

The Court Appointed Special Advocate Program in Kentucky:

A Collaborative Partnership with DCBS and the Court System

Health and Human Services Delivery System Task Force
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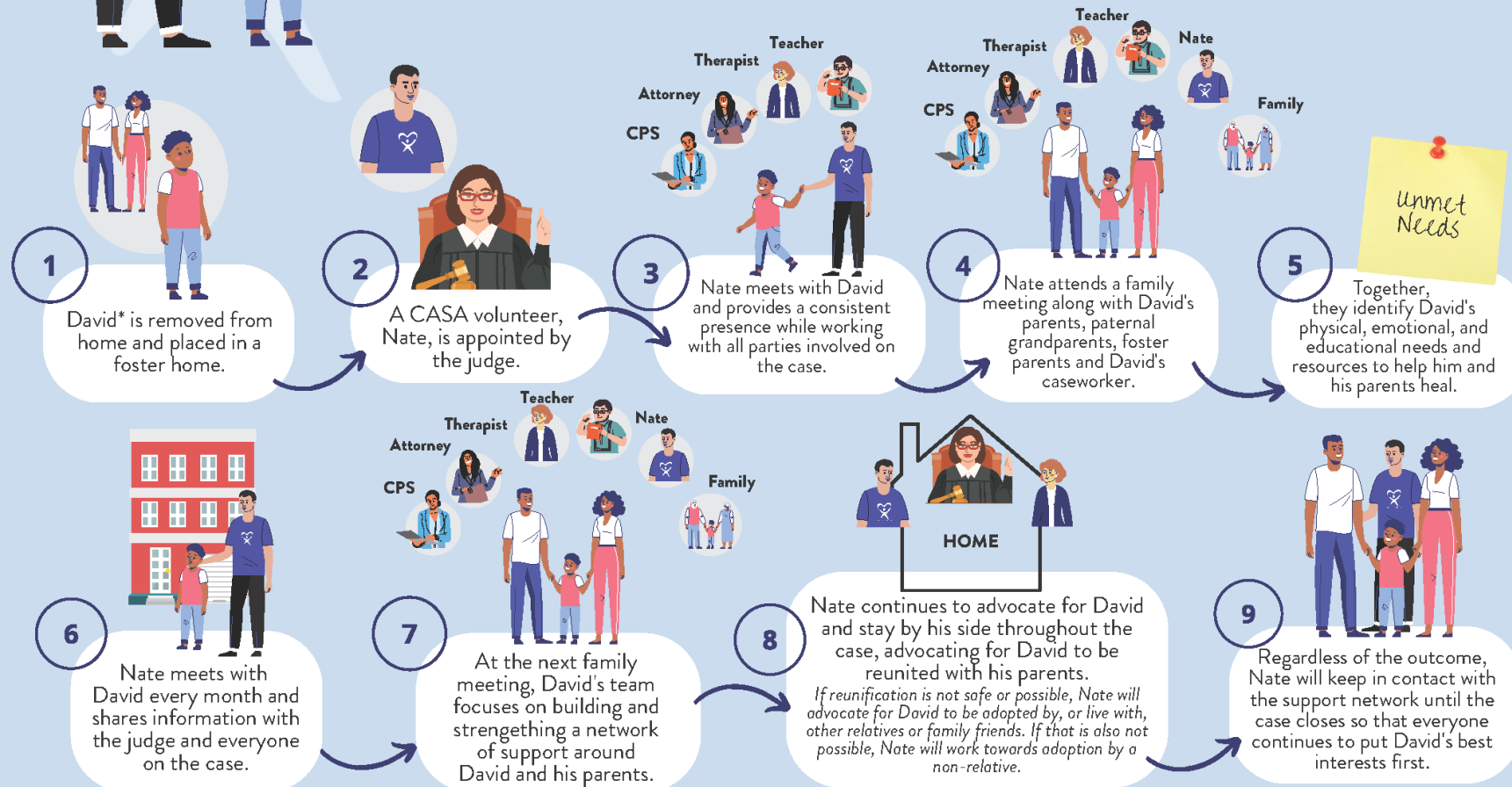


Role of CASA Volunteers in Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse Cases

- CASA volunteers are objective, community-based volunteers who are appointed by judges to serve in child abuse, neglect, and dependency cases. They provide a written report to the Court and stay on a case until a child is in a safe and permanent home.
- Kentucky has a strong statute governing the role of the volunteer and administration of the program (KRS 620.500 – 620.550)
- Judges' perspective of CASA impact in the courtroom

WHAT DOES A CASA DO?

When a family is in crisis and becomes involved in the child welfare system, a CASA volunteer may be appointed by a judge to advocate for the child. The highly trained volunteer is someone from the child's community whose responsibility is to get to know the child and their family and advocate for their safety, permanency and well-being while in foster care. This is just one example of the difference a CASA volunteer can make in a child's life.



CASA of Lexington

- Regional program covering 7 counties
- 501(c)(3) nonprofit that receives 16% of budget from State General Fund
- In 2022, 247 CASA volunteers served 671 children
- Invited to CFCRB and all Treatment Team Meetings



How CASA Works a Case with DCBS and GALs

- Receives all history and Court Orders on the case
- Conferences case and communicates with DCBS worker
- Communicates child's wishes with GAL; shares information about child with GAL
- Provides recommendations in Court Report to all parties prior to court

Reference: The Roles of Guardians Ad Litem, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and Social Workers in Kentucky's Child Welfare System

Trends in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases: Perspective from CASA of Lexington

- Post-COVID and FFPSA implementation changes in cases
- Lack of foster care and residential placements
- Temporary overnight stays at DCBS offices has increased
- Impact of DCBS case acceptance criteria on removals
- Social worker turnover and vacancies impact on the system and CASA role over past two years; trend is improving in 2Q of 2023
- Increase in substance abuse disorder and mental health diagnosis in filed petitions impacting families

Kentucky CASA Network

- Recognized role in KRS to provide training, technical assistance, and quality assurance of local CASA programs
- Develops local CASA programs
 - Mission is to strengthen and support existing programs and to achieve 100% CASA coverage in all 120 counties
- 21 local programs now covering 92 counties
 - Trending toward regionalization and expansion for sustainability and efficiency
- Contractor for JPSC in administering State General Fund dollars
 - Serves as pass-through to local CASA programs and provides funding for expansions and new programs

Updated August 2015



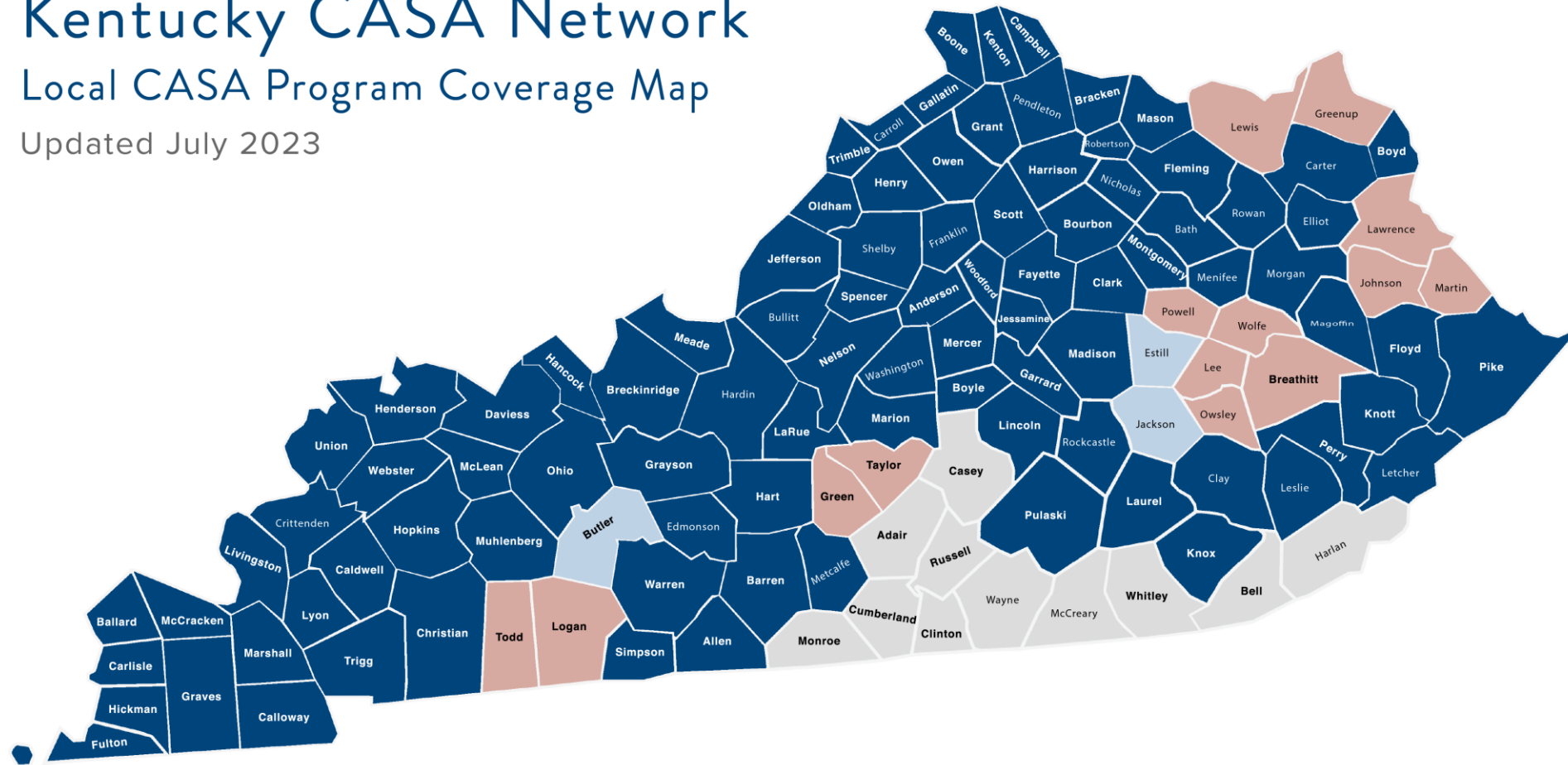
■ CASA program in development



Kentucky CASA Network

Local CASA Program Coverage Map

Updated July 2023



Map Key

■ Currently covered by a local CASA program

■ Local community and/or existing CASA program actively working through National CASA/GAL Membership Process to bring CASA services to these counties

■ KCN Growth Plan to bring CASA services to these counties by mid-2024



STATEWIDE CASA DATA

	CY 2020	CY 2021	CY 2022
Children Served	3,574	3,758	3,538
Assigned Volunteers	1,275	1,302	1,239
New Volunteers Trained	360	324	328

THE SYSTEM CASA NAVIGATES IN KENTUCKY

	CY 2020	CY 2021	CY 2022
AOC Petitions Filed ¹	16,985	17,809	16,721
Children in DCBS Substantiations ²	25,459	22,837	20,324

¹ CY 2020, 2021, and 2022 data provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts

² CY 2020, 2021, and 2022 data provided by the Department for Community Based Services

Recommendations for CASA System Improvement

- DCBS access to records
 - Electronic case migration in Twist: Barrier to CASA programs
 - KCN working with DCBS leadership on solutions to ensure CASA has access to statutory required information
- Creation of a DCBS liaison to CASA (Hardin County pilot)
- Amend KRS to allow CHFS employees to become CASA volunteers

Recommendations for System Changes for Better Outcomes for Children in DNA Court

- Increase fees for Court Appointed Counsel (GALs) per case
- DCBS should evaluate and monitor the impact of moving away from determinations of “risk of harm” in assessing safety in cases where siblings are in the care of caregivers with documented severe abuse histories; enhance training of DCBS staff
- More resources and support for fictive and relative placements for removals that are not court active
- Support for Family Recovery Courts

CASA FY '25-26 Budget Request

- Legislature first allocated State General Funds in 2016 Budget Session to Court Appointed Special Advocate program for FY '17 and FY '18 (\$1.5 million per FY, \$3 million in the biennium)
- FY '19 – FY '20: \$1.42 million per year, \$2.8 million in biennium
- FY '21: \$1.5 million
- FY '22: \$1.5 million
- FY '23 – FY '24: \$3 million per year, \$6 million in biennium (current)

Budget Request for FY '25 and FY '26

- Total CASA Network expenditures are close to \$7 million each CY
- State General Funds cover about 36% of those expenses; other 64% are from private dollars, events, individual donors, federal grants, and private foundations
- FY '24: Federal VOCA funding for KY (significant form of funding for CASA) estimated to be cut from \$28 million this year to \$11 million in fall 2024
- KCN requesting an estimated increase of \$739,000 per fiscal year (\$1,478,000 increase in biennium) to further the expansion of CASA services to cover all 120 counties and to offset expected VOCA cut for existing programs
- Increase breakdown: \$539,000 to help offset VOCA decrease and \$200,000 for further development of 1 new program. Current allocation will support KCN Growth plan and county expansions.
- **Total request: \$3.74 million per FY, \$7.48 million in biennium**

Questions

