



The 2023 Annual State of CASA

CASA of Passaic and Union Counties: three programs under one umbrella

Court Appointed Special Advocates of Passaic and Union Counties*



CASA Advocacy Program
(Serving Passaic & Union)



**New Jersey Safe Babies
Court Team (SBCT)**
(Serving Passaic, Essex &
Hudson)



Open Door Store
(Serving CASA/SBCT/DCPP
cases in all program counties)



Leadership Team



Erica Kaslander, MA
Executive Director



Gina Cetta, J.D.
Program Director



Pam Saunders
Operations and ODS Manager



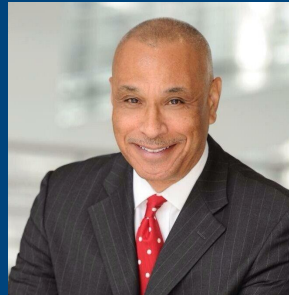
Courtney Como, MBA
Director of Development



Michelle Schaefer, MS
Director of Strategy & Impact



Janice Erzmoneit, CPA
Chief Financial &
Administrative Officer



Ed Marable, Esq.
Director of Training



Jill Reboer
Senior Advocacy Supervisor

Who's Who in CASA Staff: Advocacy Staff



Jill Reboer
Senior Advocacy Supervisor



Lauren Kestenbaum, J.D.



Victoria Cappo



Marian Golan, Ph.D.



Julie McGraw



Tiffany Mendoza

Who's Who on Staff



Laura Nanda, J.D.
Distant Placement Liaison



Julie Ritsema
Administrative Assistant



Gretchen Boger-O'Bryan
Director of Communications
& Development



Keisha Maldonado
CASA Data Analyst



Sharon Talty
Accounting Coordinator



Diego Rojas
Development Associate



Mike Walshe
Director of Communications

Who's Who in New Jersey Safe Babies Court Team Staff



Sarah During, J.D.
State Coordinator



Davetta Ford
Passaic Community Coordinator



Gino Arévalo
Essex Community Coordinator



Kirstin Uptegrove
Hudson Community Coordinator



Rich Hoffman
SBCT Data Analyst

CASA Advocacy - Union County Expansion Update

1. Identify office location in Union County
2. Add 3-4 Union County residents to Passaic County CASA Board of Trustees
3. Create CASA volunteer advisory board
4. Onboard CASA of Union Volunteers
5. Consolidate technologies, providing cost efficiencies and improved capacity
6. Expand training offerings to Union County locations.

Safe Babies Court Team Update

A collaboration between the AOC, DCPD, and CASA to ensure high quality, developmentally appropriate case management for infants and toddlers in foster care.

Using professional staff with lived experience, the program creates a collaborative process to expedite permanency.



What is New Jersey Safe Babies Court Team?

Who is eligible?

- Families whose cases arise out of **Essex, Hudson, or Passaic** Counties, that have **a child age 36 months or younger**.
- Participation is voluntary, with the consent of birth parents
 - **31 Families served in FY23**
 - **Expansion plans to add a 4th county in FY24-25**



What is the Open Door Store?

- Lasting positive impact
- Focus on normalcy, health and safety
- Provides essential items as needed and in emergent situations
 - Diapers/Wipes/Pull-Ups
 - Clothing
 - Shoes
 - Other Essentials, as available



What is the Open Door Store?

Eligibility:

- Open case in Passaic or Union County with DCP&P
- Active case with CASA/SBCT

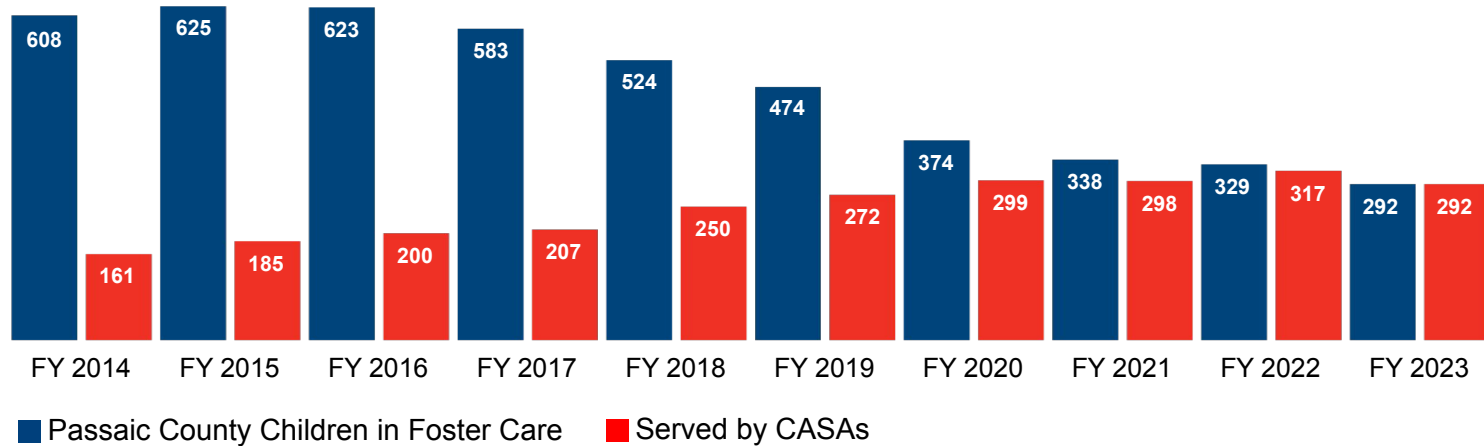
Access:

- Located in Wayne, NJ by appointment
- Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm
- 1st Saturday of every month, 10am - 1pm
- Location in Union County in the works



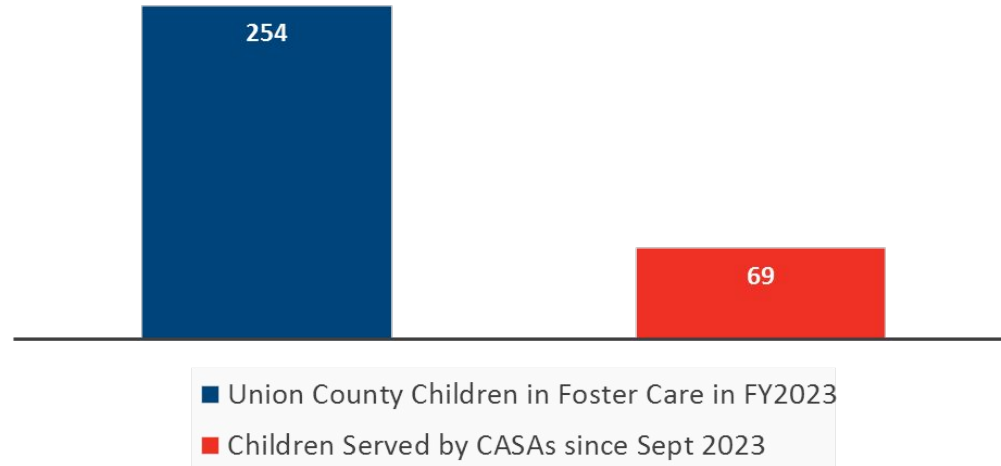
CASA Advocacy: Children Served in Passaic County

Passaic County CASA now serves every Passaic County child coming into foster care who needs a CASA!



CASA Advocacy: Children Served in Union County

Union County Children In Care



Looking Back: The Year In Review

CASA Advocacy: Passaic County FY2023 At A Glance

- Children served: **292** (*100% of children in foster care in Passaic County*)
- Volunteers active: **148**
- Court hearings attended: **975+**
- Court recommendations accepted: **more than 92% accepted**
- Number of recommendations made: **2,254**
- Volunteer hours donated: **9,315**
- Volunteer miles driven: **47,382**

- **92 children's cases closed**
- **79 new children served**

Among newly opened children in FY23, the average time from a child's removal to their CASA's appointment was **19 days**

(Excludes Care & Supervision cases, where no removal occurred and two cases for which referrals from DCP&P were delayed)

A healthcare professional, seen from the side, is examining a patient's back. The patient is lying in a hospital bed, and the professional is using a stethoscope to listen to the patient's back. The scene is set in a hospital room with a bed and pillows visible. A semi-transparent white banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text.

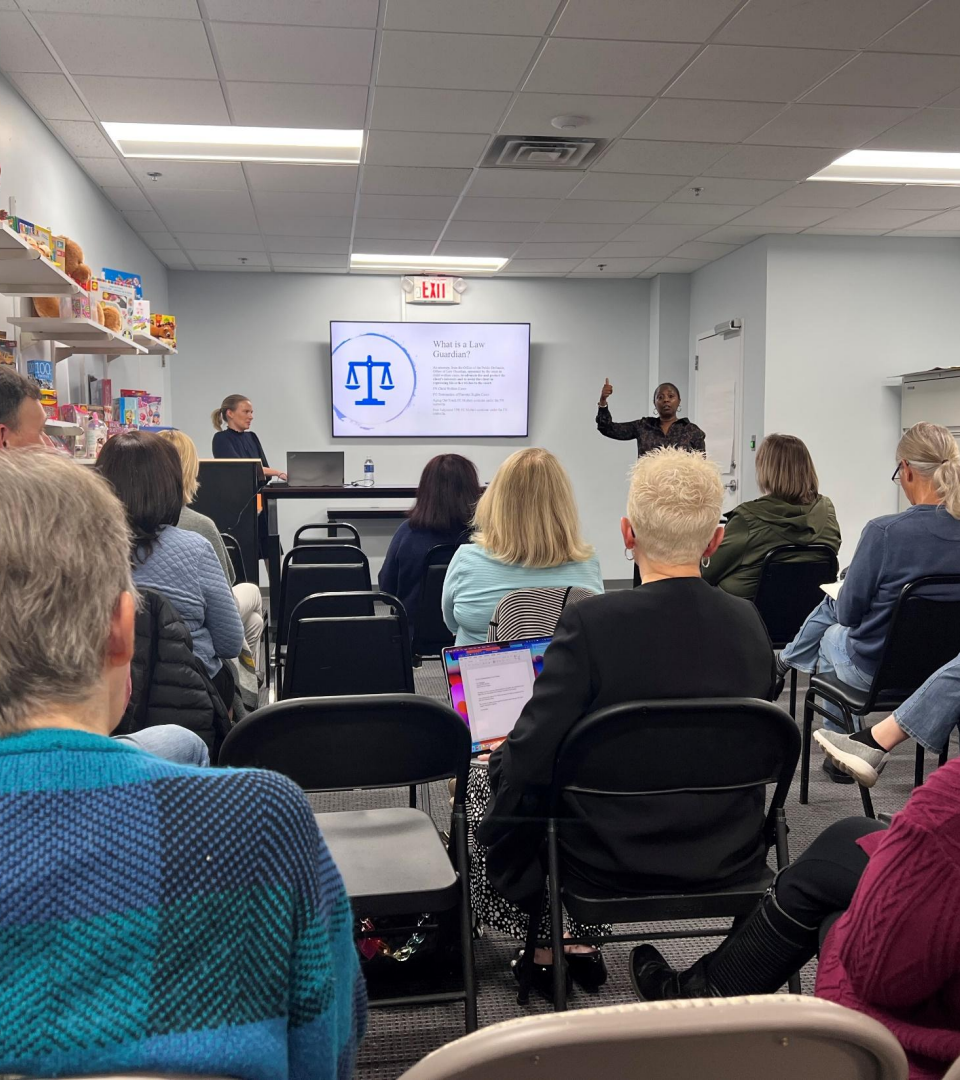
**Wellbeing Assessments
98% Completed!**

Important Reminders



Advocate Background Checks Updated Every Three Years

It might be time to renew!



In-service Requirements: 12 hours per year

- Check your CASA Connections Newsletter from Erica
- Subscribe to CASA of NJ emails
- Let us know when you read or watch a relevant book or docuseries
- Suggest resources to your Advocacy Supervisor

Monthly visits with CASA children

In person visits are required every month.

- You are the court’s “eyes on the child” and the Judges rely on you.
- We are required to report statistics on monthly in-person visits to the Administrative Office of the Courts.



Contact with parties in the case

- Don't rely solely on text messages – phone calls provide more detail.
- Contact Division caseworker and birth parents at least once per month, even if you don't receive a response.





Update Contact Logs frequently

- Please update contact logs in Optima within 72 hours of each contact

OPTIMA Record Keeping Best Practices

Contact Logs:

- Check the box of the names of each child that contact log pertains to.

Contact Type:

- In-Person contact must also have “In-Person” as the contact type

Check information for accuracy:

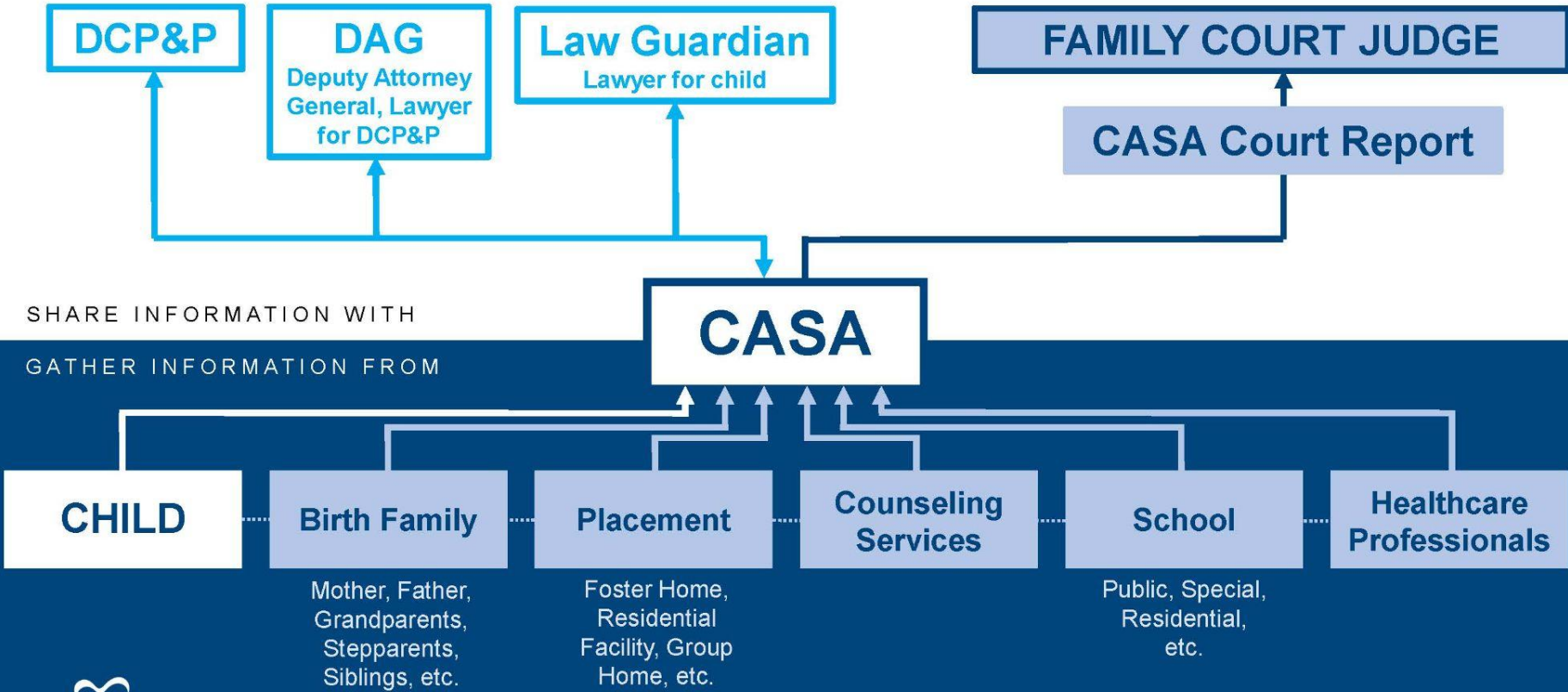
- Child’s placement
- Current school & grade level
- Does the child have an IEP?
- Update emails/phone numbers for CASA teens!
- Contact info for parents, RPs, and yourself
- Attorneys and caseworkers
- Demographic information for the child (race, languages spoken, Factors)



Entering Time in OPTIMA

Enter time in quarter hour increments

Amount of Time Spent	Enter in Optima
15 minutes or one quarter of an hour	0.25
30 minutes or half an hour	0.5
45 minutes or three quarters of an hour	0.75
60 minutes or one hour	1.0
1 hour and 15 minutes	1.25
1 hour and 30 minutes	1.5



Looking Ahead



Holiday Gift Drive 2023

- **Collect 3 - 5 holiday wishes** for each of the children on your case.
- **November 10th** - Provide the wishes to your Supervisor
- **November 14th** - Community Donors are mobilized
- **December 11th** - Donated wishes expected back to the CASA office

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

- CASAs pick up donated gifts for your child(ren) at the **Advocate Holiday Soiree, Wayne Office**
- **Thursday, December 14th between 3 and 7pm**

In-service Calendar

- **Better Court Reports**
November 13th: 6pm-8pm
- **Investigative Findings: Four Tiers**
December 5: 6pm-8pm
- **Next CASA Book Club -**
 1. Read “*Demon Copperhead*” by Barbara Kingsolver
 2. Attend a book club discussion on **January 24, 2024 at 6pm** with your fellow CASAs.
 3. Attendees who read the book and participate in the discussion will receive 3 hours of in-service credit.



Thank you!

Many thanks to all of our dedicated advocates, for all that you do for your CASA children, and for supporting Passaic County CASA!

We appreciate your patience, creativity, and support!