



# BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

**2019 ANNUAL REPORT**



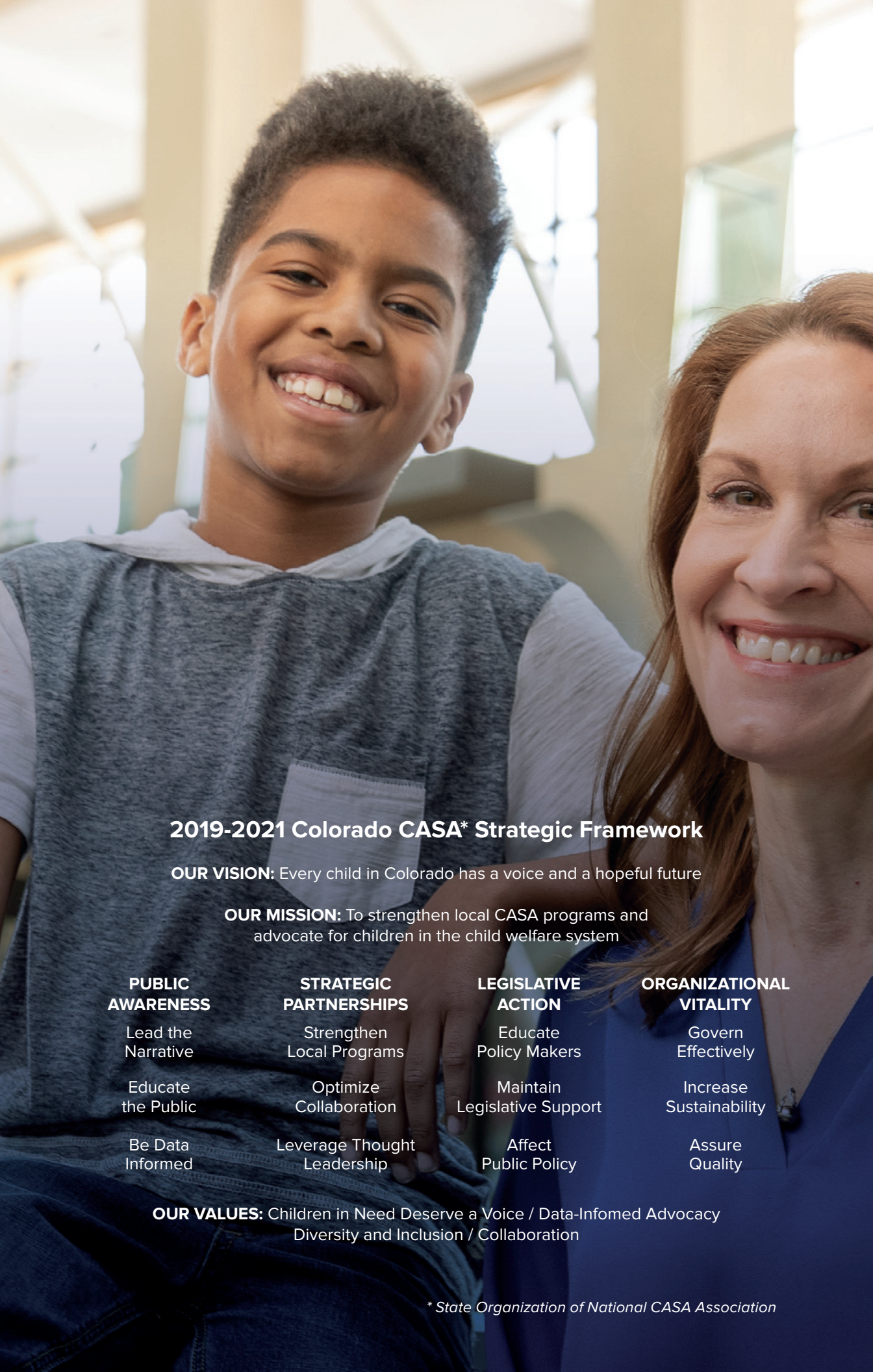
**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

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**COLORADO**





**2019-2021 Colorado CASA\* Strategic Framework**

**OUR VISION:** Every child in Colorado has a voice and a hopeful future

**OUR MISSION:** To strengthen local CASA programs and advocate for children in the child welfare system

**PUBLIC  
AWARENESS**

- Lead the Narrative
- Educate the Public
- Be Data Informed

**STRATEGIC  
PARTNERSHIPS**

- Strengthen Local Programs
- Optimize Collaboration
- Leverage Thought Leadership

**LEGISLATIVE  
ACTION**

- Educate Policy Makers
- Maintain Legislative Support
- Affect Public Policy

**ORGANIZATIONAL  
VITALITY**

- Govern Effectively
- Increase Sustainability
- Assure Quality

**OUR VALUES:** Children in Need Deserve a Voice / Data-Informed Advocacy  
Diversity and Inclusion / Collaboration

*\* State Organization of National CASA Association*

# DEAR COLORADO CASA FAMILY,

The heart of our mission is providing best-interest advocacy for the Colorado children we serve, who have experienced abuse or neglect. A guiding principle is that children grow and develop best with their family of origin if that can be safely achieved.

Our focus in 2019 was providing our statewide CASA network with the necessary resources to support their work and advance our collective mission. This included data collection and analysis, statewide branding campaign resulting in volunteer recruitment, training resources, and building out a state organization strategic framework to strengthen local programs.

This year marked the launch of our new multi-pronged data and evaluation strategy. Program leaders from across the state worked closely with Colorado CASA's Program and Data Evaluator to develop, pilot and launch a new system for measuring the strengths and needs of children served as well as CASA volunteer advocacy actions. Some results are highlighted in this report and we look forward to sharing more data throughout the coming year.

Recently, we have seen a rise in the number of children who need someone by their side advocating for their best interests. We are driven by our mission and fueled by our vision to provide a CASA volunteer to every child in Colorado who needs one.

It is an audacious goal, but one that we are committed to fulfilling as we continuously focus on expanding our capacity to serve more children.

In 2019, we made great strides toward that goal. The number of CASA volunteers across the state of Colorado increased to 1,926 serving 4,857 children. We have experienced continuous growth over the past three years with 23 percent more children served, since 2016.

We welcome you to read how our volunteers are making an impact in the stories included in this report.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the strategy we have established (see facing page) and look forward to continuing to build on our momentum and capacity to serve more children with support from you — our generous partners, donors, and friends.

Thank you for the ongoing support that makes this growth possible. CASA programs are essential to our Colorado communities and the children they serve.

With your partnership, we will continue to grow until every child who needs an advocate has one.

Sincerely,



**JENNY  
BENDER**  
Executive Director  
Colorado CASA



**CHRISTINNE  
JOHNSON**  
Board Chair  
Colorado CASA

We are driven by our mission and fueled by our vision **to provide a CASA volunteer to every child in Colorado who needs one.**





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## 2019 FINANCIALS

INCOME

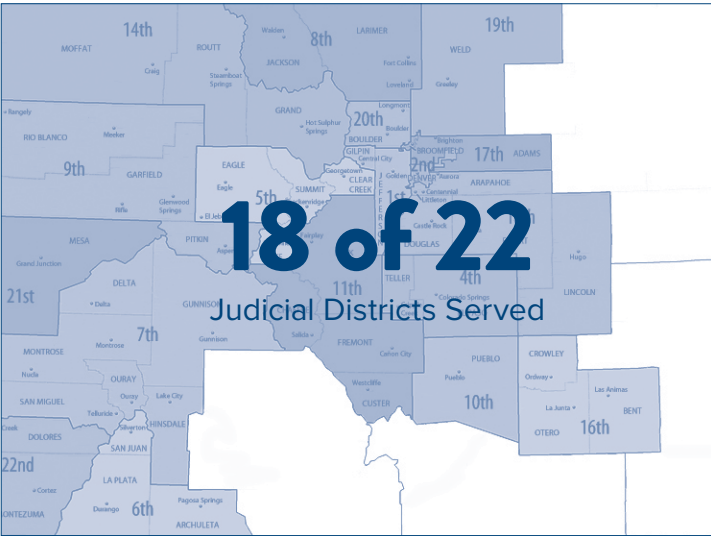
Source	Amount	FYE2019 Percentage
CO State Funding	1,550,000	93%
Other Government	15,737	1%
Individuals & Corps	15,330	1%
Conference fees	14,570	1%
Foundations and organizations	50,441	3%
Membership and dues, other	23,094	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,669,172</b>	

EXPENSES

Source	Amount	FYE2019 Percentage
Program	1,496,594	92%
General & Administration	126,279	8%
Fundraising	9,021	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,631,894</b>	

# 2019

was a year of growth



**4,857**

Total children served



**1,926**

Total CASA volunteers (who served on a case)



**111,918**

Number of volunteer hours

Our new data collection protocol supports data-informed advocacy and builds program evidence

In October 2019, CASA volunteers statewide completed new wellbeing assessments for their assigned children. A total of 1,815 children, 85% of those eligible, were assessed across the 18 programs statewide. Additionally, volunteers completed case-opening and case-closing assessments. The new process is part of a larger strategy that:

- Provides CASA volunteers and staff an opportunity to reflect on the strengths and needs of each child and brainstorm next steps, which supports high-quality, best-interest advocacy.
- Builds in times of need buffer against adverse childhood experiences.

The summary below includes routine program data and data from the new wellbeing assessments. It provides insights into the status, needs, and strengths of the children CASA serves throughout Colorado and details how CASA volunteers provide support.

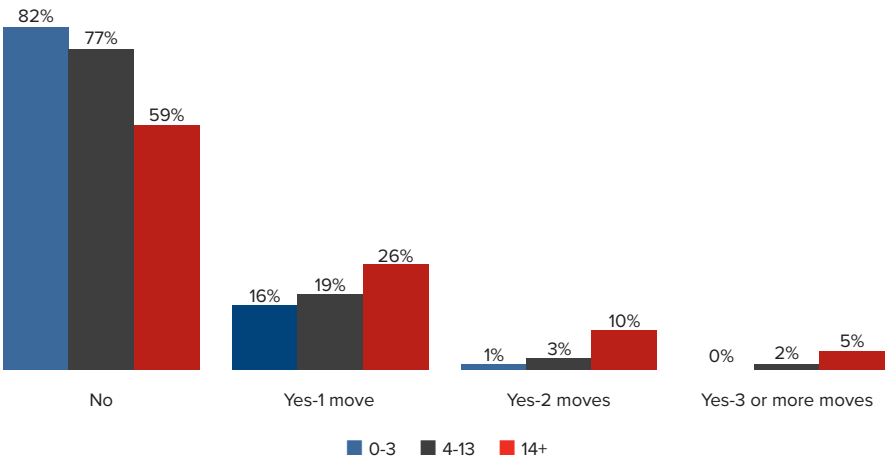
Safety | Permanency | Placement  
Placements & Mobility

Survey results show variation in placement and move frequency by age group. For the youngest age group (0-3), more than 40 percent of children are placed in foster care homes, 33 percent with kin and 25 percent with parents. Children ages 4-13 are split roughly in thirds between foster homes, kinship placements, and parents. For children 14 and older, about 25 percent were in kinship and foster homes, 18 percent were with parents, and 15 percent were in group homes.<sup>1</sup> Others were in inpatient facilities and juvenile detention.

While 82 percent of children ages 0-3 had not moved since June or their case start date (if case started after mid-may), likelihood of moving increased with child’s age. Thirty-three percent of children 4-13 and more than 40 percent of youth 14 and over moved at least once during the assessment period.

<sup>1</sup> CASA volunteers complete wellbeing assessments for each child they are assigned at case opening, case closing and three times per year while a case is ongoing. CASA volunteers are instructed to consult relevant individuals on the case and in the child’s life to accurately answer each question. As more rounds of data are collected we will be able to provide more information about trends over time. The current data represents a snapshot of children with ongoing cases (opened prior September, 2019) served by a CASA as of October 2019.

MOVES BY AGE GROUP  
Moves from mid-June to October or from case opening if case opened after May 15th

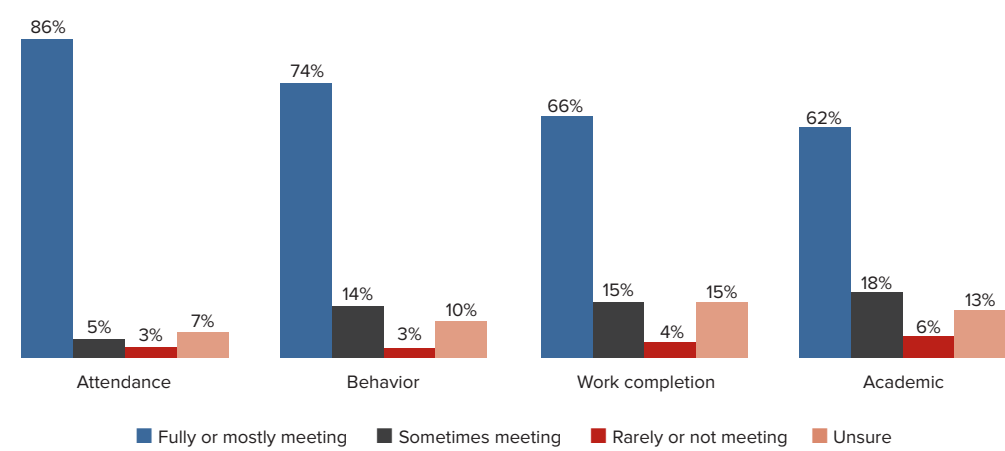


## Education

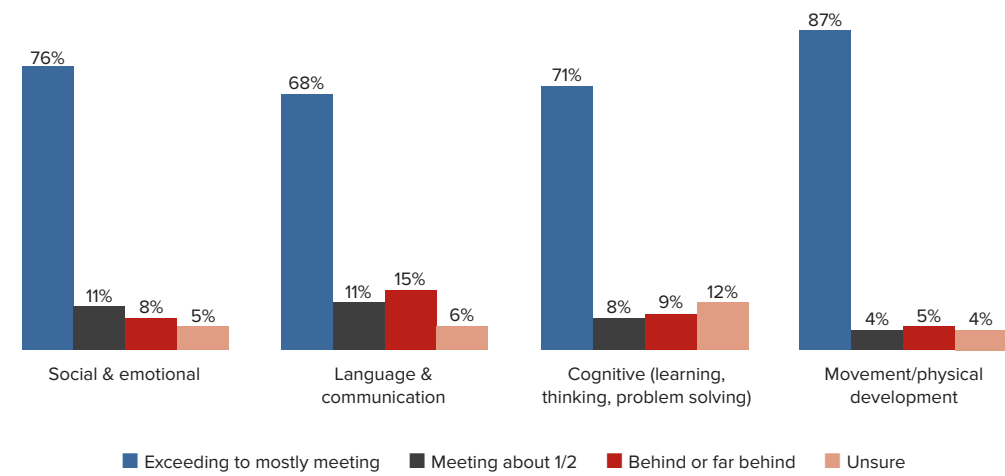
Approximately two-thirds of children served by a CASA volunteer are of school age, (6-years-old or older). CASA volunteers were asked to rate their child’s educational status in the key domains of attendance, behavior, work completion and academic performance in order to understand if additional support is needed. Around 1 in 5 children assessed have at least some needs around behavior and work completion and at least 1 in 4 have academic needs. Additionally, 24 percent of school-aged children, or nearly 1 in 4, have an IEP in place, and additional children have Learning Plans, 504 Plans, or are being assessed.

CASA volunteers serving children 5 and under rated each child’s progress on developmental milestones.

To what extent is the child meeting or not meeting expectations in each education domain?

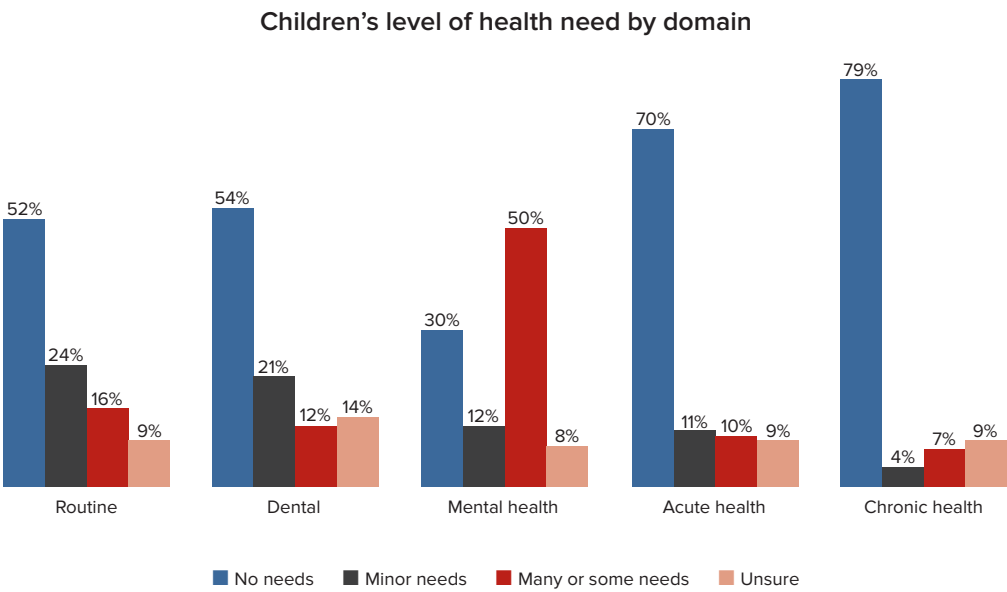


To what extent is the child meeting or not meeting expectations in each developmental domain?



## Health

Mental health was reported as a major or regular need for 50 percent of children served. Routine health needs, the next most common, were reported for 16 percent, with an additional 24 percent having minor needs. More information may be needed to determine the type of needs and whether they are being adequately addressed with existing resources. Colorado CASA, as well as individual CASA programs, are exploring how the health data may be useful in collaborations with state and other partner organizations.



## Siblings

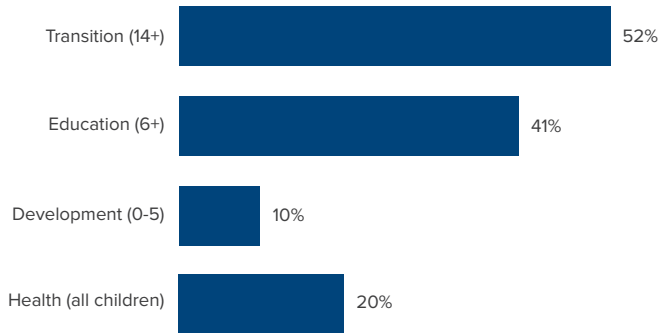
The vast majority of children served, 89 percent, have at least one sibling, in or out of child welfare. Of those 1,593 children, 49 percent are placed with their siblings and an additional 18 percent are placed with at least one of their siblings. Of siblings who are separated, 53 percent visit regularly with their sibling(s) (at least once per month), and 21 percent have another arrangement such as phone calls — based on survey comments we know in most of these situations the siblings are in separate states, half-siblings, or older siblings with limited availability. For 15 percent of separated siblings, the volunteer noted visits are not appropriate. For 12 percent of separated siblings, the volunteer recommended regular visits. This information will be used to support the rights of siblings in foster care, which were formalized in the Foster Youth Sibling Bill of Rights passed in the 2019 Colorado Legislative session. The bill emphasizes the importance of sibling relationships and provides a framework for ensuring and documenting sibling visits when appropriate for each sibling.



## Advocacy

In addition to tracking key child-information, the new wellbeing assessments provide detailed information on CASA advocacy in each domain. In the past, this information has only been tracked anecdotally in Optima, the case management system used by all CASA programs in Colorado. While the charts include all children eligible (based on age) for a specific type of advocacy, the percent of children receiving advocacy increases when narrowed by need. For example, among children with a reported acute health need, 43 percent had a volunteer who provided health advocacy.

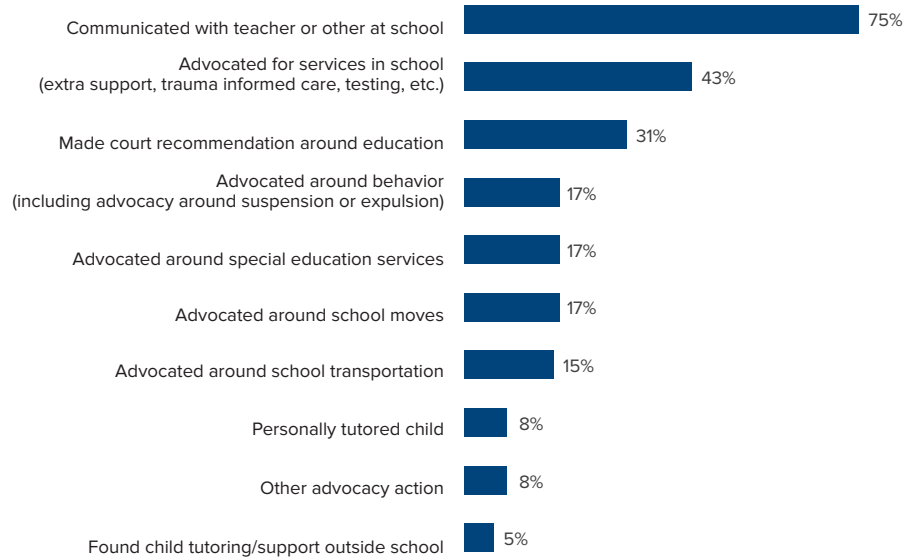
Percent of children receiving advocacy from their CASA volunteer



For volunteers who report advocacy, we drill deeper and ask what type of actions they performed to support their assigned child. When taking the assessment, a volunteer could check all actions that were applicable, or add additional options.

### EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY RESULTS

Advocacy actions among CASA volunteers who reported educational advocacy (n=492)



## Looking Ahead

The wellbeing assessments provide a powerful repertoire of information that will take our data-informed advocacy to the next level and provide documentation to better understand CASA volunteers' contributions to D&N cases in Colorado. It is a common adage that where we shine the light is where we see growth. By tracking these metrics over time, we expect to heighten awareness and thus increase the number children receiving advocacy and additional support in each domain.

# CASA VOLUNTEERS MAKE A LIFELONG IMPACT

CASA volunteers have a lifelong impact on the children they serve, and in many cases, those children want to give back when they become adults.

Deborah Rutledge was removed from her mother’s custody as a young teen. Her mom suffered from severe mental illness and was unable to care for Deborah.

Deborah moved into a group home with ten other teenagers. She felt abandoned and alone until she met Karen Scussel, her CASA volunteer.

Deborah and Karen spent time together doing simple things: walking Karen’s dogs, doing homework, playing air hockey. They listened to music together. Those were moments of relief for Deborah. She’d tell you they gave her hope.

But Karen’s advocacy was about more than those moments. Karen worked with Deborah’s



attorney and social worker to find Deborah’s biological father, and she made it possible for Deborah to visit him. Eventually, the judge awarded custody to the father and Deborah was part of a family once more.

Today, Deborah serves in the U.S. Air Force and is a CASA volunteer herself. She speaks to her mom, who is now stable, weekly.

Karen went on to lead Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, a CASA program; 2018 both marked her retirement and brought her relationship with Deborah full circle. In honor of Karen’s retirement, Deborah flew to California to participate in a celebration.

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“I remember about Karen was her smile, her encouragement and her positivity; there was never any judgment about my situation.”

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# CASA VOLUNTEER HELPS PARENTS REUNITE WITH THEIR BABY



Jenna\* was removed from her parents’ care shortly after her birth, when hospital staff reported concerns that her mother was being unsafe with her and that her father did not recognize the mother’s inability to keep Jenna safe.

Jenna’s parents were able to visit with her, but seemed to struggle in caring for Jenna even during those visits. They seemed to be ignoring recommendations from doctors and parenting instructions. It was clear they were making an immense effort to see their daughter, though: each trip to a visit meant more than four hours on public transportation.

The judge assigned a CASA volunteer to the case. She wanted to know whether Jenna’s parents were indeed incapable of caring for her, or whether there was something unknown that was impeding their progress as parents. Rueben, a CASA volunteer in Portland, Oregon, got to work. He soon discovered that Jenna’s mom had learning disabilities. The mom was shy and it was difficult for her to trust others.

Rueben recommended that a parenting instructor work with Jenna’s parents individually, providing hands-on training in child care. As a result of this focused training, Jenna’s parents’ skills quickly improved.

With their new skills in place, the parents were reunited with their baby girl. Jenna is now a happy and thriving toddler, thanks in a big way to the involvement of a CASA volunteer.

*\*To preserve confidentiality, names have been changed.*

# Our supporters

THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE DONORS AND FUNDERS WHO MAKE OUR PROGRESS POSSIBLE. TOGETHER, WE ARE A POWERFUL VOICE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

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