

MONTANA CASA/GAL ASSOCIATION



# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2020

WHAT IS THE  
DIFFERENCE

*between  
scared  
and safe?*

MY CASA.



[WWW.MONTANACASAGAL.ORG](http://WWW.MONTANACASAGAL.ORG)



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

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**MONTANA**

# MONTANA CASA/GAL MISSION

The mission of Montana CASA/GAL Association is to support, develop, expand and unite local CASA/GAL programs so they can maximize their effectiveness while advocating for Montana's abused and neglected children.

Our Vision is to give every abused and neglected child in Montana the opportunity to thrive in a safe, loving permanent home.

Our strategic plan outlines strategies and goals to support our mission in 4 core areas.

- Support local CASA/GAL programs through training, organizational development and financial support.
- Support adherence to National CASA standards.
- Advocate for state policy and funding to protect and serve abused and neglected children.
- Promote CASA/GAL through a statewide marketing campaign to raise awareness of our work and cultivate volunteers.

# MONTANA'S LOCAL PROGRAM STATISTICS



**2,253 Montana Children had a CASA in 2020**



**914 Montana Volunteer Advocates  
Helped 2,253 Children  
Donating  
38,124 Hours**

**There are over  
1,000 Children waiting for an  
advocate**





# MONTANA CASA/GAL IMPACT

Children who have experienced abuse or neglect fare better with a CASA/GAL.

Studies have shown:

- They are more likely to find a safe, permanent home
- They are more likely to succeed in school
- They are half as likely to re-enter the foster care system
- Volunteers are trained to understand the impact of trauma on children

Having a stable relationship with a supportive adult can help children do well, even when they face significant hardships.

Montana currently has 1000+ children waiting for a CASA.

We are leading the continued growth and development of a network of Local Montana CASA programs.

There are currently 15 local programs across the state of Montana.

Each Local CASA Program recruits, trains and supports their CASA Volunteers.

There are areas in Montana that currently do not have a CASA program. We have created an awareness campaign to bring attention to our cause by increasing CASA programs to help serve all Montana foster children.

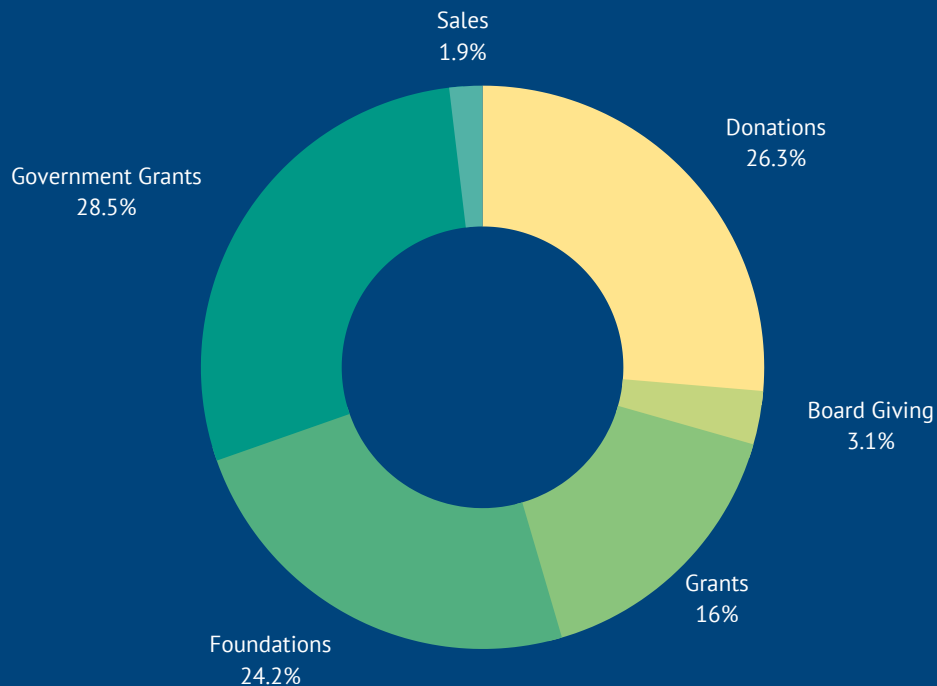
If you are considering becoming a supporter. Please click the donate button today.

[Donate Here](#)



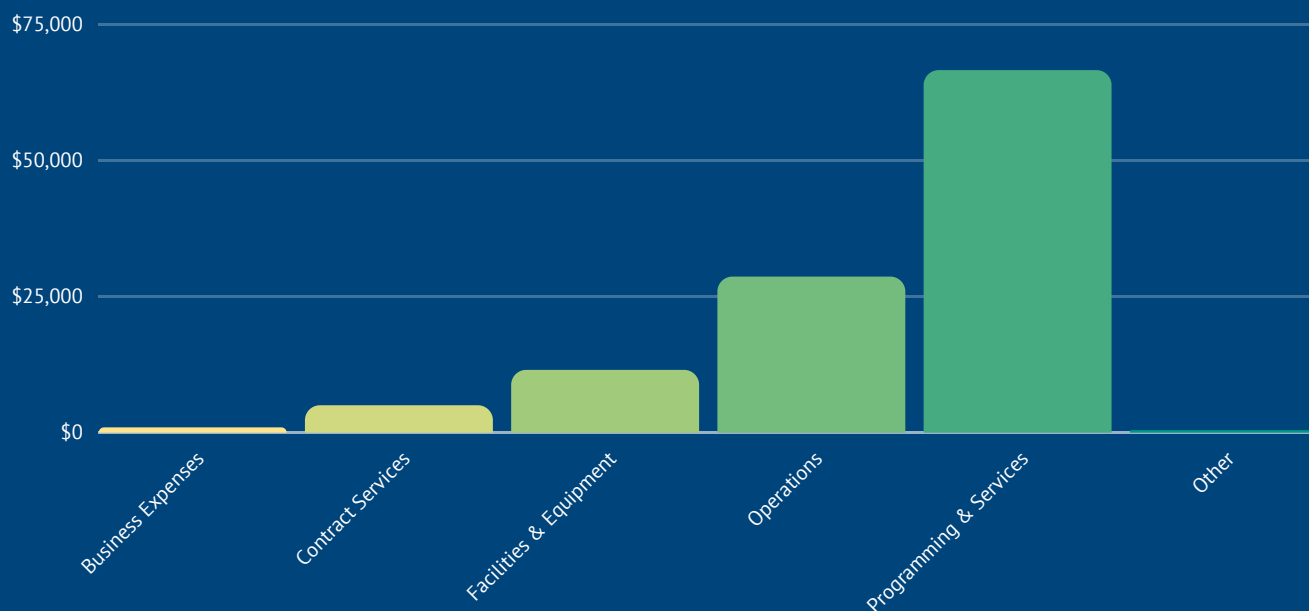
# FISCAL REPORT BY CATEGORY AND PERCENTAGE

TOTAL RAISED \$126,565.40



# EXPENSES BY DOLLAR AMOUNT

TOTAL EXPENSES \$111,829.12



# MONTANA CASA/GAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Goals

## Achievements

### **Goal #1:** National CASA Alignment

- Completed the Highly Effective Review with National CASA

### **Goal #2:** Resource Development

- Established a Resource Development Task Force
- Completed a Resource Development Plan
- Procured funds for a MTCASA vehicle for travel to provide local program trainings, annual site visits and stakeholder meetings
- Provided pass through funding to local programs

### **Goal #3:** Business Services & Training

- Provided pass through funding to local programs for training of advocates and staff
- Hosted a District & Tribal Court Judges CASA training
- Provided trainings and webinars to local programs covering the topics: legal services, trauma, insurance best practices and nonprofit board governance best practices
- Provided funding resources to local programs
- Provided networking opportunities to local programs and CASA stakeholders via a Montana CASA Virtual Conference and meetings
- Provided personal protection equipment, guidance and resources to local programs during the pandemic
- Started first steps in creating cross training opportunities with the Department of Family Services

# MONTANA CASA/GAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS CONTINUED

## Goals

## Achievements

### **Goal #4:** Legislative

- Created criteria for legislation decision making
- Provided education and Information regarding CASA to state legislators
- Provided guidance and templates to local programs for legislator engagement best practices

### **Goal #5:** Promotions, Marketing

- Produced and implemented social media campaigns and website updates
- Produced a quarterly public digital newsletter
- Provided training to local programs regarding the use of the CASA Marketing & Volunteer Recruitment Tool Kit.

### **Goal #6:** Staffing

- Hired a full-time Montana CASA/GAL Office Manager

### **Goal #7:** Board Development

- Onboarded two new board members
- Refined and completed board orientation
- Provided board trainings including the topics: Board Philanthropy and Best Board Governance Practices

# Mission Highlights

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The mission of Montana CASA/GAL Association is to support, develop, expand and unite local CASA/GAL programs so they can maximize their effectiveness while advocating for Montana's abused and neglected children.

We have all adapted and developed new skills and approaches to life and work during a pandemic. Our organization is no different, but the impact of our work has become even more critical as more families face economic and emotional stress and these conditions pose greater risks for abuse and neglect. MTCASA recognized this was an important time to advance our efforts and continue to serve Montana CASA programs across the state.

In order to support local programs we responded to the call for PPE. With adequate PPE local programs and volunteers would be able to safely connect with the families and children in foster care. While zoom meetings offered distanced connections, face-to-face meetings remain important and sometimes necessary. Providing PPE was a tangible action that supported the important work of CASA's as they develop relationships to inform their advocacy and recommendations.

A statewide perspective highlights the need for growth and to develop CASA programs where they are lacking. An ambitious growth plan to meet this need was developed and integrated into several grant applications. The board and staff are prepared to implement the growth plan when funding is secured.

In preparation for the 2021 Montana legislative session, our legislative committee developed clear guidance on MT CASA's priorities and implemented an outreach plan to inform and engage legislators across the state on CASA concerns. These efforts dramatically expanded our voice and we are now an active, respected player in the policy discussions affecting abused and neglected children.

Taking care of one another and cultivating strong community connections has been recognized over and over as a critical element in maintaining emotional and mental health during the pandemic. MTCASA worked to unite local programs with regular conference calls and check-ins to ensure program staff and volunteers were feeling supported and had opportunities to share how programs were adapting and managing with peers.

We encourage you to reach out to the Executive Director, April Sommers if you have any questions about our mission-driven programs and activities.



*Jennifer Boyer*

**JENNIFER BOYER**

Montana CASA/GAL,  
Vice Chair of the Board of Directors





# SUCCESS STORIES

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Our office is proud to support 15 local programs across the State of Montana. There are several examples of success located throughout the annual impact report with the title "Success Stories":

Cherie LeBlanc-Dyba has been a part of CASA for 27 years. She started her tenure as a volunteer and now serves on the Board of Directors for MTCASA/GAL as well as being the Executive Director of Eastern Montana CASA serving 15 counties.

Cherie is appreciative of how active MTCASA is, especially when it comes to reaching out to the board of directors and the local judges to inform them on what MTCASA is doing. She feels it is important to have the support of MTCASA.

MTCASA support not only helps her local program but it brings awareness to

what CASA/GAL does and the impact it makes on Montana children and families. With the support of MTCASA, Cherie's local program served 272 children in 2020.

Just one avenue of the support she received was in a Marketing toolkit. Cherie has utilized the tool kit for her local program's social media, website, yard signs and soon window screens.

Cherie is thankful for the many avenues of support that MTCASA has already provided and looks forward to a continued relationship that will only increase the number of children helped.

This will help MTCASA reach the goal to give every abused and neglected child in Montana the opportunity to thrive in a safe, loving permanent home.

# CHAIRPERSON'S STATEMENT

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In 2020, the MTCASA/GAL Board of Directors continued to perform our most important duty – to serve as guardians of the mission of the organization. We are committed to the singular focus of meeting the mission to advocate for the abused and neglected children of Montana. In 2020, MTCASA was guided by a three-year strategic plan, which will be completed in 2021. The plan sets the strategic direction of the organization and supports the board and staff in meeting our mission. We have accomplished many of the objectives set out in our strategic plan. In 2021, the Board will focus our oversight efforts in the following areas:

- The establishment of MTCASA as a highly effective organization as determined by the National CASA organization.
- Work towards achieving the goals of the Resource Development plan
- Continue to enhance services to local programs.
- Implement the 2021 Marketing and Communication plan
- Promote board development through a variety of educational offerings.
- Monitor the implementation of a growth plan that is aimed at increasing the number of children being served by current programs, and study the capacity for the possible expansion of programs into regions currently without CASA services.

With all the challenges of 2020, MTCASA has shown resilience and creativity in delivering our mission for the benefit of the children. We are especially gratified by the many positive and important partnerships formed with other agencies and stakeholders that will help move this important work forward. We anticipate that MTCASA will continue to play an essential role in helping guarantee positive outcomes for the neglected and abused children in Montana, now and in the future.



*Elaine Meeks*

**ELAINE MEEKS**

*Montana CASA/GAL,  
Chair of the Board of Directors*



# SUCCESS STORIES

How has the Montana State CASA Program helped our Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribe CASA Program? They keep programs informed, connected and supported on many levels: legislation, funding opportunities, reporting, resources, services, support and the list goes on. I appreciate all the staff at the Montana State CASA Office. The staff are always helpful and kind.

- In 2018, Ann Marie McNeel, Lake-Sanders County CASA Program Director and on the Montana CASA/GAL Board of Directors helped our program by adding a welcoming tag to the end of their Volunteer Recruitment campaign on a local radio station. It helped give our Tribal program recognition.

- In 2020, as COVID 19 was devastating our country and our tribal communities it was April Sommers, the State of Montana CASA Executive Director and her staff that assisted our program and programs across the State of Montana with masks, disinfectants and other PPE equipment. Thank you.

- The State of Montana CASA Program also shared their resources to help our program purchase zoom due to the shelter in place COVID restrictions.

Keep up the awesome work!!

Roxana Colman-Herak,  
Executive Director of The Confederated  
Salish Kootenai Tribe CASA



# THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



**Antoinet Bonenberger**  
**Brian and Margaret Pulito**  
**CASA for Kids**  
**Classic Ink**  
**Danielle Blank-Thomsen**  
**Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation**  
**Eagle Eye Bookkeeping**  
**Eastern Montana CASA**  
**Headwaters Foundation**  
**In Honor of Jennifer Boyer**  
**In Memory of Debra Ray Jones**  
**In Memory of Jean Trueblood Davies**  
**In Memory of Judge Ted O. Lympus**  
**Joel Crosby & Joanne Cate**  
**Joyce Dwyer**  
**Joyce and Ed Eck**  
**Lawrence and Laura Brehm**  
**Lea Stringfellow**  
**Mission Accounting**  
**Montana CASA/GAL Board of Directors**  
**Montana Court Improvement Program**  
**Montana COVID Relief Fund**  
**Montana Judges Association**  
**Montana Police Protective Association**  
**National CASA/GAL Association**  
**Oro Y Plata Foundation**  
**Pacific Health Plans**  
**Payne West Insurance**  
**Serving Well Consulting**  
**The Fred M. and Lorraine M. Nelson Trust**  
**Town Pump Charitable Foundation**  
**Victims Of Crime Act-Montana Board of Crime Control**

\*LISTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Without support, MTCASA/GAL wouldn't be able to fulfill their mission. Thank you for your generosity in supporting our vision "to give every abused and neglected child in Montana the opportunity to thrive in a safe, loving permanent home".





# SUCCESS STORIES

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Tom Russell started volunteering for CASA of Missoula in October of 2019. He immediately stood out for his exceptional attention to detail and unrelenting dedication to his role. As a result, our staff assigned Tom to arguably one of our hardest cases, which has been open for many years and requires long-term advocacy. We knew Tom would take the time to dig deep and learn the case inside and out, push the team to zealously advocate for this child, and stay involved as long as needed to see the case through. Less than a year later, Tom took on an additional case to make an even bigger impact.

Margaret, Tom's CASA Supervisor, shared, "Tom is an amazing CASA. He is extremely dedicated and has a true passion to help.

He's already written four court reports for his case and he's available for every call, hearing, and Zoom meeting."

"The child in his case is nonverbal, but despite the communication barrier, he works so hard for her and has her best interest at heart. Tom really deserves to be spotlighted. I'm so happy to be able to work with him."

Lastly, Tom takes his continuing education as a CASA very seriously. He attends all of Missoula CASA Connect meetings and the majority of our in-service trainings. He has dedicated nearly 100 hours this last year to his CASA kids!

Thank you so much for all you do, Tom. You are a great addition to the Missoula CASA program!

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

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2020 provided a historic challenge with the pandemic shaking our society to its core with lives lost, economic disaster and families devastated. Montana' CASA/GAL programs rose to the challenge of ensuring that every CASA youth were being seen and heard. This was an undertaking that required determination, collaboration and creativity. CASAs are dedicated volunteers with a keen sense of the responsibility in which they have been charged. This was a time to remind ourselves that Montana's abused and neglected children needed us now more than ever. Schools shut down meant that children were not being seen-CASAs saw them. Courtrooms closed-CASAs were still there. COVID safety measures meant little to no physical contact-CASAs engaged the children. Funds decreased-CASA programs continued to raise funds and continue operations. Here is how they did it:

- Personal protection including masks were provided and worn.
- Local programs were provided with online technology.
- Courts were open via online.
- Early in the pandemic, children were seen from sidewalks, doorways, and online.
- Some visitations are occurring with the use of PPE and social distancing.
- Children (when age appropriate) were called.
- Children are being seen virtually whenever possible.
- COVID Relief funding and PPL loans provided much needed funding.
- Creative virtual fundraising such as online auctions and virtual events brought in support.
- Donors continued to provide support. Some providing larger gifts than they had before.

We thank the Montana community and beyond for continuing to support local programs and helping us keep the state office doors open as well. Supporters provided PPE, funding for operations which were once restricted to other items, and funding for programming and projects. Most of all we thank the dedicated volunteer advocates who continue to be there for the children even while their lives are impacted by COVID. We are simply amazed by the dedicated CASA volunteers.

We look forward to being back with the children 100% in-person. Until then, Montana CASA/GAL will continue to make a difference by networking and problem solving with each other as CASA, with state agencies, National CASA/GAL and child welfare stakeholders.

We are grateful for your partnership in ensuring the success of our mission.



**APRIL SOMMERS**

*Montana CASA/GAL,  
Executive Director*



# SUCCESS STORIES

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Pam Copley has volunteered with CASA of Missoula since 2018. In that time, she has advocated for eight children in three families, and dedicated over 162 hours to their best interests. Pam has stood by the side of many children who've experienced darkness many of us could never imagine. There's no doubt her tireless efforts have changed young lives and our community for the better.

Pam's most recent dismissed case was "a success story of monumental proportion" as Pam, herself, puts it. The treatment team worked hard on behalf of two siblings that were deeply emotionally, physically, and educationally neglected and abused. Pam became very close to the children, and they shared a lot of time together. "They went from scared, confused children to confident, happy, silly kiddos," Pam said.

The children were placed in an exceptional foster home that hung in there with them while they worked through significant issues of trauma. The foster family recently took permanent guardianship of the children and their future looks bright. Although the case has closed, Pam says she will remain a part of their lives as a friend. "We went Christmas shopping together and sincerely enjoy spending time together," Pam shared.

Pam says her primary objective with the children she serves is to "Become a trusted friend. Make sure they know I am on their side and will absolutely let the judge know exactly how they are doing and what they want him to know." Pam is very responsive to everyone on her case, shows up for all hearings, and writes timely, detailed reports to the court. Pam even gives the extra time to mentor new CASA volunteers.



# MTCASA Board

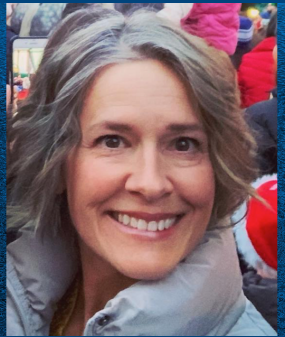


ELAINE MEEKS,  
CHAIR /PRESIDENT

## & Staff



TOM McELWAIN



JENNIFER BOYER,  
VICE CHAIR/PRESIDENT



APRIL SOMMERS,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



JOHN MENYHART



CHRISTIAN SHAEFFER,  
TREASURER



ALEXANDRA PLANT



CHERIE LeBLANC-DYBA



GLENDA NOYES,  
SECRETARY



HILLARY SALMONSEN  
Office Manager



ANN MARIE McNEEL





# SUCCESS STORIES

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It's been almost a year since June was sworn in as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for children in Ravalli County and assigned this case.

She became the advocate for two little boys that had been removed from their home 14 months earlier. June, a brand new CASA, reviewed the children's history. She contacted all family members who had provided information to CFS throughout the tenure of the case. June connected with an Aunt, who shared that the boys were always on her mind, and she wished she could do more, but she lived 3000 miles away. June discovered the Aunt was willing to take guardianship and in the future, adopt these boys.

June developed a positive relationship with the boy's parents and learned both parents were open to the Aunt taking custody.

She kept both parents informed and provided all details and progress regarding this option and made sure they understood and were informed every step of the way.

June worked with CFS and investigated processes and procedures for guardianship across state lines. She encouraged and helped facilitate the Aunt's visit to Montana to spend time with the children. She helped the Aunt access and helped her complete all the necessary paperwork. June helped the Aunt connect with local resources in her home state to help ensure necessary services for the boys would be in place for smooth personal transitions. Within 4 months this newly minted and amazing CASA identified the strengths within the family circle and helped establish a safe, permanent, and nurturing home for these boys.



**MONTANA**

**Thank You  
for your continued support**

**If you have any questions or comments  
you can reach us at:**

**P.O. BOX 2596  
225 West Front Street  
Missoula, MT 59806**

**Phone: 406-461-2111**

**Website: [www.montanacasagal.org](http://www.montanacasagal.org)**

**Email: [Office@montanacasagal.org](mailto:Office@montanacasagal.org)**