

Illinois Court Appointed Special Advocates



Diversity Strategic Action Plan

2018 – 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Illinois CASA is part of a national volunteer movement that began in 1977 when a judge in Seattle decided he needed to know more about the children whose lives were in his hands. He started using community volunteers – regular citizens – as a “voice in court” for abused and neglected children. These Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) provided him with the detailed information he needed to safeguard the children’s best interests and ensure that they were placed in safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible. The program was so successful that it was copied around the nation.

Illinois CASA was founded in 1993 and is the organizing body for thirty-one CASA programs in 48 counties in Illinois that recruit, train and manage close to 2,500 CASA volunteers who advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in court. CASA volunteers, who contributed more than 150,000 hours of their collective time last year, are trained and supervised by their local agencies and sworn to confidentiality by the Juvenile Judge of the Circuit Court. CASA volunteers gather objective information and report to the court regularly on the status of each child. This information is used by the Judge to determine if the child should be reunified with their family or prepared for adoption. The CASA volunteer works as a team member with the caseworker assigned by DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) and the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Attorney assigned to the child. Each CASA volunteer is assigned to one case (usually one or two children) at a time and serves on that case until it closes. Often times the CASA volunteer is the only consistent, caring adult in the child’s life.

Illinois CASA is committed to ensuring ALL communities view CASA as an organization that is responsive to their needs. To fulfill this commitment, Illinois CASA must be strongly committed to diversity in all aspects of our work and must be a culturally competent organization.

MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Our Mission

Illinois CASA champions children by supporting, uniting, and growing local programs to provide a court appointed volunteer advocate for abused and neglected children throughout the State.

Our Vision

All Illinois children will grow and thrive in a safe and secure environment.

Our Values

As an organization, we believe:

- All children have the right to grow and thrive in a safe and secure environment.
- Ending child abuse and neglect is a community responsibility.
- All individuals should be treated with respect.
- In maintaining the highest standards of ethics and confidentiality.
- Education can effect change in attitudes and behaviors.
- In serving as leaders for positive change through advocacy and collaboration with community partners.

DIVERSITY VISION

Illinois CASA believes that society in general and CASAs, in particular, benefit from the contributions of people with diverse personal characteristics (included but not limited to race, ethnicity, religion, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender and type of disability).

Our vision is for Illinois CASA to be a diverse and culturally competent organization, capable of serving children in an increasingly diverse, and cultural society.

Our advocacy, programs, services, and supports are relevant and accessible to persons of different races, ethnicity and other dimensions of diversity.

DIVERSITY STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

SUMMARY OF GOALS

Goal 1

Illinois CASA will be a leader in diversity in the Court Appointed Special Advocacy community.

Goal 2

Illinois CASA's 31 local programs will be recognized as preferred providers of advocacy services and supports to diverse communities.

GOAL 1 – STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Illinois CASA will be a leader in diversity in the Court Appointed Special Advocacy community.

Strategy 1: Articulate Illinois CASA's commitment to diversity to key stakeholders in the children's advocacy community.

Tactic 1: Illinois CASA will widely disseminate this Diversity Strategic Action Plan throughout the children's advocacy community, including all local CASA programs.

Tactic 2: Illinois CASA will produce and disseminate an Annual Diversity Report.

Tactic 3: Illinois CASA will convene a Diversity Task Force with participation from internal and external stakeholders to monitor progress on the strategic action plan.

Tactic 4: Illinois CASA will include its Diversity Strategic Action Plan in affiliation materials.

Tactic 5: Illinois CASA will regularly reinforce its commitment to diversity in communications with local CASA programs.

Tactic 6: Illinois CASA will increase the use of diverse images in all marketing materials.

Strategy 2: Increase the diversity of Illinois CASA's Board of Directors to be representative of the community in which we work.

Tactic 1: Illinois CASA biennially will assess the diversity of the Board of Directors and will develop and pursue diversity recruitment goals, as needed, to compose a board that can lead Illinois CASA in meeting the needs of the diverse communities of Illinois.

Tactic 2: Illinois CASA will create a list of potential board member from diverse backgrounds, establish contact, and build awareness of Illinois CASA.

Tactic 3: Illinois CASA will hold regular education sessions on diversity and cultural competence with the Board.

Strategy 3: Increase the diversity of Illinois CASA's management and staff to be representative of the community in which we work.

Tactic 1: Illinois CASA annually will assess the diversity of the staff of the organization.

Tactic 2: Illinois CASA will place all job notices in newspapers or on websites targeting diverse communities.

Tactic 3: Illinois CASA will conduct ongoing cultural competence education with staff.

Strategy 4: Increase the accessibility of Illinois CASA's programs and services to diverse population.

Tactic 1: Illinois CASA will survey all local programs to determine any and all languages that key documents can be translated into.

Tactic 2: The Illinois CASA website will have translation capability.

GOAL 1 – KEY METRICS

Key Metrics:

- Percentage of Board Members who are racially ethnically diverse.
- Percentage of staff members, at each level, who are racially/ethnically diverse.
- Number of relationships with diverse organizations.
- Number of pages (print or web) of materials in other languages.
- Number of board and staff training programs conducted.
- Percentage of favorable responses to evaluation surveys after board and staff training sessions.

Goal 2 – STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Illinois CASA's 31 local programs will be recognized as preferred providers of advocacy services and supports to diverse communities.

Strategy 1: Illinois CASA will actively support each of Illinois' 31 local CASA programs to develop and articulate their commitment to diversity.

Tactic 1: Illinois CASA will develop and provide a Diversity Toolkit to support local CASA programs to create their own Diversity Strategic Action Plan and to monitor progress in implementing the plan.

Tactic 2: Illinois CASA will create a template to support local CASA programs creating a web presence for their vision for diversity and inclusion.

Tactic 3: Illinois CASA will provide diverse images of children to local CASA programs for inclusion in local marketing materials.

Tactic 4: Illinois CASA will establish a mechanism to recognize excellence in diversity among our state and local chapters and among external stakeholders.

Tactic 5: Illinois CASA will create a peer learning community among programs to support programs working together to advance diversity and cultural competence in the network.

Strategy 2: Illinois CASA will actively support local CASA programs to increase diversity of their boards to be reflective of the diversity of the community in which they serve.

Tactic 1: Illinois CASA will provide language for the board prospectus of local CASA programs that supports efforts to create a diverse board.

Tactic 2: Illinois CASA will develop and provide a Diversity Toolkit for local CASA programs to assess their board demographics and identify outreach goals.

Tactic 3: Illinois CASA will develop and provide a Diversity Toolkit for local CASA chapters to support the identification of potential board members from diverse backgrounds and pinpoint tactics to establish contact and build awareness of the CASA program.

Tactic 4: Illinois CASA will develop diversity and cultural competence education sessions for chapters to engage in with their boards.

Strategy 3: Increase the accessibility of Illinois CASA's local programs to diverse populations.

Tactic 1: Illinois CASA will identify resources to support local CASA programs to translate key documents and information from new and existing programs into several languages, including websites.

Tactic 2: Illinois CASA's Local Program Website area will have translation capability.

Tactic 3: Illinois CASA will develop Diversity Toolkit for local CASA program staff to utilize in creating and implementing a strategy for outreach to diverse communities.

GOAL 2 – KEY METRICS

Key Metrics:

- Percentage of local CASA program Board Members who are racially/ethnically diverse.
- Number of local CASA programs participating in the diversity initiative.
- Number of local CASA programs that have adopted a Diversity Strategic Action Plan.

DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

The following personal characteristics have been identified as dimensions of diversity. The focus of the 2018-2021 Illinois CASA Diversity Strategic Action Plan is on race and ethnicity.

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender identity or expression
- Sexual orientation
- Disability status and type
- Relationship to persons with disabilities (e.g. apparent, sibling, friend)
- Religion/spirituality
- Political party, views, ideology
- Viewpoint on disability issues
- Languages spoken
- Country of origin
- Military service
- Socio-economic status
- U.S. territories
- Tribal communities
- Geographic locale (e.g. urban, rural, suburban, frontier)
- Educational level attained
- Age