



# CASA-MB PROGRAM ROAD MAP

FY 2024/2025

## Summary

The **Program Road Map** provides an overview of our current challenges, and strategies for management and growth.

Our staff developed this document to capture all that is emerging from the myriad initiatives we are currently involved in, including two staff planning retreats and the *Race Equity* and *CASA Network Impact* initiatives we are piloting for CASA-NJ. We hope that this will help inform the strategic planning work that we will begin together in early 2025.

For context, we have included the *CASA Core Model* – what our (and every) CASA program does.

# THE CORE MODEL -- HOW CASA PROGRAMS WORK

## Step 1 RECRUITMENT

CASA recruits and vets potential volunteer Advocates

Recruitment staff advertise for and conduct outreach to secure a large and diverse pool of candidates

Information sessions are held several times per month in both counties

Those who attend a session, are interested, and are approved by staff, move on to a formal 60-90 minute interview

Candidates who pass the interview, application process and background checks are moved on to the next scheduled Pre-Service training class

## Step 2 TRAINING

CASA trains all potential advocates in accordance with CASA National and AOC requirements

Pre-Service Training classes are held quarterly and consist of 30 hours of classroom training and 3 hours of court observation

Candidates are evaluated by staff throughout the training process

Candidates who successfully complete the training are sworn in by a Family Court Judge and become CASA Advocates

CASA provides In-Service training for existing Advocates on an on-going basis to ensure volunteers receive at least 12 hours of additional training annually

## Step 3 SUPPORT

Staff provide ongoing comprehensive case management support to all Advocates

Each Advocate is assigned a case manager (Advocate Supervisor) for on-going, hands-on support

Advocate Supervisors assign cases, go to court and child-visits with new Advocates, vet and approve court reports and trouble shoot issues as they arise

## RECRUITMENT

### Stated Need

After years of decline, child removals have increased in both counties

Volunteers are needed across the state, and in M-B

We do not have enough volunteers to meet the increased need in both counties we serve

Both counties need Black and Brown Advocates

Mercer needs volunteers willing to visit Trenton and volunteers who speak Spanish;

Burlington needs Portuguese speakers

### What we currently do

Agency-wide focus on recruitment; particularly successful measures include strategic/targeted postcard mailings to under-represented communities

Recruiters are tapping into our current volunteer pool for connections that can lead to recruitment opportunities

Recruiters quickly follow up on all leads to offer to make presentations, etc.

### Implementing Change...

Staff actively increase opportunities for community presentations; present at forums, meetings and to partner agencies; host Lunch/Learns for Corporations

Assistant Director will meet one-on-one with Board Members to explore their connections to potential advocates

Create a position to engage communities that reflect the families we serve, and are underrepresented by current volunteers

Send targeted post cards ahead of each training.

### ...Continued

Continually update website with new content; increase social media presence

CASA staff work with advocates with ties to Portuguese and Spanish speaking communities; engage them to make connections for us to support our recruitment goals

## TRAINING

### Stated Need

CASA National's training curriculum has not been updated in years.

There is a need for pre-service training that more effectively prepares new volunteers, and which utilizes a race equity perspective

Trainings specifically for Advocates working with older youth

There is a need to strengthen our evaluation process for volunteer trainees

### What we currently do

Director of Training is working with Aging Out Youth staff to design a specific training for Advocates working with this age group

Director of Training is revising pre-service content with/for CASA NJ and Mercer and Burlington Counties

Program Managers attend training to assess candidates

Working together, staff created a process to assess the progress of potential candidates, using a Google doc for tracking, and meetings pre- and post- training for discussion

### Implementing Change...

We will launch an Older Youth pilot in Fall of 2024.

Beginning in Fall 2024 and continuing throughout FY 25, Director of Training will implement changes to pre-service training, as they are ready to roadtest.

Staff will use the improved system for screening and assessing volunteers beginning with the fall training class

### ...Continued

Throughout FY 25 Director of Training will work with CASA NJ and a sub-committee of local programs to develop and implement changes to pre-service curriculum. These will include opportunities for role playing and have a strong Race Equity lens

## ADVOCATE SUPPORT - General

### Stated Need

To help meet our need for volunteer, we must retain existing volunteers

With case complexity increasing, support is needed to prevent secondary trauma and burnout

Managing the reality of our cases: increased case complexity; cases staying open longer; children placed further away/out of county; increased need for specialized educational advocacy

### What we currently do

Launched a well-received summer mileage reimbursement pilot

Connect advocates who have expertise in education to those who need their assistance

Meet regularly with advocates on problem solving and specific issues such as court reports

Volunteer Celebration event planned for December 2024

Planning in-person gatherings and Air/Shares throughout the year

### Implementing change...

Create annual *Plan of Support* for Advocates, to be implemented by advocate supervisors

Create a panel of Advocates with educational experience; present to volunteers, staff and community partners

Evaluate the success of visit incentives and mileage reimbursement, implementing long term if working

Increase opportunities for Supervisors to connect with their Advocates - i.e. - assist with a book club, invite them to the office for coffee or lunch after court

## ADVOCATE SUPPORT -- Case Management

### Stated Need

After a steady years'-long decline, Child Removals are increasing in both counties

Management styles differ between our Mercer and Burlington staff and may benefit from a more uniform approach – Mercer's approach is formal; Burlington's is more cooperative.

With cases taking longer to close and their complexity increasing, supporting our Advocates is more important than ever

### What we currently do

Burlington staff are intentional about relationship building, an approach that has worked in that well-functioning county

Mercer staff are organized and methodical, which benefits the less efficient court system in that county

Mercer Program Manager has created a Supervisor's Manual, which is a significant tool for new and existing staff and will be shared with CASA-NJ

We are working with CASA-NJ Training Committee to develop trauma trainings and other supports for Advocates

### Implementing change

Utilize the new CASA Network Impact advocate evaluation tool designed to deepen relationships with and provide more support to volunteers

Implement evaluation tool quarterly in the Advocate's first year, and annually thereafter

Schedule regular meetings of our Mercer and Burlington program staff to encourage cross-county communication and less siloing

Embed into office culture opportunities to be together, such as staff lunches

Beginning September 8, in addition to attending court and other meetings, staff will be in the office together every Monday and Thursday

## BONUS: OUR PARTNERS AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

### Stated Need

Mercer Court has a very high turnover in staff; Judges are overworked and overtly frustrated

Mercer Advocate Supervisors would benefit from getting Discovery documents and more frequent communication from DCP&P

Burlington County has also experienced staff changes at Court and DCP&P (to a lesser degree than Mercer) which impacts communication

### What we currently do

Due to on-going Mercer Court issues, all communication with them funnels through our Mercer Program Manager. This single point of contact has worked well. Things have improved some with the court's new team leader, and there is increased visibility at hearings

Burlington Advocate Supervisors have relationships with court and DCP&P staff. Judges are invested in CASA. When there is a breakdown in communication, any CASA staff member can address it

Staff have made presentations to DCP&P offices. This enabled Burlington to receive DCP&P reports and court Discovery. Any CASA advocate supervisors can meet with DCP&P leadership as needed.

### Implementing Change...

CASA staff will intentionally look for ways to raise our visibility and address issues that arise. This includes successful communication strategies with caseworkers/court staff/others

To strengthen our relationships, CASA will develop and offer trainings for Court and DCP&P staff and other providers on issues related to child welfare and our work

Launch "Coffee with CASA" for DCP&P case workers to meet CASA staff for informal conversation on how we can best work together and be of mutual support