

**Annual Report for
Court-Appointed Special Advocate Programs
Fiscal Year 2021**



**Administrative Office of the Courts
February 2022**

Issued by the Maryland Judiciary, Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC), Juvenile and Family Services (JFS) pursuant to Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article § 3-830(b)(3)(ii).

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I. Overview

The Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program operates in Maryland subject to Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article, § 3-830. The Annotated Code of Maryland states that the role of the Court-Appointed Special Advocate is to:

- (1) Provide the court with background information to aid the court in making decisions in the child's best interest; and
- (2) Ensure that the child is provided appropriate case planning and services.

The CASA volunteer is considered a friend of the court and is appointed at the judge's discretion to represent the child's best interests. In so doing, CASA volunteers develop trusting relationships with the children they serve. Often these relationships have a lifelong impact as is illustrated by this case story from the Anne Arundel CASA Program:

MEET JOHN: John's mother died of a drug overdose when he was a toddler, leaving him in the care of his alcoholic father. At his father's hand, he suffered physical abuse, degradation, and humiliation. He was also neglected, frequently being left alone with no food or electricity in the home.

As John grew, the abuse that he suffered began to take its toll. John struggled in school and fell behind. He began to drink and use drugs. He got in trouble with the law. By the time John entered foster care at age 14, he was a bitter, angry, and distrustful young man.

When John was first removed from his father's care, he continued to abuse drugs. He would run away from the various homes into which he was placed. He was failing school. Then, John met Anthony, his CASA volunteer.

At first, John did not trust Anthony. While Anthony faithfully visited John every week, he remained sullen and withdrawn. It wasn't until Anthony stood up in court and told the judge how much potential John had and how he believed that John could accomplish anything, that things began to turn around. With Anthony's constant encouragement and support, John's outlook began to change. With John's emerging trust in people, he was able to begin building a relationship with his foster parents. He began to do well in school and he started to receive counseling to deal with the abuse that he suffered. Anthony also encouraged him to enter a vocational program.

Last year, Anthony watched proudly as John walked across the stage to receive his high school diploma. Once he graduated, John secured

employment as a plumber's assistant, and he is working toward obtaining his plumber's license. He also saved up enough money to put a down payment on a truck. Anthony and John continue to look forward to their weekly visits, and Anthony is extremely pleased to see John developing into an adult. An adult, who, with the assistance of his CASA volunteer, was able to overcome the obstacles of his childhood.

As the pandemic rages on, the role of the CASA volunteer has become more critical than ever before. Children have become more disconnected with the systems that protect them and CASA volunteers have stepped-in to ensure that youth are provided the services and resources they need to thrive. When the pandemic began, CASA programs swiftly adjusted their operations, training and supervising their volunteers remotely and providing volunteers with the know-how and means to meet safely with their assigned children. CASA programs to continue to meet the needs of the court by providing timely and accurate information about the needs of the children they serve. During a time when Maryland's most vulnerable populations are most at risk, CASA programs have been critically important to helping courts have the information they need to protect children.

Supporting the ongoing work of CASA programs is consistent with the Maryland Judiciary's mission to provide fair, efficient, and effective justice for all, as well as its strategic goal to be responsive and adaptive to changing community needs.

II. Program Operations

A. Counties Served

Fifteen CASA programs were active in Maryland in Fiscal Year 2021, serving 21 counties. Only Somerset, Wicomico, and Garrett counties do not have CASA programs. MD CASA has contracted with a program development specialist to focus on expansion into un-served counties. Service to Wicomico and Somerset counties is expected to begin in Fiscal Year 2022, and service to Garrett county is expected in Fiscal Year 2023.

Programs by Service Area and Start Date

Programs (<i>Official Names</i>)	County/Countries Served	Start Date
Voices for Children of Montgomery County (<i>Formerly CASA of Montgomery County</i>)	Montgomery	1987
CASA of Baltimore City	Baltimore City	1988
CASA of the Mid-Shore (<i>formerly CASA of Talbot and CASA of Queen Anne's & Kent Counties</i>) (<i>CASA of Talbot began serving Dorchester County in 2010. In 2014, the program expanded to Queen Anne's and Kent Counties.</i>)	Talbot Kent Queen Anne's Dorchester	1990 2009 2009 2010
Court-Appointed Special Advocates of	Washington	1991-2021

Washington County* <i>*Program closed 03/31/21.</i>		
Voices for Children of Howard County	Howard	1992
CASA of Harford County	Harford	1996
Anne Arundel County CASA	Anne Arundel	1997
CASA of Southern Maryland	St. Mary's Charles Calvert	1998 2004 2007
CASA of Prince George's County	Prince George's	1992-1995 2001
CASA of Baltimore County	Baltimore County	2002
CASA of the Lower Shore	Worcester Wicomico	2002 2002-2008
CASA of Frederick and Voices for Children of Carroll County <i>(Became one program under the Frederick County Mental Health Association in 2011)</i>	Carroll Frederick	2002 2003
CASA of Caroline	Caroline	2004
Allegany County CASA	Allegany	2013
CASA of Western Maryland	Washington	2021
CASA of Cecil County	Cecil	2015

B. Funding Sources

All CASA programs were funded by the Maryland Judiciary in Fiscal Year 2021. Judiciary funding amounts are determined using a formula which factors in the number of volunteers who have served children, the number of volunteers trained, the needs of the community to be served, and the performance of the program. Grantees are required to match 100 percent of funds awarded.

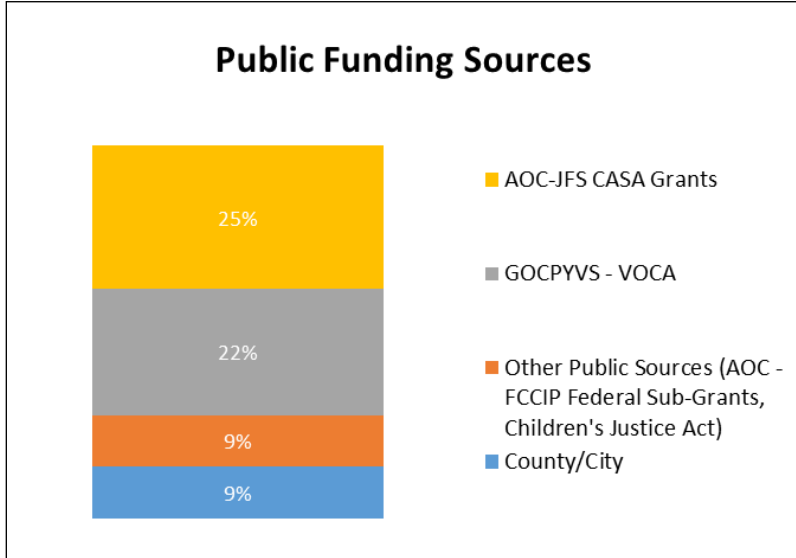
FY21 Award Amounts by Program

Voices for Children of Montgomery County	\$222,074
CASA of Baltimore County	\$154,175
CASA of Prince George's County	\$151,150
CASA of Baltimore City	\$129,299
CASA of Frederick and Voices for Children of Carroll County	\$127,663
Anne Arundel County CASA	\$116,333
Court Appointed Special Advocates of Washington County <i>Funding to this program ended 3/31/21</i>	\$59,066
CASA of the Mid-Shore	\$85,700
CASA of Harford County	\$86,550
CASA of Southern Maryland	\$79,825
Voices for Children of Howard County	\$69,750
CASA of Cecil County	\$65,166
CASA of the Lower Shore	\$68,353
Allegany County CASA	\$63,293

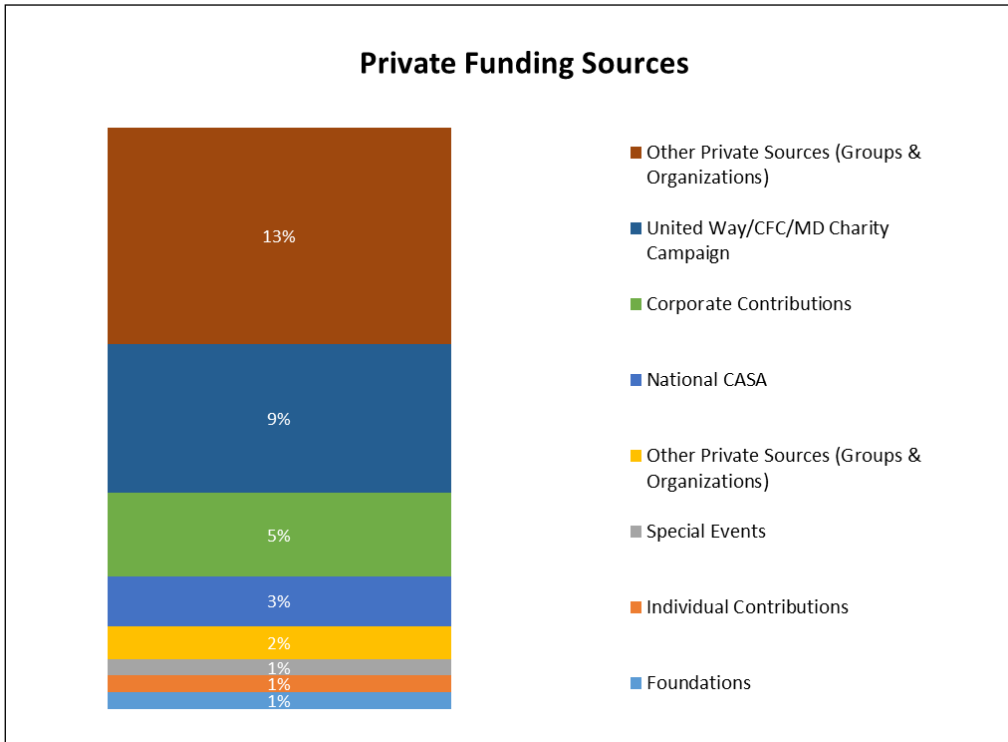
<i>DBA CASA of Western Maryland serving Allegany and Washington Counties (as of 4/1/2021)</i>	
CASA of Caroline	\$25,528

Support for programs from other funders varies by program. Some CASA programs are independent non-profits; others are programs within larger non-profit organizations.

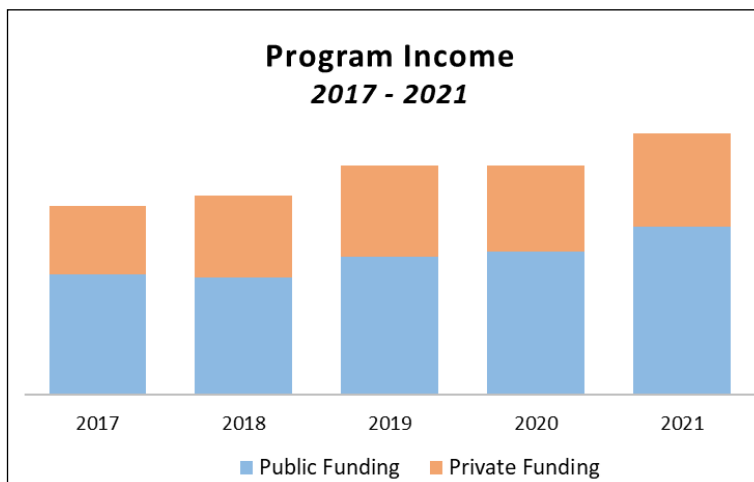
Sixty-five percent of CASA funding comes from public-sector funders.



Thirty-five percent of CASA funding comes from private-sector funders and individual contributions.



Program income has grown over the past five years. There was a 2% decline in Fiscal Year 2020 related to the many fundraising events that were cancelled due to the pandemic. Despite this slight decrease, program income grew by more than \$750,000 in 2021. Nearly \$550,000 of this growth was pandemic-related funding.



C. Staffing

Although there are 89 positions in CASA programs statewide, AOC - JFS grant funding only supports the full or partial salary and/or fringe costs of 57 positions within CASA programs.

Total Positions: 89

Full time: 43 Part time: 46

Based on the total working hours, the Full-Time-Equivalency (FTE) for all positions is 70.2 full-time positions.

Total Positions Supervising Volunteers: 49.1

Full time: 23.5 Part time: 25.6

Based on the total working hours, the Full-Time-Equivalency (FTE) for positions supervising volunteers is 37.5 full-time positions.

III. Program Activities

A. Volunteers

1. Recruitment

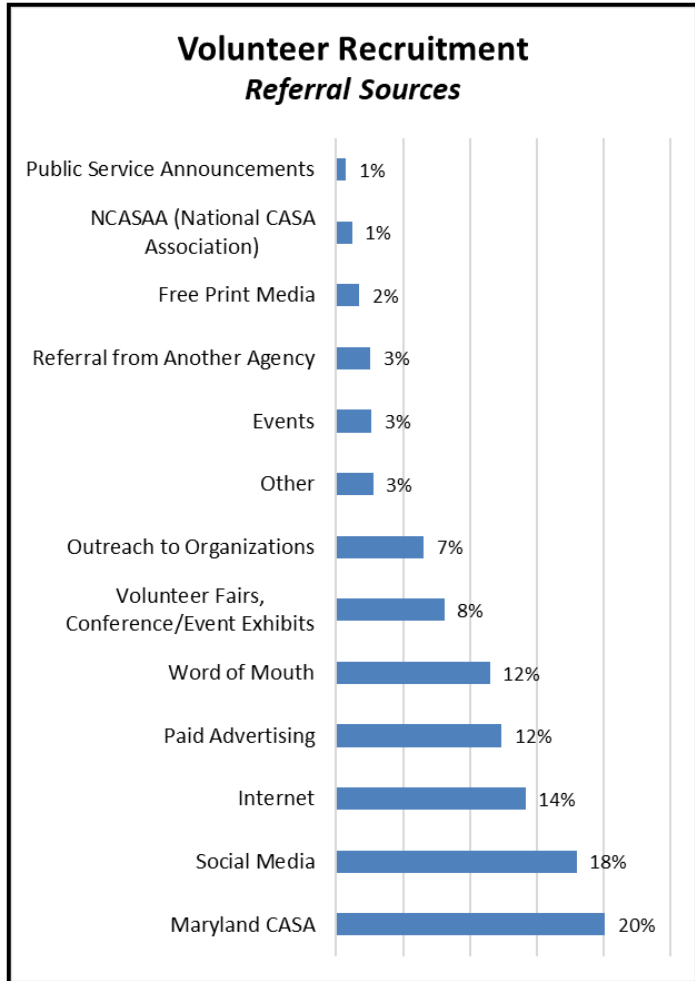
In Fiscal Year 2021, CASA programs statewide received 2,074 volunteer inquiries. This was a one percent increase from Fiscal Year 2020. During Fiscal Year 2021, 32 percent of volunteers reached their local CASA program through online resources. Of those, 18 percent learned about CASA through social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The number of prospective volunteers finding CASA online increased by ten percent over FY2020. As in FY2020, approximately 21 percent of volunteers were referred to their local CASA program by the National CASA Association (NCASAA) or the Maryland CASA Association.

Volunteer applications received: 778.

Although programs received one percent more inquiries than received in Fiscal Year 2020, there was a one percent decrease in applications received.

Prospective volunteers interviewed: 662.

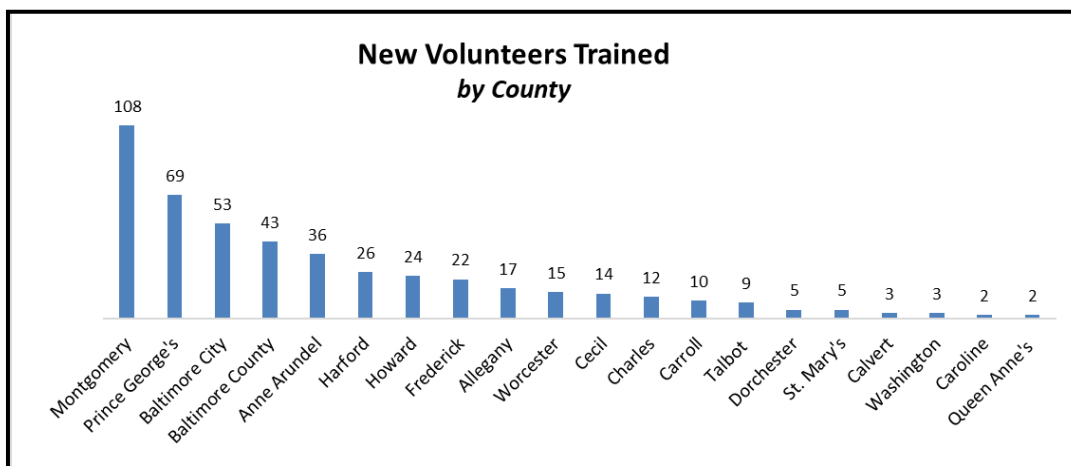
Programs interviewed 85 percent of the prospective volunteers who submitted applications, conducting 45 more interviews than in the prior year, a seven percent increase.



2. Training

Pre-service training:

In Fiscal Year 2021, 594 new volunteers were trained. Of the volunteers who started training, 81 percent (480) completed training. Some volunteers are screened-out through the interview process and others are screened-out during training. The number of volunteers trained in Fiscal Year 2021 increased by 38 percent from Fiscal Year 2020 and 18 percent from FY2019. Because of the pandemic, programs have successfully shifted to online, or hybrid training and this change has enabled the programs to start once again growing their volunteer rosters.



In-service training (continuing education): CASA programs provided 833 hours of ongoing training to active volunteers, a 49 percent increase from Fiscal Year 2020. The pandemic initially impeded programs' ability to provide in-service training, but once the staff and volunteers adjusted to the virtual training environment, training opportunities increased. Approximately 306 hours of that training (37 percent) focused on increasing cultural competence of volunteers.

3. Retention/Attrition

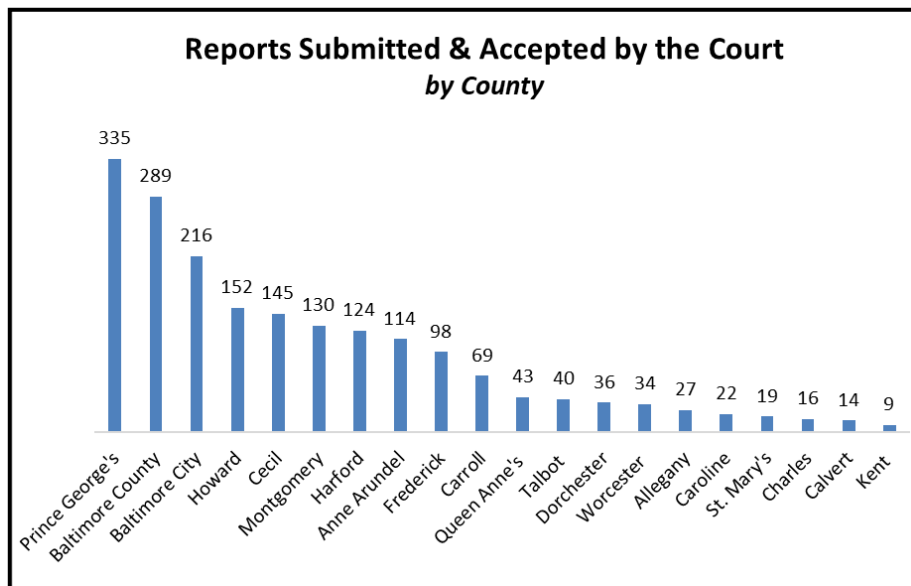
Although the goal of all CASA programs is to have volunteers serve their assigned child for the entirety of the child's foster care placement, CASA volunteers are only required to serve for a minimum of one year. More than 48 percent of the volunteers who were serving children on the last day of the Fiscal Year had been serving for 12 months or longer.

Volunteers who left the programs: **209**. This is a decrease of 21 percent over Fiscal Year 2020 when 265 volunteers left the programs. Fifty-one percent of volunteers who left in Fiscal Year 2021 left after the closure of their assigned case. Programs report that some volunteers have been reluctant to take on new cases due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, in counties where fewer children are coming into care, there are not always new cases available to volunteers whose cases have closed. For example, in Howard County, 20 volunteers left the program after their cases closed because there were no new cases available. The decline can be attributed to many factors including the pandemic and an increased focus on family preservation.

Average length of service (volunteers who left): **38.2 months**. On average, volunteers who left the program in Fiscal Year 2021 served more than three years. In the Anne Arundel, Baltimore City, Frederick/Carroll, Lower Shore (Worcester), Mid-Shore, and Montgomery County programs, the average length of service was more than three years.

4. Advocacy

CASA volunteers advocate in court for the best interests of the children they are assigned to serve. To inform this advocacy, CASA volunteers visit regularly with their assigned child and meet with family members and professionals involved in the child’s life (e.g., social workers, therapists, teachers). With the support of the program, the CASA



volunteer prepares a report which provides the court with information about the child and recommendations regarding the child’s needs and future placement. Court reports with recommendations are submitted at every hearing for the children assigned to the CASA programs.

Court reports submitted by CASA and accepted by the court: 1,932.

Volunteer rate of attendance at court: 76%. CASA volunteers attended 76 percent of the hearings for which they prepared a report. This rate is often affected by continuances; a volunteer may appear for the initial hearing but be unavailable to attend on the rescheduled date. CASA program staff attend all hearings.

5. Service

A goal of every CASA program is to provide a volunteer for every child who is adjudicated as a child in need of assistance (CINA). In Carroll, Dorchester, Howard, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, and Worcester counties, the programs have provided CASA volunteers for nearly all CINA children. There are exceptions in the case of older youth who may choose not to have a CASA, and youth who have been placed so far away that assigning a volunteer may not be feasible.

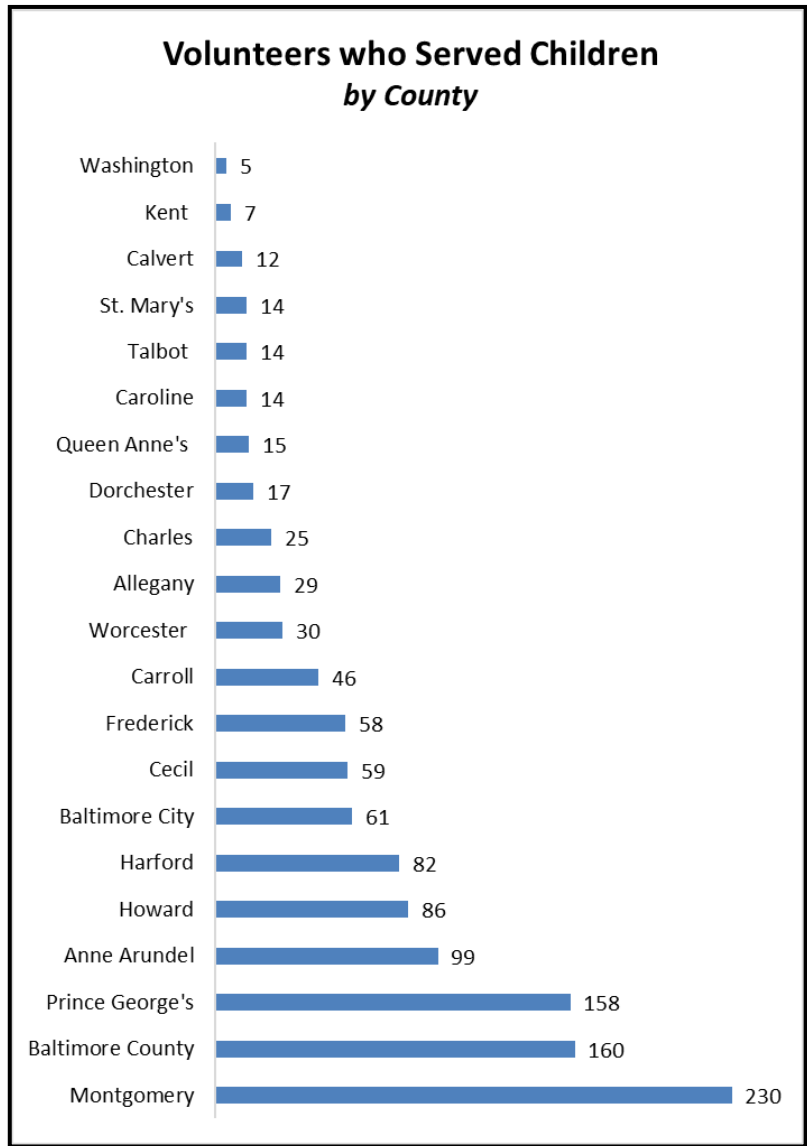
Volunteers serving children in FY21: 1,221.

This is a decrease of 73 volunteers (six percent) from Fiscal Year 2020. A large portion of this decrease is a result of the closure of the Washington County program which resulted in a decrease of 33 reported volunteers. After this closure, the Allegany program stepped-in to serve Washington County. A regional program has now been created and we expect a full rebound in Washington County in FY2022.

Volunteers serving children on the last day of FY21: 947.

Overall, the number of CASA advocates serving children on the last day of Fiscal Year 2021 decreased by 41 (four percent) over the last day of Fiscal Year 2020.

This decrease can be attributed to many factors. Programs statewide report that volunteers are more hesitant to engage in in-person volunteerism due to the pandemic. As previously mentioned, 51% of volunteers whose cases closed did not take another case. Additionally, in some counties where the program serves 100% of the children in care, a decline in case numbers equates to a decline in assigned volunteers. Fewer children entering foster care due in part to the pandemic and in part to an increased emphasis on family preservation translates to a decreased need for volunteers in those counties. Despite these pockets of decline, the number of children being served statewide remained stable.



6. Volunteer Demographics

Gender Identity

Male	15.1%
Female	84.9%

Age

21-29	12.2%
30-39	15.5%
40-49	17.7%
50-59	22.4%
60 + above	32.3%

Race/Ethnicity

American Indian / Alaska Native	0.0%
Asian / Asian American	2.1%
Black / African American	25.2%
Hispanic / Latino	3.9%
Indian	0.5%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	0.1%
White	65.4%
Two or more races	2.8%
Other	0.1%

Education

High School/GED	5.2%
Some College	11.5%
College	42.9%
Post-Grad	33.7%
Unknown	8.3%
Other	0.7%

Employment Status

Full-time	52.2%
Part-time	12.5%
Retired	17.8%
Unemployed	7.1%
Unknown	9.8%
Other	0.7%

B. Children

At the end of Fiscal Year 2021, 4,444 children were in foster care in Maryland in counties served by CASA programs. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#).) At that time, approximately 24 percent of these children were receiving the benefit of CASA advocacy compared with 23 percent in Fiscal Year 2020. As detailed in the volunteer section above, the COVID-19 health emergency impacted the number of children coming into care and consequently, the influx of cases to CASA programs slowed dramatically.

1. Children Served by a Volunteer Advocate in FY21: 1,450

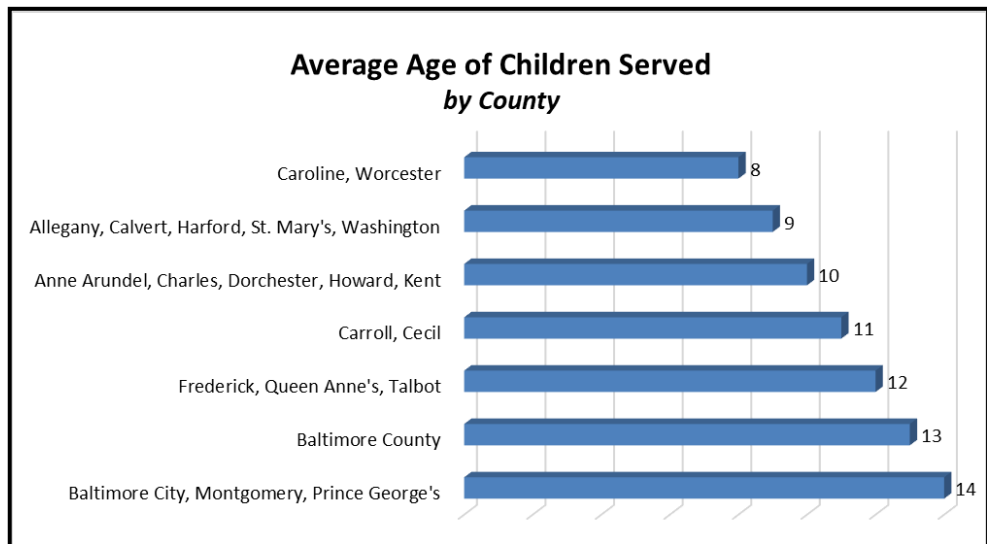
This is a decline of one child from Fiscal Year 2020. Although the number of volunteers serving children may have declined, many more seasoned volunteers are taking on more than one child resulting in the number of children being served remaining steady.

2. Children Being Served by a Volunteer on the Last Day of FY21: 1,051

This is a decline of six children from Fiscal Year 2020. Although the number of children in out-of-home placements has been decreasing, the percentage of children being served by CASA has not decreased at the same rate. Between Fiscal Year 2018 and Fiscal Year 2021, the number of children in out-of-home placement decreased by 5.2% and the number of children being served by CASA volunteers decreased by 3.9%.

3. Details about Children Served in FY21:

More than 50 percent of children served in Fiscal Year 2021 were 14 or older. At this age, youth participate in transition planning to prepare for adult life. CASA programs and volunteers play an important role in ensuring that youth have these plans in place and working to prepare youth to be independent.



4. Children Demographics

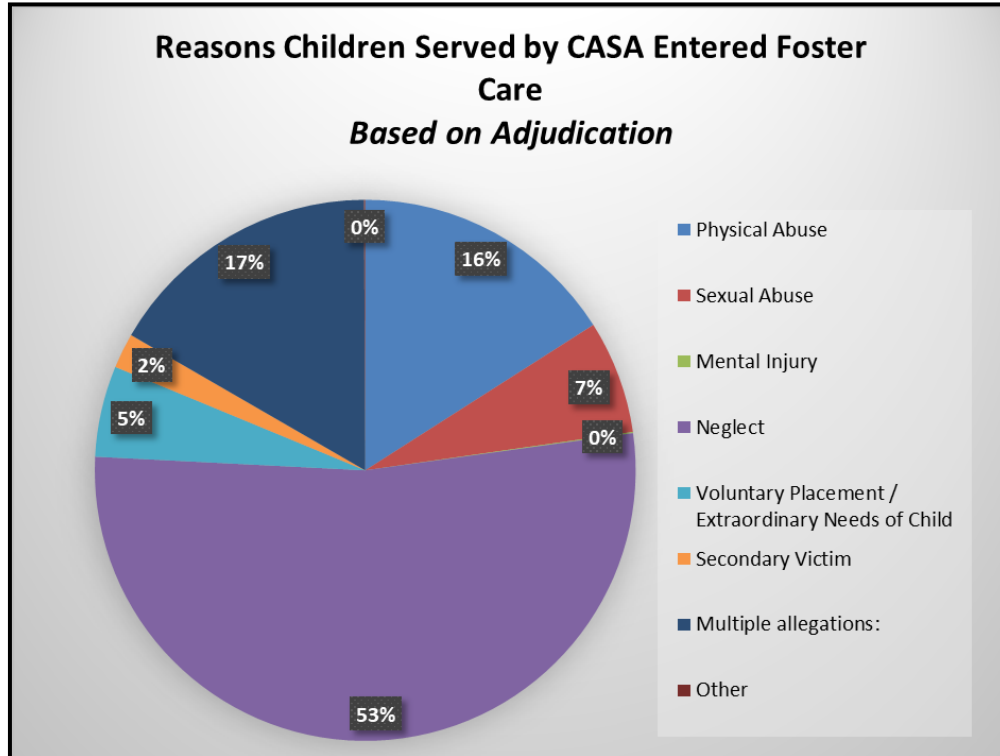
Gender Identity	
Male	49.4%
Female	50.6%
Age	
Birth to 2	11.6%
3 to 6	15.2%
7 to 13	22.4%
14 to 17	25.8%
18 +	25.1%
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian / Alaska Native	0.6%
Asian / Asian American	1.1%
Black / African American	46.9%
Hispanic / Latino	9.4%
Indian	0.0%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	0.1%
White	39.1%
Two or more races	13.5%

Programs strive to achieve cultural competence in all the volunteers they train. However, looking at all programs together, there remains a wide disparity in reported racial and gender identity between volunteers and CASA youth. To address this, the Maryland Judiciary has partnered with MD CASA to bring diversity, equity, and inclusion training to CASA programs. MD CASA has contracted with a full-time Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Training Coordinator to push this initiative forward. Since joining MD CASA in Fiscal Year 2021, the DEI and Training Coordinator has evaluated each program and provided training, resources, and technical support to them as they work to become more inclusive.

The success of these efforts is starting to be seen in the programs. Programs are beginning to shift their recruitment efforts to focus on increasing the diversity of volunteers and staff. The Lower Shore CASA (LSCASA) has done exceptional in this category over the last program year. To increase recruitment of younger advocates, Black interns from a local college were recruited into program. These interns helped to implement a shift in their recruitment and outreach efforts in Fiscal Year 2021, leading to positive results seen during their first training of Fiscal Year 2022. That training class included two Black males, five Black females, and two mixed-race females who were sworn-in as volunteers in Fall 2021. In Fiscal Year 2022, LSCASA will

continue these efforts with the launch of its “Blue Collar Campaign” aimed at attracting more males and people of color [who serve in higher numbers in the blue-collar roles].

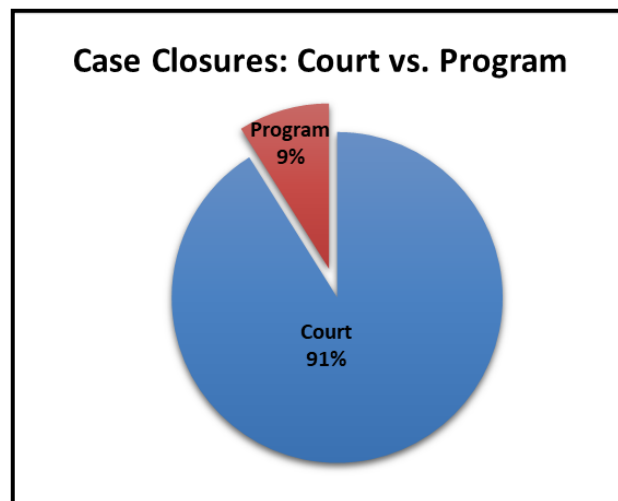
Reasons for entering care: Neglect is the most-commonly adjudicated reason that children served by CASA enter foster care, accounting for 53 percent of cases in Fiscal Year 2021. “Neglect” includes abandonment and educational/medical/physical neglect. Neglect is commonly the reason children with substance-abusing parents come into care. Of the children served in Fiscal Year 2021, 44 percent had at least one parent whose substance abuse was a contributing factor to their involvement with the Department of Social Services (DSS).



5. Case Closures

CASA programs closed 370 cases in Fiscal Year 2021. Of those, 337 cases were closed by the court, and 33 cases were closed by the programs, but remained open in court.

A program closure may occur for a variety of reasons. Examples include an older child who does not want a CASA, a child who is inaccessible to the volunteer due to placement location or runaway status, or a child who is in a stable permanent placement and is no longer in need of CASA advocacy.



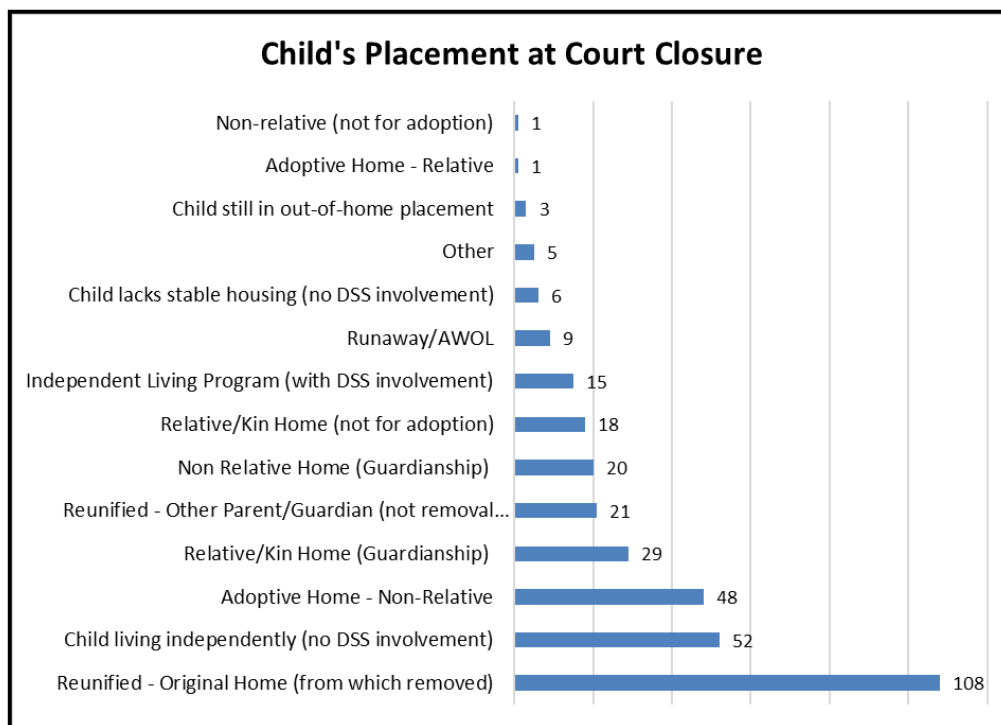
Average length of time in foster care for cases closed by the court:

County	# of Closed		
	Cases	Months	Years
Anne Arundel	55	25.3	2.1
Prince George's	46	58.0	4.8
Baltimore County	39	51.4	4.3
Howard	28	32.8	2.7
Harford	26	31.8	2.7
Carroll	26	36.0	3.0
Baltimore City	22	97.6	8.1
Montgomery	20	58.4	4.9
Cecil	18	46.6	3.9
Allegany	17	16.9	1.4
Frederick	17	35.9	3.0
Worcester	5	26.0	2.2
Caroline	4	34.5	2.9
Charles	3	18.0	1.5
Washington	3	13.3	1.1
Talbot	3	93.0	7.8
Calvert	2	25.5	2.1
St. Mary's	2	26.0	2.2
Kent	1	69.0	5.8
Dorchester	0	0.0	0.0
Statewide	337	40.7	3.4

Time spent in foster care: The amount of time children served by CASA will spend in foster care before finding a permanent home, or aging out of the system, varies from county to county. Statewide, the average is nearly three and a half years, with 146 youth served by CASA spending three years or more in care and 15 youth spending more than 10 years in foster care.

Placements at Court Closure

Permanent placements: In Fiscal Year 2021, 93 percent of children whose cases were closed by the court were in a permanent placement at closure. A permanent placement is any placement that has committed to providing a legal and physical home for the child until adulthood. Of the children served by CASA whose cases closed to permanency, 55 percent were reunified or placed with family members. Of those reunified with their family, 73 percent went home to their parent(s) and 27 percent went to live with other relatives.



Non-permanent placement: Twenty-three children were living in “non-permanent” living situations at closure. These youth were over the age of 18 and nine requested that the court close their case or were not compliant with DSS and the court’s orders, nine were out of contact (or had run-away) for a significant amount of time; five were placed in programs for adults with disabilities, and one was incarcerated as an adult.

Impact of the Stage of CASA Appointment on Outcomes: In 2011, JFS began collecting data from CASA programs regarding case closures and stage of case at appointment. Analysis of this data has consistently shown that assigning CASA volunteers early in a child’s case leads to better outcomes. As a result, JFS has continued to encourage earlier appointments. The Fiscal Year 2021 closure data demonstrates that:

- Children who were assigned to CASA before their case reached the review stage (generally within six months of entering care) spent an average of **16.6 fewer months in care** than children who were assigned to CASA during CINA review or permanency planning hearings. **This is a more than a year difference.**
- On average, children who were assigned to CASA before their case reached the review stage (generally within six months of entering care) had **fewer placements** than children who were assigned to CASA during or after the review stage.

IV. CASA in the Coming Year

As the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency continues, the CASA advocate's important role in protecting the best interests of the children in the State's care continues to be apparent. Our most vulnerable children and families continue to struggle with the issues that brought them into the system, and limited resources are just beginning to become more accessible. After a year of remote schooling, many children are adjusting to in-person learning with new limited access to teachers, school nurses, and school social workers. Overwhelmed mental health and substance abuse treatment services have led to isolation and depression. For CASA youth, having a CASA volunteer to advocate for their needs and provide a caring presence in their lives provides critical support many children have been lacking.

As CASA programs adapt to unprecedented challenges, they continue to be committed to increasing statewide capacity to serve more children and to support more volunteer advocates, thereby further helping the courts with critically important decisions about the best interests of the youth served. Programs have grown adept at remote and hybrid trainings, visits, and volunteer supervisions, enabling them to adapt and to continue growing and serving more children.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 health emergency, efforts are underway to establish a new program for Somerset and Wicomico counties, with services expected to begin in early 2022. The CASA of Western Maryland program (currently serving Allegany and Washington counties) has plans to start service for Garrett County in 2023. Other programs are working together to improve efficiency, share resources, and ensure high quality advocacy is being provided. The Maryland CASA Association is continuing program reviews to ensure the highest quality of service is being provided to both the children and the courts.

V. Conclusion

The Maryland Judiciary is committed to supporting CASA programs statewide. These programs provide vital information and recommendations to judges and magistrates who are making best interest determinations in cases involving some of Maryland's most vulnerable youth. The advocacy that CASA programs provide furthers the Maryland Judiciary's mission to provide fair, efficient, and effective justice for all. By collaborating and supporting the ongoing work of CASA programs, the Judiciary is advancing its strategic objectives to (1) be responsive and adaptable to community needs, (2) build partnerships, and (3) use resources wisely. The Maryland Judiciary continues to be a critically important source of funding for CASA programs across Maryland.