marking significant progress in our mission to advocate for and support vulnerable children in our community.

LOOKING AHEAD

We invite you to engage with “Humans of CASA of Kent County,” an initiative that highlights volunteers, donors, ambassadors, and community partners who champion the needs of vulnerable children and teens. By reading and sharing their stories on social media, email updates, and print materials, you help amplify their impact, raise awareness, and inspire others to get involved. Stay connected this year to see how these individuals bring CASA’s mission to life in Kent County. Together, we foster a strong network of support, ensuring all children have the stability they deserve.

Scan the QR code or visit casakentco.org/humans. Find us on social media [@casakentco](https://twitter.com/casakentco).

SAVE THE DATE 2025 EVENTS

Annual Luncheon
April 25

Heart of CASA
October 16



Featured Partnership

Lauren & Rosa

A Child in Crisis

It was a cold day in November 2022 when Child Protective Services (CPS) visited the Jones home again in response to ongoing concerns about domestic violence and substance use in the home. Five-year-old Rosa answered the door. Her mother was inside, unconscious, and her father was nowhere to be found. CPS removed Rosa from her parents' care and placed her with her aunt and uncle, beginning her two-year journey through the foster care system.

A CASA Steps In

Nine months into Rosa's placement with her aunt and uncle, CASA volunteer Lauren joined the case to help assess Rosa's needs, monitor her situation, and advocate for her best interests. Lauren quickly became a trusted presence in Rosa's life.

Building Relationships

From their first meeting, Lauren and Rosa bonded over simple joys like building pillow forts, sledding, and spending hours outside. Sometimes Lauren would eat lunch with Rosa at school, and she often attended Rosa's school programs and performances, cheering her on from the audience. Rosa beamed with pride whenever she saw Lauren.

Beyond those moments of connection, Lauren worked closely with Rosa's aunt and uncle, parents, teachers, therapists, and caseworkers, making sure every decision prioritized Rosa's well-being. She regularly updated the judge so that Rosa's needs weren't overlooked as the case evolved.

Challenges

Despite Rosa's resilience, her parents' struggles with substance use and legal troubles made the case take longer than expected. Whenever one parent seemed to make progress, the other faltered. But through it all, Rosa thrived in her aunt and uncle's home. Her cheerful, talkative nature and developmental progress reflected the support she received from her caregivers and Lauren.

Continued on the next page.

Featured Partnership

Lauren & Rosa

The Turning Point

With help from healthcare professionals and guidance from the judge, Rosa's mother turned her life around. She stayed sober, got a job, and moved into her own apartment. She reconnected with her church, which provided additional support and stability. As her situation improved, Lauren advocated for a gradual increase in the mother's visits with Rosa: moving from supervised to unsupervised visits and eventually to overnight stays.

Reuniting Siblings

Lauren played a vital role in reuniting Rosa with her older sister, Maria. Initially, Maria's father restricted visits due to safety concerns, but Lauren's persistence helped change his mind. Recognizing the mother's progress, he eventually allowed supervised visits at the aunt and uncle's home. These visits gave the sisters a chance to rebuild their bond, sharing laughter, conversations, and moments that deepened their connection.

By the end of the case, the sisters had overnight visits together with their mother, a joyful reunion that seemed impossible just months before.

A New Chapter

In November 2024, Rosa went home to live with her mother, marking the end of her time in foster care. The transition was a culmination of years of hard work and advocacy. Although Lauren occasionally checks in on the family, she knows her role as a CASA is complete. Rosa is back where she belongs, in the stable, loving home her mother worked hard to create.

Thanks to Lauren's determination and care, Rosa and her family have a second chance at a better future.



Volunteer

Be a voice for a child in need. CASA of Kent County trains new volunteers four times a year. To learn more, visit our website or give us a call. We'd be happy to chat.



Donate

Your support gives a child hope through the gift of advocacy. To donate with a credit card, visit our website by scanning the code below.



Spread the word

Tell others about CASA of Kent County and the needs of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Encourage them to learn more and to visit our website.

