

BOSTON CASA CHRONICLES

Spring 2020 Champions for Children Newsletter

The New Year
Brings New
Leadership and
New Opportunities



Terry Craven joined Boston CASA as its new Executive Director on January 21, 2020. Boston CASA is beyond thrilled to have her expertise and connections to support our growth and help create new opportunities for partnerships. During her first weeks with Boston CASA, Terry helped establish additional targets for referrals for Middlesex County with her former judicial colleagues, which we expect will double our caseload in that county and will help cement the positive start we have had in Middlesex courts. We look forward to working with Terry and can't wait to see the new heights we reach under her leadership.

The new year has also brought a new opportunity for Boston CASA's Transition Age Youth (TAY) Advocacy Program to continue its growth and further define our commitment to serving this population. On January 10, 2020, Boston CASA was officially awarded a \$240,000 grant (\$80,000 for three consecutive years) from Liberty Mutual Foundation to help prevent homelessness among our youth who age out of the child welfare system. We committed to providing additional training to our volunteers who support our TAY youth, creating a cadre of CASAs who are dedicated to supporting the TAY population and serving 40 TAY youth each year. Similarly, we received a grant from National CASA to support our TAY Program with additional training and additional TAY youth referrals. We intend to move forward with these initiatives in the next couple of months so you will hear more information on these efforts shortly. Stay tuned!

CASAS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Boston CASA would like to recognize our volunteers for the work that you all do supporting your kids and families. We understand that this work can be challenging and that sometimes it is hard to push on through obstacles. Boston CASA staff KNOW that you all make a difference in the lives of the children you support even if it is hard to see at times. We share the following stories as a celebration of all of your successes, be they grand or ordinary.

Ø Carla has worked with Victor since June 2019 and they have developed a wonderfully close relationship over the past 7 months or so. Victor is currently living in a group home in Framingham. Carla frequently makes the trip out to Framingham and is often one of Victor's only visitors. The home situation for Victor was tense and uncomfortable for them as their parents are not open to their LGBTQ identity and are having a hard time understanding their mental health struggles (depression, possible borderline personality, self-harming, etc.). Since the first day of her involvement, Carla has been incredibly open and embracing of everything Victor has to offer, even when over the months Victor has gone back and forth between communicating verbally and becoming nonverbal and communicating only through writing. Carla has introduced them to many new activities that relate to their passions: writing club, LGBTQ support groups, and yoga. Victor appreciates Carla's willingness to get to know them for who they are, and always looks forward to spending time with Carla. You can see their face light up whenever Carla is at court with them!

In a letter to the court, Victor put into words the impact that their CASA has had on their life. The letter was lengthy and emotional, but among the incredible things Victor wrote were the following: "...Carla has never rejected me... Carla took me into her arms and has embraced me in a way that I have never known, she has taught me love. Carla is only a volunteer, but somehow she does the work that no one else in my life has. ...Carla is the most important person in my life,... Victor's letter is one of the clearest example of why we do this work and how CASAs can literally be almost life-changing.



CASAS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Ø Eli is 15 years old and has been working with his CASA Annette for the last two and a half years. After being placed into DCF custody, Eli began to struggle with school; the school challenges increased over the first 2 years of Annette's involvement. Eli struggled with attendance, failed to engage in the work, and began acting out behaviorally. The school did not provide any supports despite attempts to identify Eli's needs through clinical and educational assessments. At the start of the 2019-2020 school year Eli started at a new high school. Despite reporting that he was excited about his new school, without the support he needed within the school Eli began to exhibit the same challenging behaviors. Ultimately, Eli was suspended from the school and was reassigned to the alternative school, which offers smaller classes and more appropriate supports.

By working together, the foster mother, CASA and the school principal were able to come up with a plan for supporting Eli.

Eli did not attend the alternative school for the three months following this reassignment. Unbeknownst to his foster mother, he left the house in the morning, but most days did not get to school, and when he did, he would often not go to class. In late January, a staff member reported that Eli told him he was going to get the school in trouble by making a false accusation. At this point the principal asked the foster mother and the CASA to attend a meeting at the school. By working together, the foster mother, CASA and the school principal were able to come up with a plan for supporting Eli. Since the meeting when his foster mother learned of his absences, she has been driving him to school and picking him up. He has not missed school since and has been engaged and in classes for over a month! The principal reported that Eli even went out of his way to give her a fist bump and that he is still eligible to pass his classes and advance to the next grade. The CASA is hopeful that with the support of the team Eli will begin to find success in school for the first time in several years, and that he will resume a path toward graduation.



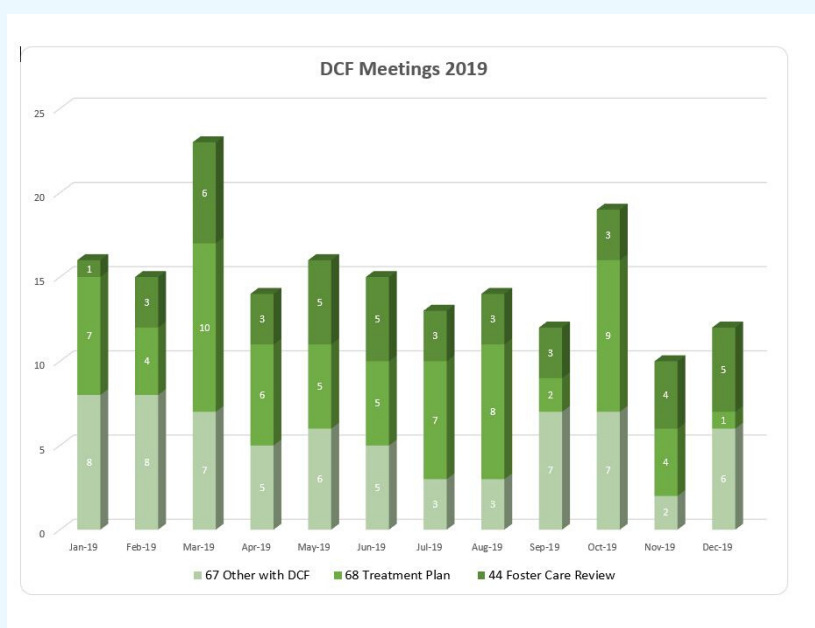
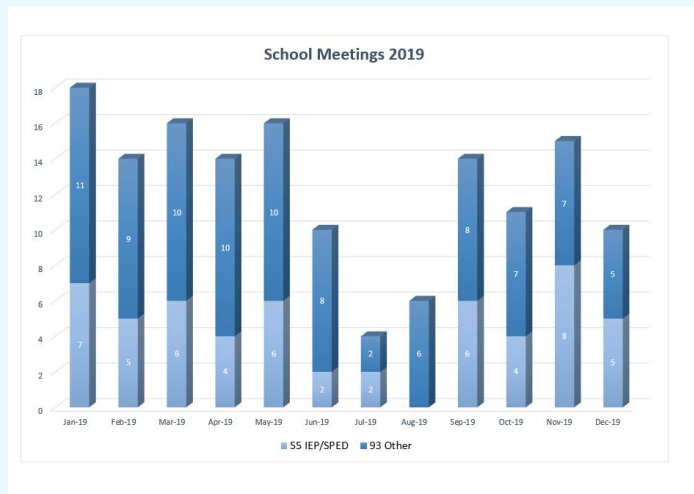
CASAS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Have you ever wondered why Boston CASA sends out the monthly survey to all volunteers?

The graphs below are just one way we use the information volunteers provide. The data we collect is used for multiple purposes: supporting our funding requests, demonstrating our effectiveness and showcasing the amazing work that our volunteers do. As you can see from the data on this page,

all of you are performing critical advocacy that is fundamental to helping our kids succeed. Did you know that in 2019 our CASAs attended 55 IEP or other Special Ed meetings and 93 related school meetings on behalf of our kids? That's 145 in-school meetings to advocate for our kids, which is pretty impressive when you consider that there are only 180 days in the school year. Also, CASAs attended 44 Foster Care Review

meetings, 68 Treatment Plan meetings and 67 related in person meetings with DCF workers. That amounts to 179 meetings with DCF personnel in one year! The information shared and the advocacy that takes place at Foster Care Review meetings and Treatment Plan meetings are essential to shaping our kids' experiences with the child welfare system.



These amazing statistics are based on the responses we receive from our volunteers each month. As you know, we do not get 100% response to our survey requests. Can you imagine how much more amazing our statistics could be if we heard from all volunteers each month? Please help us capture all that you do so that we can create an accurate picture of what we do for funders, state agencies, new volunteers and other community organizations. Fill out those surveys!!

BOSTON CASA UNIVERSITY LAUNCH IS A SUCCESS

We would like to extend a thank you to all of the volunteers who attended our first 2 sessions of the ongoing training program offered through Boston CASA University. Our first session, “Navigating the Child Welfare System,” attended by 15 volunteers and led by Aniza Arias, Response Supervisor with the Lowell office of the Department of Children and Families, offered a more in depth look at the role DCF workers play in the removal and placement of children process, how they engage with families, and their role in supervising parental visits with children. Our most recent session was taught by Boston CASA’s own resident expert (and new ED) Terry Craven. Terry presented, “Decoding the Juvenile Justice System” to 14 volunteers who were treated to stories, tips and tricks regarding Care and Protection cases from Terry’s combined 40+ years of child welfare experience. It was an amazing evening, and we look forward to conducting a similar session for Child Requiring Assistance filings later this year.

Looking ahead, we have several exciting and relevant topics this spring. In March, we are offering “Education Advocacy: Where Do I Begin?,” which will take a deeper dive into the world of IEPs, 504 Plans, the differences between the two, and a question and answer period where participants will have an opportunity to ask case specific questions of our expert. This session will be led by Demerice Pallone, a teacher in Holbrook, MA with an M. Ed focusing on Special Education Studies. April and May will bring a two-part series on mental health. The first session will focus on brain activity at various stages of development and how it can be affected by trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences. The second part will focus specifically on the impact of trauma on personal relationships, need for trauma-informed advocacy and trauma-informed practices.

Any volunteer who has not registered for an upcoming training session can visit the website at bostoncasa.org/casa-volunteer-resources. Don’t miss out!



SPRING TRAINING COMES TO BOSTON CASA

When the calendar turns to March, Boston CASA turns its attention to the Spring training class. We will be holding our annual pre-service (new) volunteer training beginning on April 25, 2020 which will run through May 9, 2020. We are hoping to enlist 35 volunteers for our 35-hour training. Please reach out to anyone you know who might be interested in volunteering and let them know about this upcoming opportunity. We know that our current CASAs are our best recruiters so let's make it happen! You can find more information [here](#).

In addition, as part of our National CASA Mentoring grant, we will be offering a session of "Fostering Futures" on April 4 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm at the Boston CASA office. Fostering Futures is a National CASA program which focuses on improving outcomes for older youth who are preparing to leave the foster care system. The in-person Fostering Futures training was developed to enable CASA/GAL volunteer advocates to effectively:

- Engage and collaborate with older youth
- Guide youth through the possible selves model
- Identify legislation that supports older youth
- Identify resources that can assist older youth
- Explain the benefit of youth attending hearings

Boston CASA program staff will be reaching out to their volunteers to identify those who are appropriate for this training to offer a seat in the program. Because space is limited, preference will be given to those volunteers who have primarily (or are currently) supporting a youth who is over the age of 14. Based on the demand for this program, we will consider offering additional sessions so please do not be discouraged if you are interested but are not offered a seat in the upcoming training session.

Finally, please take note of the upcoming Information Sessions for individuals who are interested in becoming CASA volunteers. The next two sessions will be held on April 7 and May 5 at the Boston CASA office. Please pay special attention to the upcoming Information Session scheduled for May 28, 2020 at 5:30 intended to recruit specifically for our referrals out of the Lowell court. The location will be announced in the next couple of weeks. Please be sure to forward that information to anyone you know who lives in that area who might be interested in becoming a CASA or who could support our recruitment efforts.



SUPPORT OUR MARATHON RUNNERS!

Boston CASA is honored to have Karen McDonnell and Drew Smith run the 2020 Boston Marathon on our behalf!

From now until April 20th they will be training hard and raising funds that allow us to keep up our advocacy for our community's most vulnerable youth and young adults.

Karen McDonnell

Karen resides in Needham with her husband Ryan and their four children Annie, Erin, Joe and Charlie. She is a nurse employed part time in the operating room at Beth Israel Deaconess Needham hospital. She feels so fortunate to have her family, home, and health. At age 21, she was diagnosed with Diabetes and running has been an integral piece of managing the disease. She had never, however, had a real yearning to take on a marathon! CASA has filled her with the inspiration and motivation necessary to reach this new goal and express her gratitude for the stability in her home life and her health with action and not just thoughts and words.



Drew Smith

Drew was a CASA volunteer for 3 years. Having seen the good it can accomplish first hand, he is passionate about growing the program. Drew and his family previously lived in Boston, where he completed a master's degree in medical sciences. He is currently a 4th year medical student at Florida International University and is applying for Otolaryngology residency. In addition to running, he enjoys going to the beach with his wife and two young boys.

SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Boston CASA is fortunate to be connected to many amazing organizations that provide much needed support to our families and to our CASAs. This month we are highlighting an incredible resource in One Can Help. One Can Help is a non-profit organization founded by among others, Anne Bader Martin (current ED), a juvenile court attorney who recognized that there are times when a family needs support more quickly than DCF or a similar large organization can provide.

When our neediest children and parents find themselves in the juvenile court system, they're often without any resources. Finding the support and skills to overcome homelessness, trauma or psychological challenges can seem next to impossible. One Can Help's mission is to address the impact of poverty on children and families in the juvenile court system. Providing the individualized missing resources that are needed can ignite life changing impact for a largely underserved and mostly invisible population.

Boston CASA has partnered with One Can Help to support a number of our families who were experiencing financial hardship. For example, One Can Help was able to provide the funds for a CASA family whose apartment had been involved in a major fire to stay in a hotel for a couple of nights while the mom worked to find suitable emergency housing, and ultimately, a permanent place for her and her 3 young children to live. In the midst of all that this mom had to deal with following a traumatic event such as a fire, knowing that she and her kids could stay in a safe place while she sorted through her options provided much needed peace of mind and space to make good decisions on behalf of her family.

A CASA who identifies an urgent need for a child/family they are supporting should discuss with their advocate supervisor the option of requesting funds from One Can Help. It is important that the CASA work with their Advocate Supervisor to assess the appropriateness of the request and to help shepherd the request through the approval process. CASAs should not apply to One Can Help without discussing the specific request with Boston CASA Program Staff.

Please access the link below to learn more about this fantastic organization.

<https://onecanhelp.org/>

Meeting one child's need.



Moving one family forward.

BOSTON CASA CELEBRATES ITS VOLUNTEERS

We are so grateful for the amazing work of our volunteers. You truly are the heart and soul of this organization! As we turned the calendar to 2020, we recognize the length of service of some of our most steadfast volunteers. We would not be in the position we are in without your support.

Please join me in applauding the following volunteers:

5 Years or More of Service (Classes 2014 and prior)

Tish Allen	Francie Crowley	Karina Noyes
Claire Reilly	Marlowe Farrar	Margie Henderson
Resie Flaherty	Patrice Oppliger	Sally Jenks
Martha Curran	Posy Walton	Cathy Robinowitz

Three or Four Years of Service (Classes in 2015 and 2016)

Jennifer Costa	Molly DiCecca	Anita Splendore	Jenny Fitch
Carol Schraft	Amy Wilson	Karen McLaughlin	Jim Milke
Linda Hannigan	Nancy Pendleton	David Sears	Carol Louik
Sarah Neville	Lena Weiner	Norma Steinberg	Elena Koukina
Megan Moran	Helen Garretson	Barbara Sinisgalli	Diane Shipp



LOOKING FOR ANOTHER WAY TO HELP?

Please consider whether your company might have a matching donation program. Many organizations will match the amount their employees donate to charities or causes they support. If you have or are planning to make a donation to Boston CASA, please check with your corporate benefits department to see if your company offers such a match. It's a simple way to double your impact. In FY20 (October 1, 2019 to date), Boston CASA received \$20,800 in matching corporate donations. Thanks to all for your support. Let's keep it going!

