

Chester County Community Foundation
Grant Proposal Summary Sheet
General Operating Request
September 10, 2018

Contact Information:

CASA Youth Advocates, Inc.
PO Box 407
Media, Pa. 19063

Chester County Office
19 S. High Street
West Chester Pa. 19382

610-565-2208
www.delcocasa.org
Year Incorporated: 1992

Executive Director: Leigh Anne McKelvey MSW LSW
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Board Chair: David Cramer
Primary Contact: Anne Shenberger, Strategic Director
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Applied to Chester County Community Foundation: yes
Funded by Chester County Community Foundation: no
Field of Interest: Human Services

Organization Information:

Geographic Area Served: Chester and Delaware County
Population Served: Children adjudicated dependent in Chester or Delaware County
Children Served 2017: Chester County: 39 Delaware County 168
Cases Served 2017: Chester County: 28 Delaware County 107
Educational Advocacy 2017: Chester County 5 Delaware County 22
Active Volunteers 2017: 106
New Volunteers Trained 2017: 32

Mission: CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Youth Advocates, Inc.'s mission is to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children who are adjudicated dependent in Chester or Delaware County. CASA works to promote and support quality volunteer advocacy to ensure each child a safe, permanent and nurturing home.

Proposal Summary: This general operating fund proposal seeks funding to support CASA's continued expansion of services into Chester County, helping CASA serve more of the children in need. Currently, CASA serves only 19.6% of the adjudicated dependent children in Chester County. CASA expanded services into Chester County in 2015, serving 7 children on 6 cases that year. By 2017, that number had grown to 39 children on 28 cases, clearly an indication that these services are seen as both necessary and valuable for the children and for the dependency court.

Annual Budget 2018: \$1,238,759 Annual Budget 2017 \$1,041, 822

2017 Audited Numbers: 81% program expenses, 9% administrative expenses, 10% fundraising/development

11 FTE Paid Staff (As of September 2018)

13 Board volunteers (As of September 2018)

106 Active Non-Board Volunteers (2017)

9,928 Volunteer Hours (2017)

Top 3-5 Funding Sources: Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Delaware County Department of Human Services, The Philadelphia Foundation, Connelly Foundation

Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$7,500

CASA Youth Advocates, Inc.
Proposal Narrative
Chester County Community Foundation
Operating Grant Request: \$7,500
September 5, 2018

Organizational History and Distinctiveness: In existence since 1992 in Delaware County, in 2015 CASA expanded services to Chester County. This expansion occurred at the request of Dependency Court Judge Ann Marie Wheatcraft for the purpose of assisting the court in making decisions based on the most extensive information possible. CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Youth Advocates, Inc. is a member of the National CASA Association, a membership organization that provides technical assistance and support to over 900 programs nationwide. Individual CASA programs must secure their own funding to support services, with no guaranteed funding from National CASA.

The CASA service model is unique, depending on volunteers to provide the majority of our individual advocacy on behalf of abused and neglected children. CASA's mission is to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children who have been adjudicated dependent in Delaware or Chester County. CASA works to promote and support quality volunteer advocacy to help assure each child a safe, permanent and nurturing home. Each volunteer works with only one child or sibling group at a time, focusing on that child's needs and what is in that child's best interests. CASA professional staff, composed of masters level social workers, attorneys or bachelors level staff with over 10 years of experience in child welfare, each work with up to 25 volunteers at a time, providing support, supervision and guidance to volunteer advocates. Volunteers can come from any walk of life. They undergo a comprehensive application process including a written application, in person interview, contacts with references, background clearances and then must complete a 35 hour pre-service training program prior to being sworn in by the Dependency Court Judge with an oath that specifies their responsibilities and confidentiality obligations.

CASA operates in Chester County based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed between CASA and the Dependency Court Judge and the Department of Children Youth and Families. It outlines CASA's responsibilities and CASA's right to obtain all information regarding a child and the right to full and free access to the child in the child's living environment and in other locations as well. CASA is appointed to each case via a court order signed by the Dependency Court Judge. Once appointed, the CASA volunteer and case supervisor collect all case record information and records from other service providers to identify the action steps needed to address the child's needs. This includes in person visits with the child in the child's living environment at least once per month and ongoing communication with all family members and professionals involved with the child. Prior to each court hearing, the CASA volunteer and case supervisor prepare an extensive written report to the court outlining all significant case events that occurred since the last hearing and

making CASA's recommendations for needed services, service changes and recommendations for the child's permanent home, whether that is return to parents, adoption, placement with a relative or another permanent outcome. This report is circulated to the parties prior to each hearing. The CASA volunteer and case supervisor attend every court hearing and provide testimony regarding the contents of the court report and CASA's recommendations.

In addition to this advocacy function, CASA is also appointed by the court to act as the child's educational decision maker in cases where the child's parent is deemed unable to perform this role. This is a separate role focusing on ensuring that the child receives the education and special education services the child needs and provides CASA with the legal authority to consent to all educational services and to initiate due process and litigation should the child be denied services that are required to be provided.

There is no other agency providing this service in Chester County. The court and other parties in the dependency proceedings depend on CASA's court reports extensively as they are the most comprehensive document outlining key events in the child's case that are objective and clearly sourced. Frequently, the CASA volunteer is the only consistent caring adult in the child's life, as caseworkers change frequently and children often move to multiple foster homes or residential facilities during their stay in foster care. For this reason, the CASA volunteer's testimony is given significant weight by the judge and the dependency hearing officer as well as the child's attorney, the guardian ad litem.

Goals, Key Achievements: CASA's goal is to provide a CASA volunteer advocate to every adjudicated dependent child in Chester County. Between 2015 and 2017, CASA increased the number of children served from 7 to 39 (557%) and the number of cases (one child or one sibling group) from 6 to 28 (467%). CASA served 5 children as educational decision maker during 2017, an increase from one child in 2016.

Key Initiatives, Needs and Issues to be Addressed: While CASA has grown significantly since 2015, we are currently serving only 19.6% of the children who are adjudicated dependent and in foster care in Chester County. During 2017, there were 198 children in foster care in the county of which 116 remained in foster care for the entire year while the others either entered or exited at some point during the year. During 2017, there were 106 substantiated child abuse cases in Chester County. Of those cases, 67% were confirmed sexual abuse, 14.2% were physical abuse/bodily injury, 8.5% serious physical neglect and 4.7% reasonable likelihood of bodily injury. In addition, there were 442 valid reports of neglect involving 1,456 children. Over the past five years, there has been a 10.2% increase in children re-entering foster care after within 12 months of discharge. For the children who remained in care, their length of stay in foster care increased by 42.1% over the past five years and, at 19.6 months is well above the statewide average of 13.4 months.

Why Now? This is the most opportune time for CASA to take advantage of this funding opportunity for several reasons. First, CASA will be adopting a new strategic plan in January 2019 that will continue to have as its primary goal the expansion of CASA services to provide a CASA volunteer for every adjudicated dependent child in Chester County. Work on this new plan is currently well underway. Second, CASA has been invited to submit a capacity building proposal to the Nelson Foundation for a three year grant to support the creation of a robust Development function within CASA, one that we have only recently had the funds to begin.. Third, CASA received a grant from the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency to add one professional staff person to our Chester County office to double our capacity in Chester County. That person began work on August 2018. With this additional staff, CASA needs to recruit new volunteers to take on these new cases. Fourth, CASA is currently conducting a qualitative evaluation of our program that we expect to result in information that will assist in making program improvements. CASA has also applied to PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency to fund a project to establish performance metrics for CASA services. These evaluation efforts will provide much needed data that will help to guide program improvements.

Results: CASA uses a robust case management software system designed for CASA programs to track cases and volunteers. This system will be the foundation of the performance metrics that will help CASA quantify service outcomes. Currently, CASA produces a monthly program report that includes an extensive data set for each county including: cumulative children and cases served, children for whom CASA is educational decision maker, number of volunteers trained, referrals, sources of referrals, cases closed, disposition of cases closed, time to achieve permanency, waiting lists, volunteer retention and attrition, reasons for volunteer attrition. In addition, CASA reports annually on the demographic characteristics of children, staff and volunteers. CASA also collects the stories of volunteers whose impact on the lives of children have been exemplary and uses these stories, either with permission or with changes to protect the identity of the children , on our website and in our publications.