



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

HENRICO COUNTY

**STRATEGIC PLAN
FY2022 - FY2025**

OVERVIEW, TRENDS, AND CURRENT POSITION

HENRICO CASA OVERVIEW

Established in 1994, Henrico CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is authorized by the Code of Virginia which ensures that CASA programs provide trained volunteers to advocate on behalf of children who are the subjects of juvenile court proceedings involving allegations of abuse and neglect. After completing extensive training, volunteers are appointed by juvenile court judges. They investigate the circumstances of the child by conducting interviews with family members and case professionals, review professional reports, and make observations of the child's environment, family, and social interactions. This information helps inform the judge's decision.

Henrico CASA is a part of a national network of CASA organizations. We are the largest of the 27 CASAs in Virginia. Our volunteers currently serve as advocates for roughly 400 children each year. Henrico CASA volunteers have given thousands of hours of their time and have made deep and long-lasting impacts in the lives of abused and neglected children in Central Virginia. Since first accepting cases in 1994, Henrico CASA has provided a powerful voice in court for more than 3,500 children. Our agency has served every referred child for as long as necessary to ensure they found safety and stability in the place they call home.

CURRENT SITUATION AND NEEDS

Studies make clear that child abuse and neglect is the largest health crisis of our time. The effects of childhood trauma are directly linked to mental illness, physical illness, and addiction in adulthood. This results in direct and devastating impacts on our health, justice, and economic systems. CASA is an important part of the solution. For a child who has experienced abuse or neglect, CASA ensures that a child receives the required services to mitigate their trauma and build resilience.

Over the years, Henrico CASA has seen a steady increase in the number of children in need of CASA advocates. We expect that the Pandemic, which has placed additional stress on families, will add to that number. Those results will become apparent as children return to school and resume activities that put them in touch with professionals who are trained to identify abuse and neglect issues. During the two years preceding the pandemic, Henrico CASA experienced an increase of 20% in cases. During the 2020/21 fiscal year, we have continued to serve roughly the same number of children while other CASAs have seen a decrease in cases. Signs indicate that as children return to school and other activities, we will see an increase in cases, which will increase staffing and volunteer needs to meet demand.

In talking with judges and others involved in supporting children during the disruption in their lives that these proceedings cause, we have identified a significant need for a safe and inexpensive location where families can hold supervised visitation. Very often, supervised visitation is the only way that a judge will allow a parent or both parents to spend time with their

child. Currently, fees for supervision can run between \$75 and \$100 per hour, an amount that most families cannot afford. The option is to meet in a cubicle at a social services location, which is clearly not conducive to maintaining or rebuilding a healthy parent-child relationship. We believe there is a need for a safe, affordable, child/family-friendly visitation center.

Recent legislation, the Family First Prevention Services Act, provides more support for efforts to keep children with their families – or with relatives, when necessary. This legislation supports the need for a safe family/child-friendly location for supervised visitation.

Finally, there is continued need to increase education and awareness of the signs of trauma, abuse, and neglect among childcare workers, teachers, faith-based communities, and others who encounter children, as well as among the general public. Without intervention, children in dysfunctional and dangerous situations remain at risk.

CURRENT POSITION

Henrico CASA enters our next fiscal year (2021/22) from a position of strength yet realizing there is much work to be accomplished. Highlights of our current strengths and challenges include:

Strengths:

- Dedicated volunteers, staff and board who are passionate about our work.
- Good relationships with Henrico County juvenile judges. Currently, 99% of our volunteers' recommendations are incorporated in the judges' orders.
- Collaborative working relationships with other child-serving agencies, nonprofits, and professionals in the child welfare system.
- A conservative approach to financial management that has provided financial stability.
- Progress in our messaging and digital marketing.
- Success in the first *Home for Good* playhouse event, with intent to grow as signature event for both awareness and fundraising efforts.

Challenges:

- A small staff and board that are stretched to cover the amount of work required.
- A need for additional volunteers, especially if we see a spike or general increase in cases referred to us.
- Competition for funds from many respected nonprofits in the area.
- A lack of some important employee benefits which puts us at a disadvantage in hiring and retaining staff.
- Adjusting to new legislation and turnover as it occurs within the collaborative working relationships with our other child-serving agencies.

Building on our strengths and with a focus on supporting and protecting Henrico's children who are neglected or abused, Henrico CASA's strategic direction is outlined as follows.

MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

OUR MISSION

Henrico CASA advocates in court for a child’s best interests and seeks to educate the community concerning the needs of abused and neglected children.

OUR VISION

All children in Henrico County live in safe and stable homes.

CORE VALUES

Henrico CASA provides best-interest advocacy for children and integrates the following guiding principles into our program’s practices, policies and procedures. We are committed to:

- **Family preservation and reunification.** Children grow up best in their families. Our work will support preservation and reunifications whenever that can be achieved safely.
- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion.** Our children come from all parts of Henrico County. We believe our volunteers, management and staff, and our Board should reflect that diversity and should feel safe and comfortable in their roles.
- **Collaboration within the child welfare and court system.** We will work jointly with professionals throughout the system in the best interest of children.
- **Gratitude for the commitment made by our volunteers, staff, and donors.** We realize that we could not accomplish our mission without the selfless commitment from many in our community.
- **Stewardship of the resources entrusted to us.** We will use our resources carefully to help ensure we can serve all children who need us.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To advance our mission and vision, Henrico CASA has established three strategic priorities.

AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

We will help the community understand the sometimes-dangerous situation for many children and build a base of support for them.

Goal 1: Develop understandable and impactful messaging and create channels to reach a broad audience.

- Acknowledge the crisis using clear language, statistics and graphics that are easy to understand. Tie messages into our mission.
- Build on the success of the *Home for Good* event to increase the number of people we reach directly through email and social media.
- Continue to establish relationships with media outlets that will provide coverage of our work.
- Present Henrico CASA's work to various groups and organizations that are interested in community engagement.

Goal 2: Educate appropriate groups about what signs to look for and what steps to take if they see a potential problem.

- Develop a short training program for the community that can be presented in person or online.
- Find opportunities to present to professional groups or organizations who come in contact with children.

Goal 3: Increase financial support to support program expansion.

- Build our donor database with individuals who have expressed interest in Henrico CASA.
- Increase the number of Ambassadors to help reach entry level donors.
- Move existing donors towards higher levels of commitment and/or recurring gifts.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

We will build capacity within our organization to help us meet the needs of children referred to us.

Goal 1: Build and retain management and staff that represent the community and have the experience and skills to move the organization forward.

- Assess the current duties of the Executive Director, management and staff to determine shifts in responsibilities and new positions needed.
- Use a lens of diversity, equity and inclusion in hiring, training and developing the culture of the organization.
- Continue to move towards market compensation and benefits as the budget allows.
- Create a succession plan for all positions.

Goal 2: Build the base of trained volunteers to ensure adequate capacity to accommodate all children referred to us.

- Continue to invest in digital marketing to increase exposure and recruit volunteers.
- Balance the timing of volunteer training and onboarding to align with the volume of children so that volunteers will have meaningful work soon after joining.
- Continue to recruit volunteers who represent the communities we serve. (DEI lens)

Goal 3: Cultivate and engage board members who have the identified and desired skills, experience, and community connections to provide the leadership Henrico CASA needs.

- Continue the work of the governance committee in board member cultivation and board development.
- Move toward an optimum number of Board members, expected to be 12-15, using the advisory role as a starting point for involvement with Henrico CASA.

VISITATION CENTER

We will establish a visitation center to provide a safe, inviting, and enriching space for children and families to visit and nurture healthy relationships.

Goal 1: Conduct a thorough needs assessment regarding a visitation center.

- Identify prospective community leaders to be a part of a steering committee.
- Determine the number of current cases that require supervised visitation.
- Learn how families are currently handling supervised visitation.
- Test their reaction to the concept of a visitation center.
- Develop a clear understanding of the perspective of judges, social services professionals and county leaders.

Goal 2: Develop the Visitation Center concept fully.

- Create a steering committee of community leaders.
- Determine needs and resources for paid and volunteer staffing, including MSW internships.
- Explore available, accessible space through the County and other community organizations.
- Research funding options at local and state level.

Goal 3: Implement a phased roll-out of the program.

- Provide space and supervision to a limited number of families to assess effectiveness and operating needs.
- Evaluate next steps regarding increasing capacity.

Reference Notes:

EXAMPLES OF SIMILAR MODELS (within CASA Programs)

<https://www.casaofleacounty.com/family-time-visitation-center/>

<https://www.casappr.org/programs/sept/>

<https://casakids.org/services/>

[Statement: The Supervised Access and Visitation Program provides a safe, neutral, and comfortable place for children and non-custodial parents to visit and maintain family ties, whatever else may be happening in their lives. Because children have a need to love their parents and to feel loved in return, the program is dedicated to preserving parent-child relationships, focusing primarily on resolving conflicts related to child custody and visitation. The program maintains strict neutrality, playing an unbiased role in the facilitation of meetings and taking no position between parents. Our Supervised Visitation Center furnishes a relaxed and home-like environment for these encounters, with the safety of clients assured by expert staff and a comprehensive