

NATIONAL CASA/GAL ASSOCIATION AFFINITY GROUP CALL

Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2020

*This call is being recorded.



Welcome

NICOLE GUSTIN
NETWORK COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER
NATIONAL CASA/GAL ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN





Agenda

Welcome

Nicole Gustin

Research Studies & Update (1 hour)

Brad Ray

- Volunteer Retention Study Results
- Judicial Perspectives Study Results
- 2019 Annual Survey Key Indicators

Leadership Council Recruitment (5 minutes)

Nicole Gustin

Questions & Wrap Up (10 minutes)

Nicole Gustin



Helpful Tips

Reminder

- This call is being recorded

Q&A Box Use

- If you have a question that a National CASA/GAL staff member can assist you with or you need program specific support

Chat Box Use

- If you have a thought, an idea, a suggestion for the whole group

Volunteer Retention Study Results

BRAD RAY
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NATIONAL CASA/GAL ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN



The Research Team



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Study Purpose

Explore **factors related to volunteer retention** with special focus on:

- **Volunteer Recruitment**
- **Training and Post-Training Support**
- **The Advocacy Experience**
- **Relationships with Stakeholders**

Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods Design



Research Approach

Collaboration

Involvement of National CASA/GAL in the study and instrument development

Involvement of local CASA/GAL programs in the pilot testing of materials

Mutual respect and trust

Clear roles and expectations for each party



Communication

Regular, timely communication between National CASA/GAL, local programs and USC



Volunteer and Staff Surveys

Part I:
Volunteer and Staff
Surveys
(quantitative data)



Volunteer & Staff Surveys

390 local CASA/GAL programs were contacted via e-mail in January 2019

Requesting the following information:

Volunteers (Current/ Former):

- Name
- E-mail address
- Number of cases
- Status

Staff:

- Name
- E-mail address of staff who recruit, train, and/or supervise

Volunteer & Staff Surveys

- Survey invitations were sent to volunteers and staff members in January and February, 2019
- For programs and states that wanted anonymous links, a template letter with survey link was sent to our contact person
- Qualtrics online survey system was used to collect the survey data

Volunteer & Staff Surveys

133 programs participated

Volunteer survey: 8,879 valid e-mail addresses

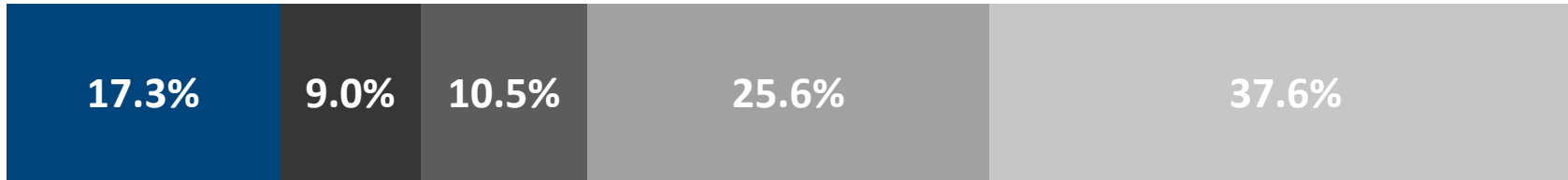
Staff survey: 394 valid e-mail addresses

Anonymous volunteer and staff surveys links were sent to

- Three states forwarded links to their programs in our sample
- 11 programs (three requested anonymous links for only the volunteer survey)

Program Areas (n=133)

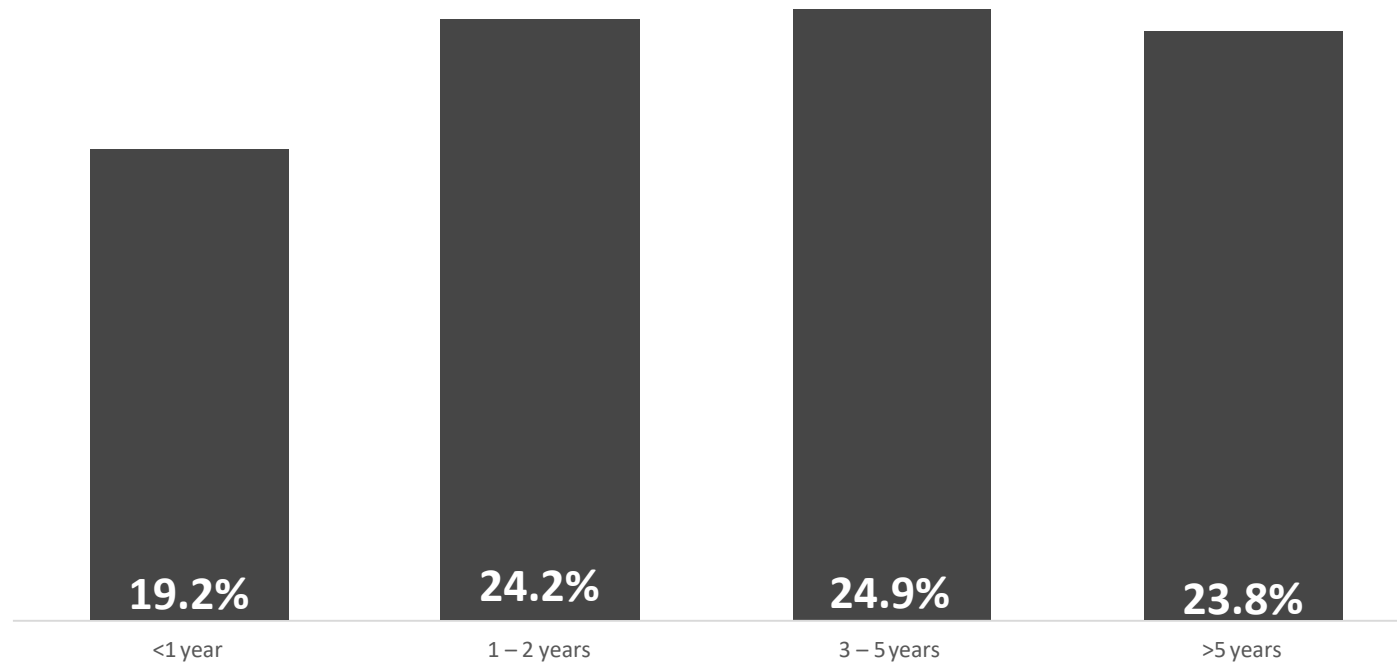
■ Mixed ■ Urban ■ Suburban ■ Rural ■ Unknown



Description of Volunteers (n=3,311)

- 80%+ White and Female
- 64% ≥ 55 y/o
- 43% Retired
- 82% Did not have previous child welfare experience
- 81% Have been a CASA/GAL for at least a year
- Most volunteers had one case at a time

Staff Members' Tenure in Current Role (n=281)



Local Program Site Visits

Part II:
Site Visits
(qualitative data)



Local Program Site Visits

36 programs were invited to participate

- Sites were chosen based on volunteer retention (high vs. low), program area (urban, rural, etc.) and region (Northeast, Midwest, etc.)

10 programs participated

Site Visit Protocol

Interviews with at least one:

- Current volunteer
- Former volunteer
- Staff member
- Court personnel
- Child welfare agency personnel

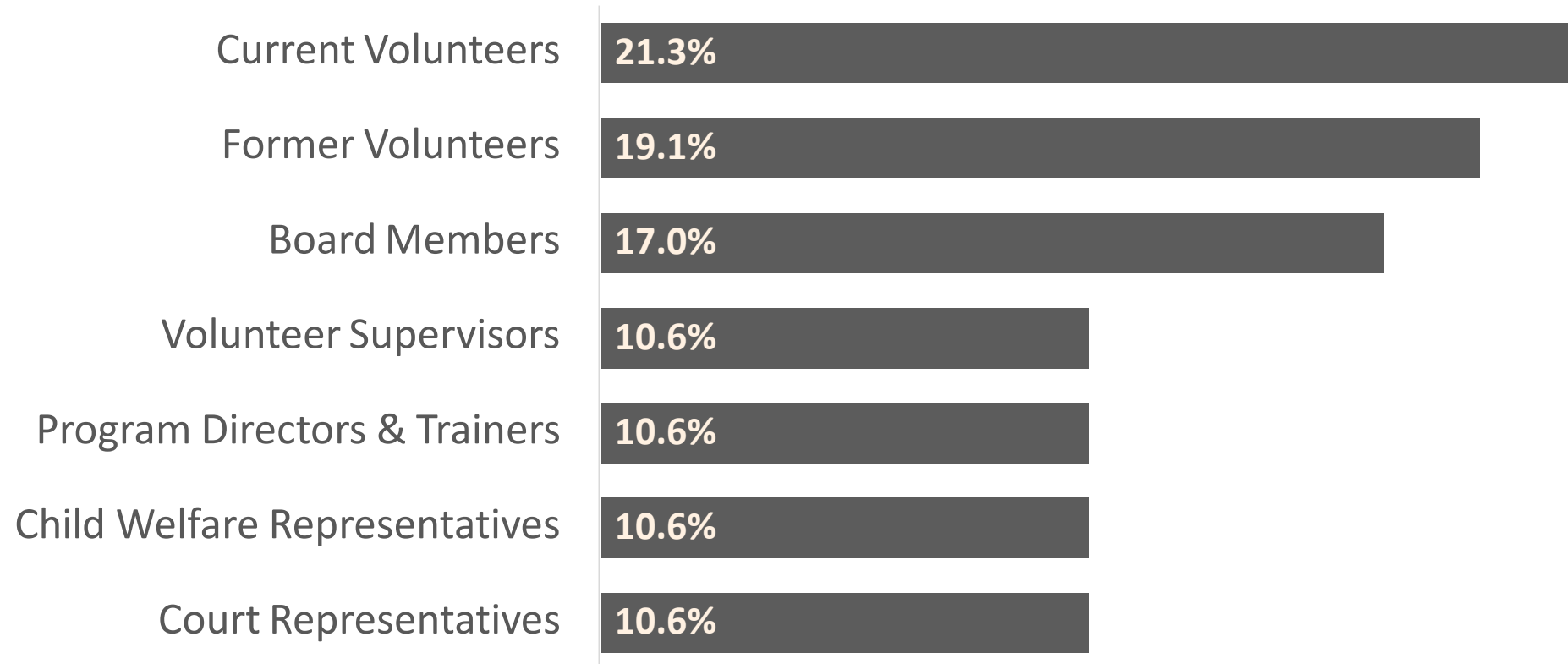
Observations

- Court hearing w/ a CASA/GAL volunteer present
- Initial training





Site Visit Participants (n=47)

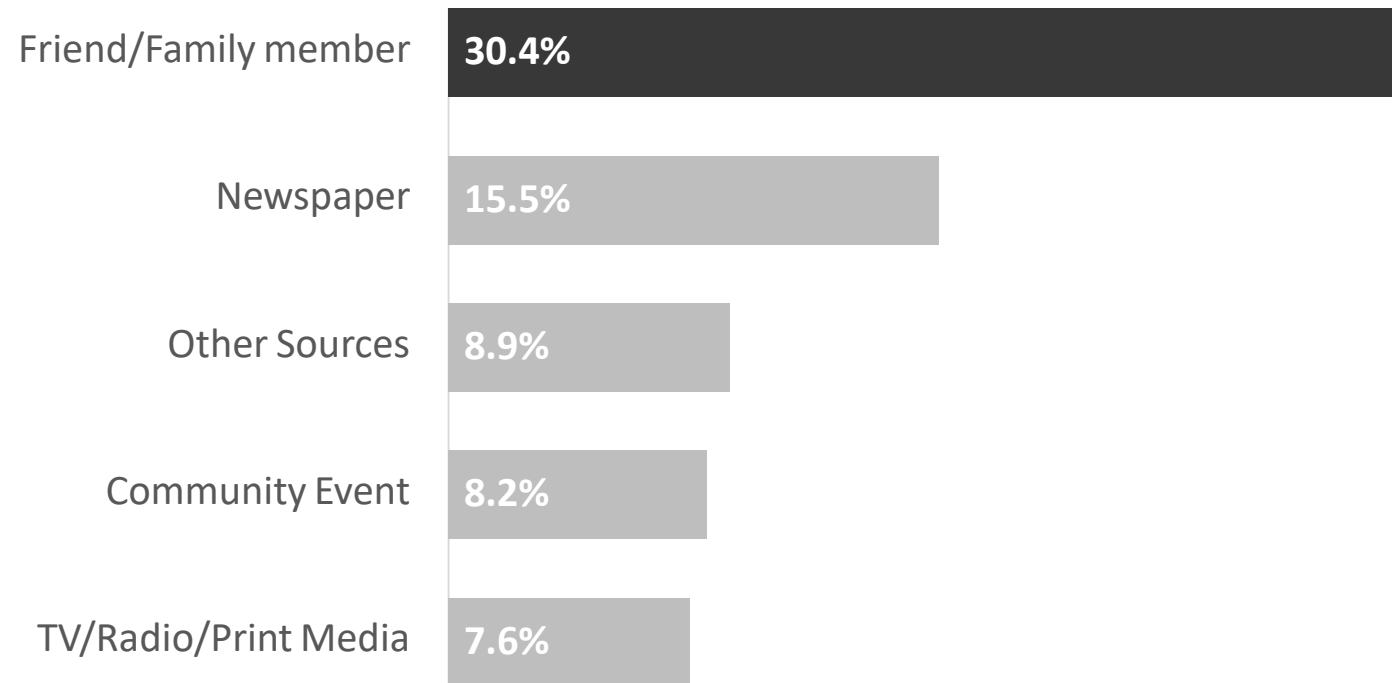




Study Results

- Recruitment
- Training
- CASA/GAL Volunteer Experience
- Satisfaction

How Volunteers Heard about CASA/GAL



What Prompted Volunteers to Join?

- Tangible difference in the lives of children
- Previous experience and desire to work with children
- Existing interest in the legal/juvenile justice system
- Give back to their communities

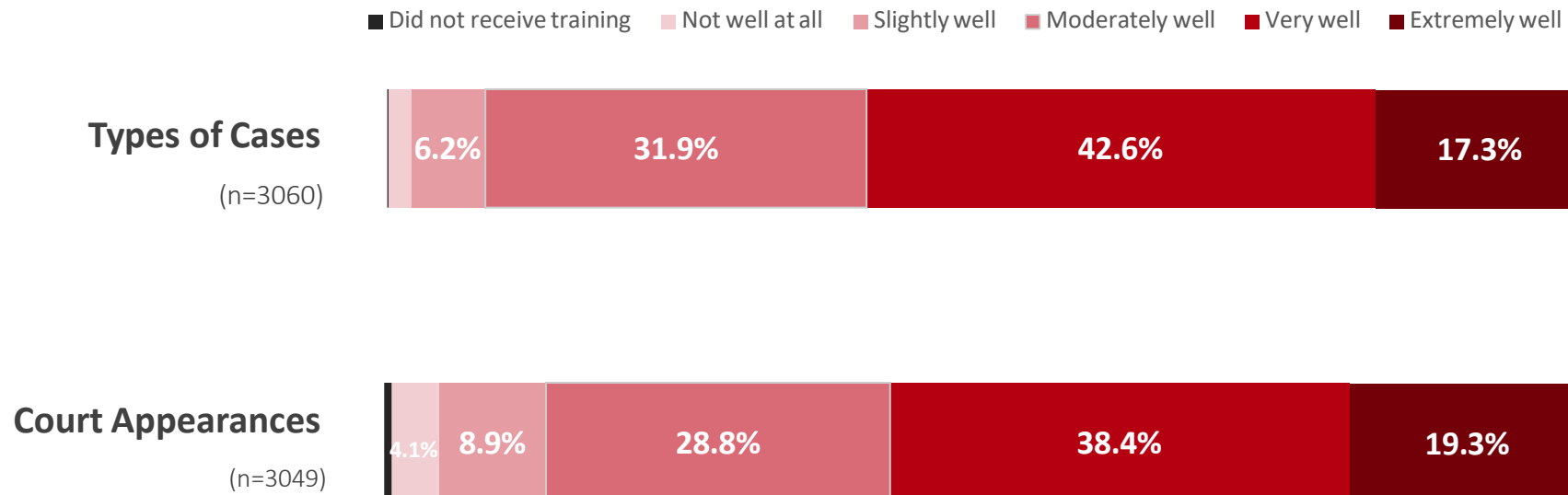


- Trained an average of 12 volunteers per training session
 - Rural areas on average, train significantly less volunteers per session
- Frequency of trainings varied
- A majority received in-person training



Training

Most **volunteers** said the **initial training** well prepared them for the **type of cases** handled and the **court appearances**.



Most **staff members** were confident that the training was adequately preparing their volunteers

Follow-Up Training



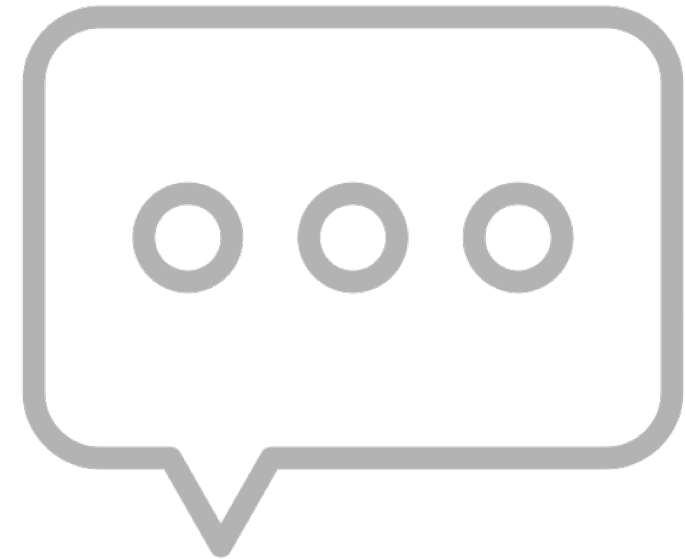
of volunteers have participated in a follow-up or refresher training



of staff members said refresher/follow-up training is required for volunteers

Training Concerns – from Staff

- Amount of information
- Time commitment, particularly for non-retirees
- Technology challenges



Volunteer Experience - Caseload Information

- Most volunteers had one case
- Required contact with cases varied, but generally was once a month
- Volunteers are expected to dedicate 5-10 hours a month for visits, court dates, and report writing
- Volunteers are responsible for all costs incurred
 - Some programs offer gift cards to offset travel costs



Volunteer Experience - Assigning New Cases

Some programs were intentional in matching volunteers with cases

- Matching criteria included age of child(ren), number of children in a case, distance of placement, and personality of the volunteer

Supervisor support for new volunteers

- Attending initial meetings and help with the beginning of a case
- Some programs mandated this process, others made it available as an option

Tag team approach

- Experienced volunteer handles all intake/initial procedure then hands off case to the new volunteer

Volunteer Experience - Organizational Support

CASA/GAL Supervisors were the biggest source of support for volunteers

- Source of knowledge and even mediators at times
- Volunteers are able to express concerns with case and external partners
- In some programs, volunteer retention was directly related to supervisor retention

Communication and feedback (internally and externally) was often informal

- No formal communication channels to express grievances
- Few programs had policies to formally solicit feedback

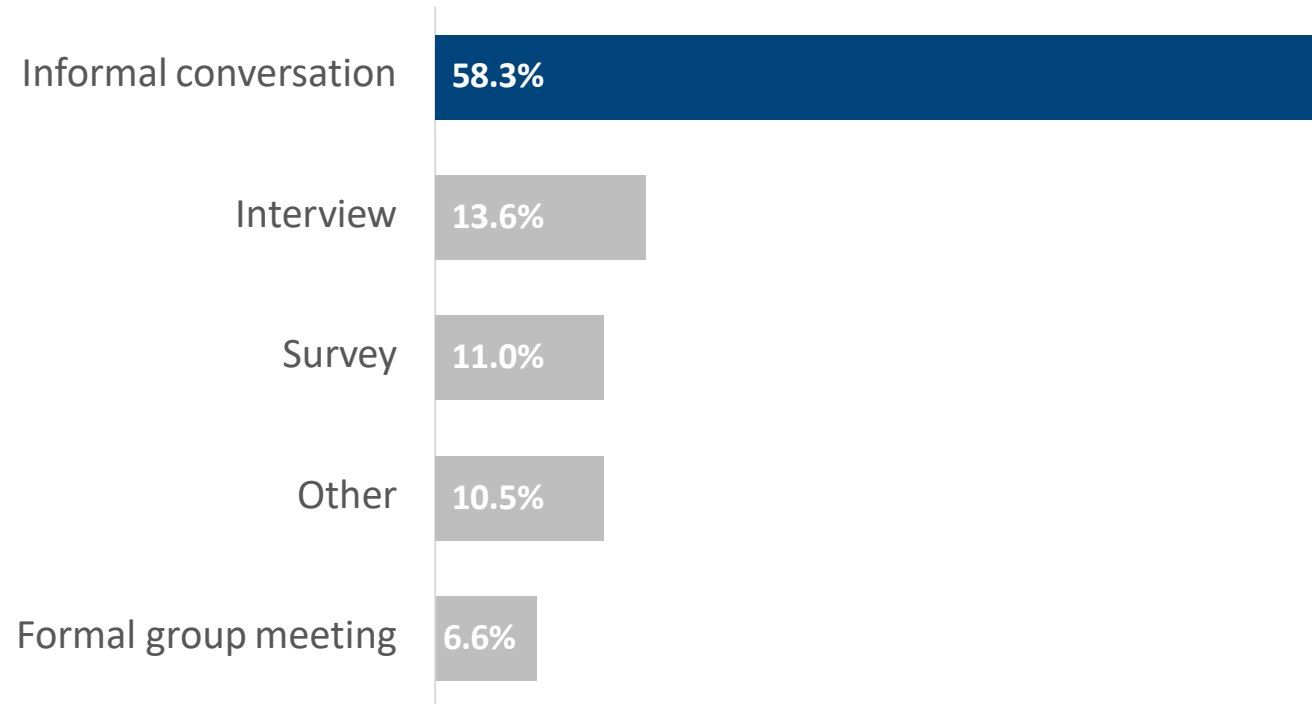
Volunteer Experience - Organizational Support

Changes in staff affected perceived support and satisfaction

“New office very lukewarm about my effort to volunteer. Even though I am an experienced CASA with a glowing recommendation from my previous office. Maybe I was being too sensitive... But they acted like they couldn't care less if I volunteered or not - almost like I was bugging them.”

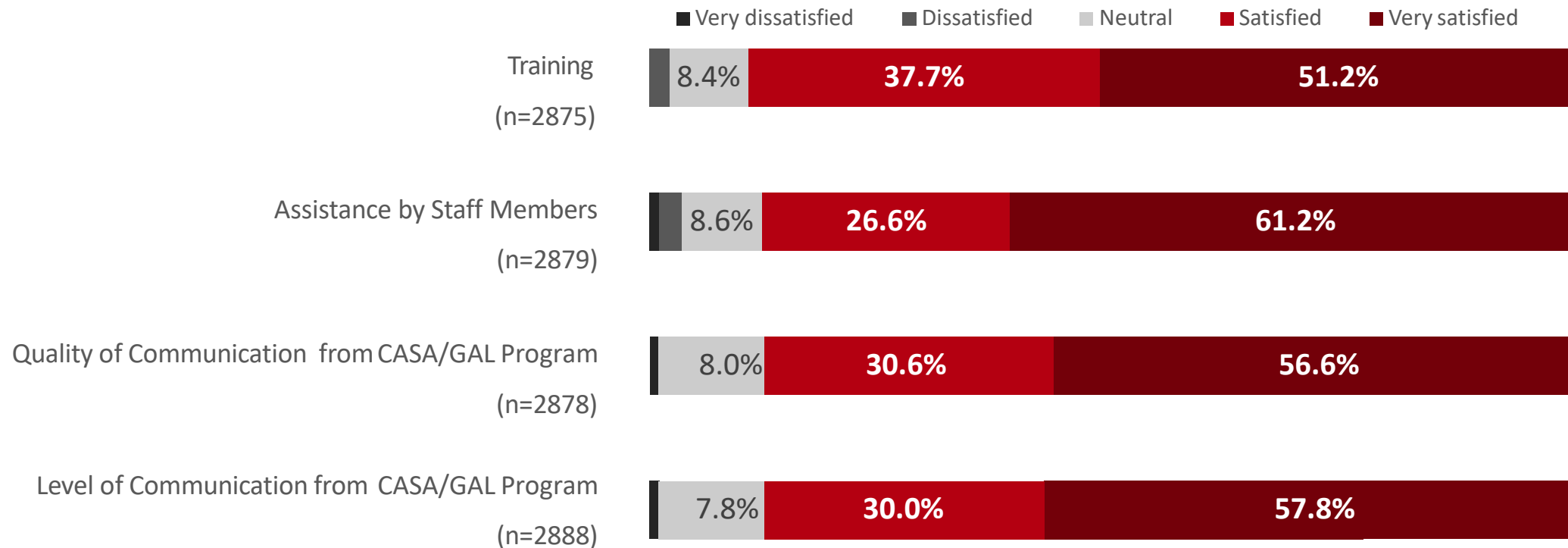
“Director changed at same time my case closed. The new director never reached out to me again.”

Methods of Obtaining Volunteer Feedback





Volunteer Satisfaction



Volunteer Satisfaction

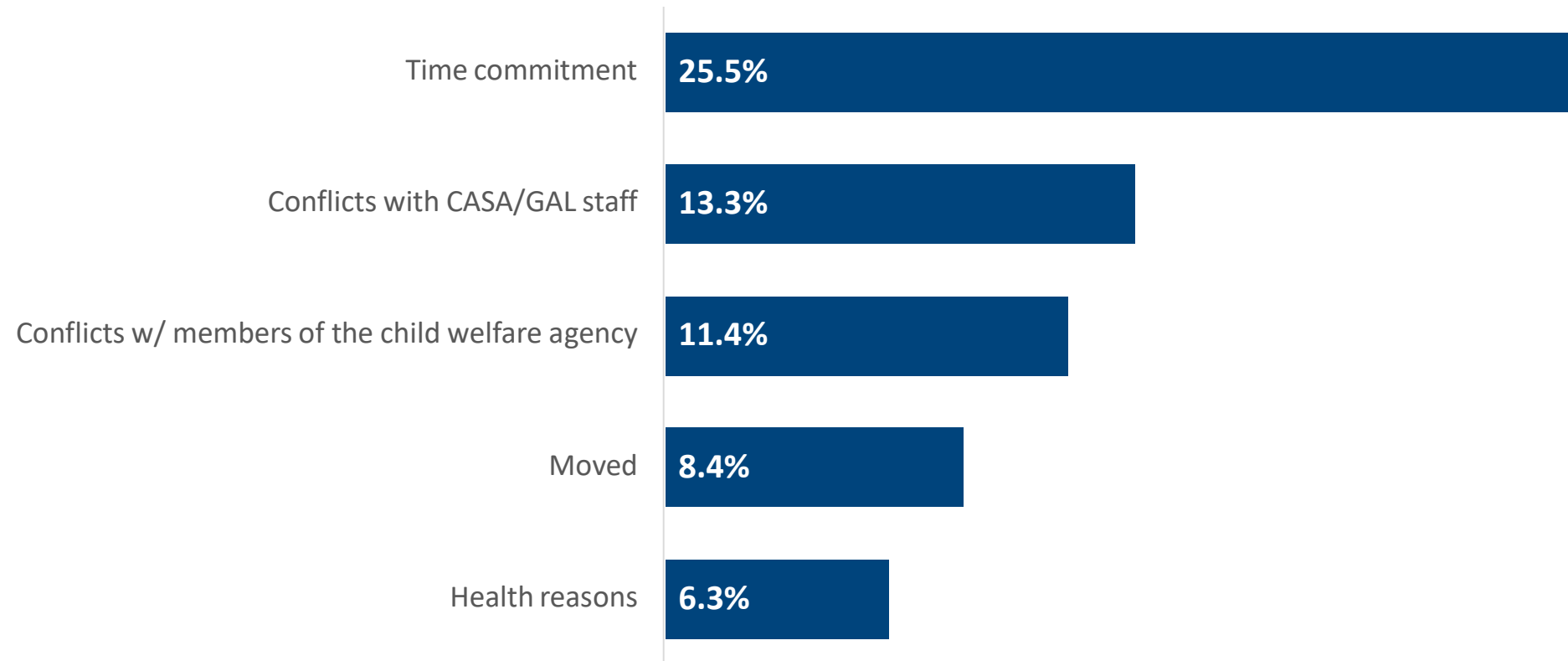
While there were some positive interactions with child welfare agencies (CWA), there were challenges such as:

- Communication
- Role confusion
- Practicalities of the child welfare system

Other challenges mentioned:

- Placement changes which led to significant increases in travel time
- Complexity of paperwork (particularly court reports)
- Learning to use computers and required software
- Frustration regarding interactions with other stakeholders (particularly communication with child welfare personnel)

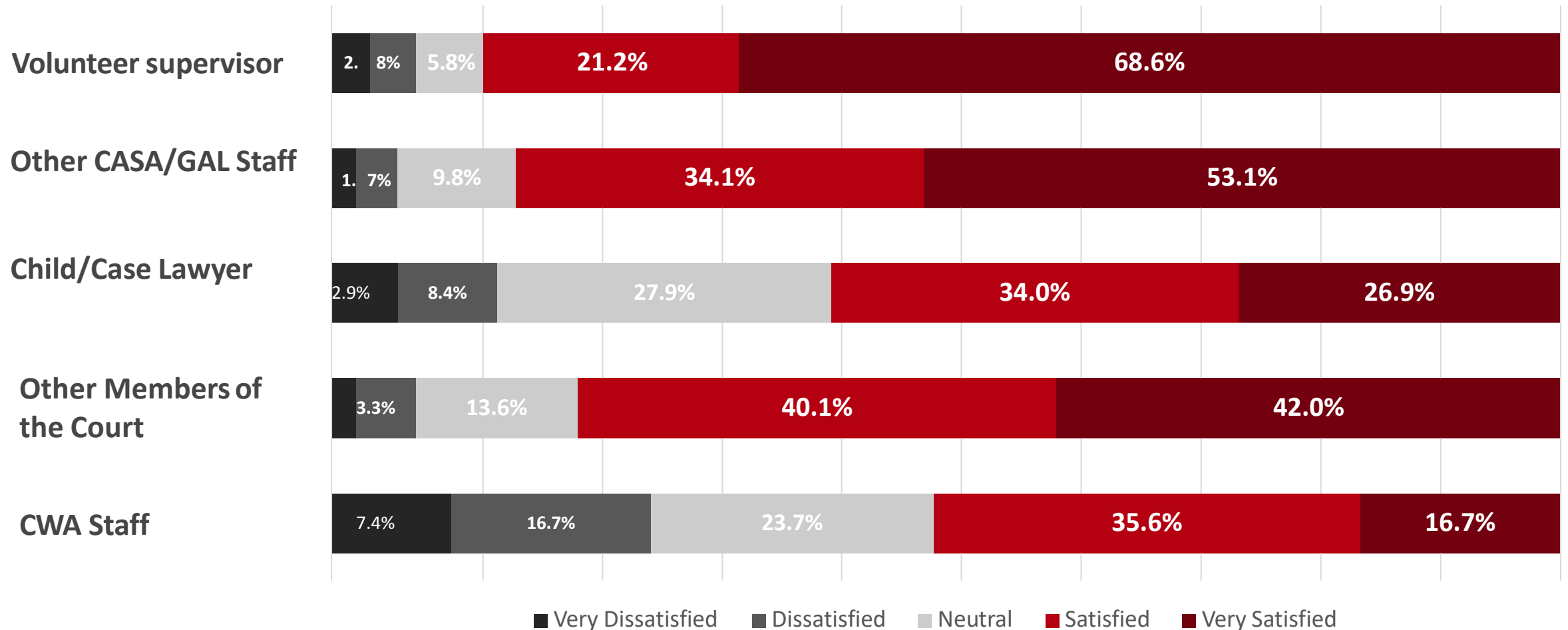
Top Five Reasons for Leaving



Other Reasons for Leaving

- Volunteers feel redundant or unvalued in the child welfare system
- Conflicts or lack of connection with CASA/GAL staff
- Joined child welfare in another capacity (often as a foster parent)
- Case closed and did not have a desire to take on another

Satisfaction w/ Staff & Stakeholder Relationships



Relationships with External Stakeholders

CASA/GAL volunteers were viewed positively and a valued resource by CWA and court representatives

- Volunteers are an important part of the process and contribute valuable information and insights.

CWA representatives have had some challenges with CASA/GAL volunteers

- Would like improved communication
- More teamwork in developing recommendations

Summary

- **Volunteers leave CASA/GAL** for a variety of reasons.
 - Time commitment and relationship with staff and CWA were the most cited reasons.
- Overall **volunteer satisfaction** is high, but there are some challenges.
 - Most reasons for leaving are personal or out of the control of local CASA/GAL staff
- **CASA/GAL Supervisors** play a tremendous role supporting and keeping volunteers satisfied.
- **CASA/GAL Volunteers** are valued by their external partners, but there are tensions and areas for improvement.

Recommendations



- Role Definition
- Relationship w/ Stakeholders
- Training
- Improving Feedback
- Staff Support

Recommendations

- Clearly define the roles & responsibility of a CASA/GAL**

- Relationship with stakeholders**
 - Improve communication methods
 - Develop formal grievance policies

Recommendations

□ Training

- Increase understanding of the role of a CASA/GAL volunteer in the greater child welfare system
- Improve report writing skills
- Online delivery methods support
- Increased interactions with experienced volunteers
- More in-depth case studies
- Role playing activities

Recommendations

- Improved communication between CASA/GAL staff and volunteers**
 - Develop formal mechanisms of soliciting feedback
 - Develop follow-up procedures for volunteers taking a break

- Increased training and support for volunteer supervisors, especially those with multiple roles**

Next Steps

- Volunteer Leadership Council
- Overarching volunteer retention strategy and plan
- Volunteer engagement and resources
- Development of a volunteer administration function
- Strategic volunteer retention planning tool and training and resources for staff
- Expanded national training and development calendar

Judicial Perspectives Study Results

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The Research Team

CASA Judicial Perspectives Study: Building Evidence for Best Interest Advocacy

- Dana Weiner, Ph.D.
- Robert Goerge, Ph.D.
- Larry Small, Psy.D.
- Kiljoong Kim, Ph.D.
- Elissa Gitlow, M.S.W.
- Clare Anderson, M.S.W.
- Amber Farrell, M.U.P.P.



Research Goals and Methods

- Goals
 - Capture and describe judicial perspectives
 - Build evidence for best-interest advocacy
- Methods
 - Judicial interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Judicial survey
 - Document review
 - Text mining
 - Policy analysis

Study Questions and Methods

Question	Judicial Interviews	Focus Groups	Judicial Survey	Document Review	Text Mining	Policy Analysis
When do judges assign or not assign volunteers?	X		X		X	
In what competencies should volunteers be trained? Need more training?	X	X	X	X		
Based on the best interest recommendations of the volunteers, what normal activities of growing up do Judges order? Why?	X				X	
In what ways do legal mandates, statutes, and local conditions present service barriers to effective practices?	X	X	X			X

Policy Review – Legal Precedent

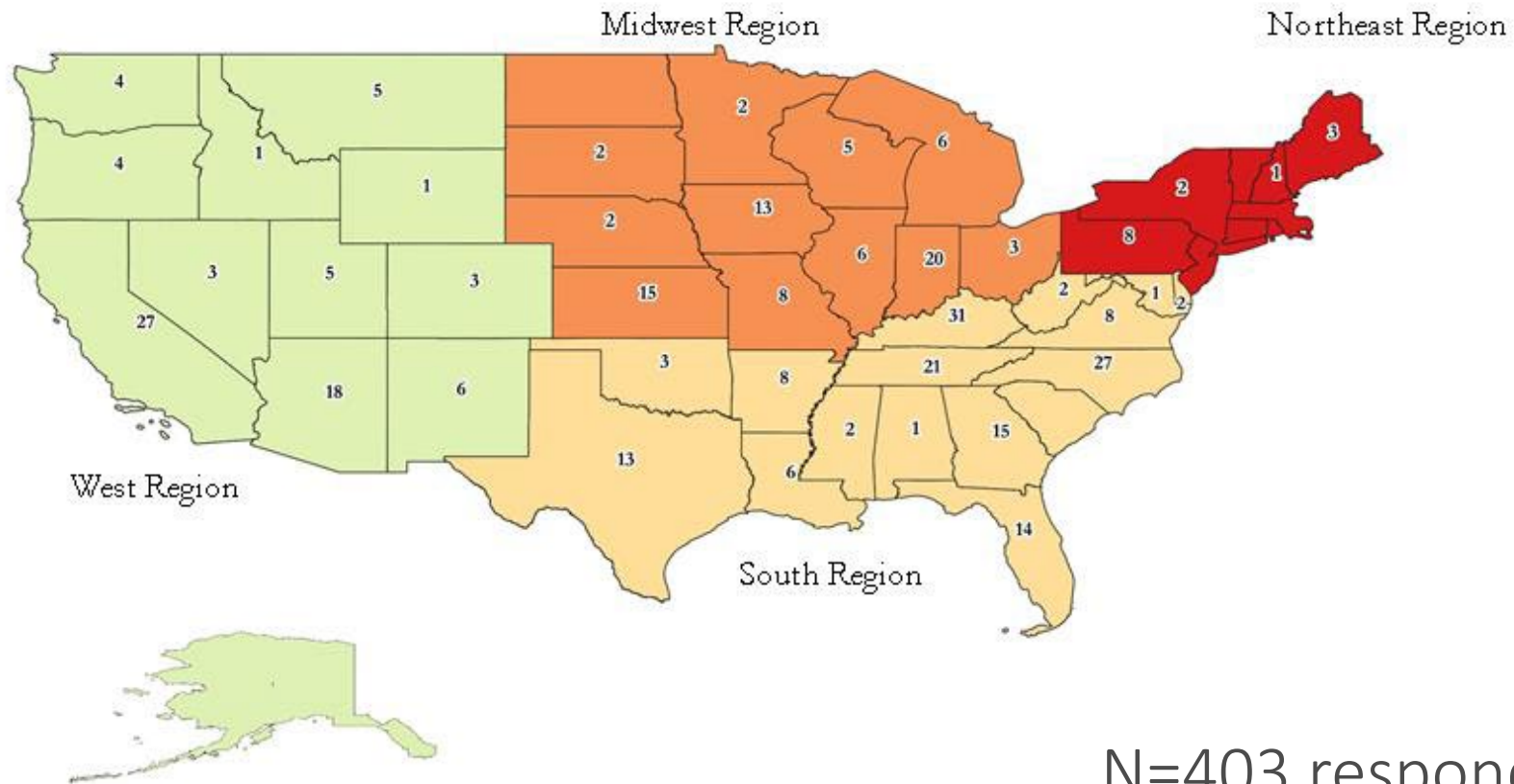
- Federal Policies (e.g. CAPTA, 1974 and VOCAA, 1990) that address child representation
 - Appointment of guardian ad litem (GAL) who may be an attorney or a court appointed special advocate
 - Requirements and guidelines for representation for child victims of abuse and neglect by investigating child circumstances and presenting a report to the court
 - Requirements for training for guardians ad litem and court appointed special advocates
- Federal Policies have also authorized funding for CASA/GAL best interest advocacy
 - Victims of Child Abuse Act (1990)
 - Court Improvement Project (1993)

Literature Review

- N=15 studies (1990 – 2018) examining CASA/GAL effectiveness and impact on a range of outcomes:
 - Number of placements
 - Services received and information provided
 - Permanency: adoption & reunification
 - Child well-being
- Studies suggest CASA/GAL volunteers are assigned to the most complex cases
- Studies suggest volunteer advocates are associated with:
 - more information for the courts
 - more services for the child and family
 - greater likelihood of adoption (over other permanency outcomes)

Judicial Perspectives' Survey

CASA Survey Responses by State



N=403 respondents

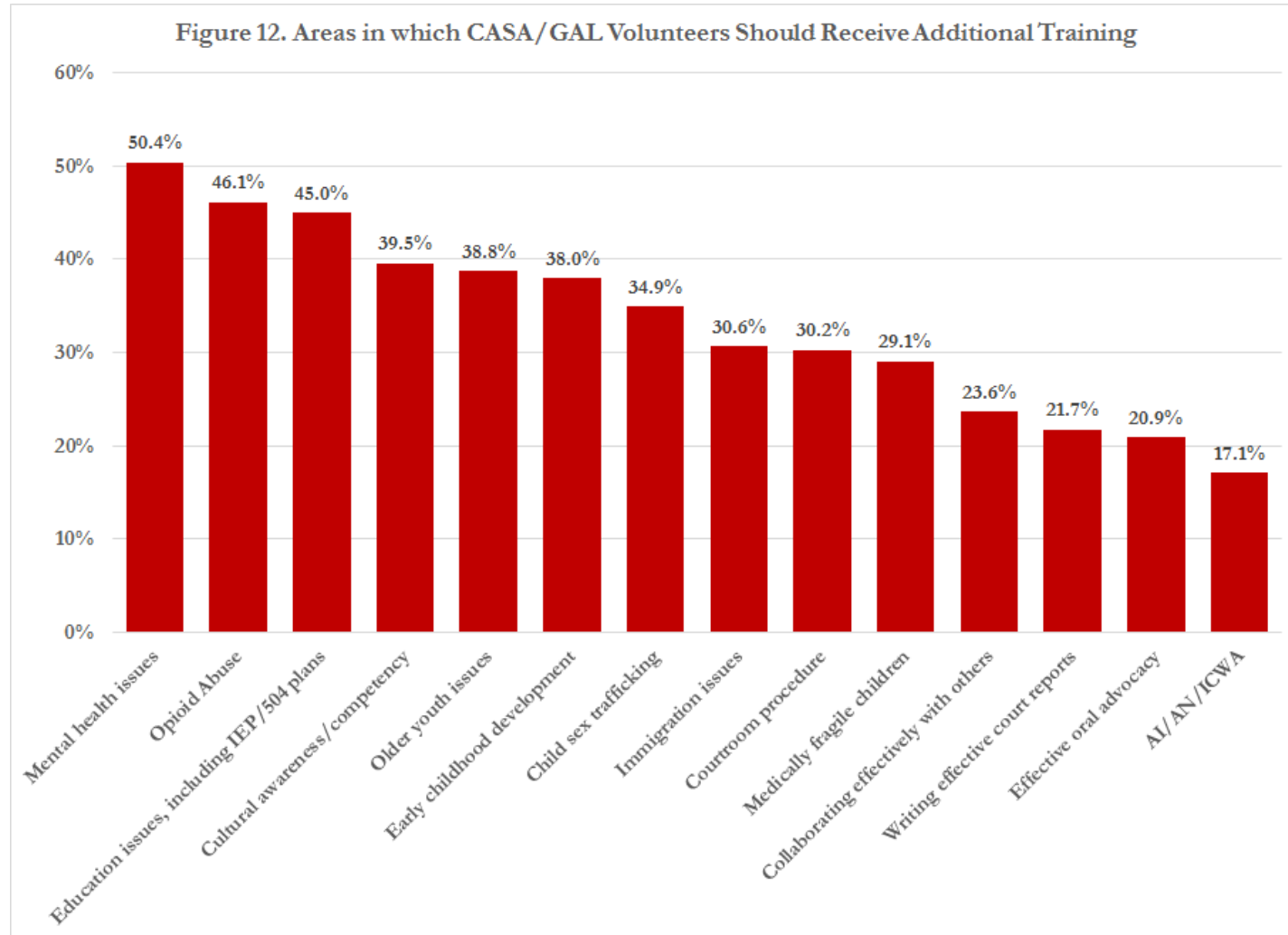
Summary of Findings

- Judges highly value CASA/GAL volunteer support—survey results demonstrate that across the US, judges that use CASA/GAL volunteers tend to want one on every case.
- Over 93% of judges report a very positive (71.9%) or positive (21.4%) overall experience with the CASA/GAL program.
- Judges report the impact of CASA/GAL volunteers is most pronounced in "promoting long-term well-being "(92.2%), followed by "appropriate services to child and family" (83%) and "psychological well-being"(79.9%).

Summary of Findings

- 78.7% of judges report lack of volunteer/program availability as the reason they don't appoint more CASA/GAL volunteers to cases.
- Regardless of region, judges report their reason for not appointing more volunteers to cases as the unavailability in jurisdictions or insufficient numbers of CASA/GAL volunteers.
- The CASA/GAL model of best interest advocacy varies regionally, and the availability of CASA/GAL volunteers varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.
- While there is a defined national Core Model; appointment, intended purpose, statutory authority, and court relationship are not uniform across local programs.

Judicial Perspectives Survey



Summary and Recommendations

National CASA/GAL can:

- Learn from successful programs by cataloguing practices that promote volunteer retention and quality and establishing local networks of providers to leverage existing capacity/expertise.
- Improve consistency across programs through refined training and use of fidelity model—which will also facilitate evaluation that can build evidence for the CASA/GAL practice.
- Build evidence by monitoring fidelity, engaging a team of evaluators, promoting evaluation partnerships with programs engaged in CQI, and leveraging the Optima case management tool to improve CQI capacity.
- Scale and grow the program by strengthening partnerships with NCJFCJ to engage judges/jurisdictions that don't currently actively partner with CASA/GAL programs and by continuing efforts to understanding local barriers to scaling and implementation.



Summary and Recommendations *(continued)*

National CASA/GAL can:

- Develop an approach to monitoring fidelity to ensure consistency and for researchers to evaluate the effects of best-interest advocacy on child welfare outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being.
- Consider increasing training in the priority areas (based on survey results) of Opioid Abuse, Cultural Awareness, and Older Youth Issues.

Next Steps

- Communicating and disseminating research findings to strengthen relationships with courts
- Exploration of development of a fidelity model
- Addressing research limitations
- Conduct feasibility study of rigorous quasi-experimental research and/or utilizing existing evidence based practices
- Increased training for CASA/GAL volunteers

2019 Key Indicators

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By the Numbers (2019)



CASA/GAL Volunteers

96,929



Children Served

276,809



State & Local Member Programs

948



Volunteer Hours

5,384,665

Questions

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Leadership Council Recruitment

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Leadership Council Recruitment

- Accepting Applications
- Urban, Suburban, Tribal and Rural
- Recruiting for 2021-2022 (2-year term)
- Deadline for applications: **Oct. 30, 2020**
- Open to executive directors of local CASA/GAL programs or equivalent
- Application on Member Portal, <https://member.nationalcasagal.org/network-development/councils-committees/>

Wrap Up

Thank you for your leadership and service!

The Next Affinity Group Calls are January 2021

