



# ANNUAL REPORT 2019



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

SAVANNAH/CHATHAM COUNTY





## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR


Over the last 18 months that I've served as board chair, Savannah/Chatham CASA has experienced significant transition and growth. When the previous executive director left mid-2018, our committed staff worked diligently to manage the operations while our board of directors selected the new executive director, Kate Blair.

In 2019, our board of directors and staff were re-energized – determined to take the organization to the next level. This energy resulted in the highest grant funding and individual giving that the organization has experienced in many years.

As the funding increased, two additional advocacy coordinators were added to oversee new volunteers as well as a staff member dedicated to recruitment and training. In 2019, we trained a record number of 64 new volunteers who will in turn advocate for hundreds more children. We are now equipped with 122 CASA volunteers, which is a 50 percent increase from 2018.

In the Fall, our CASA staff moved to new offices in the DFCS building. This has helped to strengthen our relationship with DFCS staff which improved communication tremendously. The staff actively looks for ways to support and appreciate caseworkers to ensure that they can focus on the most important aspects of their jobs – achieving permanency for the children.

This year has been an exciting year for Savannah/Chatham CASA. But it is only the beginning. With our larger staff, we are able to manage 135 volunteers who have the potential to serve upwards of 350 children in foster care. We finished the year serving 282 children, an 11 percent increase from 2018. Currently, we serve 54 percent of the children in foster care and we aim to serve 100 percent by the end of 2021.

  
Jerry Rooney  
President, Chatham Steel

## 2019 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Prejea'n Andrews, New York Life Insurance  
Faith Buchanan, Hancock Askew  
Kate Bailey, Savannah Country Day School  
Chris Collins (Treasurer), Wet Willies  
Megan Dulamal, Thomas & Hutton  
Holly Holdsworth, Chatham County Parks & Recreation  
Dr. Jacobium Holliman, Holliman Educational Agency  
Antwan Lang, Chatham County Board of Elections  
Kathy Ledvina, Preservation Associates  
Terry Lemmons, Workplace Advisory Services  
Debra Powell, Retired Nurse  
Penny Rafferty (Secretary), Penny Rafferty Realty  
Rodney Rawls, Rawls Realty  
Courtney Reich (Vice Chair), GMC  
Jerry Rooney (Chair), Chatham Steel  
Carson Wilson

### Ex-Officio Members:

Honorable LeRoy Burke, III  
Honorable Lisa G. Colbert  
Honorable Thomas Cole  
Tom Hassett, CASA Volunteer  
Yolanda Parker, Chatham County DFCS



## 2019 CASA STAFF

Kate Blair, Executive Director  
Eric Hornfeld, Community Engagement Coordinator  
Trish Humphrey, Development Coordinator (until 11/2019)  
Saveion 'RJ' Jackson, Administrative Assistant  
Mandy Roberts, Advocacy Program Manager  
Susan Ryncavage, Advocacy Coordinator  
Maggie Smith, Advocacy Coordinator  
Momilani Williams, Advocacy Coordinator (until 9/2019)  
Kayla Williams, Communications & Development Coordinator  
Michael Wilson, Administrative Assistant  
Tim Wright, Advocacy Coordinator  
Savannah Meyer, Summer Intern  
Makala Owens, Fall Intern  
Kamaria Roberts, Fall Intern



## WHY CASA?

*Court Appointed Special Advocates* are volunteers appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. They stay with each case until it is closed and the child is in a safe, permanent home.

Volunteers work with legal and child welfare professionals, educators, and service providers to ensure that judges have all the information they need to make the most well-informed decisions for each child.

Our best-interest advocacy is driven by the guiding principle that children grow and develop best with their family of origin, if that can be safely achieved. Most of the children we work with are in foster care, but some are with their family of origin. And, most children who leave foster care do so to return to their family.

## OUR IMPACT

*Carolyn*, was appointed as a CASA to 'John', a young man who was shuffled from foster placement to foster placement. Carolyn advocated for a better long-term placement and at last, he was put in a great placement where he was thriving in nearly all areas except at school. When Carolyn asked him what was going on there, he shared that it was boring because he was taking all the same classes over again and he wasn't learning anything new. So Carolyn tracked down all his past transcripts and shared them with his new school. With this information, the school was able to promote him to the correct classes. As a result, John graduated from high school on time. Because of Carolyn's advocacy, John didn't get lost in the shuffle of the system. Her perseverance ensured that John got the education that he deserved.

*"You are the only person* that I feel like I can talk to and trust." said 'Sarah' to her CASA volunteer Marly. Sarah and her siblings experienced severe neglect which resulted in developmental delays. Building trust with children who have experienced such trauma is not easy. But Marly was up for the challenge. Sarah believed Marly when she said she was there to help so she confided that she missed her two older siblings that she doesn't get to see. Marly had never seen anything in her file about older siblings and Sarah didn't know where they lived. When she learned that the siblings had developmental disabilities and were placed in adult protective services to ensure their needs were met, she started making phone calls. Eventually she was able to track them down and advocate for regular visitation to preserve their sibling bond. Marly understood that providing for the physical needs of the child is not enough, our children deserve to retain any possible family connections. Marly ensured that this sibling group of five had a future where they could grow and heal together.

*Amy's* first case was 'Laura', a child who would soon be reunified with her parents. Due to the nature of the reunification, one of the judges felt it was in the best interests to assign a CASA volunteer to ensure a smooth and successful transition back home. Before coming into foster care, Laura missed an overwhelming amount of school. It was a difficult transition back into school but Laura was now thriving in the neighborhood school by her foster family. Laura did not want to change to her parents' neighborhood school when she returned home because it was her deceased sister's school. The sight of it reminded her of a very traumatic time in her life. So Amy advocated within the school system to secure administrative placement so Laura would not have to change schools. Amy also connected the family with resources to ensure they could transport Laura to and from school and assisted Laura's mother in accessing the educational resources that Laura needs to continue to be successful in school.



## DFCS PARTNERSHIP

In 2019, Savannah/Chatham CASA prioritized improving our relationship with the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). This is an important relationship as we rely on caseworkers to share timely information with CASA. Here are some of the ways we are working to improve the relationship:

- Partner Appreciation Day - free cookies!
- Summer Bash at the DFCS Building
- Utilizing volunteers to sit with children at DFCS office when caseworkers are looking for placements
- Coordinate and deliver Christmas gifts to foster children
- Assist with case research
- Caseworker of the Month
- Prizes for DFCS staff events
- Invitations to Volunteer Appreciation events
- Working with volunteers to ensure they understand the pressures on caseworkers - patience is key!

## CASEWORKER OF THE MONTH

In June, we decided DFCS staff needed a little love for all the amazing work they do. So each month, Savannah/Chatham CASA celebrates a DFCS caseworker or supervisor. They get an appreciation card and a small gift card for a bit of pampering.

- June - Nekesha Larkin
- July - Kayla Harsch
- August - Cyrus Hansberry
- September - Lenaida Green
- October - Melody Scott
- November - Montrenice Austin
- December - Blair Beasley



## JUVENILE COURT PARTNERSHIP

Savannah/Chatham CASA partners closely with the Chatham County Juvenile Court.

- Provide additional advocacy to Family Treatment Court
- Participate in quarterly stakeholder meetings
- Participate in truancy stakeholder meetings
- Attend MD CANI- a court improvement initiative
- Create and maintain a kids play area
- Meet regularly with judges



JUDGE COLE



JUDGE COLBERT

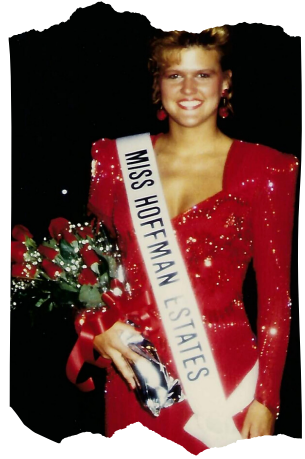


JUDGE BURKE

## VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

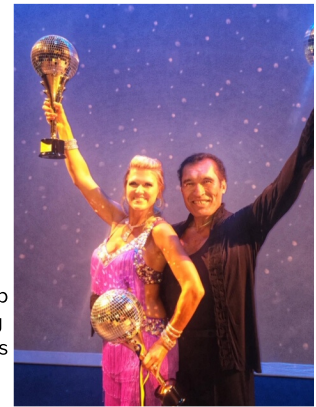
*Twenty years ago,* Kelly Kommel was competing in the Miss Illinois pageant with a platform focused on child advocacy when she stumbled upon CASA in her research. The mission of the program resonated with her and she soon became a CASA volunteer in Chicago. After her career took her different directions and to a new state, her heart called her back two and a half years ago to our CASA.

Kelly will never forget her first case in Savannah. She was assigned to a family participating in Family Treatment Court (FTC) which is a special accountability court program designed to break the cycle of abuse and neglect by addressing a parent's substance use disorder through monitored service delivery and ongoing, expedited planning. The mother in her first case had an addictive disorder but no shortage of love for her children. Kelly supported the children and cheered on the mother as she made every effort to heal from her trauma, receive treatment for her disorder, and utilize the resources to restore her family. While in the program, CASA volunteers like Kelly and staff from the court, DFCS, and community partners work together to ensure the children receive the support and love they need while their parents recover and learn to parent sober. FTC graduations are heartwarming events to celebrate the parents who did what they once feared was impossible – heal and thrive. As parents graduate, their newly cultivated self-worth is apparent and their confidence is growing. Kelly's heart beams with pride whenever she sees that mother around town – she is still thriving.



Kelly's experience with CASA has helped her to build her own confidence as well. When she first began as a volunteer, she was nervous to speak up in court – fearing that she didn't have much to offer. Over time, she has seen that her perspective is unique and valued. She now shares in court without fear or nervousness. This confidence has helped her to speak up when there were times parents could not complete the recovery process and it was in the best interests to permanently remove the child from their care. But she became a CASA volunteer because she has a "deep passion to help children grow and prosper." So, in the end, she focuses on the child and fights for their future.

Being a CASA volunteer isn't easy, but it is rewarding. As a volunteer, Kelly has seen firsthand the impact she has made on children and families during their most difficult moments. Savannah/Chatham CASA is thankful for Kelly Kommel and the many volunteers like her who give their time, energy, and love to our community's most vulnerable children.



*Thank you, Kelly, for changing a child's story.*

Kelly won best dancer and top fundraiser at the 2018 Dancing with Savannah Stars

## IN LOVING MEMORY OF JOANIE BACZYNSKI

This year, we lost a very dear CASA volunteer, Joanie Baczynski. Her nonprofit and healthcare experience were so valuable to our organization. Her warmth and wisdom brought so much to the staff and other volunteers.

Joanie was an advocate for three separate sibling groups (7 total children.) Her first case ended in reunification several years ago. Her second and third cases ended in adoption around the time of Joanie's passing. Her legacy as a CASA volunteer will always live in the stories of those children.



# 2019 VOLUNTEERS \*with active cases in 2019



Pria Abraham  
 Karen Allen  
 Ellen Atkins  
 Victoria Avant  
 Joan Baczynski  
 Christina Barney-DiCianno  
 Lorri Beassie  
 Karen Beckley  
 Jamera Bigby  
 Oliver Braun  
 Megan Breese  
 Danielle Breidung  
 Leslie Bryant  
 Ashton Burton  
 Khalilah Canada  
 Carolyn Childers  
 Simone Clarke  
 Timothy Clemm  
 Pam Cole-Grimes  
 Megan Collier  
 Terry Danhof  
 Debra DeMito  
 Jackie Dixon  
 Omelia Donahoo  
 Courvoisier Dorsey  
 Dorinda Duggan  
 Jasmine Early  
 Heather Ebanks  
 Cole Eberle  
 Richard Ellison Sr.  
 Danielle Ellison  
 Amanda England  
 Alexandria Feal  
 Beverly Flanagan

Becky Fox  
 Desharon Frazier  
 April Gainey  
 Howard Gaynor  
 Carol Gerrin  
 Daniel Grabher  
 Laura Graves  
 Katie Griffith  
 Mike Habib  
 Yvonne Hafer  
 Destiny Hallett  
 Lori Harris  
 Tom Hassett  
 Crystal Hintz  
 Sarah Holbach  
 Lucille Jackson  
 Susan Jenkins  
 Christy Johnson  
 Linda Johnson  
 Mary Jones  
 Vernon Jones  
 Shelley Kaplan  
 Michele Karnes  
 Mary Ellen Kearney  
 Megan King  
 Ann Knight  
 Kelly Kommel  
 Jane Levy  
 Sharia Lonon  
 Shenika Lovewine  
 Teresa MacBride  
 Candace Marshall  
 Jessica Martin  
 Jennifer McCarthy  
 Kari McDonald  
 Amanda Meyer  
 Skye Mills  
 Ashley Miracle  
 Montisha Montgomery  
 Judy Moreno  
 Deborah Morse  
 LeAnne Myers  
 Hannah Neal  
 Michelle Nelson  
 Adrian Nottage

Eula Parker  
 Sandra Poole  
 Gamuchirai Postell  
 Amy Potter  
 Lucy Rau  
 Queen Reeves  
 Tatyana Reeves  
 Valerie Reeves  
 Denise Ritter  
 Geneva Roberts  
 Cheryl Rogers  
 Mary Rooney  
 Lorrie Rumpel  
 Billie Jean Sanders  
 Christi Sayyar  
 Carolyn Schoenwald  
 Tanya Scott  
 Melissa Sharp  
 Lorraine Sheppard  
 Marly Shuman  
 Wendi Sparks  
 Connie Strunk  
 Julie Sywassink  
 Teorna Thomas  
 Brandy Trappio  
 Casey Tuggle  
 Bet Walker  
 Dale Wallace  
 Anna Walton  
 Ann Waltz  
 Gabriell Washington  
 Shell Washington  
 William West  
 Karen White  
 Alicia Wilson





## BY THE NUMBERS

# 274

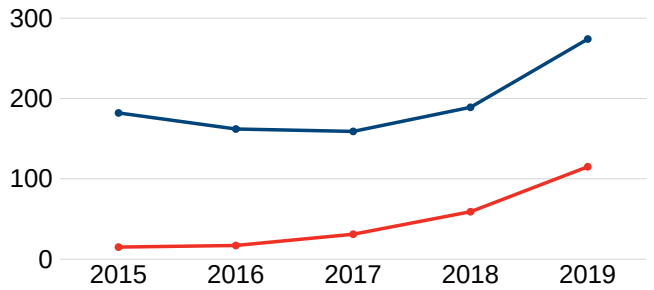
## CHILDREN SERVED

In 2019, CASA volunteers served 274 children.

72 cases were closed. Of those cases:

- 55% were reunified with their parent(s)
- 28% were adopted
- 13% received guardianship
- 4% turned 18 without permanency

## FIVE-YEAR OVERVIEW



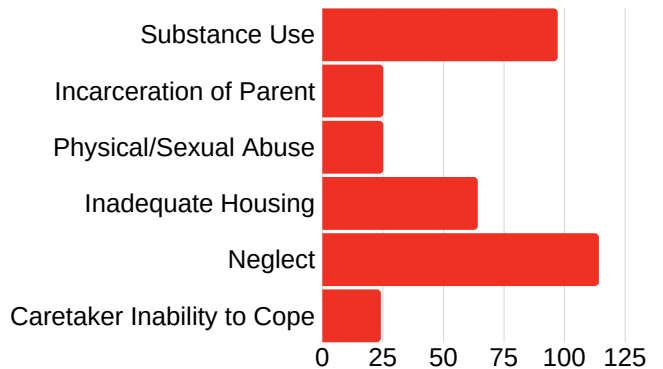
■ Children Served ■ Assigned Volunteers

## CURRENTLY SERVING

# 56% OF CHILDREN IN CARE

GOAL OF 100% BY END OF 2021

## REASONS FOR ENTERING FOSTER CARE IN 2019





# 122

## ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

### VOLUNTEER DEMOGRAPHICS

**Race/Ethnicity**

African American/Black - 35%  
 Hispanic - 1%  
 Multi-racial - 3%  
 White - 60%

**Education**

High School - 12%  
 Associates - 7%  
 Bachelors - 43%  
 Post Graduate - 28%

**Employment**

Full-time - 60%  
 Retired/Not employed - 27%  
 Student - 1%  
 Part-time - 10%

**Gender**

Male - 10%  
 Female - 90%

**Age**

21-39 - 39%  
 40-59 - 34%  
 60+ - 27%



# 76%

## VOLUNTEER RETENTION

In 2019, 14 volunteers were discharged. The primary reasons cited for ending volunteer service were moving to another city or a career change.

# 43,839

## MILES DRIVEN

In 2019, CASA volunteers drove all over the state to visit their children. Unfortunately, many of our Chatham County children are placed in other counties which requires significant travel for our volunteers.



# 64

## NEW VOLUNTEERS

In 2019, we swore in 64 new volunteers which allows for us to serve more children in 2020.

# 4,487

## HOURS VOLUNTEERED

In 2019, CASA volunteers documented 4,487 hours of advocacy. This includes time in the courtroom, visiting the child, researching their case, meeting with stakeholders, etc.

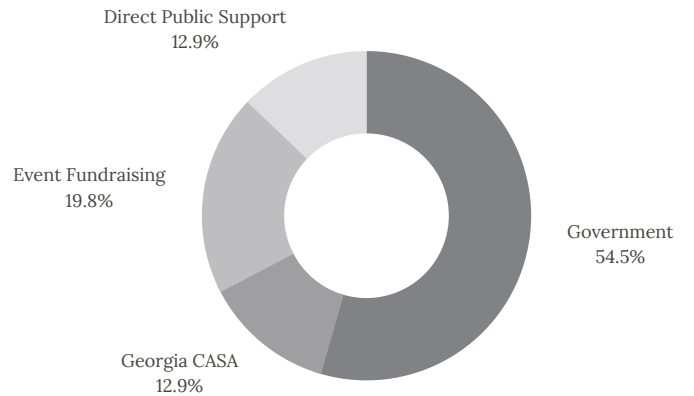


# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

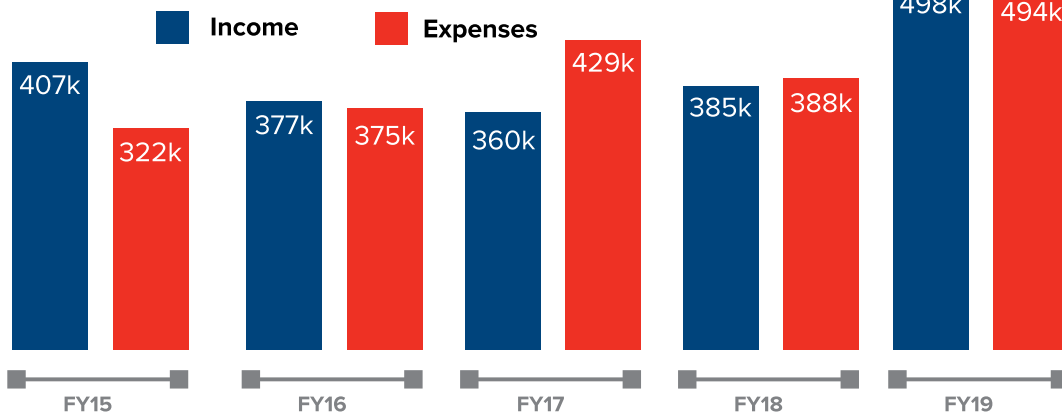
## REVENUE & EXPENSES

	2019	2018
Government Funding	\$301,960	\$214,556
Fundraising Events	\$104,481	\$127,318
Contributions	\$92,108	\$43,2148
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$498,568</b>	<b>\$385,814</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$494,887</b>	<b>\$388,916</b>

## REVENUE BREAKDOWN



## FIVE-YEAR OVERVIEW



# OUR SUPPORTERS

## FRIENDS OF CASA (\$500 OR MORE)

Lucie B. Atkerson  
 Dr. Marc & Kate Bailey  
 Holly Holdsworth & Katie Ban  
 Heidi & Oliver Braun  
 Lawrence Brody  
 Faith Buchanan  
 The Honorable LeRoy Burke III  
 Terry & Theresa Carter  
 Pam Cole-Grimes  
 Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Collins  
 Richard Coomer  
 Erica Deeb  
 Pat Dreher  
 Megan Dulamal  
 John & Stephanie Duttonhaver  
 Jamie Gyke  
 James Wheeler  
 Beth Haberman  
 Johanna Hall  
 Thomas Hassett  
 Amy Hughes  
 Averil & Jeremiah Hull  
 Kari McDonald  
 Glen Montgomery  
 Antwan Lang  
 Dr. Kristin & Dr. Mickey Ott  
 Pranav Patel  
 Joelyn Pirkle, Atty.  
 Penny Rafferty  
 Ms. Courtney Reich  
 Jeanine Roach  
 Susan Roberts  
 Jerry & Mary Rooney  
 Ira Ruby  
 Janet Sinclair-Yon  
 James Wheeler  
 Carson Wilson

## CORPORATE SUPPORTERS

Carter's Pharmacy, Inc.  
 Chatham Steel  
 CitiTrends  
 Coomer, Coomer, Routhier.  
 First Choice Wellness  
 Goodwyn Mills and Caewood  
 Hancock Askew & CO. LLP  
 JC Lewis Foundation, INC.  
 Kinder Morgan  
 Law Office of Wendy A Owens, P.C.  
 Reliance Steel and Aluminum  
 RepowerIT  
 Southern Motors  
 SunTrust Foundation  
 Tapestry Church  
 Thomas And Hutton Engineering CO.  
 Wells Fargo Advisors  
 Wells Fargo Foundation  
 Wet Willies Management Corporation

## HOLIDAY GIFT DONORS

Erica Acker  
 Altria  
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 Beckman Aspey  
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 Chris Brannan  
 Critz Buick GMC  
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 Cancer Institute  
 Diverse Staffing  
 Pamela Everett  
 Freedom Boat Club  
 Georgia Ports Authority  
 Brittany Harte  
 Kacey Headrick  
 Kayla Hendricks  
 Tisha Jacobsma  
 Susan Jenkins  
 The Landings Association  
 Amber Lee  
 Parkway Church of Christ  
 Sarah Patillo  
 Linda Ruby  
 Wendi Sparks  
 Strayer University  
 Melissa Tapley  
 TitleMax Finance  
 Winn Army Community Hospital  
 Brandy Zinn  
 ZTA Alumnae



### Our 2019 Dancing with Savannah Star Participants

Lorrie Rumpel, Wendy Owens, Ashley Richards,  
 Courtney Booker, Dylan Cantrell, Commissioner Jay  
 Jones, CJ Jackson, Amy Hughes, and Dr. Heidi Braun

## MAJOR SUPPORTERS

Bank of America Foundation  
 Criminal Justice Coordinating Council  
 DHS- Promoting Safe & Stable Families  
 The Eichholz Law Firm, P.C.  
 Georgia CASA  
 Savannah Community Foundation's Emerging Leaders Committee  
 United Way of the Coastal Empire

A special thank you to Compassion  
 Christian Church for their assistance  
 with sorting and organizing gifts.





## **OUR MISSION**

Savannah/Chatham County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) recruits and trains volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

## **OUR VISION**

A community where every child who has experienced abuse or neglect is given the opportunity to thrive in a safe and loving home.