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## Plan for Growth Takes Root

**A Letter from Nicole  
Stewart, Boston  
CASA's Executive  
Director**



Photo by Sally Rose Photography.

Dear Boston CASA Community,

I know Fall is in the air, and Halloween is on the horizon. Still, I need to skip forward in this letter to Thanksgiving to express my gratitude to Boston CASA's incredible volunteers, generous supporters, and outstanding staff. We can only fulfill our mission thanks to the work of our CASAs and our team, who recruit, train, and support them, and the commitment of our kindhearted donors.

Twelve years ago, Boston CASA became a nonprofit to expand the program through philanthropy. Yet, despite its rapid growth and the life-altering work of our CASA volunteers over the last decade, funding limited it to serving only 15% of eligible children. Every child deserves the opportunity of a CASA. My unwavering commitment to meeting this goal is deeply rooted in my experiences growing up in the foster care system and understanding firsthand how the power of one caring adult can significantly impact a child's life. In 2023, with the support of Community Action Partners (CAP), we began extensive research on scaling the program. CAP's economic modeling showed that Boston CASA could triple the number of children and youth benefiting from the support of a Court Appointed Special Advocate in Suffolk and Middlesex Counties by doubling its budget over five years. In fiscal year 2024, Boston CASA launched its five-year Plan for Growth to achieve this goal.

We ended the fiscal year on September 30th, and I was given another reason to express my gratitude. I am overwhelmed by the generosity of our community, who dug deep and exceeded total giving from last year by over 25%. This increase came from previously unaffiliated foundations making grants, new private and corporate donors providing their support, and most importantly, the continued support of long-time donors like the extended Ganz and Moriarty family, Cummings Foundation, Liberty Mutual Foundation, and Viney Wallach Foundation, who continue year over year to invest in the lives of these often-forgotten children. This allowed us to provide 107 new children this fiscal year with a CASA.

The Plan for Growth received a tremendous boost of momentum with the increased giving over the last fiscal year, but it is about more than just increasing the budget year over year to increase staffing capacity. I must thank my tremendous team that has diligently worked to create an infrastructure for growth. One focus has been on expanded recruitment activities to develop a volunteer pipeline to grow our wonderful CASA ranks. Boston CASA has also assigned Advocate Supervisors to be ambassadors to the family courts of Suffolk and Middlesex Counties. These monthly

visits to the courts improve communications with the judges and probation officers, and the result has been an increase in the appointment of special advocates and the hastening of closing cases that no longer require a CASA. We established a data collection program to generate statistics measuring the positive impact of the work of our CASAs. These metrics will help direct how volunteers are trained and provide hard data to make the case to foundations and corporate donors who prefer measurable impact over anecdotal evidence.

The driver behind increasing the budget is to add staff who can train and support additional Court Appointed Special Advocates to serve more children. The first step will be to hire a Transitional Age Youth (TAY) Coordinator. CAP's research highlighted the need for increased support for our Transitional Age Youth (TAY) between 14-22 years, representing fifty percent of the children we serve, helping them navigate the transition to independence. For most, reunification with their family is not an option, and they must transition from foster care to independence and face a very challenging future. In this newsletter edition, you can read about Boston CASA's Youth Advisory Board (YAB), established in 2022 to equip foster youth aged 16-22 with independent living skills while offering insights to help Boston CASA serve this age group better. The TAY Coordinator will manage TAY cases, oversee the YAB program, and lead our growing data collection efforts.

The final piece of the Plan for Growth is to increase visibility for Boston CASA. The public is often only aware of foster children when one of them falls through the cracks. We need to change this narrative by shining a light on the incredible work of our CASAs, who do so much to help these children prosper. We must make their work widely known, which will help us generate broader and deeper support for Boston CASA. It's a task we can all contribute to, and it's a crucial part of our growth plan.

I am always thankful for the opportunity to lead this great organization and work alongside each stakeholder committed to improving the chances for success for our most vulnerable children. I am grateful for our generous supporters who make tremendous philanthropic investments in the children we serve. The increased financial support is a ringing endorsement of the work of our volunteers and staff and a shared desire to make life better for the children and youth who have been dislocated from their families and placed in foster care through no fault of their own.

Warm regards,

## **The Cummings Foundation Awards \$30,000 in Support of the Youth Advisory Board**

On September 16, Boston CASA received a boost for its Youth Advisory Board (YAB) when they were visited by Dr. Joyya P. Smith and Ms. Georgiana Chevy, two volunteers from the Cummings Foundation who make site visits to the organizations the foundation supports. They had attended a site visit at Boston CASA in July, and they were returning with very exciting news. Dr. Smith and Ms. Chevy had shared their enthusiasm for the importance of the YAB program with the Cummings Foundation Board – especially its potential to become a template for CASA programs nationwide. The Foundation in turn awarded Boston CASA with an additional \$30,000 grant to support YAB.

YAB was established in 2022 to address the unique challenges of Transitional Age Youth (TAY), who are foster youth (ages 14-22) facing independence from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) without the support of a family. Compared to their peers, who are guided to adulthood by parents or guardians, TAY have lower graduation rates from high school, less than 4% graduate with a four-year college degree, and they are far more likely to suffer homelessness, face arrests, and endure substance abuse.

Now in its second year, the YAB program is comprised of five TAY, ages 16-20, selected from an applicant pool of approximately 140 who currently benefit from having a CASA. Being a member of the Youth Advisory Board is a 10-hour commitment each month for the length of the near year-long program. Their efforts as board members include onsite and virtual meetings led by staff from Boston CASA and Small House, a local non-profit that helps youth build their own pathways out of homelessness and successfully transition to independent adulthood on their own terms. Along with learning their rights as foster youth, the members work through a curriculum specifically designed for them that covers life skills like financial literacy, resume writing, public speaking, and leadership. The board members also enhance

Boston CASA's ability to train the special advocates who serve them by defining the specific challenges they face in transitioning to independence. The program concludes with a capstone project each November. This year, as part of the advocacy skills they learn, YAB members will host a conference on the challenges facing TAY for other transitional age youth, CASAs, and community leaders who work with this cohort.

As the YAB program continues to be refined and improved, the plan is to turn it into a pilot program to be replicated by other CASA programs nationwide and build a strong Boston CASA alumni base to strengthen our work. Boston CASA will share its template and curriculum with National CASA so that TAY across the country can benefit from the opportunity that a Youth Advisory Board provides.

Boston CASA has enjoyed the generous support of the Cummings Foundation since 2014. The Foundation has been integral in the organization's ability to grow: from serving 60 children since 2012 to advocating for more than 300 annually. The Youth Advisory Board is being led by Advocate Supervisors Jaylene Tiscareno and Jasmine Bell.



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November 2, 2024

10:00am - 10:30am - Welcome!

10:30 - 11:45am - YAB

Presentations

11:45 - 12:00pm -15-minute break

12:00 - 12:45pm - YAB Panel/Q&A

12:45 - 1:00pm - Forum Close Out

## Virtual Youth Forum

### Hosted by Boston CASA's Youth Advisory Board

Boston CASA's Youth Advisory Board (YAB) will be hosting a virtual Youth Forum on **November 2nd** that aims to provide a platform to amplify the voices and concerns of youth in the foster care system.

Members of YAB will be presenting on a topic of their choosing created from their perspectives and experiences as they navigated and continue navigating the foster care system. The forum's goal is to empower transitional age youth in areas that are meaningful and important to them while simultaneously providing lived realities and experiences directly from youth to CASAs, members of the child welfare system and the community.

[Register Here!](#)

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## **2025 Gala to Introduce the Jack and Marci Williams Philanthropist Award**

At the 13th Annual Transforming Lives Gala on April 17, 2025, Boston CASA will introduce the Jack and Marci Williams Philanthropist Award to honor its long-time philanthropists who have made foster children and Boston CASA a charitable priority. Since 2012, when Suffolk County Family Court incorporated Boston CASA as a nonprofit organization, the Jack and Marci Williams Endowment for Wednesday's Child has been a generous supporter of Boston CASA and the children and youth our special advocates work so closely with. Through the philanthropic support of so many donors, Boston CASA has had significant growth since 2012. This year, the first honorees will be Jack and Marci Williams, and in the future, we look forward to shining a light on others who have made a year-over-year commitment to invest in making life better for these often-forgotten children.





## Congratulations to our newest CASA Cohort!

In September our newest cohort of CASA volunteers finished their 35 hour training program. They spent many hours learning about the child welfare system and child advocacy. The group also heard from current CASA volunteers, attorneys, social workers and professionals in the field.

The CASA staff are excited to see the difference this group will make in the lives of the children we serve.





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