



Organization Information

1. Mission of your organization.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Mercer and Burlington Counties' mission is to train and supervise community volunteers, appointed by the Family Court, to advocate for the best interests of children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and/or neglect. For children where reunification is not an option and adoption is unlikely, the advocate remains with the child until he or she ages out of the system at the age of 21.

2. Brief history of your organization, including accomplishments and milestones (Limit answers to 250 words or less.)

CASA is a national volunteer movement that began in 1976 in Seattle. CASA of Mercer & Burlington Counties was established in 2000 and addresses the needs of children removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. Each year, more than 700,000 children experience foster care in this country. According to the NJ Administrative Office of the Courts, over 13,000 children in New Jersey lived in out-of-home placements last year. Over 1,500 children in Mercer and Burlington Counties pass through the foster care system because of abuse, neglect or abandonment each year. In FY17, we were able to serve 152 of the 743 children who were placed out of their homes in Burlington County (NJ Courts). Their cases are brought before a Family Court Judge who need to make critical, life-altering decisions about the children's futures. Family Court Judges need accurate, up-to-date information to make decisions which are in the children's best interests, CASA volunteers are trained and appointed by judges to act only in the child's best interests.

3. Briefly describe what makes your organization unique. (Limit answers to 250 words or less.)

While there are other social service and youth-serving organizations in Burlington County, CASA is the ONLY organization whose sole focus is on securing the best possible outcome for children involved with the foster system.

Because there are not enough CASA volunteers to represent all of the children in care, judges typically assign CASA volunteers to their most difficult cases. CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children, to make sure they are not lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in inappropriate group or foster homes. Volunteers stay with each case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home. For many abused children, their CASA volunteer will be the one constant adult presence in their lives. Independent research has demonstrated that children with a CASA volunteer are substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care and less likely to re-enter care.

4. Briefly describe your organization’s long-term goals or vision. (Limit answers to 250 words or less.)

CASA’s vision is to be a widely recognized, financially self-sustaining organization striving to improve the lives of all Mercer and Burlington County children in out-of-home placement foster care. We are committed to the highest quality of advocacy through trained community volunteers.

CASA is central to fulfilling society's most fundamental obligation by making sure a qualified, compassionate adult will fight for and protect a child's right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to learn and grow in the security of a loving family. Our long-term goals and the focus of this request are to ensure that every eligible child has a CASA.

5. List of board members. Please include board position, professional affiliation and number of years served.

| Name | Position Title | Employer | Start Date |
|--|---|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Betz, Deena Esq. | Attorney | Borger Matez Attorneys at Law | 5/1/2016 |
| Dropcho, Jerry MBA, SPHR, SHRM-SCP | Principal | Dropcho HR Management LLC | 5/1/2015 |
| LaVan, Julie | Attorney | LaVan Law | 7/1/2015 |
| Massi, Jane O | Vice President – Senior Relationship Manager | M & T Bank | 4/1/2016 |
| Patel, Digesh | Director | Mercadian | 6/1/2016 |
| Sheldrick, Robin | Sr. Vice President and Director, Human Resources | Mathematica Policy Research | 7/1/2015 |
| Silverman, Abraham | Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, Regulatory | NRG Energy, Inc. | 4/1/2017 |
| Smith, Marge | Nonprofit Consultant | (Former CEO Princeton YWCA) | 11/1/2011 |
| Vanella, Roseann | President | Advanced Mediation Solutions | 9/1/2013 |
| Zita, Patrizia | Principal | Kaufman Zita Group | Fall 2014 |

6. Percentage of board members who provided contributions to the organization during the last 12 months. 100%

7. Date of the organization’s last strategic plan. May 8, 2017

8. Number of full-time employees. 12

9. Number of part-time employees. 3

10. Number of volunteers. 258

11. In the next 6-12 months, do you foresee any significant changes taking place within the organization? If yes, please provide details. (Limit answers to 250 words or less.) No

Project Information

12. Describe the problem or need that this project will address. Provide specific data or organizational experience to support the problem or need.

At CASA, we work with children who have been abused, neglected, and removed from their families and homes to ensure their safety. The majority of these children come from families who are living in poverty. Parents are often unemployed and struggling to find enough money for housing and food. In many cases, they suffer from substance abuse and mental health issues. With inadequate resources to access help, these families often fall into a vicious cycle where these issues are passed on for generations.

The children often experience a journey of injustices. It is traumatic for them to leave their families and have to adjust to new foster homes, new schools, new neighborhoods and often new towns, in addition to making new friends. They no longer can see their parents and siblings every day. Instead, visits with family members occur weekly or monthly for just one to two hours.

The number of children in out-of-home placements overwhelm court administration staff, as well as the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P). A DCP&P caseworker in Burlington County handles an average of 20 cases (families) at one time and often has more. The turnover rate among caseworkers has been high and consequently, children rarely have the same caseworker during the duration of their out-of-home placement. The overburdened caseworkers find it difficult to find the time to follow through with all of the court orders. Children in Burlington County receive legal representation through Law Guardians, however, there are only seven Law Guardians in Burlington County to serve all children in litigated cases. Thus, the Law Guardians have not actually met many of the children they are representing. The fact that there are staffing problems within DCP&P and the Judicial system often make it difficult for the Family Court Judges to obtain information vital to their decision-making in the cases that come before them. That is where CASA steps in. The judges select which children are assigned a CASA. Because there are not enough advocates for every child, judges appoint their most challenging cases, with the most at-risk children, to us.

Most researchers agree that the underlying causes of child abuse and neglect can be organized around four domains: the child, the family, the community, and the society. Certain child characteristics have been found to increase the risk or potential for maltreatment. Children with disabilities, for example, tend to place more stress on a family; 41% of CASA's current children have a documented disability. Issues within the family, such as substance abuse or a parent having been involved with the foster system themselves, also increase the risk of abuse; 32% of CASA's current children have such documented family issues. In addition, Burlington is one of 6 NJ counties ranked in the top 30 percent for opioid prescription amounts nationally (#3 in NJ). In 2016, at least 83 people died from illicit drug overdoses but in 2017, through June (just the first 6 months of 2017), 82 people have lost their lives to overdoses in the county (Burlington County Prosecutor's Office).

Issues relating to the community and society tend to include poverty, violence, homelessness, unemployment, and in Burlington County, social isolation due to the area's rural nature. Burlington County is New Jersey's largest County. There are 449,284 people living in an 820 square mile area (US Census, 2016 estimates). According to Robert Wood Johnson's County Health Rankings, Burlington ranks 11th for health outcomes (of 21). Negative health issues include higher than NJ averages for deaths due to injury, adult obesity, sexually transmitted diseases. There are economic stressors as well; the average house is worth 29% less than in the rest of New Jersey.

The need cannot be overstated. Compared to other youth in the US, those who age out of foster care (without a permanent home placement) are more likely to not have completed high school or received a GED, they often suffer from mental health problems, many are unemployed and live in poverty, and nearly 40% become homeless: "one out of 4 will be incarcerated within 2 years after leaving the system, over one fifth will become homeless after age 18" and a substantially lower percentage of youth obtain high school degrees as compared to 87% of non-foster youth (Pew Charitable Trust, December 2007).

Children who age out of the system without ever finding a permanent family or home are less likely to be employed than their peers and if they do have employment, few of them have enough money to make ends meet. As a result, many of them need government assistance and are much more likely than their peers to be arrested and convicted of committing a crime (University of Chicago, 2010). As mentioned, their rates of arrest, health problems, and welfare dependency are far higher than those of the population as a whole. For girls, 70% become pregnant by the age of 21 and 10% are incarcerated at least once.

An estimated 45%-65% of children in the foster care system are in severe to critical need of mental health services; a study of 243 foster children ages 4-17 found that more than half of the children had at least a mild impairment in behavioral functioning, and nearly half had moderate or severe impairment (Beliner & Fine, 2001). It was found that the rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among adults who were formerly placed in foster care were up to twice as high as rates of U.S. war veterans. More than half of adults formerly in foster care had clinical levels of at least one mental health problem within the previous 12 months such as depression, social phobia, panic syndrome and anxiety (Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, 2005).

Studies also have shown that foster children have: 1) higher rates of grade retention, 2) higher drop-out rates, 3) lower graduation grades and there exists an achievement gap for children in out-of-home placements. The mobility of children contributes to the significant problem of delayed assessments and lost or delayed records transfer (Advocates for Children of NY, 2000). All of this research points to the essential nature of CASA's services.

These are not the outcomes we want for the children entrusted to our care. Our primary goal is always for each child to be placed into a permanent home. Funds requested will provide a jump start to our growth initiative, which provides a blueprint for a coordinated effort to increase the number of children served in out of home placement foster care in Burlington County by 25% per year by increasing resources and support for advocate recruitment, retention, recognition and supervision. This project is part of a 4-year effort to grow our program by modifying the way we

work. The Peer Coordinator program model was created by the National CASA in consultation with local CASAs across the country. It is directly aligned with our strategic plan; we are currently only serving 22% of eligible children because we are at maximum capacity. Reorganizing our work and transitioning to this evidence-based model will allow us to increase capacity at minimum cost, thereby ensuring sustainability.

13. Approximate number of individuals the organization expects to serve through this project.

This project is meant to be transformative to the entire agency. Our CASA has been serving local children since 2000 yet we are still only serving less than a quarter of those children needing services. Transitioning our volunteer training and recruitment to the Peer Coordinator Model will allow us to implement an aggressive growth plan, which will allow us to serve an additional 25% of the most vulnerable children in our community each year. Impact funding will allow us to implement our growth plan in the most efficient manner possible. An increase of volunteers will result in an immediate increase in our capacity to serve. In FY17, our agency served 352 total children, 152 in Burlington, an 11% increase over FY16. We are approaching the end of FY18 (June 30). Our Burlington County goal for FY19 is to serve 228 children.

14. Provide details regarding the project's implementation, including specific activities to be undertaken and timetable.

To achieve the type of dramatic growth described here, we will intently focus on recruiting new advocates and training them while re-training our existing advocates on how the new model works.

Historically, our service ratio was one Advocate serving 1.6 children while the State average is 2.2 and the National average is 3.1. This misalignment is why we are only serving an average of 22% of our eligible youth. Clearly, we need to grow to meet demand yet besides struggling with recruiting new volunteers, we also struggle with retention. We conducted focus groups last summer and established two county specific Advocate Program Committees of the Board in September and distributed a recruitment and retention survey to our existing Volunteers in October, which was a product of the volunteer committee. We found that improvements in both our initial training (for them and for our Case Supervisors) and ongoing professional development would help with retention. In addition, we have begun implementing the Peer Coordinator model this past fall (2017) as part of our Growth Plan.

The purpose of the peer coordinator model is to increase the amount of children we can serve each year without increasing our personnel costs. The eventual goal is to have each paid staff person each supervise 10 peer coaches. These volunteer peer coaches can in turn each supervise up to 8 advocates, which means that instead of our old model where each staff person directly supervised 30 cases, the peer coaches will allow each staff person to oversee 80 cases with no loss in quality. We currently have 6 peer coaches in Burlington, on our way to an eventual goal of 30. In order to reach that goal, we need to train more advocates and peer coaches. Specific activities to achieve these growth goals are therefore focused on recruitment, training, and retention of volunteers.

The Director of Recruitment and Retention will recruit 75 new volunteers. Volunteer Recruitment efforts will take place throughout the year with an emphasis on African American and males. Case Supervisors will assist with interviews. The Volunteer Recruiter and Office Manager will process all of the paperwork for fingerprinting, sexual abuse registry checks and Child Abuse Registry checks. This effort will be assisted by the Burlington Recruiter, who conducted a volunteer recruitment survey. The survey asked volunteers to share faith-based, civic, employment, education and alumni connections for recruiting purposes as well as areas of expertise and influence. The recruiter used the survey results to build a volunteer recruiter matrix to assist in outreach. She, along with the Mercer County recruiter, also created a team of community outreach volunteers (including Advocates) to represent CASA at all events in our two counties.

The Director of Training and Evaluation will ensure that at least 58 of the new recruits complete the full training. The pre-service trainings will take place in June 2018 (day time training in Burlington County), September and October, 2018 (flex training offered in each county), January 2019 (day time training in Mercer County), and again in March and April (flex training in both counties). Pre-Service pre and post training tests will be distributed and evaluation surveys will be distributed after each day of training. The trainer began implementation of the peer coordinator model throughout the agency last Fall.

Once an advocate is sworn in by the judge, that CASA diligently remains focused on the child's needs during his or her time in out-of-home placement and stays with the child until he or she is stabilized and in a permanent home. If a child is reunified with relatives, the advocate remains with the child until reunification is finalized to make sure the child remains stable; if the case plan for the child is adoption, the advocate remains with the child until the adoption is legally finalized, which can take up to 6 months to a year after the child has been living in the adoptive home. For those children where reunification is not an option and adoption is unlikely (due to age or complex health or behavior problems) then the advocate remains with the child until he or she ages out of the system at the age of 21. Specifically, the services a CASA volunteer provides include:

- Review all records and documents related to the child and his or her family;
- Identify child's medical and dental, educational, psychological and social needs;
- Identify and assist in locating specific services, placements, or special services as necessary (e.g., sexual abuse counseling, separation and loss counseling, speech therapy, educational interventions, medical and dental care, tutoring, mentoring, after-school recreational activities, special camps, arranging visits with siblings and parents, medical care of specific disorder, vocational training, college selection counseling, college entrance exam tutoring, independent living skills, housing search after child ages out of the system);
- Make recommendations and referrals for those services or for other resources;
- Facilitate service delivery and monitor parental progress;
- Search out relatives who might be able to provide a safe and permanent home;
- Facilitate and monitor compliance with all court orders;
- Maintain regular and continued contact with the child, the family and all of the persons (e.g., teachers, doctors, therapists) involved in the child's life;

- Advocate for parent/sibling visitation (when appropriate);
- Advocate for child's development of independent living skills;
- Frequently speak with teachers and school staff to understand child's educational needs
- Facilitate educational interventions and accommodations;
- Attend Individualized Education Plan Meetings at School if the child is "classified";
- Write reports to the Judge at the time of Court hearings;
- Make common-sense recommendations based on facts to help the Court determine and expedite the best permanency plan for the child;
- Accompany the child victim in court;
- Attend all court hearings.

15. Describe the anticipated, measureable outcomes your organization seeks to achieve with this project. (Limit answers to 500 words or less.)

Our goal is to grow by 25%/year. Regardless of how many children we serve in a year, the specific measurable objectives we aim to achieve annually are: 1) 100% of our clients will receive a medical and dental assessment; 2) 100% of our clients will have educational performance and grade level assessment; 3) at least 80% of our clients will have educational interventions put into place such as development of an IEP or special tutoring; 4) 94% of all recommendations made by advocates that are heard in court will be accepted by the court; 5) at least 85% of all cases that close will end in permanency.

To achieve 25% growth annually over the next four years, we will increase the number of trained advocates capable of overseeing other volunteers instead of having all volunteers report directly to staff. We will support these new Advocate Leaders by implementing the Peer Coordinator Model. Implementing this nationally validated model will allow us to increase capacity at a minimum cost, thereby ensuring sustainability.

16. Indicate the tools you will use to measure project outcomes. How will you use the resulting data? What will be done if the data shows what you are doing isn't working? (Limit answers to 500 words or less.)

Data collection and program assessment is ongoing. All data collection is contained in Optima, our database. The following evaluation tools will be used to gauge the program effectiveness: 1) Pre-service training evaluation survey distributed to the volunteers, 2) In-service training pre and post tests; 3) Survey for case supervisors to complete evaluating each new volunteer three months after working their first case and annually thereafter; 4) Annual semi-structured interview with Family Court Judge to measure the usefulness of CASA work; and 5) Hold quarterly meetings between caseworkers in local offices and CASA staff to provide feedback on ways to improve our practices.

Quantitative measures on the children's progress will include statistics gleaned from Optima. We will also use statistics provided by the state Administrative Office of the Courts to track the demographic characteristics of the population of children in out-of-home placement and average length of time in placement. Qualitative methods used will include one-to-one conferences with the volunteers and semi-structured, in-depth, personal interviews with key members of groups that are in a position to evaluate the work of CASA volunteers. Finally, both a staff retreat and

Board retreat are conducted annually to review our policies, procedures, and future plans.

Specifically, the following measures will be taken to gauge the program effectiveness:

- Compare demographics of volunteers before and after the grant. (This measures effectiveness of strategically planned recruitment practices.)
- Count number of new volunteers and total number of children served.
- Training evaluation survey distributed to the volunteers after each day of pre-service training and each in-service training.
- Annual Survey distributed to all volunteers every September to measure their perceptions of the value of the program and supervisor effectiveness.
- Annual Survey to DCP&P workers to gauge their perception of CASA and collaborative efforts.
- Annual semi-structured interview with Family Court Judge to measure the usefulness of CASA work and ways we can improve.

We will focus on the following outcome measures:

- Percentage of closed cases which ended in permanency (reunification or adoption);
- Percentage of children whose medical and dental needs are identified, percentage of children who have received medical services/intervention if deemed necessary;
- Percentage of children whose educational needs are identified and percentage who received educational services or interventions that are deemed necessary;
- Percentage of children whose mental health needs are identified and percentage who received mental health interventions if deemed necessary;
- Percentage of children for which recommendations were made for changes in the sibling/parent visitation schedule;
- Percentage of children 14 or older whose independent living skill needs are identified and who have received independent living skills services
- Percentage of recommendations made by the advocates who are heard in court are accepted and turned into court orders.

17. List the steps the organization will take to achieve sustainability of the project beyond the 24-month grant period.

As was mentioned earlier, reorganizing our work and transitioning to this evidence-based model will allow us to increase capacity at minimum cost, thereby ensuring sustainability.

Organizationally, we have continued to diversify our funding sources to measurably increase both individual and corporate donations. In Burlington County this Fall, we will hold our 5th annual comedy event which generated the most income for a Burlington event ever last year. A concerted effort is being made to train the staff and Board to solicit individual donations to sustain our organizational growth; all of these efforts will be enhanced by our Communications and Special Events Director has the time and resources to focus on diversifying our income streams. The Marketing and Communications Committee was developed this year to support increased fund development in addition to the support already provided by the Development Committee.

Specifically, the implementation of the Peer Coordinator Model will enable us to sustain growth by improving retention, which will decrease our reliance on constantly needing to recruit new people. When fully implemented, the Peer Coordinator model will allow each Case Supervisor to supervise 10 Advocate Peer Coordinators who will each supervise 8-10 Advocates for a total of 80 to 100 advocates supervised under one FTE instead of 30 advocates as is the case now.

18. As our name suggests, our grant is all about impact. List 3 significant ways this grant would improve or change your organization's ability to more effectively carry out its core mission going forward. (Limit entire answer to 500 words or less.)

As was mentioned earlier, transitioning to the peer coordinator model will be transformative to our work. Significantly, it will allow us to 1) serve 25% more children/year; 2) relieve strain on DCP&P case workers and judges, who will be able to refer more children to CASA knowing that a trusted adult is looking out for their best interests (743 children were eligible last year in Burlington County, only 152 served); and, 3) reduce budgetary strain by enabling us to serve more children with fewer staff positions. By increasing the number of children we can serve each year, this one-time training expense will have a direct and dramatic impact on Burlington County's most vulnerable children.

19. Describe why now is a particularly significant time for your organization to receive this grant. (Limit entire answer to 500 words or less.)

Now is the ideal time for this grant as we have already begun implementing the peer coordinator model and have feedback from our first peer coaches. That feedback is being used to refine the program as we move forward and has caused us to slightly modify our recruiting practices and dramatically increase the amount and types of trainings we provide to our more experienced Advocates. As a result, we are experiencing less Advocate burn-out and are slowly seeing improvement in our retention numbers among Advocates.

20. List of key staff members involved in project, their job title and role.

Katherine Carmichael, MSED, MSW, LMSW has been the Executive Director of CASA for Children since 2016. Ms. Carmichael has a Master's degree from Columbia University School of Social Work in Advanced Clinical Social Work Practice and a Master's degree from Bank Street Graduate School of Education. As CEO she oversees the entire advocacy program, does direct recruiting for new advocates, works closely with the Board on fundraising activities, and represents CASA at community stakeholder meetings.

The FT Director of Advocate Recruitment, Maureen Tyler, joined CASA in 2018. Mauri has worked with volunteers her entire career. She spent the first part of her career as a Certified Therapeutic Recreational Specialist providing and managing recreation services in health care settings. She pioneered bringing recreation services into hospice care. The next part of her career was devoted to community work as Program Director for the Princeton Senior Resource Center. Mauri holds a BS in Education from Utah State University, as well as graduate work in Therapeutic Recreation from San Francisco State University and Montclair State University. 50% of Maureen's time will be devoted to this Impact project; she reports directly to the ED.

The FT Director of Training and Evaluation, Laura Fitzgerald, Ph.D, is providing additional ongoing training to our staff and advocates, making them feel more supported in their efforts,

reducing our turnover rate, and improving our retention. Laura had been with CASA for over five years as an Advocate Supervisor before being promoted to the Director of Training and Evaluation. Laura is a trained and experienced social service professional with a background in case management, developing and reviewing treatment plans, and preparing court reports. As Director of Training and Evaluation, Laura is responsible for developing, implementing and evaluating advocate pre-service and in-service training as well as staff training. She is implementing a “Graduate Level” series in areas such as Educational Advocacy, Medical Advocacy, Cultural Competency, Mental Health and Fostering Futures Adolescent training. In addition to internal training, Laura informs staff and advocates of relevant external training opportunities. Further, Laura is broadening our training initiatives to include offerings open to the public and community stakeholders such as a monthly speaker series on child welfare topics and an annual conference for volunteers. 50% of Laura’s time will be directed toward this project; she reports directly to the ED.

Project Budget

21. Total project budget amount (including grant from Impact100 SJ). \$169,072.

22. Please list proposed expenses in format indicated below.

| Specific Expense | Additional Details/Breakout | Total |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Personnel | Up to 25% of the ED’s time and 50% of both Laura and Maureen’s time will be spent on implementing the peer coordinator model in Burlington County. | \$129,708 |
| Burlington office space | 100 High Street, Suite 301 in Mt. Holly. Besides office space, advocate trainings are held in our conference room. | \$6,389 |
| Advertisement | Recruitment of volunteers is ongoing. CASA relies on advertisements in print media, radio, and TV spots. | \$5,000 |
| Office supplies & materials | Books, references, local training materials for volunteer advocates and office staff | \$9,500 |
| Printing | Copying of national curriculum materials | \$2,600 |
| Training expenses | Speakers and educators for pre- and in-service trainings | \$10,625 |
| Volunteer expenses | Volunteer recognition and appreciation, screenings, and background checks | \$5,250 |
| TOTAL | | \$169,072.00 |

23. Please list all income for this project, including Impact100SJ Grant as well as any in kind support.

| Funder/Donor | Amount/Value |
|--|---------------------|
| Impact SJ | \$74,000 |
| State of NJ, Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Grant Program | \$95,072 |
| TOTAL | \$169,072.00 |