



the Advocate Newsletter



Annual Report Fiscal Year 2023

Hope & Resilience

Dear friends,

"Hope is the belief that a thriving future is possible, and you can have the power to make it so." -Casey Gwinn, Family Justice Center.

Our focus at CASA of Yellowstone County is building up a child's resiliency and protective factors and providing children in foster care with hope. We are able to accomplish this through our generous donors, Board of Directors, staff, and 144 highly trained Court Appointed Special Advocates. On average, volunteer Advocates will serve with the organization for over three years. As many of you know, the role of a Court Appointed Special Advocate is no ordinary volunteer opportunity. The volunteer Advocates serving in Yellowstone County come from a variety of backgrounds, but they have some things in common: a heart for children and a passion for serving their communities.

It's important that we don't just look to the past and what has taken place in the lives of these children, but that we look ahead to their futures and help instill a sense of hope and resiliency for the children in the CASA program. Several factors contribute to hope and resiliency for children: when children have a nurturing supportive relationship; where they can grow and live in safe, stable, and equitable environments; when they have a sense of social connectedness, and when they have opportunities to learn social and emotional competencies. If at least one of these factors is present in the life of a child, the outcomes for that child are much more positive than a child lacking any of these resiliency factors. Volunteer Advocates work in partnership with other professionals in the child's life to support these four elements of resiliency for children and set them up for better futures. Through your support of the CASA program, you provide hope and resiliency to children in foster care.

Sincerely,

Shayla Fox Brown



Shayla Fox Brown
Program Director

Emily Gaudreau



Emily Gaudreau
Development Director

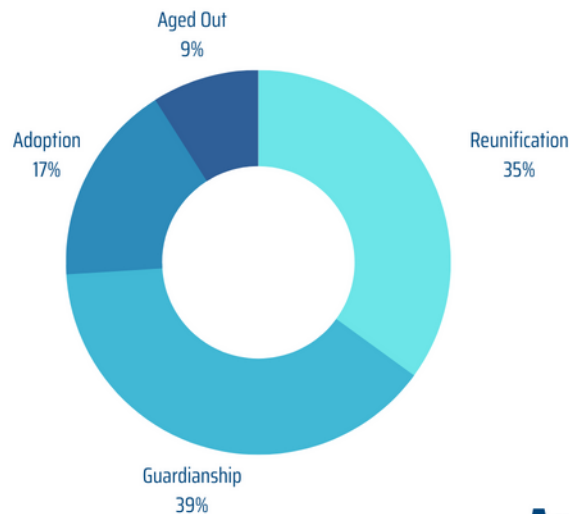
The CASA Impact



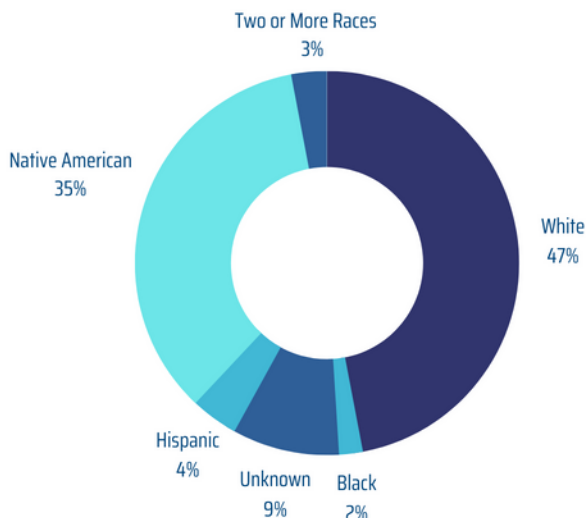
Between July 2022 and June 2023, volunteer Advocates served 366 children in Yellowstone County. Within that time period, 150 of those children achieved permanency outside of foster care.

Youth Served in Fiscal Year 2023

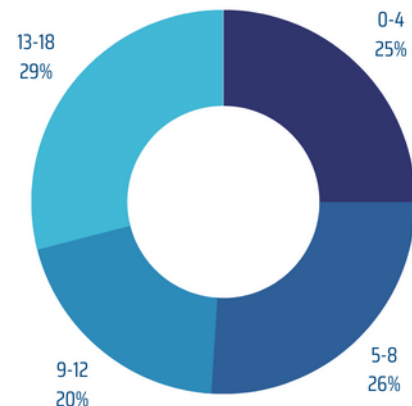
Case Closures



Race/Ethnicity



Age Breakdown



Advocate Spotlight

Barb Hogg



"I'm probably the luckiest CASA in America to have this opportunity to see Nick grow and thrive." These words were spoken by Barb, a CASA, who has served right alongside her assigned child for nearly 10 years. She is one of the longest serving volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates in Yellowstone County.

Nick entered the system in 2013 due to neglect caused by his parents' substance abuse. Barb was soon assigned and had no idea the impact she would have, nor the remarkable relationship that would be built over the next several years.

This special CASA saw Nick be placed in several different group homes, foster homes, and finally an out of state private residential school that provides opportunities for positive change. Throughout these difficult years, Nick experienced challenges with his social, cognitive, and behavioral development. Having a consistent advocate to voice his concerns, pursue resources for therapy, ensure appropriate educational support, and have frank conversations with Nick's support team, made all the difference in helping him grow and become semi-independent.

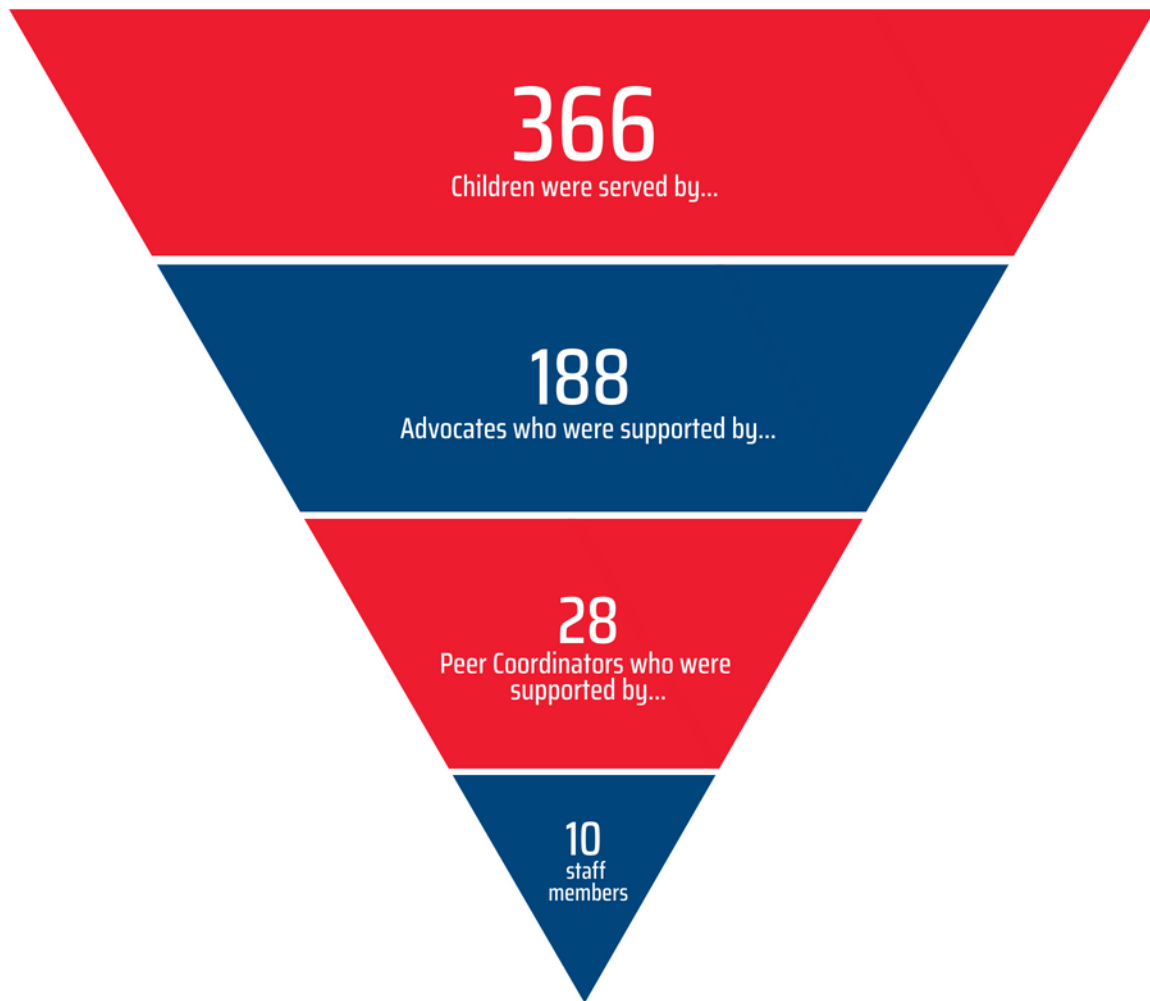
On a recent visit to see Nick, Barb joined him on a shopping trip to Walmart. Unbeknownst to her, Nick had no idea what to buy nor how to budget his money. She quickly gave him a lesson in simple economics, and he was quite pleased with all his purchases. On a subsequent visit, Nick, who now works at a thrift store on his campus, presented Barb with a small pink purse that he had purchased specially for her. Her time and effort to show him a simple task paid off in huge dividends with his generosity and money-saving skills.

Nick's goal today is to be able to graduate in the spring, a task that has proved quite a challenge. He is now able to advocate for himself and his needs. He is amicable with other adults. A huge part of his success has been the one person standing by his side over the years, his CASA.

The work of a CASA has a deeper impact than many can fathom. In this unique case, one special CASA could never have imagined the special outcome volunteering gave her. It will be a lifetime bond with a very special young man. "I've grown right along with him," says Barb.

Thank you, Barb, for your dedication and commitment to changing the lives of youth in the foster care system!

Between July 2022 - June 2023



During this fiscal year, volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates:

- Spent **7,945** volunteer hours on their cases, donating more than **\$252,651** worth of casework to Yellowstone County
- Conducted **2,288** visits with children in foster care
- Submitted **1,727** official reports on children in foster care to judges, attorneys, and social workers
- Attended **786** hearings to advocate for the best interests of the children on their cases

CASA of Yellowstone County Board Members

Dallas Pender	Jenn Weber	Charlie Jackson
Clayton Gregersen	Nate Nunberg	Clayton Barnes
Brittney Mada	Maria Gnecco	Holly Hinte
Ursula Richter	Lynne Roccisano	Lindsay Masquat

Retiring Board Members

Thank you for serving CASA

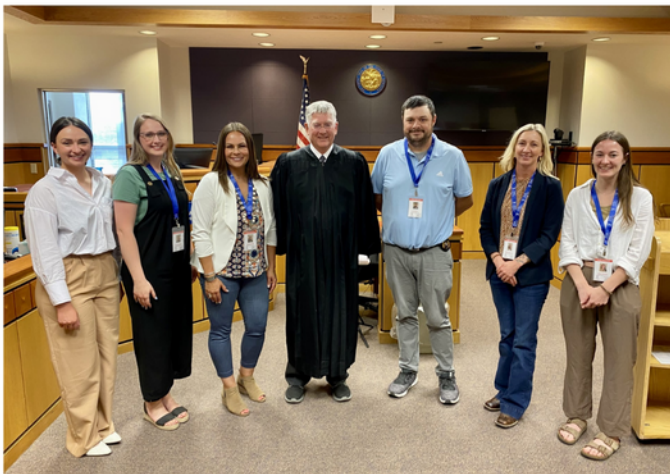


Jennifer Smith
6 years of service



Linda Schmaing
3 years of service

Congratulations
Spring Class Advocates!



CASA of Yellowstone County would also like to extend an immense thank you to the Honorable Judge Michael Moses for his many years of service to the community as a 13th Judicial Judge. He has touched countless lives and many generations through his service to Yellowstone County and we wish him all the best in his retirement.



A Letter from CASA Board Member **Brittney Mada**

I've donned various uniforms since I first encountered the CASA program. I hope this is relatable for the community of past & current CASAs while also offering perspective to everyone else, all of whom are potential, future CASAs.

First, business professional, interview attire - the kind that sticks to your skin due to anxious, giddy perspiration - that makes you feel a bit out of your body with a heavy tongue - as I met with CASA staff to discuss if this opportunity was an appropriate fit for me and if I was an appropriate fit for the CASA program. I recall feeling the heightened sense of significance and importance compared to other volunteer roles. This was a vetting process; a mutual selection. Being chosen by CASA was separate but concurrent to me choosing CASA. This was a big deal.

My second uniform was often a full-day-in-a-chair crumpled outfit, hair askew just coming undone from the put-together model that morning, ink spotted finger-tips as I attended the 30+ hours of training that, during my on-boarding, was held on weeknight evenings. I entered a bit dehydrated, mentally fatigued, and overall spent but always departed satiated by the conversations, the curriculum, and the perspectives of my co-attendees. I liked the way the training posed questions to which I rarely had automatic answers.

Next came a day of formal dress for the ceremony. I took an oath of service administered by the Judge, shook their hand, and celebrated. My friends and family were in attendance, and photos were taken. It felt grand in its scripted nature and personalized in its attentiveness toward me.

In an about face, my next years with CASA found me in shorts, tank-tops, rollerblades, and summer dresses as I played, cooked, gamed, and befriended a remarkable young adult. This phase was punctuated by a few suits for those court appearances during which I was a vessel communicating her voice in the formal space making decisions about her life. The last ornamentation marking this chapter was a monogrammed necklace bearing her new name.

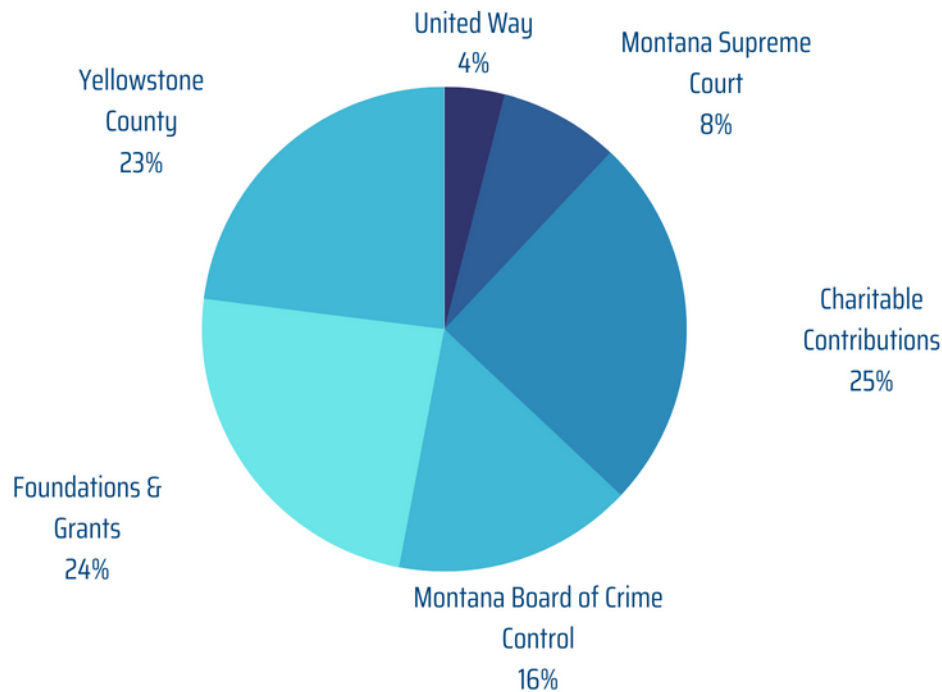
Now, as a Board Member for CASA of Yellowstone County, my uniform is a mosaic of all prior. Most monthly meetings find me in my default, creased from sitting cross-legged, too long clothes, hair on the brink of becoming askew, with those signature black and blue spotlets or highlighter residue tinting my fingers. Whenever possible, I attend the swearing in ceremonies of new CASAs donning more fresh attire as a representative of the Board. If you spot me at any of our various community events, because of the organic culture of joy and fun the CASA staff embody, do not be surprised if you see summer dresses, neon t-shirts, costumes, and even capes.

CASA is a program that integrates into a life respecting and seeing all the different ways we show up. Participating in the program accepts talents and strength while also challenging volunteering by ongoing skill building. Very few experiences span the experiences CASA has allowed me to live. In all uniforms since, I've been deeply grateful that since introduction I found CASA and CASA has continued to choose me.

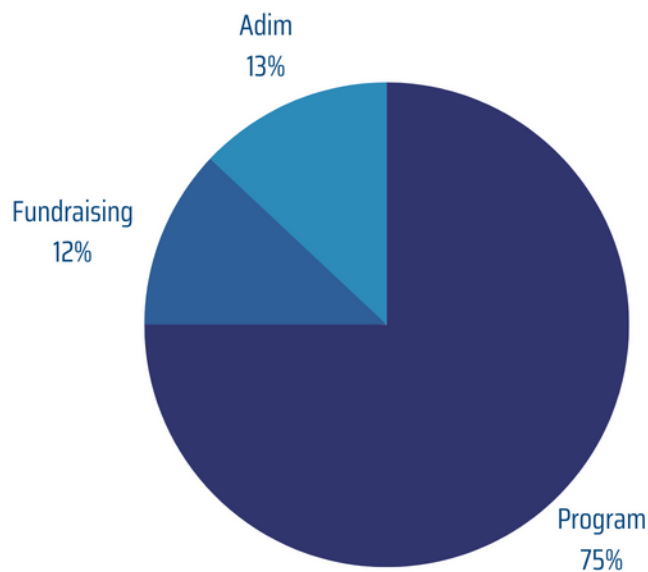


Fiscal Year 2023 Financial Statement

Income- \$800,956



Expenses- \$749,220



This financial statement is based on preliminary, pre-audited figures



Bigger & Brighter Future

CASA of Yellowstone County Endowment



Did you know that CASA of Yellowstone County partners with the Billings Community Foundation (BCF) to manage our endowment fund? Our goal is to build the endowment so earnings can contribute to the annual budget, especially in lean years. We have a great start on that objective, however it takes continuous attention to move closer to that goal. There are numerous “vehicles” to use when it comes to supporting your favorite non-profit and lowering your tax bill, please contact us and we can put you in touch with the BCF and other financial institutions that have the expertise and skills to maximize your gift to CASA.

The Montana Endowment Tax Credit provides an extraordinary opportunity to reduce your Montana taxes by directing funds to an endowment. Currently, the tax credit provides an outstanding philanthropic opportunity. You may receive a federal income tax deduction for your gift, a credit on your Montana state income taxes, and capital gains tax savings if appreciated assets are given. Funding for the future through endowment giving means your gift is held and invested in perpetuity and only investment income is used for accomplishing the purpose of your gift.

To take advantage of the Montana Endowment Tax Credit, individuals are required to donate through a planned gift, which is as simple as establishing a Charitable Deferred Gift Annuity with the Billings Community Foundation to benefit the CASA of Yellowstone County Endowment. This giving vehicle allows a tax credit of up to 40% against Montana income tax owed as well as the standard Federal deduction. The maximum credit is \$10,000 per individual or \$20,000 if you file jointly. Cash, securities, real estate, and other assets may be used to fund a charitable planned giving instrument to qualify for the tax credit.

Another way to give directly to the organization is to direct your RMD to CASA. RMDs or Required Minimum Distributions are the minimum amounts you must withdraw from your retirement accounts each year. You generally must start taking withdrawals from your traditional IRA, SEP IRA, SIMPLE IRA, and retirement plan accounts when you reach age 72 (73 if you reach age 72 after Dec. 31, 2022). The IRS says “Any IRA owner who wishes to make a Qualified Charitable Distribution should contact their IRA trustee soon so the trustee will have time to complete the transaction before the end of the year. Normally, distributions from a traditional individual retirement arrangement (IRA) are taxable when received. With a QCD, however, these distributions become tax-free as long as they're paid directly from the IRA to an eligible charitable organization”. This sounds like a win-win for you and your favorite non-profit, hopefully CASA.

CASA of Yellowstone County appreciates all the gifts we receive, they are used to recruit, train and support volunteer Advocates to improve outcomes for children in the foster care system. As always, check with your tax professional or financial advisor for the most current information, rules and advice on planned giving.

Let's Talk, About CASA

Perhaps you've heard about CASA on the radio or TV, or seen our billboards while driving across town. One of the best ways for us to reach new folks in the community, however, is much simpler—talking to people! Here at CASA of Yellowstone County, we are always seeking out new opportunities to speak to local churches, clubs, schools, and businesses about what we do and the impact our volunteer Advocates have on the lives of children in foster care. We speak to groups large and small, and we're happy to present anything from a short speech to a full PowerPoint presentation.

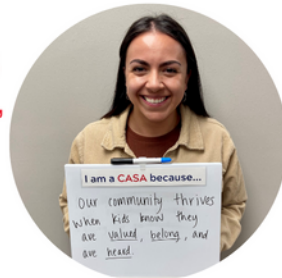


If you are interested in having someone from our organization come speak to members of your club, congregation, or anything in between please let us know. We look forward to talking soon!

I am a **CASA** because...

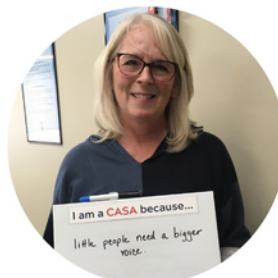
"I am a CASA because our community thrives when kids know they are valued, belong, and are heard."

-Alyssa Guerrero
CASA since 2021



"I am a CASA because little people need a bigger voice."

-Corinna Byler
CASA since 2015



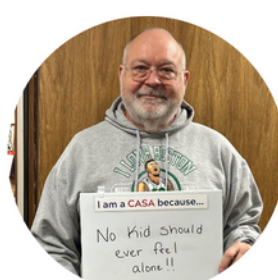
"I am a CASA because I love kids!"

-Bronwyn Hammond
CASA since 2019



"I am a CASA because no kid should ever feel alone!!"

-Tom Brewer
CASA since 2019



Are you ready to be a **CASA**?
yellowstonecasa.org/volunteer

Memorial & Honor Gifts



Your donation in honor or memory of your loved ones has a direct impact in the lives of children in our community. Thank you!

In Memory of Robert Dilworth

Nick & Jean Schultz

In Honor of Denise O'Reilly

Patti Stein

In Memory of Jane Kay Hunter-Gibson

Vera & Bob Ulschak

In Honor of Anne Rost's Birthday

Patti Stein

Memorial & Honor Gift Form



Amount _____

Given by _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

In Memory/In Honor of _____

Send Acknowledgement to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Mail to: CASA of Yellowstone County | P.O. Box 688 Billings, MT 59103



THANK YOU 2023 0.5K SPONSORS

