



## 2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT

# Change a Child's Story



# ONCE UPON A TIME

In 1977, a Seattle juvenile court judge concerned about making drastic decisions with insufficient information conceived the idea of volunteers in the courtroom speaking up for the best interests of children who had experienced neglect or abuse. That judge was David W. Soukup. From the first program has grown a network of 940 CASA and guardian ad litem programs that are recruiting, training and supporting volunteers in 49 states and the District of Columbia.

CASA stands for “court-appointed special advocate.” CASA Advocates are volunteers, trained by supportive, accessible staff to advocate for the best interests of abused or neglected children during court proceedings. CASA Advocates are welcomed into courtroom proceedings and have the opportunity to truly change a child’s story.

## MISSION

The mission of CASA of Hinds County is to recruit and train community volunteers to become court-appointed advocates for the best interests of abused or neglected children in the pursuit of safe and permanent homes.



**CASA of Hinds County is a member in good standing with National CASA/GAL and CASA Mississippi.**

Though numbers tell only a fraction of the story, today there are nearly 4,000 children in Mississippi’s child welfare and foster care system: toddlers removed from their families due to abuse, abandonment or worse; children, who, having lost both parents, are separated from their siblings due to strain on the system; and teenagers who have spent nearly all of their youth shuffling from house to house and school to school.

In Hinds County alone, there were an average of 237 children in the foster care system in 2025, the second highest number of any county in the State of Mississippi.

## JUDGE CARLYN HICKS, HINDS COUNTY YOUTH COURT

CASA of Hinds County serves under a court-order from the Hinds County Youth Court Judge, Carlyn Hicks. Individual foster care cases are assigned to CASA advocates by the order of the judge.

Judge Hicks is a lifelong resident of Jackson and Hinds County. She attended Jackson State University for her undergraduate degree and Mississippi College School of Law. She was sworn in July 2020 and has served as the Youth Court Judge since that time.

As of July 2025, Judge Hicks has 236 children in state custody and 720 children in in-home or kinship placements on her case docket.

[www.casaofhindscounty.org](http://www.casaofhindscounty.org)





# MEET THE CAST

## CASA STAFF

- Samantha Kalahar, Executive Director
- Cathy Chapman, Program Manager

In January 2025, Laura Gee left the role of Executive Director of CASA of Hinds County. Laura's hard work and dedication to the mission took the program from an idea to reality. Her legacy of service will better the lives of children and families for years in Hinds County. Thank you Laura!



*Thank you for  
your dedication  
to the foster  
children of Hinds  
County!*

## 2024-2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Jamie Rasberry, President
- Kelly Meeks, Vice President
- Miya Bates, Treasurer
- Betsy Hood
- Tonja Murphy
- Caitlin Bradshaw
- Lauren Engel
- Emma Lyle

## ADVOCATES

CASA exists to give children in foster care a voice. Our advocates give foster children a voice each day in court, in team meetings, and in planning for their futures. Advocates complete at least 30 hours of training including court observation and complete full background checks to become an advocate. Each year advocates must also complete at least 12 hours of continuing education to grow their knowledge-based and learn best practices in foster care, trauma-informed techniques, and understand what resources are available to support their cases.

- |                         |                    |                 |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| • Gwendolyn Braddy      | • Susan Cobb       | • Anna Peterson |
| • Charlotte Briscoe     | • Haley Hartfield  | • Heidi Pickett |
| • Margaret Byrd         | • Ivy Johnson      | • Jasmine Robb  |
| • Talethia Catchings    | • Gina Kennedy     | • Siqueta Tate  |
| • Alexandra Chamberlain | • Shayla Lee       |                 |
| • Cathy Chapman         | • Elizabeth Parker |                 |

## KEY PARTNERS

The work of CASA happens through partnerships and coordination with all parties involved in a child's case. We value our relationship with all parties and their support services. A few key relationships include:

- Melody Vaughn (MDCPS Area Director) and the front line social workers
- Henley-Young Youth Court staff
- Chad King and Matthew Thompson, MDCPS Attorneys
- Clayton Giles, Parent Public Defender
- Foster parents caring for the children CASA advocates serve

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## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

CASA of Hinds County is a 501c3 non-profit organization. We are able to serve the Hinds County children and family due to the generous support of individuals, corporations and foundations who walk beside us. There are many ways your company can partner with us to make an impact.

### CHAMPIONS FOR CASA

Donors who provide monetary and volunteer support valued at \$25,000 or more annually.

- Ergon Foundation
- James W. Hood Family Foundation

### CORPORATE/FOUNDATION DONORS

- Community Foundation of MS
- Kendra Scott
- America's Charities
- Environmental Management Plus
- Diane D Kemp Agency Inc.

**THANK  
YOU!**

### INDIVIDUAL DONORS

- |                              |                        |                    |
|------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| • Stewart Hood               | • Mark and Janet Allen | • Caitlin Brooking |
| • Rob and Courtney Love      | • Carolyn Whyte        | • Michael Martella |
| • Mylan and Melissa Anderson | • Karen Collins        | • Zakiya Summers   |
| • Bill Sullivan              | • Leigh Ann Griffith   | • Sarah Cote       |
| • Derrek and Nikki Elam      | • Chelsea Hannah       |                    |
| • James and Stacey Williams  | • Pat White            |                    |

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| • Keesler Federal Credit Union        | • Hinds County Children's Coalition          |
| • Colonial Heights Baptist Church     | • Mississippians Against Human Trafficking   |
| • Parkway Baptist Church              | • Mississippi United to End Homelessness     |
| • Jackson Leadership Foundation       | • National CASA/GAL Association              |
| • MSDH State Victims Services Program | • Trace Ridge Baptist Church Resource Center |
| • Holmes CC Student Support Services  | • MadEsthetics MedSpa                        |
| • Rotary Club of North Jackson        | • Fresh Cut Catering                         |
| • Fondren Church                      | • Lampton Love                               |
| • Sunnybrook Children's Home          | • Stowaway Self Storage                      |
| • Southern Christian Services         | • Miss Mississippi Organization              |

And so many more!





## CASA SUPPORTING CAST

The work of CASA is centered around helping children navigate the foster care system and working to give them the support and resources they need to have a successful outcome. This work requires the support of so many supportive volunteers and partners stepping up to serve along side CASA.

## CASA CHRISTMAS

The holidays are a difficult time for foster children. The CASA team and our volunteers work to bring as much joy and love to the children we serve. So many great people and churches came together to help us make Christmas memorable for the children in Hinds County.

Thank you to the wonderful donors, churches, advocates and others who came together to help us show the holiday spirit to our CASA children. The generosity and love shown was felt by the social workers, advocates, and families (bio and foster) that surround the children we serve.



## MISS MISSISSIPPI 2025- ANNA LEAH JOLLY

Coming to CASA as Miss Capital City, Anna Leah has been a vocal ambassador for foster and adoptive youth in Mississippi. When she went on to win the Miss Mississippi title she took the message statewide and even onto the national stage in the Miss America pageant.

Her platform, **Limitless**, aims to help children understand they have limitless possibilities, regardless of their background. Jolly advocates for foster and adopted children, focusing on emotional intelligence and healing from trauma. She has written two children's books that help children understand the emotions and processes of going through foster care or adoption.

## COURT HOUSE REFRESH

Court can be a very intimidating place for a child, even youth court. CASA volunteers, Miss Mississippi and members of Parkway Baptist Church in Clinton decided to give the Hinds County Youth Court a child-friendly refresh!

New artwork, craft tables, art supplies, toys and books were donated to the children's area and the main waiting area. A new television was installed to provide age-appropriate programming for children and families as they await their day in court.

The refresh has been well-received by the children at court!



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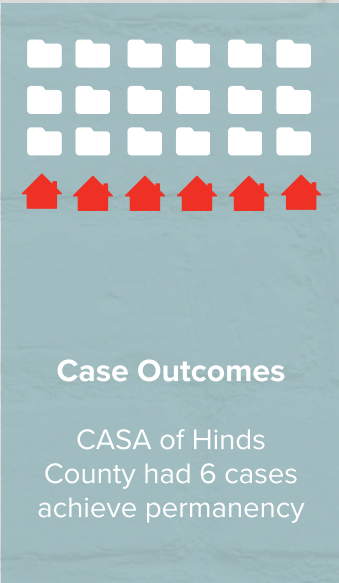
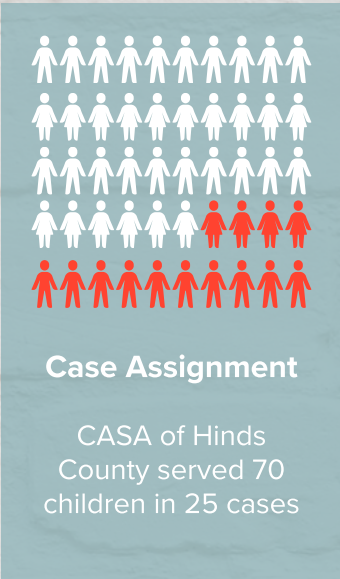
[www.casaofhindscounty.org](http://www.casaofhindscounty.org)



# AND THEN ONE DAY....

CASA of Hinds County was created in 2022 and began training and assigning volunteer advocates in 2023. In our second year of programming, we saw great strides in our work. The data below gives a snapshot of our service and impact from July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025.

## BY THE NUMBERS

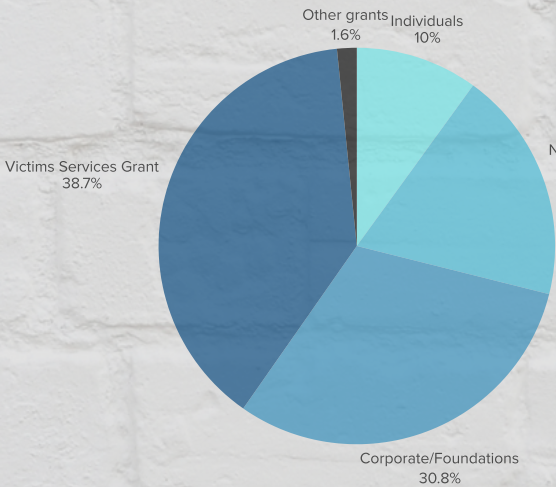


## FINANCIALS

CASA of Hinds County has a diverse set of funders that support our critical child advocacy. As we enter our third year of operations, we hope to increase our support in order to serve more children.

- Individual Donors: \$18,308
- National CASA Support: \$34,739
- Victim Services Grant: \$71,000
- Foundations/Corporate: \$56,536
- Other Grants: \$2,940

**Total Contributions: \$183,523**





# BECOME THE HERO IN A CHILD'S STORY

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) serves by judicial orders of the Hinds County Youth Court. A CASA Advocate serves on a volunteer basis as an independent advocate for the child's best interest and monitors the case until permanency is achieved. The CASA Advocate is directly responsible to the CASA Executive Director and must adhere to the rules and guidelines of the National CASA Standards.

## QUALIFICATIONS

- At least 21 years of age
- No recent or current involvement in a case with the MS Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS)
- Not an active foster parent in Hinds County
- No convictions or pending charges for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse/neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or to the CASA program's credibility
- Completed CASA Volunteer Application Form
- You have listed on the application all previous names used.
- You have listed on your application three references for a reference form to be completed
- Participated in a face-to-face interview
- Submitted to and pass a background checks
- Verified social security number
- Possess good oral and written communication skills
- Access to a computer and knowledge of word processing programs

## TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

To become a volunteer advocate, you must complete thirty (30) hours of training. Attendance and completion of training is mandatory. The syllabus includes information pertaining to child abuse and neglect, the legal and social service systems, permanency planning and advocacy. Training also addresses practical issues related to case advocacy, such as policy and procedures, the court process and communication/negotiation skills. Upon successful completion of the training, you will be appointed as an officer of the court in a swearing-in ceremony before a Youth Court Judge.

## CASA COMMITMENT & REQUIREMENTS

As an advocate, you will be assigned one case at a time requiring approximately 5-15 hours per month. The advocate's role is to inform the court of all findings related to the case and provide an assessment as to what is in the best interests of the child. As a part of this commitment, advocates must meet with the child(ren) at least monthly, and should communicate with interested parties such as parents, foster parents, school personnel, therapist, to learn about the dynamics of the case. You must also attend all court hearings and appropriate interagency meetings regarding the child. Hearings take place every three to six months and advocates are required to submit a monthly activity report to the Advocate Supervisor.

Advocates are required to submit formal reports to the court detailing your findings and observations. Court reports are due to the Advocate Supervisor no later than one week prior to the scheduled hearing.

An additional 12 hours of in-service training per year are required to maintain active status as an advocate.



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