



Court Appointed Special Advocates Study Scope

August 2017

Background

State and federal law require courts to appoint a guardian ad litem to victims in child protection cases. Federal law states that guardians ad litem are responsible for “obtaining, first-hand, a clear understanding of the situation and needs of the child and making recommendations to the court concerning the best interests of the child.”

In Idaho, the role of the guardian ad litem is fulfilled by trained volunteer advocates or court-appointed special advocates (CASA). Seven non-profit organizations, one in each judicial district, are responsible for recruiting, training, supporting and supervising CASA volunteers. Idaho’s CASA organizations rely on state funds, grants, and fundraising to finance operations. For fiscal year 2018, the Legislature appropriated \$1.1 million for the local CASA organizations.

In our 2017 report, *Child Welfare System*, we found that CASA organizations have some common implementation challenges:

Staff struggle to recruit enough volunteers to adequately represent all children appointed an advocate

Volunteers are not consistently familiar with the legal system and have differing levels of monitoring and report writing skills

Limited resources restrict the amount of volunteer training and support

Scope

Building upon the findings of the 2017 report, our evaluation will seek to answer the following questions:

What is the structure of the guardians ad litem program in Idaho?

How well does the structure of the program align policy and procedures, stakeholder expectations, available resources, and quality control measures?

How does this alignment effect the program's ability to adequately advocate for children's best interests in child protection cases?

What opportunities exist for improving the effectiveness of Idaho’s CASA organizations?

Projected completion date: December 2017