



## **More than 700 CASA volunteers, judges, attorneys come together at Ohio CASA conference for essential training to help Ohio children in foster care**

Hundreds of CASA volunteers and child welfare professionals from across Ohio came together for training at Ohio CASA's 29th Annual Celebrate Kids! Conference in Columbus, thanks to generous support from the Ohio Department of Children and Youth.

There was a record turnout at the Ohio CASA/GAL Association's three-day event in late September, with over 700 CASA volunteers, social workers, attorneys, judges, and court staff members gathering for training and discussion sessions.

"This is one of the largest such training events in the nation and we are honored that so many CASA volunteers and child welfare professionals joined us once again," said Ohio CASA Executive Director Doug Stephens. "Attendees from almost every Ohio county participated in training sessions."

DCY Director Kara Wente was honored during the conference as Ohio CASA's 2024 Child Advocate of the Year. DCY staff also answered questions and shared resources with conference attendees in the exhibitor area.

At any given time, there are 15,000 Ohio children in foster care, making this training essential to best serve Ohio children in need.

Attendees engaged in training led by nationally recognized experts on a range of critical topics, including supporting youth aging out of foster care, understanding the dynamics of domestic violence, addressing the obstacles faced by families living in poverty, and responding effectively to juvenile victims of human trafficking.

There were special features at the 2024 Celebrate Kids! Conference, including a networking hour, which featured a performance from student musicians from Columbus City Schools. There were also large training sessions led by nationally recognized experts.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers are community members who are appointed by a judge to advocate for a child's best interest in the court system. CASA volunteers complete comprehensive training in order to speak up for children experiencing abuse and neglect.

There are CASA programs in 60 Ohio counties, with CASA volunteers serving around 10,000 children annually.

Attendees obtained needed training hours at the Celebrate Kids! Conference, allowing them to continue their work as CASA volunteers or attorneys, for example.

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