

RISE PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

CASA Youth Advocates, Inc. of Delaware & Chester Counties



Overview

CASA Youth Advocates, Inc. of Delaware & Chester Counties (CASA) recruits, trains, and supports community volunteers to serve as advocates – known as Court Appointed Special Advocates – for children who have experienced abuse and neglect and are therefore in the dependency court system. Many of these children are in foster care. Volunteer advocates appear in court on a regular basis, give recommendations, and provide information to help judges make the best decisions about a child’s immediate needs and long-term future.

As a member of a national organization, CASA formed locally in 1992, building on the work of volunteers supporting children in Delaware County since the 1970s. In 2015, CASA expanded to begin serving children and youth in Chester County. Today, more than 140 volunteers in the local program annually serve over 250 children aged birth to 21 years old.



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Leigh Anne McKelvey, Executive Director at CASA

Children with an advocate are more likely to find a safe, permanent home, succeed in school, and they are half as likely to re-enter the foster care system.

CASA is further enhancing its impact as one of 15 organizations selected to participate in the RISE Partnership's "Implementation" phase.

CASA's work with RISE started with the development of a logic model, a process the organization had never gone through in detail before. After several iterations, the logic model is now ready to share with funders and guides internal checks of the organization's work and practices.

"Not only did we get a logic model on paper describing the pathway that our work takes and what it takes to be impactful and successful in our work, but going through that process actually helped us better understand those steps ourselves," said Leigh Anne McKelvey, executive director at CASA. "I inherited one when I became the executive director but, looking back now, knowing what I know about developing logic models, I wouldn't even say it was a logic model."

Following the logic model process, CASA started to look deeper into its data collection and analysis process.

The organization started questioning the data it collects and what should be done with it.

"[RISE] really helped us take a lot of data that was already in some format and look at it in a way that was meaningful," said McKelvey. "And also helped us focus in on 'what do we truly need to be tracking and what is unnecessary?'"

This new approach to data collection and analysis led CASA to start looking at outcomes by various demographics like age, gender, race, and cultural background. The organization wanted to answer questions like: Who is most vulnerable? Who is most likely to have the worst outcomes? And who is most likely to have a difficult journey through the child welfare system?

From there, advocacy practices and interventions could be tailored to better support children's needs.

"We wanted to tailor our advocacy so that we can do everything we can to better those outcomes," said McKelvey. "We're in the process of really looking at how we appropriately train people who are going to become their advocates to be the best advocate possible."



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Leigh Anne McKelvey, Executive Director at CASA

CASA found that children of color, particularly African American children (and specifically African American teenage girls) were the most marginalized group, with the most time in foster care, most number of placements, or most likely placed in residential care.

"Really every data point you can think of in child welfare, their outcomes were worse than their white counterparts or their male counterparts," explained McKelvey.

CASA wasn't convinced that this data was unique to their local program, but rather reflective of a larger problem in the child welfare system. So the organization launched the Equity Child Welfare Task Force consisting of CASA, Children and Youth Services, as well as

the Dependency Court judge, attorneys, and community leaders who work in the county's child welfare system. The task force examined data at the county level and found similar disparities to CASA.

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The task force also conducted a best practices scan to learn what other child welfare programs across the country were doing to advance equity in their systems. As a result of the learnings, CASA advocated to bring a series of professional development trainings to



child welfare stakeholders, including attorneys and case workers. The impact of RISE extended beyond CASA to the entire countywide child welfare system.

“We advocated to bring a series of continuing education opportunities around diversity, equity, and inclusion,” said McKelvey. “It really had ripple effects at a systemic level and at a countywide level, the work that we started with RISE three years ago.”

With the help of RISE, CASA accomplished a lot in three years – but believes it can do much more.

“I look at it as just the beginning of the journey and setting us on the right path,” said McKelvey. “It’s a long process and a long-term journey, but I’m excited about where we’re at and where we’re trying to go.”



Established in 2018, The RISE (Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability for Effectiveness) Partnership supports promising Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey nonprofit organizations. The RISE Partnership Evaluation Funders Learning Community is the first convening supported by a network of funders in the region. The Learning Community is a collaborative effort with the Barra Foundation, Campbell Soup Company, Horner Foundation, Nelson Foundation, Philadelphia Foundation, PropelNext/Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Scattergood Foundation, and United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, and a partnership with YaleEVAL of The Consultation Center at Yale. The Partnership provides nonprofits with resources and training to strengthen organizational effectiveness and ensure a greater impact on social, economic, health, and educational conditions in communities, including the effects of racism, intergenerational poverty and trauma.

For more information visit therisepartnership.org

