

IN FOCUS



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Child Protection: Dependency Courts

All children deserve to grow up in safe and nurturing environments. For too many young people, childhood ends prematurely when they become victims of abuse or neglect.

Judges and court personnel are uniquely positioned to identify maltreated children and those at risk of being maltreated. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) helps to ensure these professionals have the skills necessary to address the needs of vulnerable youth and to protect them from further harm.

OJJDP funding supports juvenile and family courts as they develop policies, practices, and programs to improve safety, permanency, and outcomes for abused and neglected youth. Funding also broadens youth's access to well-trained volunteer advocates who represent their best interests in dependency cases and help decrease the time children spend in foster care.

Program

Court Appointed Special Advocate Program

Funding to the **National Court Appointed Special Advocates/Guardians Ad Litem Association for Children** helps recruit and train volunteers who serve as fact finders, monitors, and facilitators in child dependency cases. Court appointed special advocates (CASA) and guardian *ad litem* volunteers protect the best interests of children who are abused and neglected or live in foster care, ensuring they do not get lost in the legal or social service systems and are placed in safe, permanent homes. OJJDP also supports a national court appointed special advocate membership and accreditation program. In 2021, 93,000 volunteers in 49 states and the District of Columbia served approximately 242,000 children.

Training and Technical Assistance

Child Abuse Training for Judicial and Court Personnel Project

OJJDP provides **training and technical assistance** to judicial, legal, and social service professionals to improve their understanding of and response to child abuse cases, including cases involving families impacted by opioids and other substances. The project also teaches practitioners to coordinate information and services across the juvenile justice and child welfare systems to achieve safe, permanent placements for abused and neglected children.

For More Information

Learn more about OJJDP's child protection programs at ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/child-abuse.

Funding

Between fiscal years 2019 and 2021, OJJDP awarded \$41.7 million to improve the judicial system's handling of child maltreatment cases.

- ▶ **Fiscal Year 2021—\$14.3 million**
- ▶ **Fiscal Year 2020—\$14.0 million**
- ▶ **Fiscal Year 2019—\$13.4 million**

From the Field

At CASA of Southwest Missouri, 305 volunteers serve more than 400 children annually. Jacob* entered foster care at age 4 after being "exposed to things that no child should ever experience," shared Executive Director Laura Farmer. His CASA volunteer became a steady, reliable presence, bonding with Jacob through regular visits.

"When Jacob went to court, he was the only child in a room full of adults who were all making decisions for him," Ms. Farmer said. "He was scared and hid behind his CASA volunteer. That's when the volunteer knew Jacob felt safe with him and trusted him."

The volunteer continued advocating for Jacob and, eventually, the child moved into his grandparents' home. On his adoption day, Jacob hugged his CASA volunteer and told him, "You're my best friend."

*Name has been changed to protect the child's identity.



Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention
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