



# HENRICO CASA STRATEGIC PLAN

**BUILDING ON THE PAST, FRAMING THE FUTURE**

2026 - 2029



# ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Founded in 1994, Henrico CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is a child advocacy organization authorized by the Code of Virginia to provide trained volunteers who serve as the voice of children involved in the judicial system due to allegations of abuse and neglect. Advocates conduct thorough investigations, collaborate with child welfare professionals, and provide well-supported reports and recommendations to ensure that each child's best interest remains at the forefront of court decisions.

Henrico CASA operates as part of the national CASA network and has grown into one of the largest of 27 CASA programs in Virginia, serving the most children. Our organization has served more than 4,500 children since inception and remains committed to ensuring 100% of the children referred by the Court receive advocacy services.

Henrico CASA provides high-quality advocacy at no cost to the child or family, all while operating at a fraction of the cost of other child welfare interventions. As an early intervention, CASA plays a critical role in preventing the need for more intensive — and far more costly — services down the line. The cost for CASA to serve one child for an entire year is just \$1,500. This offers a significant return on investment when compared to the annual costs of basic foster care (\$8,400), residential treatment (\$70,000), or juvenile justice care (\$246,000).

Beyond cost-effectiveness, Henrico County's Juvenile Judges recognize that CASA improves a child's psychological and long-term well-being, increases the likelihood of family reunification, and helps secure a permanent home more quickly.

# MISSION, VISION, 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.

## OUR CORE VALUES

Henrico CASA integrates the following guiding principles into its practices, policies, and operations:

- Best-Interest Advocacy – Placing the needs and well-being of children at the center of all decisions.
- Family Preservation & Reunification – Supporting family stability whenever it can be achieved safely.
- Commitment to Representation & Access – Ensuring CASA volunteers, staff, and leadership reflect the myriad of backgrounds and experiences of the children and families we serve, fostering fairness and an equal opportunity to receive effective advocacy.
- Collaboration – Working closely with judges, social services, and community partners to provide holistic advocacy.
- Stewardship – Responsibly managing resources to ensure sustainable and impactful operations.

# TRENDS AND CURRENT POSITION

## 1. INCREASE IN CHILD ADVOCACY NEEDS

Over the last few years, Henrico CASA has observed a notable increase in caseloads, reflecting both the county's evolving demographics and the growing complexities within the child welfare system and cases. While Henrico County's population has experienced modest growth in recent years, Henrico CASA has observed a consistent increase in caseloads each year. This trend underscores the continued need for thorough, well-informed advocacy to assist Henrico County's judges in making decisions that serve each child's best interests.

Cases have also become more complex, as many children and families are facing multiple layers of adversity including mental health challenges, substance use concerns, housing instability, and deep-seated trauma. These factors require trauma-informed, highly trained advocates to provide the court with a comprehensive understanding of each child's unique needs and circumstances. As the child welfare landscape continues to evolve, judges increasingly rely on CASA's well-researched, child-focused recommendations to navigate these challenges.

Despite national trends showing a decline in volunteerism, Henrico CASA continues to meet the growing demand for child advocacy with strength and consistency. The following highlights illustrate both the scale and impact of Henrico CASA's work:

- CASA served 388 children in Fiscal Year 2023-2024, marking a nearly 20% increase from two years ago and an 8% increase from the prior year.
- CASA continues to meet 100% of its referral demand, despite the increasing need for child advocates and the challenge of volunteer recruitment.
- Judges consistently rely on CASA's independent recommendations to guide complex, child-focused decisions, with at least 95% of recommendations accepted and incorporated into court orders each year.



# TRENDS AND CURRENT POSITION

## 2. EVOLVING NEEDS OF THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

The child welfare landscape is continually shifting, and agencies like CASA must adapt to meet emerging challenges. Judges, attorneys, and child welfare professionals are navigating cases that often involve multiple, compounding concerns such as domestic violence, parental substance use, mental health conditions, and family instability. These issues directly impact a child's safety and well-being, and they require consistent, thoughtful interventions.

As these complexities grow, so too does the need for consistent, reliable advocacy. Advocates remain a steady presence throughout the life of cases that span several months to multiple years as families work toward safety and stability. In many cases, the CASA volunteer is one of the few consistent, trusted adults in the child's life.

At the same time, broader shifts in the child welfare system have contributed to a developing role for CASA. Increased focus on family preservation and kinship placements — guided by legislation such as the Family First Prevention Services Act — has rightly encouraged earlier use of community-based services and wraparound supports. While these efforts aim to stabilize families and prevent the need for court intervention, CASA is increasingly appointed to cases where, despite prior support and interventions, concerns for the children and/or family have persisted or escalated. As a result, when these cases reach the court, they often involve more entrenched challenges that require sustained advocacy to achieve long-term stability for the child.

## 3. GROWTH IN FINANCIAL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

As the demand for CASA's services has increased, so too has the need for sustainable funding and strong community partnerships to meet the increased demand. Ensuring that CASA has the resources to meet every referred child's needs requires an ongoing commitment to financial growth, donor stewardship, and strategic collaboration. Over the past several years, CASA has proactively expanded its fundraising capacity, fostering deeper engagement with supporters and exploring new avenues for long-term financial sustainability.

A key strength of Henrico CASA lies in its ability to cultivate strong, mission-driven partnerships. By leveraging a combination of fundraising events, individual donor relationships, corporate and foundation support, and community partnerships, CASA has strategically built a diversified and sustainable funding structure that allows for organizational growth and programmatic expansion. This focus on long-term investment in the mission ensures that CASA can continue to provide high-quality advocacy and expand services where needed.

Beyond fundraising, Henrico CASA has strengthened its relationships with judges, local and state government agencies, and civic organizations to enhance both financial and programmatic stability. These collaborations not only support CASA's operational needs but also increase community awareness, reinforcing the organization's role as a leader in child advocacy. As CASA moves forward, a continued emphasis on financial growth and relationship-building will remain critical to sustaining its mission and expanding its impact.

# TRENDS AND CURRENT POSITION

## 4. ADVANCING FAMILY SUCCESS – A VISITATION CENTER INITIATIVE

Henrico CASA has long recognized the critical need for a safe, neutral, and child-friendly space where families can rebuild or maintain connections to each other. The Visitation Center initiative, first introduced in the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, was developed in response to gaps in available visitation options, particularly for families who have complex family dynamics, cannot afford private services, or need a more secure setting.

When parents are unable to comply with Court-ordered visitation, they lose critical opportunities to demonstrate their capacity for safe, consistent parenting — factors that are essential to the Court’s decision-making around reunification. CASA has engaged key stakeholders, conducted needs assessments, and explored models to ensure a Visitation Center would meet the needs of children and families navigating the court system while also meeting the needs of the court and our child welfare colleagues.

As this initiative moves forward, judges, attorneys, and social service professionals have expressed strong support, recognizing the potential impact of a dedicated visitation space in strengthening family bonds and improving long-term outcomes for children and the juvenile court system. CASA has worked to gather insight from court partners, child welfare professionals, and our own advocates and staff to refine the vision and structure of the center. These collaborative efforts have laid the groundwork for CASA to transition the initiative from concept to active planning and implementation.

With a clear path forward, the next phase of development will focus on finalizing operational plans, securing sustainable funding and partners, and identifying a physical location for the center. As CASA enters the next strategic cycle, this project will shift from vision to execution, ensuring that families in Henrico County have access to a safe, accessible, and well-supported visitation space that prioritizes the wellbeing of children and advances family success.



# STRATEGIC PLANNING APPROACH

Henrico CASA's 2025–2028 Strategic Plan builds thoughtfully upon the progress of our previous plan, representing a natural next step in our organization's growth. The 2022–2025 plan laid a strong foundation, enabling CASA to serve 100% of referred children while expanding initiatives focused on awareness and education, organizational capacity, and the Visitation Center concept. With this momentum, Henrico CASA now turns to refining its approach to long-term sustainability and impact by elevating operational excellence, expanding community reach, and advancing the Visitation Center initiative. This next chapter reflects a strategic, forward-thinking response to both our past successes and the emerging needs of the children and families we serve.

In developing this current plan, Henrico CASA leveraged the "Hedgehog Concept" from *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* by Jim Collins, a framework that challenges organizations to focus on three key guiding principles:



Using this framework, Henrico CASA has reframed its strategic priorities as three interconnected pillars that reflect our mission, values, and long-term vision. *Operational Excellence* focuses on strengthening governance, staffing, and volunteer engagement to ensure CASA continues to deliver high-quality, best-interest advocacy. *Expanding Our Reach* aims to deepen community partnerships, enhance fundraising efforts, and cultivate leadership to support organizational sustainability. *Advancing Family Support with a Visitation Center* moves this vital initiative from concept to implementation, creating a safe and structured space for families to maintain meaningful connections. Together, these three priorities reinforce one another and represent a long-term investment in CASA's continued leadership in child advocacy.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1

## OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Henrico CASA is committed to delivering the highest quality advocacy by ensuring our organization is built on a foundation of strong governance, well-trained staff and volunteers, and a resilient leadership structure. By maintaining a mission-driven, highly skilled workforce, Henrico CASA will continue to serve 100% of children referred to our organization by the court and remain responsive to the evolving needs of the judicial system and child welfare landscape.

To sustain and enhance our impact, Henrico CASA is focused on what we do best — providing best-interest advocacy through dedicated, highly trained volunteer advocates and staff. We remain committed to recruiting and retaining exceptional advocates, strengthening our relationships with the judiciary and community partners, and ensuring long-term organizational sustainability. Through strategic investments in recruitment, professional development, and leadership cultivation, we will continue to elevate our role as a trusted leader in child advocacy.

With this in mind, our goals are to:

### **Goal 1: Strengthen recruitment, retention, and development of staff and advocates.**

- Implement effective recruitment strategies that attract high-quality staff and advocates who reflect the myriad of experiences of the children and families we serve.
- Ensure competitive compensation and benefits to support staff retention and long-term organizational stability.
- Expand professional development and thoughtful succession planning to ensure staff and advocates remain highly skilled and engaged in best-interest advocacy.

### **Goal 2: Maintain CASA's collaboration with the judicial system and child welfare partners.**

- Continue to work closely with judges, attorneys, and social service professionals to ensure Henrico CASA's advocacy remains a trusted and reliable resource in court proceedings.
- Adapt to shifts in child welfare policies and legal representation to ensure Henrico CASA's advocacy remains aligned with the needs of the court as well as children and families.
- Sustain Henrico CASA's role as a leader in best-interest advocacy, ensuring judges receive well-supported, comprehensive reports to help guide decision-making.

### **Goal 3: Expand Board recruitment and governance structures to ensure leadership stability.**

- Strengthen Board recruitment, orientation, and mentorship processes to cultivate engaged and informed leadership.
- Ensure the Board reflects a range of experiences, professional backgrounds, and geographic representation to best serve Henrico CASA's mission.
- Foster a culture of leadership development to maintain continuity and stability within Henrico CASA's governance structure.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2

## EXPANDING OUR REACH

Henrico CASA's ability to provide high-quality advocacy depends on sustainable funding, engaged leadership, and strong community partnerships. To expand our reach, we must continue deepening financial resources, strengthening current relationships, and cultivating leaders who champion our mission at every level.

By focusing on long-term sustainability and strategic growth, Henrico CASA will ensure that every child referred by the Court has an advocate, fulfilling our mission for years to come. Through diversified funding, leadership development, and meaningful partnerships, we will continue to build a stable foundation that supports the future of our work.

With this in mind, our goals are to:

### **Goal 1: Sustain Henrico CASA's position in the community through strategic partnerships.**

- Maintain strong collaboration with the judicial system and child welfare organizations to ensure CASA remains a trusted resource in court proceedings and child advocacy.
- Strengthen partnerships with civic groups, businesses, and community organizations to expand CASA's community presence and deepen local support for its mission.
- Increase public engagement and awareness efforts through purposeful outreach, storytelling initiatives, and media partnerships to highlight our mission and impact.

### **Goal 2: Expand community outreach and education across all areas of Henrico County.**

- Increase community awareness about the realities of child abuse and neglect across all socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds, ensuring a shared understanding that these issues impact children in every part of Henrico County – and greater Richmond.
- Foster relationships with local organizations, faith groups, businesses, and civic leaders in areas where CASA's presence and engagement have been historically limited.
- Utilize data-driven insights to identify any gaps in engagement to ensure recruitment, volunteerism, and advocacy efforts are visible throughout the County.

### **Goal 3: Strengthen financial sustainability through diversified funding sources.**

- Strengthen individual donor stewardship to enhance recurring giving, major gifts, and Ambassador engagement.
- Cultivate long-term funding partners, including foundations, corporate sponsors, and community groups, to create reliable and diverse funding sources.
- Expand current fundraising efforts by increasing participation and revenue in signature events such as Home for Good® and Mustaches for Kids (M4K) while exploring additional revenue streams.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3

## ADVANCING FAMILY SUCCESS WITH A VISITATION CENTER

Henrico CASA is committed to strengthening families and promoting safe, stable homes for children navigating the child welfare system. With family stability, reunification, and kinship care at the forefront of legislative priorities, this initiative responds to the growing need for safe, structured spaces where families can maintain and strengthen relationships.

By developing a child-centered, professionally supported visitation center, CASA will provide a secure and supportive environment where children can maintain critical family connections, support reunification when appropriate, and experience greater stability. Through collaboration with judicial partners, child welfare professionals, and community stakeholders, CASA will ensure that the center is designed to meet the needs of children and families while reinforcing long-term family success.

With this in mind, our goals are to:

### **Goal 1: Engage key stakeholders to finalize program development and operational structure.**

- Work closely with judges, child welfare professionals, and County leadership to ensure the center's services align with the needs of families, the Court and child welfare systems.
- Develop clear policies, staffing models, and program guidelines to ensure effective and consistent service delivery.
- Engage professionals in child development and trauma-informed care to ensure the visitation space is safe, supportive, and child-centered.

### **Goal 2: Secure sustainable funding and resources to support long-term operations.**

- Identify and secure an appropriate physical location that meets the needs of the families, children, and professionals who will utilize the center.
- Begin seeking sustainable operational funding sources through partnerships with local government, foundations, and community stakeholders.
- Launch a capital campaign and pursue grant opportunities to fund the development and launch of the center.

### **Goal 3: Establish the Visitation Center's identity and community support.**

- Socialize the initiative among key stakeholders (local leaders, judicial partners, child welfare agencies, and collaborative partners) to build momentum and establish the center as a vital community resource.
- Finalize the organizational structure and space design to align with the needs of children and families, the Court, and child welfare professionals, ensuring a trauma-informed and child-centered environment.
- Increase public awareness and engagement through storytelling, media outreach, and educational efforts that highlight the impact of structured visitation on child and family well-being.

# A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Henrico CASA stands at a pivotal moment in its history. As we celebrate 30 years of unwavering advocacy, we have proudly reflected on our journey of growth, resilience, and a steadfast commitment to ensuring every child referred by the Court receives an advocate. This 2026- 2029 Strategic Plan is not just a continuation of our past efforts but is a bold step forward, built on a solid foundation of success and designed to elevate CASA's impact for the next 30 years and beyond.

Through *Operational Excellence, Expanding Our Reach, and Advancing Family Success through a Visitation Center*, we are positioning CASA for long-term sustainability and even deeper impact. We are strengthening our team, engaging the community in new ways, and investing in innovative solutions that address the evolving needs of children, families, and the judicial system. These priorities reflect who we are, what we do best, and what will sustain our mission for the future.

But a plan alone does not create change — it is the people behind the mission who bring it to life. Our Advocates, Staff, Board members, Ambassadors, donors, and community partners each play a role in ensuring that Henrico CASA remains a vital resource for children in crisis. Their dedication ensures that we continue to serve 100% of the children referred by the judges, even as our mission expands. As we look ahead, we recognize that our impact stems from the relationships we foster, the voices we amplify, and the futures we help shape.

We commit ourselves to building a stronger, more sustainable future for CASA and the hundreds of children we serve each year. As we embark on this next phase, we remain committed to one simple yet profound truth: every child deserves a safe and stable home and family life. With this plan as our guide, we will continue to amplify children's voices, strengthen families, and ensure that the next 30 years of CASA's work are even more impactful than the last.





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