

BOSTON CASA CHRONICLES

Summer 2020 Champions for Children Newsletter

Black Lives Matter: Boston CASA Stands Against Racism

Boston CASA is committed to providing meaningful education and learning opportunities to our staff and volunteers so that we are better informed, better prepared and better allies to our colleagues and families who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. On June 23, Boston CASA engaged Dr. Liza Talusan, PhD.,

an educator and facilitator for discussion involving diversity, equity and inclusion, to lead a dialogue on Supporting CASA Youth through Dialogues about Race. The session was attended by 35 CASA volunteers and provided meaningful opportunities for participants to examine their own biases, thoughts and feelings as well as practical information on how youth might be experiencing the world at this time to facilitate conversations on racial equity and current events. Thanks to all of our CASAs for joining and to Dr. Talusan for leading the discussion.

In addition, Lauren Sampson, an attorney for Lawyers for Civil Rights and a current Boston CASA board member, along with her colleagues will lead a discussion on implicit bias for CASA volunteers on July 8 at 5:15 p.m. and for Boston CASA staff on July 22. Lauren Sampson and Jake Lebovic of Lawyers for Civil Rights, a racial justice, impact litigation nonprofit in Boston, Massachusetts, will lead a session on learning about the effects of implicit and explicit bias, the way that bias can be expressed in individuals and institutions, and what can be done to identify and eliminate biases in our personal and professional relationships. Please look for the invitation in the coming days.

Boston CASA's mission is to bring a voice to the children and families involved with the child welfare system, who are disproportionately from Black and other marginalized communities, in part as a result of systemic racism. As an organization we are outraged by the murder of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and so many others as a result of police brutality. Every day people from communities of color risk arrest and physical harm as they protest for their right to be treated with the respect and dignity which white Americans take for granted. They are continuing to put themselves in harm's way by serving as essential workers during this global pandemic as a result of unequal access to a livable wage and paid sick time. Boston CASA stands with the organizations and community members taking action to end the systemic injustices borne by communities of color. Boston CASA's message to our Black colleagues, friends, community partners and families we serve is clear: Black Lives Matter. We see you. We hear you. We stand with you.

Boston CASA staff and volunteers:

- Support young adults who may become involved with the juvenile justice system through discriminatory policing tactics or disproportionate discipline in school.
- Fight to increase access to necessary educational supports for children and youth in communities of color.
- Advocate vigorously to reduce the impacts of systemic and generational poverty which restricts access to quality and affordable housing, adequate nutrition and equal educational opportunities.
- Interact with colleagues, community partners, and most importantly, our families, with a social justice lens so that our actions reflect the dignity and respect due all people in America.
- Recognize and call out the systems and practices which combine to perpetuate oppression and structural inequities.

In recognition of the work that remains to be done, Boston CASA staff commits to the following steps to more fully participate in effecting change:

- Provide additional training for staff and volunteers regarding the history, impact of racism and the depths to which it is intentionally built into our society.
- Collaborate with organizations with similar objectives and intent to transition the call for change into action for change across Massachusetts.
- Support legislation that actively dismantles policies that contribute to or sustain racism and oppression.
- Increase the representation of people of color in leadership positions in our organization, on our board of directors and in our volunteer base.
- Stand with Black Lives Matter and other organizations who are actively participating in the fight to end systemic racism.

BOSTON CASA THANKS EVELYNNE SWAGERTY AND WISHES HER THE BEST IN THE FUTURE



As many of you know, Boston CASA has been fortunate to have Evelynne Swagerty as a part-time volunteer for the last 3 years. Evelynne began her tenure with Boston CASA in September of 2017 as part of the Access to Justice Fellow program through the Lawyers Clearinghouse Corporation. Evelynne had recently retired as an attorney with Bank of America, but was interested in working with a non-profit within child welfare to capitalize on her experience as a social worker in the field for a decade prior to attending law school. Despite initially committing to one year (through June 2018), we have been able to convince Evelynne to continue supporting us for the last

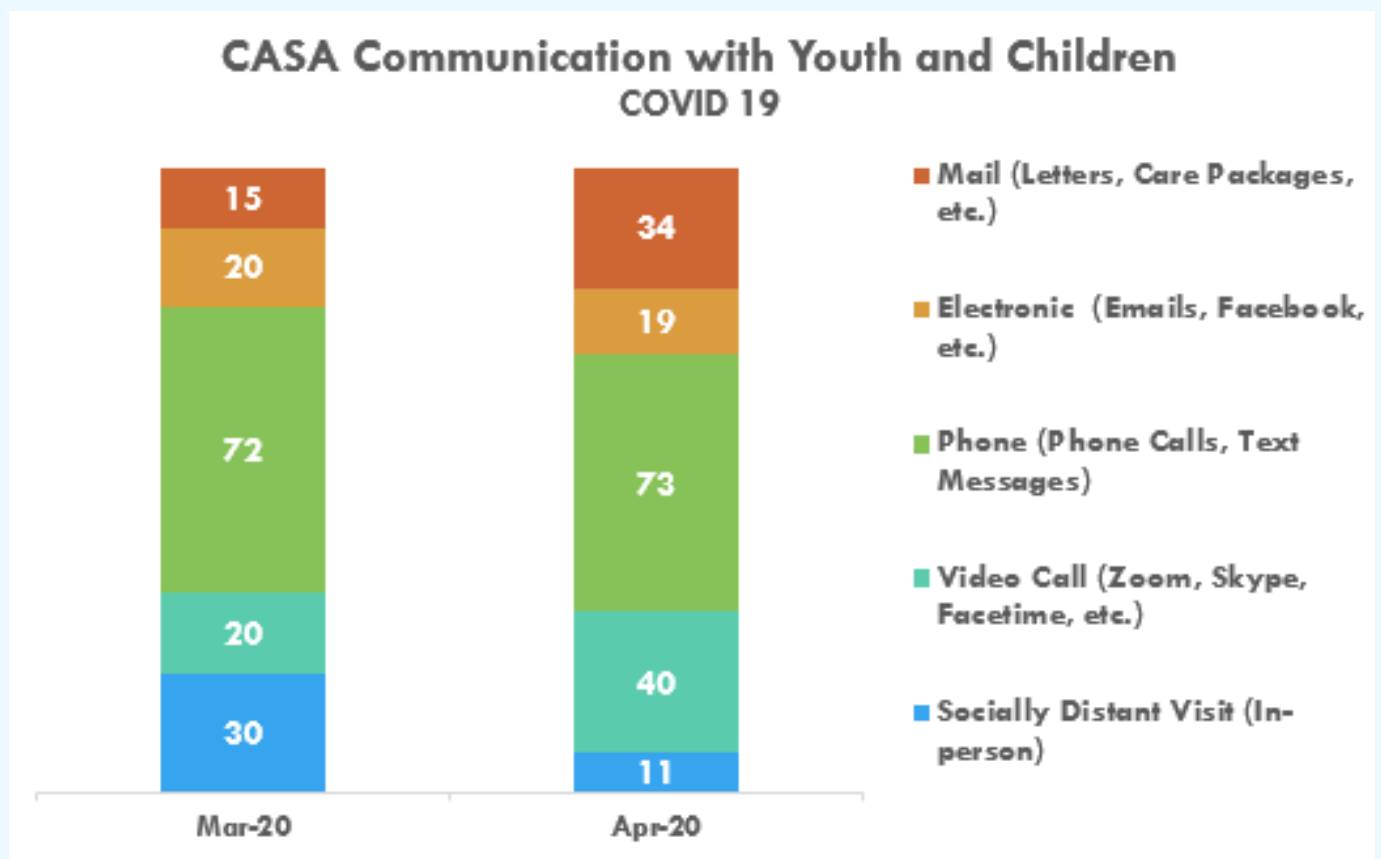
3 years! Sadly, our ability to persuade Evelynne to stay on has come to an end and she will be leaving us at the end of July 2020.

During her time with Boston CASA, Evelynne has been a stalwart in our recruiting and interviewing process. During her first nearly 2 years with us, Evelynne conducted the majority of the recruiting interviews, which resulted in a phenomenal crew of dedicated CASAs who have done amazing things for our CASA families. In addition, Evelynne has carried a supervision caseload of as many as 19 cases and has served them admirably over her 3 years of service. Evelynne stepped in to support the program staff during times when we were understaffed and/or undergoing organizational transition. She has been indispensable in supporting Boston CASA with legal research around Department of Children and Families rules and regulations, federal statutory changes, updates to the Advocate Handbook and our internal Employee Handbook. And last, but by no means least, Evelynne and her husband hosted Boston CASA's annual summer Fun Day at their home on the Cape!

Boston CASA cannot thank Evelynne enough for her volunteer service, her comradery, sense of humor, and willingness to engage in daily battles with our technology. Evelynne, we will miss you and we wish you the best of luck in your well deserved, but delayed retirement! Hopefully, the connection that we have all formed with you over the last 3 years will not end. Thank you!!

BOSTON CASA AND ITS INCREDIBLE VOLUNTEERS CARRY ON THROUGH COVID-19!

Even though the world shifted dramatically almost overnight in March, Boston CASA and our volunteers were able to shift to a new normal fairly seamlessly. The courts closed in mid-March and all in person visits between CASAs and their children and youth ceased as well. Despite these challenging circumstances, CASAs were able to continue to engage with their youth through texting, email, virtual visits (Zoom), and on occasion, a socially distant driveway, window or porch visit. CASAs took creative approaches to stay connected with their kids which provided a much-needed sense of stability and normalcy in a world which otherwise seemed anything but normal.



Please read the following stories about some of the successes our CASAs experienced with their CASA kids and families. We are so grateful for our CASAs' dedication and commitment even during these uncertain and constantly changing circumstances.

Mel and her CASA

One of our fabulous CASAs, Suzanne, has been working with a fourteen-year-old girl named Mel since last July, and has come to be a great support for her. Through the last ten months Mel has run from multiple STARR and Residential programs following her removal from her grandparents' home due to abuse by an uncle living in the home. Mel advocated for a family friend to become a kinship placement which disrupted following a suicide attempt. Mel spent several weeks in a hospital level of care placement, and repeatedly ran from the placement and remained missing for weeks at a time. Mel often responded to Suzanne to let her know she was safe when on the run and consistently connected with her when she came back home or in a placement. During the last visit Suzanne had with Mel in person, Mel asked to print out some pictures from her phone, one of her with her CASA.

Concerningly, Mel ran away from the program she was in shortly before schools closed and was gone for long enough that her bed was closed. When she was located, she was returned to her grandparents' home, as DCF had nowhere for her to go, but that quickly fell apart. After a very hard and scary night, Mel again went to the family of a school friend who agreed to let her stay and help connect her with services. She has been there for a little more than two weeks. Her CASA and the mother have been able to communicate and get her connected with a counselor and working with the school. Mel has a distance learning plan, got a chrome book, and (kind of) likes the therapist. DCF conducted a home visit (the on-going worker was there) and the family cleaned and got ready ahead of time to make a good impression. The last thing Mel shared was that she put a picture of her CASA hanging above her bed!



Jose Graduates High School!

Jose became involved with the court after a Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) petition was filed by his high school for truancy. A CASA was requested and appointed in late spring of 2019 to assist Jose and his family with issues surrounding his school attendance.

During all of the CASA's visits and communication with Jose, he was very reserved and quiet. He reported having some depression and social anxiety. He also stated that he was not happy at

school because he was in classes with students who were much younger. Jose had recently turned 17 and had just completed his freshman year due to past absences and grades. Jose's family was very supportive of him, however, due to a language barrier, his parents had a hard time communicating with school staff.

The CASA began regularly communicating with Jose's school counselor who was able to arrange for Jose to take online courses throughout the summer to make up a 9th grade class as well as complete his 10th grade curriculum. By fall, Jose completed all the online

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By fall, Jose completed all the online coursework to make up for missing credits as well as the curriculum to move him to Junior grade status. The Truancy CRA was dismissed in court but the CASA kept some communication with Jose and his family. This spring, a year after the CASA had been assigned to the case and six months after the case had been dismissed, the CASA received a text from Jose's mother. The text explained that because of the CASA working with the school to connect Jose to the online curriculum he had completed high school and that his diploma was being mailed to him! Jose's mother added that he was now learning to drive and looking forward to getting his license.



CASA connects with a Teenager with Depression

“She is doing well and came out of her room after having a chat with the CASA,” reported a father to the child’s Probation Officer. The father was talking about Yani, his 14-year-old daughter who is struggling with depression and who often stays in her room for days without any communication. Yani has never met her CASA Ella who was assigned to her right before Covid-19 hit Boston. The closing of school, the safety measures– especially social distancing– have negatively impacted her condition even further. In order to stay safe, she stays home with her father who has recently lost a job. She hardly reaches out to speak to friends and family.

The Boston Emergency Services Team (clinical providers) has been called to screen her behavior multiple times. Her CASA, who had just completed her CASA training, in a very brief period has developed a relationship without meeting Yani or her father. The father, who was initially reluctant to provide access to Yani, now openly admires the trustful relationship the CASA has developed and sings her praises to the team.



Silver Lining in Remote Learning:

The quarantine has raised so many challenges for our CASA families, and CASAs have gone to great lengths to continue to support their kids and families. Among these local heroes is one amazing CASA who has led 10 Zoom tutoring sessions with a 9th grade teenager who has an IEP and has been struggling in school. One small positive note amidst all the heartbreaking tragedies of this pandemic is that this teen has been thriving in a remote learning environment!



He feels less pressure and anxiety around relaxed deadlines and start times. Many of his teachers are thrilled with his progress, including his English teacher where he earned a 100% on the last assignment. It seems that this young man may have found the formula for his academic success with the support of his CASA and his teachers who are continuing to work with him through these unprecedented times.

BOSTON CASA TRAINING GOES VIRTUAL!

As a result of the state-required quarantine, the Boston CASA Program Team (along with the rest of the state and most of the world) had to adjust to a virtual training environment. Although there were a few bumps along the way, Boston CASA was able to offer numerous virtual trainings to our volunteers to keep everyone connected to each other and to the changed and uncertain times. Boston CASA's own ED Terry Craven delivered two amazing sessions on the substance and process of a Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) petition in April and a similar session on the procedural requirements of a Care and Protection (C&P) filing in May. Each session was attended by over 25 volunteers! Everyone was thrilled to have the opportunity to learn about the court process from our resident expert, Terry Craven, and looks forward to more of these training sessions in the future.

Likewise, Boston CASA migrated its successful monthly volunteer support group from an in person meeting format to a virtual gathering. The interest in participating was so amazing that we had to offer 4 virtual gathering during the first month (April)! Ultimately, each virtual session included about 15 volunteers grouped according to the age of their CASA kids who came together to share their experiences of staying connected with their CASA kids and working through any issues that arose in placement and/or remote schooling with limited ability to contact collaterals who were also working remotely and facing unprecedented challenges of their own. The virtual format was so successful that we continued to offer multiple sessions in May and June and intend to keep this format as a regular event even after we all emerge from the current quarantine and the courts reopen. Thanks to all of our volunteers for shifting seamlessly to this format and helping to keep us all connected with each other.



The program staff was also able to take advantage of the slowdown by participating in an intensive series of six trainings on special education law delivered by Michele Scavongelli, senior attorney with the EdLaw Project, a division of the Committee for Public Counsel Services. The sessions included fantastic presentations on topics that often come up for our CASA families, including Special Ed 101, the IEP process and school discipline. The program staff is extremely grateful to Michele and EdLaw for their time and support. EdLaw has offered to provide focused support for our CASA volunteers with complex issues which often arise around school-related supports and placements. EdLaw has already begun providing this much-needed in-depth support, for which Boston CASA is immensely appreciative.

Looking ahead, Boston CASA has two more virtual trainings scheduled in the coming weeks. The Massachusetts Court Improvement Project has graciously agreed to deliver training to CASA volunteers across the state regarding confidentiality issues and The Answer Book. The session will be held on June 30 at 5:00 pm. Please register [here](#). Next month, PFLAG will host a session for volunteers on the LGBTQ community, specifically regarding appropriate terminology, the importance of being an affirming support and ally and some practical suggestions on supporting youth who identify within this population. That training will be held on July 15 from 5:00 to 6:30. Please be on the lookout for that invitation which will be sent shortly.

FALL TRAINING COMES TO BOSTON CASA

Finally, please take note of the upcoming Information Sessions and Pre-service training for individuals who are interested in becoming CASA volunteers. The next two information sessions will be held virtually on July 7th and August 4, 2020. On September 12, 2020 we plan to start the Fall 2020 pre-service 35 hour training for applicants who have completed the screening process. Boston CASA is actively recruiting individuals from the Lowell and Boston area in order to meet the needs for many children and youth receiving services from the Department of Children and Families and the Suffolk and Middlesex Juvenile Court. Join us to ensure that their voices are heard. <https://bostoncasa.org/volunteer>

BOSTON CASA SUPPORTS SELF CARE

A virus that has spread across the globe, coupled with breaking news accessible to us at any time, has made many of us worried. It can be hard to stay calm when there is fear and unease in the media, stories of self-quarantines, and shortages of sanitizing products. Many people are feeling anxious, even if they rarely experience anxiety. So how do we stay informed and keep our anxiety at bay in a time where there is a lot of misinformation out there? Equally as important—how can we stay calm and keep our loved ones reassured?

Click on this link for more information:

<https://iocdf.org/covid19/self-care-during-covid-19/>

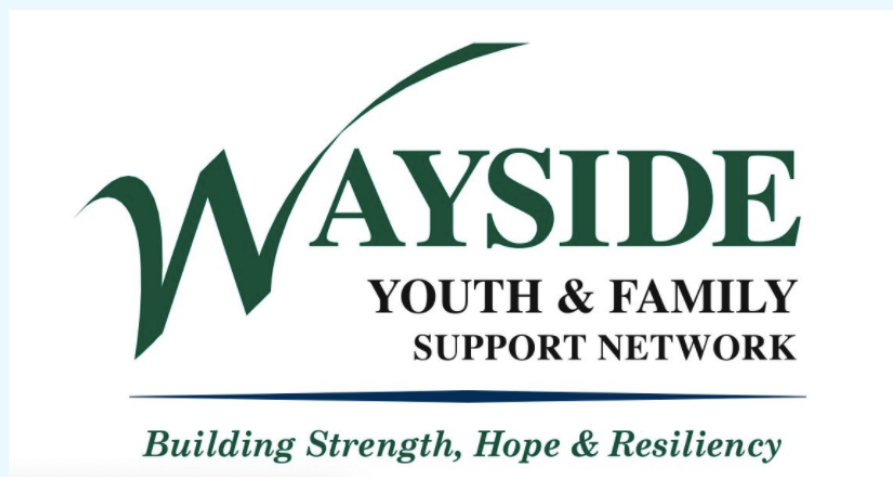
SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Wayside Youth and Family

Boston CASA would like to take a moment to recognize and thank Wayside Youth and Family Support Networks Lowell office for continuing to host and organize their monthly Systems of Care meetings! These meetings have been an amazing resource during this time of increased challenges faced by our children, families, and providers to stay connected and find support.

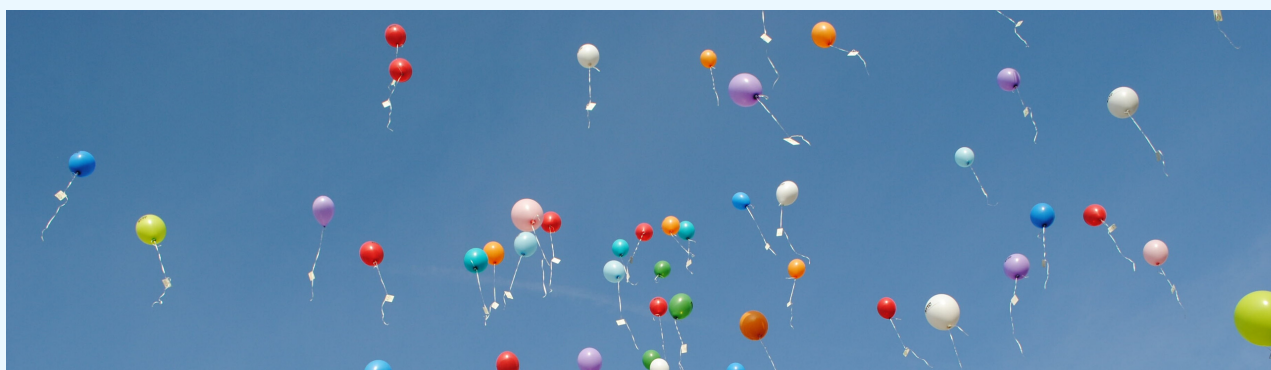
The Wayside team quickly shifted these meetings to being held virtually and has done a fantastic job at bringing presenters and speakers, opening space to share about the work being done in the community, and remaining connected through email making sure that meeting notes and additional resources reach as many providers as possible!

The Systems of Care community Wayside has been truly priceless as we all work to meet the on-going needs of the children and families we collaborate to serve. Thank you to Beth Lindsay and the Wayside team!



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2020 BOSTON CASA GRADUATES

Please join us in congratulating and welcoming the new Boston Court Appointed Special Advocates. 2020 has brought many new challenges and increased the needs for the children and youth we serve. In March 2020 Boston CASA quickly pivoted to virtual platforms to ensure, not only accessibility, but to prepare for the the expected increase in Care and Protection and Child Requiring Assistance referrals. In response to the call for action community members have stepped up, once again, and are now ready to advocate and support (40) additional children.



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!

[**DONATE**](#)