



2023 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



“*Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story.*”

– Josh Shipp

Words from Our Chair & Executive Director

Linda Kern and Carla Baker



How do you respond to change? Is it unsettling, or even scary? Do you see it as an opportunity? Some of us thrive with change; others resist it all costs. Change is “making the form, nature, content, future course, of something different from what it is or from what it would be if left alone.” **One thing is certain: change is inevitable – in our personal lives, in our workplaces, in our culture.**

2023 brought many changes to Hall-Dawson CASA.

We experienced a change in board leadership and

membership. We welcomed some new staff members and volunteers, and others took a different path. We added new supporters and saw funding cuts from some. The most visible change was bringing on a new executive director, Carla Baker, as our long-time ED Janet Walden stepped aside to devote more time to her family.

For the 350 local children we served in 2023, changes came in ways that most of us cannot imagine. Children in foster care typically change placements (or homes) five times a year; they will likely have multiple DFCS case managers, attend several schools, even live in different cities. They are often far away from their friends, family and beloved pets. And their time in foster care is on average up to two years, but can extend much longer. Often, the only consistency in their young lives comes through their CASA Volunteer. In 2023, 95% of the time when a child’s case closed, they had the same Hall-Dawson CASA Volunteer from the beginning to the end of their time in foster care. We are so grateful to our Volunteers for their consistency with our kids! **Our CASA Volunteers daily embrace these words from Mary Davis, “We can’t heal the world today, but we can begin with a voice of compassion, a heart of love and an act of kindness.”**

Children with a CASA Volunteer have measurably better outcomes. The majority experience fewer changes in placement, a shorter time in foster care, fewer visits to court, more success in school – and most important of all, they are more likely to find permanency. This is our mission: to ensure that every child has the right to a safe and permanent home. Every child deserves a place to call home, a place where they are safe and loved.

In 2024, Hall-Dawson CASA celebrates 35 years of advocating for our community’s most vulnerable children and teens. We are grateful to all who have consistently walked with us along the way over these years, and for all listed on these pages who are supporting us today. We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us and look to the future with those who partner with us. We will continue to advocate for kids, and seek to grow our CASA family, so that we may serve more children who need us.

With gratitude,

 LINDA KERN
2023 Board Chair

 CARLA BAKER
Executive Director, Hall-Dawson CASA

Board & Staff

Our Mission

To ensure children who have experienced abuse or neglect have the right to a safe placement and permanent home. CASA provides trained, screened and supervised volunteers to advocate for the best interest of children requiring court intervention as a result of abuse or neglect.

2023 BOARD

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Christie Ledlow-Hodges / Advocacy Director

Kristin Lesutis / Staff Attorney/ Advocate Supervisor

Sarah Morton / Advocate Supervisor

Keyla Suero / Advocate Supervisor

Haley Turner / Office Administrator

Tracy Verrigni / Volunteer Recruitment & Training Coordinator

Reflects active staff as of 12/31/2023.

Child Success Stories

Consistency Matters

Consistency Matters

After two teen boys were brought into care for the third time, it became apparent that reunification – while always the first choice – was simply not going to be a reality. The CASA Volunteer started digging and looking for relatives to be the placement. After several attempts, the CASA identified a relative, connected them with DFCS, and they ultimately were awarded guardianship of the boys. The CASA remained a constant support for the boys and the relative throughout the process, visiting regularly, attending a concert, and even helping to identify funding for a summer camp. The CASA Volunteer was key to the boys finding permanency.



“

Over the past 20 years, I have had the opportunity to volunteer my time for whichever community I happen to reside in – serving different charities, with different needs. Although each provided its own level of satisfaction and fulfillment, it has been my involvement with CASA these past 5 years that has given me the most. To volunteer for CASA is to accept a new challenge... a very rewarding challenge.

Volunteerism is the practice of providing time and skills for the benefit of others. Volunteering is the key to making a difference in a child's life. As a CASA, you become an advocate, a friend, and possibly the most loving person in this child's life. Helping to ensure the best possible outcome for the most vulnerable is so very important.

I am proud to wear the CASA badge, as is every CASA staff member and volunteer. To wear the badge, is to wear a badge of honor. It is an honor and a privilege to be entrusted with improving the life of a child.”

– Kim E., CASA Volunteer

CASA Volunteers

CASA Volunteers make a life-changing difference in the well-being of children and youth as they help them find a permanent, forever home.

Natalie Aitken	Debbie Fox	Susanna Mann	Addrienne Session
Marie Allan	Wanda Fuller	Tracie Maxey	Robin Session
Barbara Allen	Jerry Gauerke	Robbie McCormac	Naveen Singh
Patricia Allen	Ellie Gravitt	Lisa McCulloch	Al Smith*
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Connie Daniels	Susan Lahey	Wati Rengasamy	Kaitlynn Waits
Tina de Waart	Lisa Lancaster	Gertrude Rhein	Michelle Wills
Tamila Dover	Wendy Lavergne	Shanni Roberts	Alexander Wisnoski III
Amy Edmunds	Amy Leonard	Kylee Schacht	Janice Young
Kim Everhart	Stefani Lesser	Christine Schroeder	Dana Zhun
Maureen Files*	Gail Lombardo	Helen Scovill	
Jane Fischer	Ashley Mann	Kim Seastrom	*deceased

Scan [here](#) if you'd like to learn more about becoming a CASA Volunteer, or call 770-531-1964



“

We know CASA Volunteers have a profound impact on the children we serve, which leads to better outcomes. However, the demand for CASA Volunteers outweighs the supply and we are unable to serve all of the children experiencing foster care. We need more caring individuals to join our CASA family and advocate for those who need them most.”

– Christie Ledlow-Hodges, Advocacy Director

Our Children, Our Community

As we express our gratitude for our volunteers and donors listed on these pages, we look to the future and the children we have yet to serve. **Our community's most vulnerable kids need your support.**

- **Be a Changemaker:** Our Changemakers set up a recurring donation on a monthly basis, and these gifts support our needs throughout the year. They make a huge difference.
- **Planned gift:** How will you create a legacy? Consider a planned gift that not only helps secure the future of Hall-Dawson CASA but also benefits you and your family through tax advantages.
- **Share our story:** Invite us to speak to your book or wine club, civic group or church family. Be sure to “like” us on social media and share our content. Also, subscribe to our newsletter and share it with your contacts.

Reach out to Joy Green by calling 770-531-1964, emailing joy@halldawsoncasa.org or **scan the code.**



In Memory of Maureen Files & Al Smith

With great sadness, we mourn the loss of two of our long-time CASA Volunteers, Maureen Files and Al Smith. We are grateful for the commitment each of them had to child advocacy and to the children they served during their time with CASA.

Maureen was sworn in as a CASA Volunteer in March 2007. During her 16-year tenure, she advocated for 15 children in eight juvenile court dependency cases. Serving the same child for more than seven years in her final case as a CASA Volunteer, Maureen modeled the importance of

consistency for children and her dedication to this important work.

Al was sworn in as a CASA Volunteer in October 2017 and served four children in two cases until his passing. Al was a consistent presence and tireless advocate for the children he served. His heart and mission to improve the lives of others was a perfect fit for his work as a CASA Volunteer. Al remained committed to the youth he served even when faced with challenges.

Awards of Excellence

Georgia CASA honors Chris Hollifield with 2023 Board Leadership Award



We are so proud that Chris Hollifield received the 2023 CASA Board Member

Leadership Award in Georgia. Chris was officially awarded at the Georgia CASA Conference in Atlanta on August 12, 2023.

An active member of the Hall-Dawson CASA Board for 16 years, Chris started as Treasurer, and in 2021 and 2022, he served as Board

Chair during some challenging times. He is well-known in the Gainesville community as an audit and accounting professional, but his dedication to his family is what truly defines him.

Chris is an excellent communicator who thinks logically and in an organized manner. He sets a positive example for others to follow. As Treasurer and Chair, he worked tirelessly to support the growth of Hall-Dawson CASA. When Chris took over as Board

Chair, Hall-Dawson CASA was undergoing many changes, and Chris led beautifully through the challenging days of the pandemic. Chris was the perfect leader to ensure continuity and that needed changes were implemented successfully.

Chris' exceptional contributions and unwavering dedication make him a model board member and very deserving of the Georgia CASA Board Member Leadership Award.

2023 CASA Volunteer of the Year: Dian Hatfield



Dian Hatfield has been a CASA Volunteer for almost 22 years. She was originally sworn

in as a volunteer in Austin, Texas in 2001 where she was appointed to approximately eight cases before moving to Georgia. She was sworn in with Hall-Dawson CASA in 2013 and has served 38 children and 22 cases with our program. Dian is a dedicated volunteer who frequently thinks outside of the box when trying to find solutions for the children she serves. She

learns about the children's needs and collaborates with DFCS, school staff, doctors, therapists and other treatment providers. She enjoys the ability to be creative and collaborative with them. Dian exhibits a persistence when faced with complex issues that sets her apart from other CASA Volunteers. Dian also volunteers weekly in the Clothing and Toy (CAT) Center.

We are grateful to Dian for her commitment to the children she serves, and for her willingness to share the CASA story throughout our community.

“Ms. Hatfield's long-term dedication to her cases shows in her thoroughness. She has worked on a variety of different types of cases with different permanency outcomes. Of particular note, she has worked hard to maintain children's placement with family members while working delicately to address concerns about the family dynamics within the household before the children reached permanency and no longer had court involvement.”

–Alison Toller, Chief Judge, Juvenile Court

Child Success Stories



Lifelong Relationships

The impact a CASA Volunteer makes on a child is vital throughout the life of the case. Often the relationship continues long after the case closes. CASA Volunteer Cathy V. recently received calls from (now adult) children she served, whose cases both closed more than five years ago. One of the girls was asking for Cathy's guidance on receiving funding for college. The other was simply wanting to share that she now has a relationship with her Dad, which she had never had before. It meant a great deal to Cathy that both girls remembered her, reached out for help, and had good news to share.

Consistent Connections

Jasmine, raised by her aunt since her mother passed away during infancy, was removed from the aunt's home and placed in foster care. The barriers to her return to the aunt's custody were too great to overcome. The CASA Volunteer quickly jumped in and identified an adult cousin who ultimately became Jasmine's legal guardian. Finding this solution enabled Jasmine to remain with family, and to find permanency in surroundings that were familiar and comfortable for her.



“ *CASA had a big impact on my life, I don't think I would be here today if it wasn't for my CASA. She went above and beyond for my child and me. Even after she moved out of state, she still made it to her scheduled visits to see us.”*

– Mom, seeking reunification

Advocacy in Action

We are pleased to share our 2023 statistics. We are reminded that these are not just numbers on a page, but they represent children, families and hope for a bright future. They represent CASA Volunteers who have chosen to make child advocacy a priority – to advocate for the best interest of a child – in the Juvenile Courtroom, in the schools and in the community.



52

Reunified with their families



29

Adopted into a forever family



20

Placed in the legal guardianship



13

Remained with parent while receiving services

114

children who experienced Juvenile Court intervention because of abuse or neglect achieved permanency in 2023.



95%

of children whose cases closed in 2023 had the same CASA from start to finish

CASA's Reach in 2023

86%

of children whose cases closed in 2023 achieved permanency



10

paid staff

102

volunteers providing advocacy services

350

children in the Hall and Dawson counties child welfare system

“

Simply put, ‘permanency’ means family. It means having positive, healthy, nurturing relationships with adults who provide emotional, financial, moral, educational and other kinds of supports as youth mature into adults. Ideally, permanency takes the form of a relationship that has a legal component that provides a parent-child relationship. Older youth, regardless of age, need and deserve to be connected to a permanent family and support system that both lifts them up and cushions them if they fall.”

– Juvenile Law Center, jlc.org

“

We give because CASA makes sure that kids in foster care receive the protection and services they need and deserve. Many years ago, before CASA existed in our community, we adopted our three children through DFCS. We were the 7th home for these three young kids, and their backgrounds were heartbreaking. There is no doubt that their journey would have been very different if they had a CASA Volunteer.”

– Bob Swoszowski

2023 DONORS

Hall-Dawson CASA is pleased to recognize those whose support enables the work of advocating for children experiencing foster care in Hall and Dawson counties. Every effort is made to accurately reflect donor name and contribution between January 1 – December 31, 2023. Please contact us at 770-531-1964 to make us aware of any inaccuracies.

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* at the North GA Community Foundation

Our Grantors

Scan here to watch a special message from our supporters.



In Honor & In Memory

Memorial and honorarium gifts are listed in alphabetical order by the name of the honoree. Donors are listed after the name of the person in whose honor they contributed.

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Jeff Jenkins

Teri Southworth

Robbie Swenson

Kelly Anderson

John and Stephanie Copeland

Linda Verrigni

Mike and Tracy Verrigni

Linda Williams

Mike Berg

Farewell to Janet Walden

Hall-Dawson CASA donors, staff, volunteers, board members and supporters gathered to bid “farewell” to Executive Director Janet Walden as we celebrated the impact she has made on CASA since she joined us in 2017. Janet is a visionary who developed and increased funding sources as well as expanded the staff in order to effectively and efficiently advocate for our community’s most vulnerable children. Janet led the organization through the uncertainty of the pandemic and ensured children experiencing foster care continued to have an advocate to stand in the gap between their challenging present and promising future. **We are grateful for Janet’s years of leadership of Hall-Dawson CASA and wish her well on her journey!**



Janet and John Walden

Women Working Wonders



Women Working Wonders (WWW) is a group of women who supports the children CASA serves, and helps share the CASA story throughout our community. Members pay annual dues of \$100.00 to join WWW. Unlike donations that go to support the operations of CASA, these dues help fill the gap for kids where there are no other resources. Examples include tutoring and tablets, fees for camps and sports, and beds to provide adequate sleeping arrangements. WWW also funds appreciation gifts for our CASA Volunteers who do the hard work of advocating for our kids, all at their own expense.

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Blair Diaz	Starlet Jones	Teri Briskman Miller	Cathey C. Sexton	
Tamila Dover	Beth Kaufman	Barb Mistarz	Amy J. Smith	

To learn more or to join WWW,
call 770-531-1964 or **scan the code.**



Community Supports CAT Center

Our Clothing and Toy (CAT) Center is a resource for our CASA Volunteers, DFCS partners and foster families to fill needs for children they are serving, and is located in the basement of The Little House. Community members, business partners and civic groups donate new toys, diapers, gently used clothing and kid-friendly furniture throughout the year. School supplies are collected and distributed before school begins in August, and toys at Christmas are available for CASA Volunteers to drop by and “shop” for their kids. This past year, 150 of the kids we served got the school supplies they needed, setting them up for a successful school year. Toys and gifts were provided for 172 kids ranging in age from infants to college students.

These are the “extras” that are important for our kids to have during a chaotic time in their lives. We are grateful that, in addition to the vital advocacy we provide, these needs are met by our generous community.



The Giving Tree

Each year in early December, our community gathers around The Giving Tree at The Little House, providing a unique opportunity to honor friends and family through a tribute gift. The \$10,000 raised in 2023 will help provide for maintenance and upkeep of The Little House, home of Hall-Dawson CASA & Edmondson Telford Child Advocacy Center (ETCAC). This support is vital to our operations, and we are grateful to those who made the choice to partner with us through a gift or sponsorship.

Thanks to our Sponsors!

Sam Couvillon, Mayor of Gainesville
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 Gainesville First United Methodist Church
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 Hasty Pope
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 New Leaf Landscape Services
 S&S Trucking
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Child Success Stories



Reunifying Families

Often a major barrier to kids reunifying with their biological parents is the inability to provide adequate housing. In 2023, 157 of the kids we served had inadequate housing. CASA Volunteers regularly help parents identify resources to overcome this barrier. From roof repairs to finding adequate bedding, CASA Volunteers support families in the very practical ways that are pivotal in achieving permanency.

Comforting Through Consistency

A young girl we served had experienced horrific trauma in her life. As a result, she had displayed behaviors that made finding a consistent placement difficult. She was moved to several different foster homes in a brief time. Her CASA Volunteer, Sherry T., was diligently trying to keep up with this child's transitions and was having a difficult time getting in touch with the most recent foster family. Sherry T., being a tenacious CASA, was able to locate this young girl. When she arrived to visit, the girl looked at her with relief and a smile, and said, "I knew you would find me."

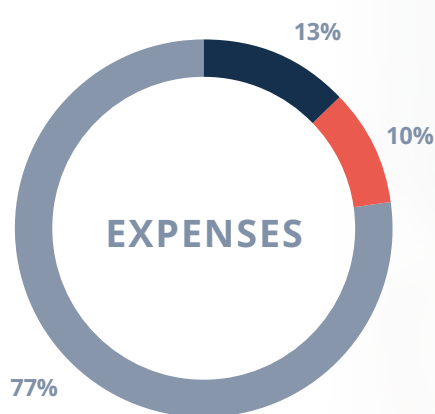


“ *I love CASA because children deserve somebody in their corner who is looking out for their needs and significantly impacting the health and stability of their family.”*

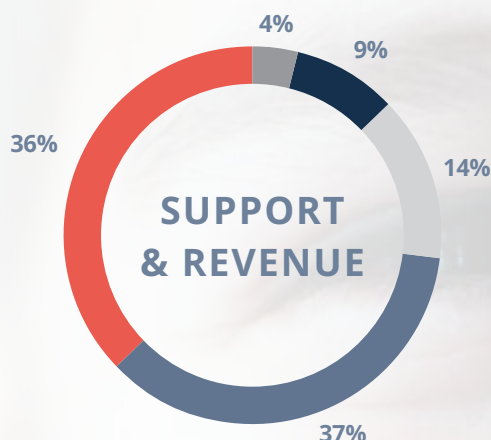
–Tina P., CASA Volunteer

2023 Financials

The condensed statement of activities is reflective of the fiscal year ending December 2023. Hall-Dawson CASA prides itself on prudent financial practices, diversity of funding sources and the highest level of transparency. Our funding uses are reflective of all costs to operate our programs and include recruiting, training and empowering CASA Volunteers who make a meaningful impact in the lives of the children and families we serve.



- Direct Services
- Fundraising
- General Operating



- Federal and State Grants
- Local Grants
- Foundations
- Corporate and Individual Giving
- In-kind Program Support

TOTAL EXPENSES

\$1,060,446

TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE

\$1,121,904

5,446 Total volunteer hours given

58,329 Total volunteer miles driven

\$320,521 Financial Impact for community*

Published numbers are based on our preliminary audit. Full financial statements provided upon request.

A complete copy of the audited financial statements is available at www.halldawsoncasa.org.

**When a CASA Volunteer is unavailable, Hall and Dawson counties incur these costs.*

HALL-DAWSON CASA
P.O. Box 907471
Gainesville, GA 30501

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CASA is vital to our Juvenile Court Dependency proceedings. Often what a child wants and what is in their best interest does not align. Therefore, we rely on CASA Volunteers to give us the full picture of what is best for the child. CASA Volunteers are often able to obtain more information from children and parents than what is seen on the surface. Additionally, their gathering of information from schools, medical professionals, and others help give us so much more information that helps us make sure all of the children's needs are being met and that they are on track for reaching permanency.

Our CASA Volunteers also offer support and encouragement to parents who are working towards reunification and make lifelong connections with children. They are often the only “constant” for a family in a system that sees frequent turnover in DFCS Case managers and sometimes judges and attorneys.”

– Alison Toller, Chief Juvenile Court Judge



HALL-DAWSON CASA

603 Washington Street SW
P.O. Box 907471
Gainesville, GA 30501

Scan here for more info
or call 770-531-1964.



www.halldawsoncasa.org