



# the Advocate Newsletter

2024 Vol. 3



## Annual Report Fiscal Year 2024

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# A Letter from Executive Director **Drew MacLeod**

Dear friends,

Each year, as we prepare our annual report, I'm reminded of the unique opportunity it offers to reflect on the journey we've taken—both the challenges and the victories that come with advocating for the children in our community. One of the most difficult parts of this process is finding the right words to express just how much our volunteer Advocates and CASA supporters impact the lives of children and families. I often wish I could bottle up the big and small moments shared between volunteer Advocates and their CASA kids, so you could see firsthand the profound difference your support makes.

At CASA of Yellowstone County, we're proud of the volunteers who make room in their busy lives to impact children in our community. We especially appreciate those who have stuck with their CASA kids for years, overcoming challenges with resilience and a strength-based mindset.

This year, we're aiming to recruit even more volunteers in creative and diverse ways. We'd love your help! Can you encourage friends, family, or colleagues to join us? We're friendly and happy to answer any questions they might have. And if you're an employer, could you offer flexibility to help your staff support a local child? These youth could be the future of our workforce.

Our goal is to increase from serving 30% of youth in foster care in Yellowstone County to 50% in the next two years. How can you partner with CASA to make this possible? We believe in the generosity, courage, and wisdom of our community to help us reach this goal.

We are deeply thankful for your partnership and excited to share the impact of your generosity over the past year.

Sincerely,  
*Drew MacLeod*  
Executive Director  
CASA of Yellowstone County

## Between July 2023 - June 2024 Yellowstone County's Court Appointed Special Advocates Made a Big Difference

**297** children in foster care had a volunteer Advocate to represent their best interests and wishes

**170** Court Appointed Special Advocates were assigned to children in foster care. Those volunteers accomplished:

**1,663** visits with children

**1,393** court reports

**552** court hearings attended

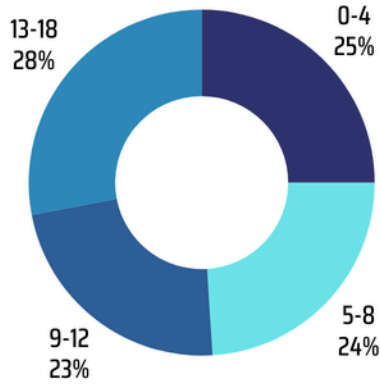
**40** new Court Appointed Special Advocates were sworn-in by a judge.

**124** children with a volunteer Advocate received permanency

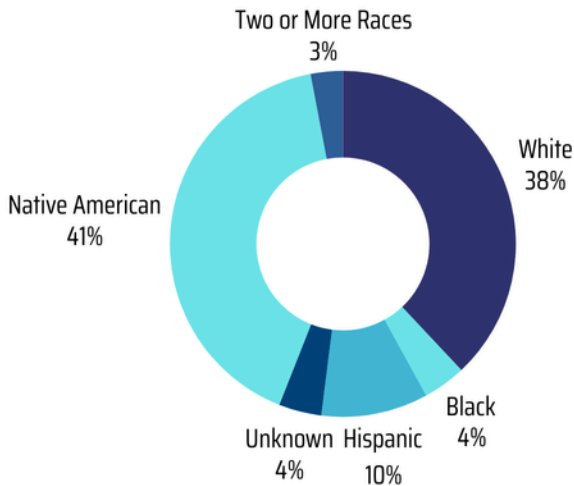
Advocates volunteered **5,791** hours on their cases, donating more than **\$193,940** worth of casework to Yellowstone County

# Year in Review: Children Served

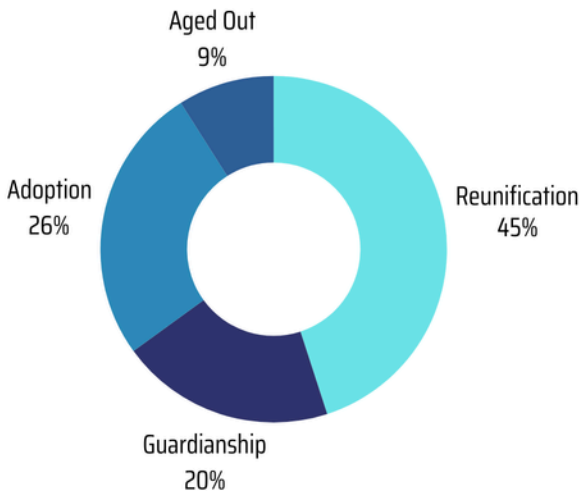
## Age Breakdown



## Race/Ethnicity



## Case Closure of Fiscal Year 2023



# CASA Endowment

Did you know that CASA of Yellowstone County partners with the Billings Community Foundation to manage our endowment fund? Our goal is to grow the endowment so its earnings can support our annual budget, especially during lean years. While we've made great progress, ongoing support is essential to achieve this goal.

There are many ways to support your favorite nonprofit while also lowering your tax bill. One powerful opportunity is the Montana Endowment Tax Credit, which allows you to reduce your state tax liability while supporting CASA of Yellowstone County's Endowment. By making a planned gift, such as a Charitable Deferred Gift Annuity with the Billings Community Foundation, you may qualify for a 40% tax credit on your Montana state income taxes, up to \$10,000 per individual or \$20,000 for joint filers, along with potential federal deductions and capital gains tax savings.

Another option is directing your Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from your retirement accounts to CASA. Normally, IRA withdrawals are taxable, but through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD), those distributions become tax-free when paid directly to a qualified nonprofit. It's a win-win for you and CASA, helping fund our mission to recruit, train, and support volunteer Advocates for children in foster care.

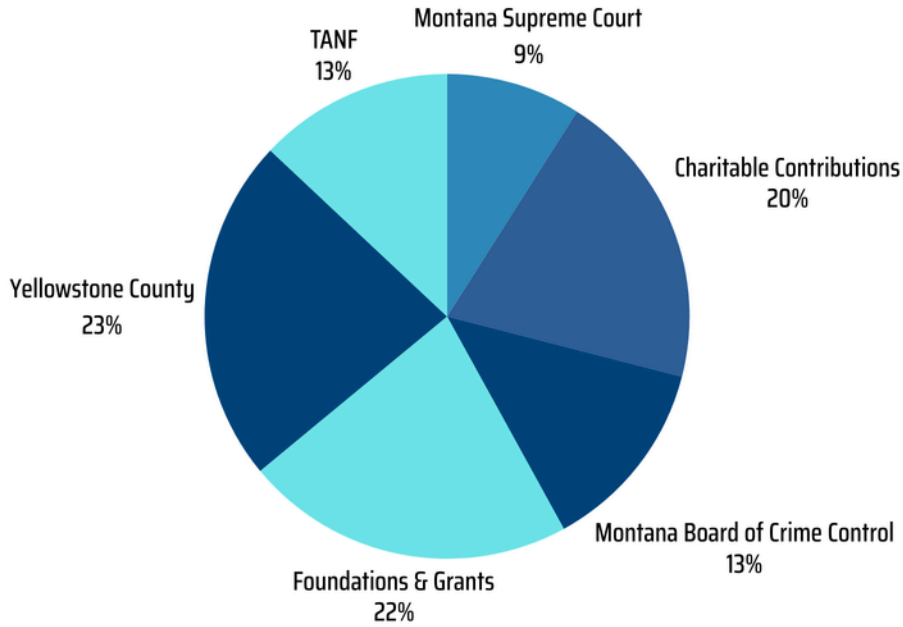
As always, consult your tax professional or financial advisor for the most current information and advice on planned giving. Your support ensures a brighter future for the children we serve.



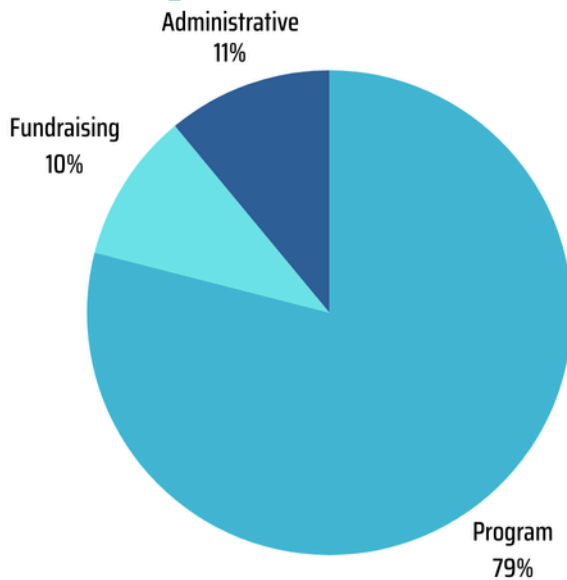
**CASA of Yellowstone  
County Endowment- \$101,648**

# Fiscal Year 2024 Financial Statement

## Income- \$786,635



## Expenses- \$767,772



This financial statement is based on preliminary, pre-audited figures



# Supporting Futures

## The Impact of the Bush Scholarship

The Bush Scholarship stands as a beacon of hope for youth who have transitioned out of foster care, offering them a chance to pursue their educational dreams and build a brighter future. Established by Dick and Rosalie Bush, the scholarship aims to provide financial support to individuals who may lack the resources to further their education independently. The Bushes' commitment stems from their belief in the power of a strong educational foundation and their desire to support those with potential but limited means.

The impact of the Bush Scholarship is best captured through the voices of its recipients:

- Tre: “As a former foster kid, I didn’t have any family support to aid in my desire to attend college. It’s my desire to go to school so I can learn psychology and to be able to provide help to those who are struggling with life and with anything really, just as I was. Thank you for supporting me and my dream.”
- Angel: “The relief I feel is what I wish to thank you for and I appreciate the time you took to know a little bit about me! I hope your life is filled with so much happiness and tranquility as this is what you give each applicant that receives this scholarship. Thank you!”
- Taylor: “This scholarship means the world to me because it would be very hard for me to pay to go to school without your help. You are helping me make my grandma proud. I am so thankful that you chose me for this scholarship.”
- Ryker: “This scholarship has made it possible for me to attend college and also make my dream of becoming a teacher possible. I appreciate everything you guys did to make this scholarship possible for people in foster care. Thank you!”

The journey from foster care to higher education can be daunting, but CASA Advocates play a crucial role in guiding and supporting these young adults. Sandy Wong exemplifies the profound impact an Advocate can have. Her dedication to supporting Taylor throughout her transition highlights the vital role of encouragement, resource connection, and emotional support.

Sandy has been more than just a mentor; she has been a source of unwavering support. By attending meetings, asking questions, and providing guidance, she has made a significant difference in Taylor's life. Her commitment mirrors what every CASA Advocate strives to offer: a steady hand and a compassionate heart during one of the most challenging times in a young person's life.



The Bush Scholarship and dedicated Advocates like Sandy Wong are changing lives by providing essential support and opportunities to youth who have faced significant challenges. The Bushes' generosity and Sandy's unwavering support embody a commitment to empowering the next generation. Together, they are helping these young individuals build the foundation for a successful and fulfilling future.



*Carrie Porter*  
Program Manager

## I am a **CASA** because...

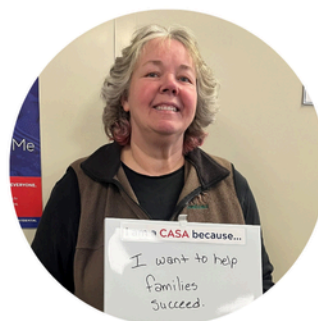
**"We learn just as much from our children as they learn from us."**

**-Tyra Klein**  
CASA since 2021



**"I want to help families succeed."**

**-Lynda Demaray**  
CASA since 2019

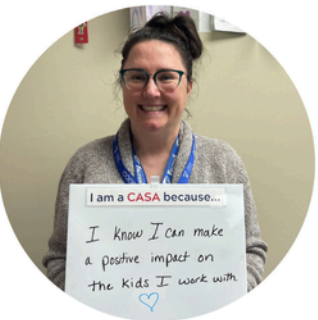


**"I love kids!"**  
**-Linda Priddy**  
CASA since 2017



**"I know I can make a positive impact on the kids I work with."**

**-Mary Rose Swan**  
CASA since 2019



# CASA Board Members



Dallas Pender

A heartfelt thank you to Dallas Pender for her three years of dedicated service as CASA Board President. We are thrilled that she will continue to contribute as a valued board member.

A warm welcome to Tom Brewer as he assumes the role of CASA Board President. Tom brings valuable experience from his five years of service as a volunteer Advocate and Peer Coordinator before joining the Board of Directors.



Tom Brewer  
Board President



Clayton Gregerson  
Vice President



Brittney Mada  
Treasurer



Lynne Roccisano  
Secretary



Jenn Weber



Clayton Barnes



Charlie Jackson



Holly Hintz



Laura Forcella



Allison Scheeler

**A heartfelt thanks to our retiring Board Members for their dedicated service!**



Maria Gnecco



Ursula Richter



Nate Nunberg



# Jake

## CASA Story



In September of 2024, Jake aged out of foster care when he turned eighteen. To many in the community, he might just seem like another statistic—a young person aging out of the system. But to his CASA Advocate, Cyndi, Jake is still that ten-year-old boy she first chose from a priority list when she began volunteering with CASA of Yellowstone County.

**Think about that for a moment: Cyndi has been Jake's Advocate for eight years—over half of his life.**

Jake's journey through foster care was anything but easy, filled with both struggles and victories. At just 10 years old, he was already battling serious challenges—an eating disorder and disruptive behaviors at school, all rooted in the instability of his home life. A few years after entering foster care, Jake's mother lost her parental rights, and his father, struggling with severe mental health challenges, was unable to safely care for him.

Jake's CASA, Cyndi, became a pivotal figure in his life. From the start, she threw herself into the role with passion, attending Jake's special education meetings, working closely with his teachers and therapists, and always making sure his needs were heard and met. Her unwavering dedication and determination helped her build a deep bond with Jake, one based on trust and accountability. Over time, through countless visits and shared moments, Cyndi became more than just an Advocate—she became a mentor, a confidant, and a true friend.

Over the eight years they spent together, Cyndi celebrated every victory in Jake's life, no matter how small. Whether it was improvements in his school behavior or progress in handling social situations, each success strengthened her commitment to his well-being. As Jake neared his 18th birthday, the reality of aging out of the foster care system grew closer. He transitioned into a state group home, where he began learning essential life skills and holding down a job, slowly but surely finding his way through the complexities of adulthood.

Throughout his time in foster care, Jake had nine different caseworkers and four placements. Despite the challenges, Cyndi remains a steadfast presence in Jake's life. Her commitment to him does not end with his transition out of the foster care system. She will continue to stay in contact with Jake, offering guidance and support as he steps into this new chapter of his life. Jake knows he isn't alone. Their bond is a testament to the power of advocacy and the profound impact one person can have in the life of a child in need.

# *Congratulations* to our new volunteer Advocates!

We are thrilled to welcome our new volunteers who have joined CASA this past year! Your dedication and enthusiasm are already making a significant impact, and we are immensely grateful for your willingness to share your time and talents with the children and families in our community.



Are you interested in becoming a volunteer Advocate? Make a meaningful impact in the lives of children in our community today. Your involvement creates a ripple effect of compassion and support. Together, we can accomplish remarkable things!

[yellowstonecasa.org/volunteer](https://yellowstonecasa.org/volunteer)

# Memorial & Honor Gifts



Your donation in honor or memory of your loved ones has a direct impact in the lives of children in our community. Thank you!

## In Honor of the Vennes Family

Joyce Bratland

## In Honor of Vera Ulschak

Lillian & James Hartung

## In Honor of Tyler Benjamin

Jennifer Benjamin

## In Memory of Phyllis Roberts

Sue & Perry Roberts

## In Memory of Ted Lechner

Patty Lechner

## In Memory of their parents

Brenda & Eugene Olheiser

## In Memory of Heather Craig

Beth Ann Michaels

## In Memory of Jim Clark

Judy Senteney

Steve Fischer & Nikki Nakayama

## Memorial & Honor Gift Form



Amount \_\_\_\_\_

Given by \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

In Memory/In Honor of \_\_\_\_\_

Send Acknowledgement to:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: CASA of Yellowstone County | P.O. Box 688 Billings, MT 59103



# THANK YOU 0.5K 2024 SPONSORS!



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- Lauraleah Griffin of Meridian Real Estate Mattovich, Keller, Huso PC Morrison Maierle
- Proof Donuts & Coffee SCHEELS Strategic Retirement Plans Summer McNea CPA
- Transitional Marketing Visit Billings Yellowstone Auction

