

# Advertising For Advocates: A Project to Bolster Volunteer Recruitment for CASA Worcester County



## Abstract

Both child abuse and subsequent, prolonged stays in the foster care system are shown to have devastating effects on its victims. These effects include increased risks of depression, anxiety, learning disabilities, and substance abuse issues to name a few. In order to minimize the occurrence of these conditions, legal advocates represent the best interests of child that are placed into foster care after suffering abuse. Legal advocates observe a child's current situation and submit reports to the judge, essentially telling the child's "complete story" to the court. CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children) is a national, nonprofit organization that recruits and trains volunteer to be legal advocates (called CASAs by the organization). Our project aims to give CASA Worcester County an effective plan for recruiting more volunteers to better serve the numerous children in foster care in Worcester County. To achieve this, we produced an educational and persuasive video that demonstrates the need for more volunteers and teaches its audience what CASAs actually do. We also designed a yearlong social media marketing strategy for CASA Worcester County in order to increase their outreach on the Internet. Our deliverables will hopefully work in conjunction to result in an increase in volunteers for CASA Worcester County, which in turn will lead to better support for victims of abuse in the foster care system.



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## Promoting Legal Advocacy Online

Child abuse has been a prevalent issue in the United States and globally, as children who were once abused can potentially become abusers themselves and/or are traumatized throughout their lives. It was estimated that from 2012 to 2016 there were over 600,000 child abuse cases reported in the United States. These unfortunate children are, in many cases, left with traumatic scars from the abuse they experience. Abused children have an increased chance of being arrested for violent crimes. Nearly 60% of the men that aged out of the foster care system will be convicted of a crime.<sup>1</sup> The effects of child abuse manifest in signs of mental illness such as depression or anxiety in adulthood.<sup>2</sup> A team of psychologists concluded that there are many disorders associated with cases of abuse, such as suicidal ideation, based on a nationally representative sample of adults who had experienced child abuse.<sup>3</sup> If nothing is done, this issue may start to impact society on a much larger scale, as these once neglected and abused children become adults and potentially abusers themselves. This incidence of abuse leads to a cycle of abuse.<sup>4</sup> Being mentally and/or physically abused as a child can have a huge toll on the individual. These abusive actions would become a norm to the child, and thus they would know no other way than to act in a toxic manner.

In particular, there exists a strong relationship between foster care and abuse. A large proportion of children in foster care have been abused. Thus, a child in foster care is seven times more likely to experience depression, six times more likely to experience behavioral problems, 5 times more likely to have an anxiety disorder, 3 times more likely to have attention deficit disorder, and 2 times more likely to suffer from learning disabilities, developmental delays, asthma, obesity and speech problems.<sup>5</sup> However, the negative impacts that come with these abusive experiences can be reduced with the help of legal advocates. Children with legal advocates spend less time in the foster care system, have higher chances of finding a permanent home than those with no advocates, and have a decreased rate of reentering the foster care system.<sup>6</sup>

Compared to the national scale, child abuse is a

pressing issue particularly in Massachusetts. The occurrence of these cases has been at a steady rate from 1999 to 2017, nationally, however, child abuse cases in Massachusetts has drastically increased from 1999 to 2016. In 2016, the Massachusetts rate of 23.3 victims per 1,000 children was more double the national average. On a state level, the Child Welfare League of America's report on Massachusetts states that the number of child abuse victims has increased by 30% and the number of children living in out-of-home situations, as in foster care or being homeless, has increased as well. If action is not taken, the issue can have a deeper impact on society, especially in Massachusetts, as these abused children become adults.

In Worcester County alone there are an average of 1,700 abused and/or exploited children that live in foster care. Nearly 850 of these children arrive in the juvenile court system each year with about half of them being under the age of 6. Fortunately, these children are supported by an organization called CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates). CASA is a national NGO that recruits and trains volunteer legal advocates that are appointed by the judge who represent for the best interests of the children moving through the court system. There are already about nine-hundred CASA agencies nationwide and six in Massachusetts alone as shown in Figure 1. These programs provide services to

about 280,000 children nationwide. With an increase in incidences of child abuse in Massachusetts, more CASA advocates are needed to support these children. In 2018, there were a total of 325 CASA advocates that served 906 children. With only 325 volunteer advocates being responsible for this many children, CASA becomes limited in the amount of resources they can provide to each child. Therefore, CASA Worcester County demonstrates a need for greater volunteer intake especially considering the increasing rates of child abuse victims.

The mission for our project is to create a marketing campaign for CASA so that the organization can recruit more volunteers. This will be achieved through focus groups, video production, and interviews with past CASAs. In order to craft an effective social media presence, our group will research the strategies used to achieve this effectively. Through the marketing schedule and video we will create for CASA, we hope that the agency will be able to recruit more volunteers to represent children in the juvenile court system. Essentially, with more CASAs being recruited through a stronger social media presence, victims of child abuse can be better supported as they move through the court system. With better support systems surrounding them, the developmental issues that child in the foster care system due to abuse experience can be stymied.

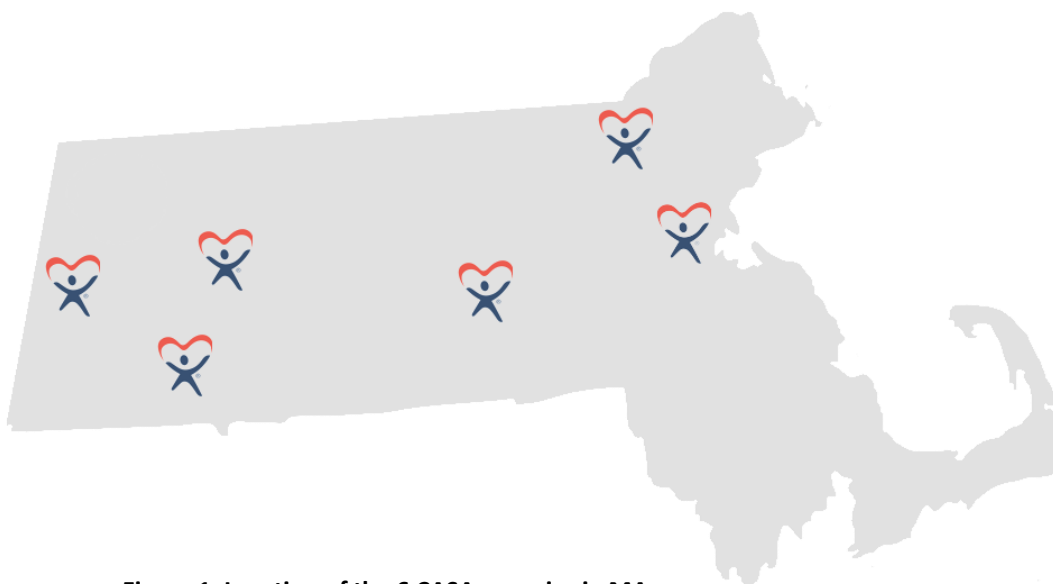


Figure 1: Location of the 6 CASA agencies in MA.

# Characterizing Child Abuse and Foster Care

## The Scale of the Problem

Child abuse impacts an alarmingly large amount of children in the U.S, and there has not been any significant improvement with this in recent years. Figure 2 displays the occurrence of reported child abuse cases from 1998 to 2017, and it is evident from the trend shown on the graph that the number of reported cases nationally has remained nearly constant over the past decade. The U.S. also has one of the highest fatality rates among abused children when compared to other industrial countries with an average of four to seven children dying every day to child abuse. Along with this, the rate of foster care admissions has only seen a small decline over the years, and there is a higher number of children entering than those exiting the system. The U.S. Children’s Bureau collected data regarding the number of foster care admissions and it was found that in 2008 a total of 280,000 children were entered into foster care nationally. In 2017 this number was reduced slightly to 270,000 children being entered, but only 248,000 children exited the system, while 123,000 are left waiting.<sup>7</sup>

This issue also exists on a local scale, and its consequences are felt by thousands of children living in Massachusetts. The red line in the graph of Figure 2 depicts the number of reported child abuse cases in the State of Massachusetts. It can be seen from this graph that the occurrence of child abuse cases in Massachusetts exceeds the national average by a considerable amount. Along with this, the rate of children entering foster care also increased. According to a study done by the Administration for Children and Families, there were a total of 20,307 child maltreatment victims in Massachusetts as of 2013 with the rate of foster care entries rising to 3.9 (1 entry per 1000) compared to a rate of 3.8 in the previous year. However, there has been significant improvement over the past decade nationally. It was recorded as of 2006 that there were a total of 510,000 children placed in foster care, and this number was reduced to 437,465 as of 2016.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that Massachusetts is not doing as much

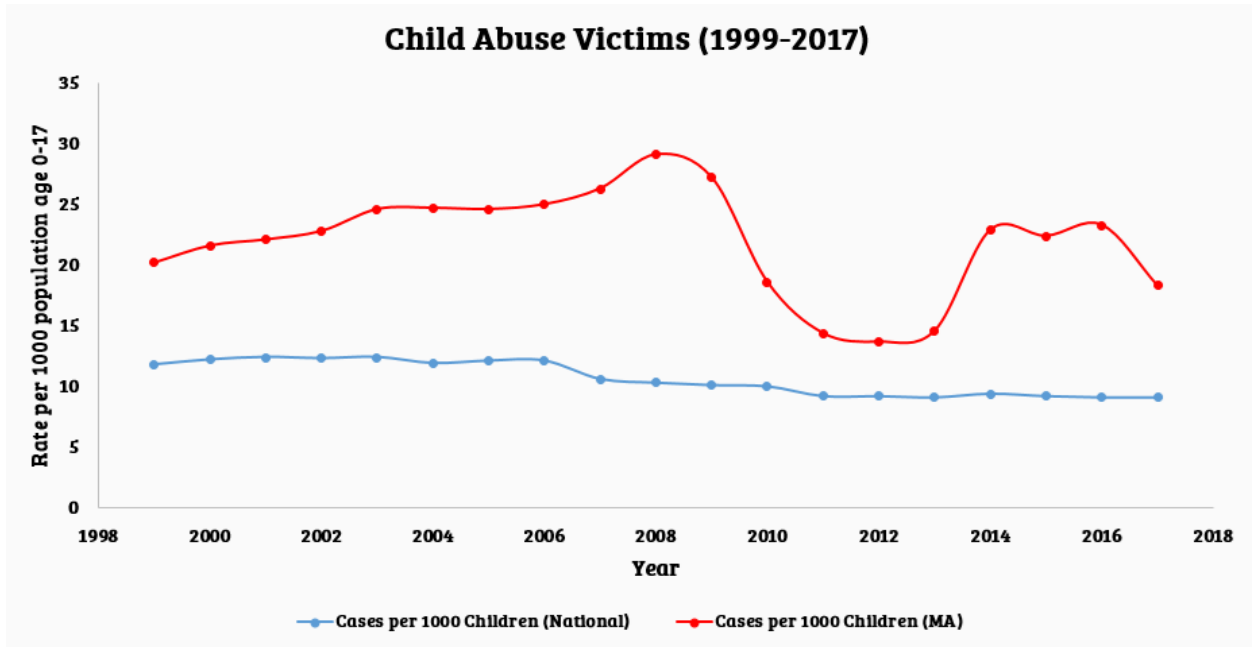


Figure 2: Rate of child abuse cases from 1999 – 2017. <sup>2</sup>

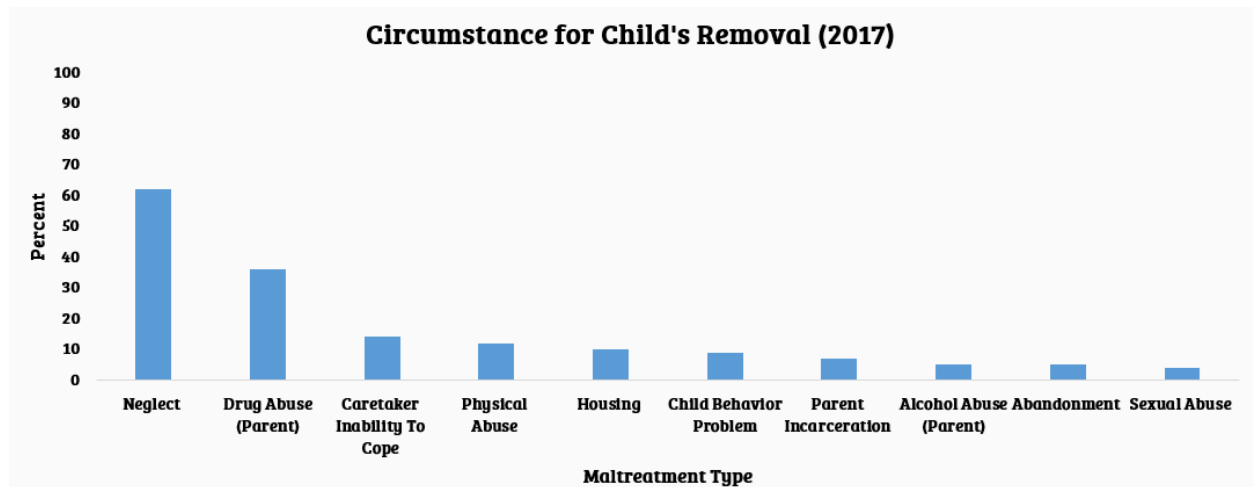


Figure 3: Relationship between placement in foster homes and maltreatment. <sup>8</sup>

as other states in order to reduce the rate of child abuse, and as a result, more of these abused children end up in the foster care system.

It has been observed that there is a significant link between abuse and foster care admissions, with the majority of children entering foster care due to traumatic abuse-related events they experience at home. Figure 3 shows that the top reasons for the removal of a child are due to abuse, with 61% being from neglect, 32% from parents abusing drugs and 14% from physical abuse.<sup>8</sup> It is also extremely hard for these children to cope with the experience of being taken from their home, which leads to the children exhibiting more severe issues. This large number of abused youth is bound to have a significant effect on society as a whole, as those harmed children go into their adult lives and are forced to struggle with the effects of their abuse.

## Impacts of Abuse & Subsequent Placement into Foster Care

Adults who have suffered an abusive childhood experience the impact of their trauma throughout their lives. Children who have experienced abuse have an increased risk of developing a variety of mental and physical health issues, which limits their ability to live normally. Children who are abused are more likely to become mentally unstable and in some cases they can develop disorders that prevent them from living normal lives. There have been many cases of people being left with post-traumatic stress disorder, and becoming depressed as a result of the mistreatment they experienced. A study conducted between 1967-1971 examined the link between child abuse and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among a sample of 2,000 people who had been experienced child abuse. It was found that 37.5% of childhood victims of sexual abuse, 32.7% of those physically abused, and 30.6% of victims of childhood neglect met DSM-III-R criteria for lifetime PTSD.<sup>9</sup>

Abused children are also more likely to be physically unhealthy, and may face problems such as malnutrition and injuries from the abuse. Additionally, they may develop a skewed understanding of normal social behavior, which leads them to have trouble developing healthy relationships with those around them. A research team at the University of Western



Figure 4: Abusive tendencies can be passed on between generations.

Ontario observed the development of 267 children born to first-time mothers identified as being at risk for parenting problems. According to the study, at 24 months of age, children with a history of physical neglect were found to be less enthusiastic, more frustrated, and angrier in problem-solving tasks than non-maltreated and other maltreated children.<sup>10</sup> Along with this, it has also been found that abused children have higher chances of developing substance abuse, which further hinders their ability to cope with their living situations. Many children are not able to solve their behavioral and developmental issues, and without the support of a parent or caretaker these issues may become more severe as they grow up, leading to them having a higher chance of becoming involved in criminal activity.

Abuse is a learned behavior. This poses a serious problem because victims of childhood abuse have an increased chance of going on to abuse others including their children. This creates a seemingly endless cycle as abusive tendencies are passed on from one generation to the next as you can see in Figure 4. A group of researchers conducted a prospective study over

30 years in order to assess whether or not there is evidence of a transmission of abuse between generations. The researchers analyzed three different generations, G1, G2, and G3. They would regularly check up on the research subjects with interviews over the course of the study to examine their condition. After the third generation matured it was found that adults with a history of being abused were statistically more likely to be reported to Child Protective Services for child abuse.<sup>11</sup> This cycle likely contributes to the number of child abuse cases that occur annually has not seen much improvement nationally, and it will continue to remain a problem if nothing is done to help the victims.

When it is discovered that a child is being abused, measures can be taken in order to remove the child from their home. If it is determined that a child is living in an unstable and abusive environment they are entered into foster care where their suffering gets even more severe. These children have been observed to have issues in several categories such as emotional, developmental, behavioral and health. A study done by researchers at the University of New Hampshire

observed that 27 percent of children aged 11 to 18 had clinical levels of emotional problems, and 41 percent of these children had clinical levels of behavioral problems. It was also found that only 5 percent of children from age 15 to 18 get adopted, so it is likely that once this age is reached the kids will have to continue suffering inside the foster care system until adulthood.<sup>12</sup> These problems become more severe as they grow up, making it two to three times more likely for the children to enter the criminal justice system as adults.<sup>13</sup>

## Interventions & Support Networks for Victims

There are many different organizations that work to better support victims of child abuse. Family preservation and child protective services have reduced incidents of abuse recidivism, intervened and helped both children and parents experiencing trauma from the abuse, and overall improved the child's welfare in relation to the welfare of the families involved.<sup>15</sup> These family preservation services fall under social work, and involve crisis interventions, programs, activities, and counseling specifically tailored to each family member's needs and the family's unique situation overall. Among these entities, legal advocates for children ensure a child's best interest is being preserved in a court of law. After a child has experienced abuse and their placement with their current caregivers is brought to court, legal advocates conduct monthly visitations to the child's home and report their findings to the judge presiding over the case. These advocates work in collaboration with other efforts to support victims, as the role the legal advocate plays compared to other institutions is very unique. Children who have supportive, professional figure(s) to help cope with their abuse are shown to be able to lead normal, healthy lives.

Mikton and Butchart conducted a review of the overall portfolio of child abuse intervention methods by scouring the numerous publications and evaluation studies. This review assesses the varying levels of success of different programs working to combat child abuse and support its victims. The methods it considered include direct approaches, such as at home visitations and support groups for victims, as well as indirect processes, such as parental education programs, in

school child sexual abuse (CSA) awareness programs and media awareness campaigns.<sup>16</sup> While the data for the effectiveness of media campaigns and support groups was found to be inconclusive, this review found that parental education and CSA programs were found to be particularly successful. Awareness raised through the media is thought to be a major preventative measure in combating child abuse, however there are few publications that specifically analyze and can quantify the impact that such efforts actually have. The nebulous ways that the media can impact the masses, especially in regards to topic as serious as child abuse, requires further research.

There are presently many organizations and institutions working to both support child abuse victims and prevent abuse before it happens. One example is the National Child Abuse Coalition, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to advocacy work that aims to prevent child abuse before it has to be escalated to higher authorities. The Coalition also keeps track of federal laws and funds surrounding the prevention of child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment, operating as a "think tank" focusing on child abuse policy. On a state level, organizations such as Massachusetts Citizens for Children or Children's Trust Massachusetts both campaign to prevent child abuse and provide victims and families with support systems necessary to cope with abuse. These organizations are only a small sampling of the numerous other agencies that work towards stopping child abuse and supporting its victims through methods such as fundraising, campaigning,

providing resources to victims, spreading awareness, etc.

The most powerful agency dealing with all matters regarding child abuse is Child Protective Services (CPS). CPS is the federal agency entrusted with the responsibility to manage issues associated with child abuse. The service allows individuals to make reports of suspected child abuse, which it investigates and then intervenes as necessary. The service that CPS provides begins with the initial intake of report(s) of child abuse. CPS then determines whether these reports meet the agency's standards of child abuse as well how urgently the agency has to respond to the report. Next, the CPS caseworker conducts an initial assessment or investigation that essentially involves determining whether any abuse occurred. After determining that a child has suffered from abuse, the child's immediate safety is ensured and a further assessment on the needs of the family is also conducted. Afterwards, ideally working with the family and community professional, the CPS caseworker will develop a safety plan if the child is at risk of imminent harm, a case plan that sets goals for the family to achieve and details how the family will work towards these goals, and/or a concurrent permanency plan to determine how both legal permanency with another family or reunification can be achieved. The CPS caseworker then oversees the implementation of the appropriate plans, ensuring that proper services are provided to the child and their family. After additional assessments of the family's reduction or elimination of the risk of child abuse

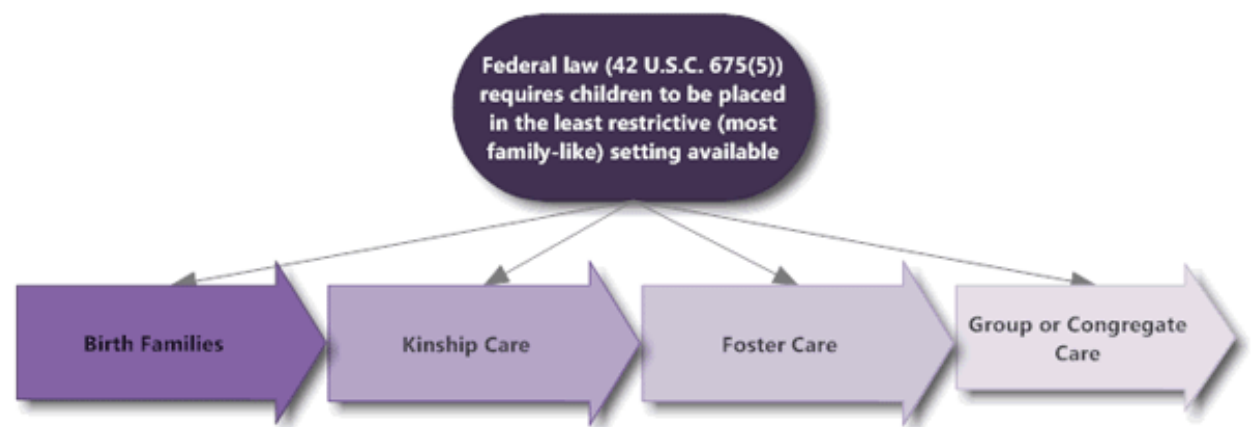


Figure 5: Preference for Child Placement<sup>21</sup>

through the case plan, the CPS caseworker can then close the case.<sup>17</sup> These safety plans are written agreements that are developed between the CPS caseworker and the child's family in order to manage safety threats to the child. However, the nature of consent for the parent in signing off on the safety plan has come under legal scrutiny, as it is difficult to determine conclusively that a parent is truly acting on their own free will when the denial of the safety plan results in the removal of their child.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that children from poorer families are disproportionately removed from their families, suggesting that CPS may have underlying classist and potentially racist tendencies as evidenced by the increased rates of child removal from poor or black families even under the same conditions of abuse as white children.<sup>19</sup> However, the chance of child abuse occurring can be increased by economic anxiety present in the caregiver(s), a phenomenon which may explain the increase rate of child removal in poorer families.<sup>20</sup> Few studies on the effectiveness of CPS as a whole have been conducted, but it has been found that therapy sessions for a child's caregiver(s) are more successful in decreasing abuse recidivism than removing the child from the caregiver(s) temporarily, an act that is reported to result in behavioral problems in the child.<sup>21</sup> Generally speaking, displacing a child from their home should be a final measure in stopping abuse from occurring, especially considering the effects that a prolonged stay in the foster care system has on children. The issues surrounding CPS show that even large-scale measures to prevent child abuse are flawed despite their good intentions.

In the event that a child is removed from their current caregiver(s), preference is given to placing the child with relatives in order to preserve a sense of familiarity. In Massachusetts, the child's removal and placement with relative(s) or other adults who "ha(ve) played a significant positive role in the child's life," is carried out by the Department of Child and Families (DCF) and is known as placement into kinship care. DCF conducts an assessment on the potential new caregiver(s) for the child by determining if they are "fit and willing" to care for the child.<sup>4</sup> If kinship care is found to be a not viable option, the child will be placed into the care of a foster family. If the child has a need for specialized services and/or intensive supervision, the child will be placed into group care. The order of

preference of these various approaches to a child's displacement due to abuse is shown in the graphic.

However, considering the effect long periods in foster care and group care have on children, it is vital that they move through the system efficiently and quickly. More than one fourth of children exiting foster care spent between one year and two years there.<sup>7</sup> For children, who are still being molded by their environment, one to two years is a significant amount of time to spend in an unfamiliar place of care. Especially considering that the majority of the children that enter the foster care have already suffered some form of abuse or neglect, these children must be adequately supported if they are to lead healthy, well-adjusted lives.

Through analysis of many of the institutions and methods for preventing and intervening in instances of child abuse, it is found that keeping the child with their family (as long as there is no imminent danger of abuse) with as little intervention from the law as possible is ideal. However, in the instance that legal enforcement must come into play, and the child may potentially face removal from their family, it is vital that



Figure 6: The face of a legal advocate.

these children moving through the complicated legal system are adequately supported. This is a current area for improvement in supporting child abuse victims, as the court of law is already plenty difficult for adults to navigate, let alone children that have suffered abuse.

## *The Role of Legal Advocacy*

While the previously mentioned institutions work diligently towards their goal of preventing child abuse, there is conspicuously little support for children involved in the juvenile court system due to abuse, especially those that have been displaced from their previous caregiver(s). These children may be seen as a "lost cause" to some due to their position in the court system, but especially in matters concerning the law, children are in a particularly precarious situation and require legal representation that will advocate for their best interests. Broadly, legal advocates act in the best interests of those who cannot adequately represent themselves. Many legal advocates are compassionate and motivated by a desire to serve their community. Figure 6 displays a legal advocate discussing his passion for volunteering. Those requiring a legal advocate include children, as well as disabled individuals, the elderly who are not healthy enough to represent themselves, and any other individuals with circumstances that prevent them from advocating for themselves in a court of law.

Children are particularly unique in their needs for representation in that they do not have all of the legal rights as an adult, and therefore presumably do not have the same knowledge of the legal system an adult would have. Furthermore, many children's time in the justice system surrounding their abuse will likely be the first experience the child has in the legal system, so advocating for children presents a unique challenge for the legal advocate. The legal advocate for the child, like any advocate, must act in such a way that preserves the welfare of the child, as well as making the child aware of their respective situation in a way that is comprehensive and easily understandable for the child. Thusly, representation in the court of law for children is a complicated and often neglected phenomenon in larger society due to the unique challenges it presents. Despite these challenges, many legal advocates speak positively of their experiences, as evidenced by the quotes on the next page.



***“I think the important thing is for you to have a good support system”***

***-Helen***



***“You’re taking on a human being, a child... How could I give up on a child?”***

***-Suzanne***



***“The Important part about being a CASA is that it is uniquely for the child”***

***-Anne***



***“Be prepared to be grabbed right here”  
\*motions to heart\****

***-Joe***

# Methodology & Results: Creating A Promotional Campaign for Increasing Volunteer Participation

In this section, we outline our objectives and summarize the associated methods and results for each one. This is shown visually in Figure 7, with each objective working towards our larger goal for this project. Our specific objectives are as follows:

1. Design a yearlong social media marketing strategy.
2. Produce an educational and promotional video.



Figure 7: Objectives for CASA Worcester County

## Objective 1: Designing a Yearlong Social Media Marketing Strategy

In order to make a social media campaign that effectively modernizes CASA’s recruitment tools we collected data on social media activity trends within a sample of CASA volunteers and found strategies that are often used to bolster social media presence. This was done through two focus groups with CASA volunteers, a survey, and a literature review. All of the findings from this research was used in conjunction in order to design our social media campaign and produce a calendar that outlined the monthly posting schedule for CASA as well as a guide for posting.

### Survey

Our group created a survey that was filled out by former advocates to obtain information for our social media campaign. Our survey sought to gather data on CASA volunteers current social media usage and CASA’s own social media presence. Some of the core questions we included in the survey were asking what social media platform(s) the volunteers mainly used, what times of the day they use social media most often, and what they want to see out of CASA’s social media presences going forward. (See Appendix E for all survey questions).

### Focus Groups

In order to get additional information on the type of content that would effectively engage current CASA members and pull in more volunteers, we conducted 2 separate focus groups where we got feedback on what volunteers wanted to see on CASA’s social media platforms, and furthermore, it gave us direction on where to go with the campaign. For the focus group iterations, we attained a list of volunteers from CASA and then randomly chose volunteers from those lists. In total 7 people participated, with one group consisting of 3 volunteers and the other having 4. The staff at CASA were not informed on what the feedback given by the individuals in the focus group in order to

ensure confidentiality. We asked a variety of baseline questions regarding the test posts that we created and their experience with social media (See Appendix E). The test posts were created using information about the Instagram and Facebook algorithms that we found from our literature review, each with an emphasis on different strategies (See Appendix F). These focus groups took place at the CASA office space and the WCPC. The focus groups consisted of the volunteers arranged in a circle with two of our teammates leading the discussion included, while the others took notes on important feedback given. The direct data from the focus group sessions consisted of audio recordings of each iteration.

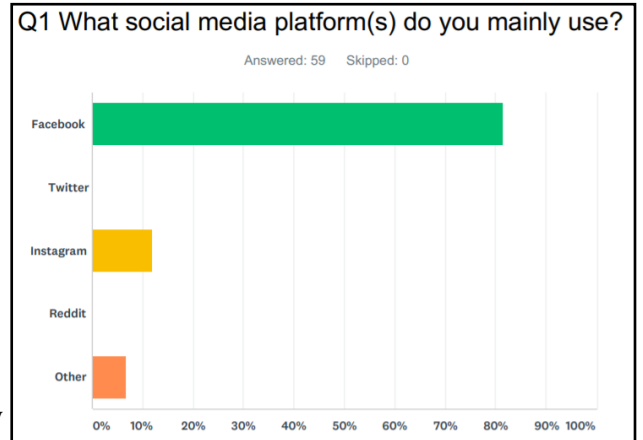


Figure 8: Platforms mainly used by CASAs.

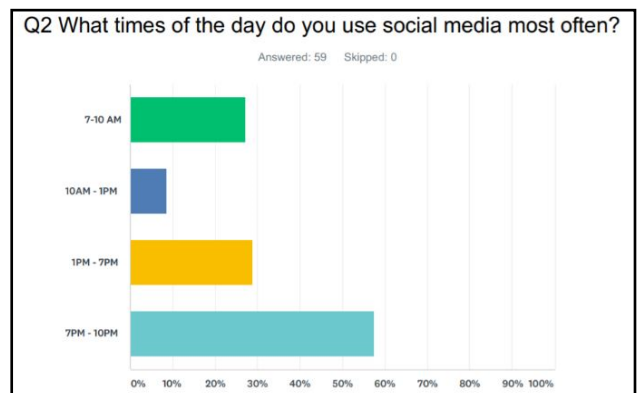


Figure 9: Time of social media usage by CASAs.



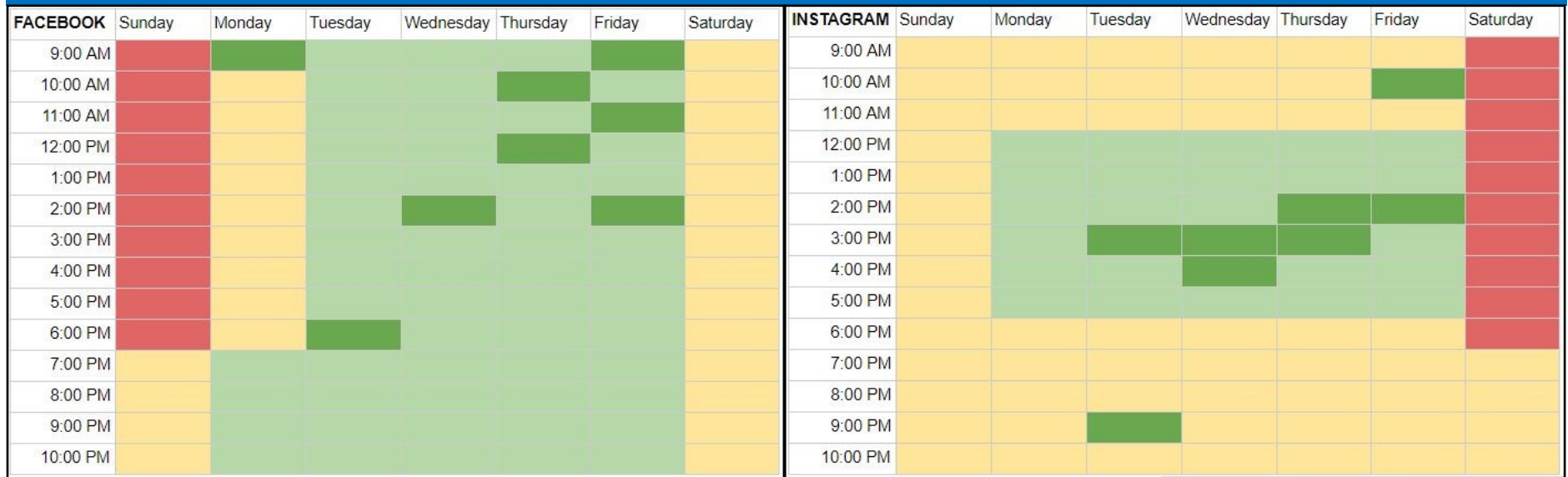


Figure 10: Heat map of best times to post on Facebook and Instagram.



### Determining Platform Preferences

CASA Worcester County currently has an active presence on Facebook and an inactive Instagram account. Since CASA’s Facebook page already has ~1,100 likes and 68% of American adults use Facebook, we decided that focusing our research around Facebook would be most beneficial.<sup>22</sup> Facebook’s popularity was also reflected in our survey results with over 80% of the respondents stating that Facebook was their main platform. Furthermore, in terms of usage, Instagram comes in second with 35% of American adults using it. CASA Worcester County’s Instagram account currently has very few followers and posts, so increasing their presence on Instagram will allow them to reach a larger audience.<sup>22</sup>

Our survey distributed to current CASA volunteers also demonstrated a strong preference for Facebook, with some volunteers using Instagram as well as shown in Figure 8. Analysis of the individual responses showed that those who answered “other” do not use social media at all. Having considered this data and the wider research surrounding platform usage, we determined that CASA Worcester County should favor posting on Facebook over Instagram, but should also

work to increase their Instagram following. Considering the disparity in Instagram usage between the present research and the survey, we guess that CASA Worcester County’s older demographic accounts for the difference. Therefore, efforts should be made to bolster our sponsor’s Instagram following to appeal to a younger audience.

### Timing

One vital factor to posting effectively on social media is the timing of posts. Sprout Social conducted studies detailing the best days and times to post on Facebook and Instagram for nonprofits specifically.<sup>23</sup> Since Instagram’s algorithm changed in 2018, it has been found that posts determined to be of interest to users will be shown on their feed more so than recent posts.<sup>24</sup> Interest is measured by the level of engagement the viewer has with content through likes, comments, views or shares. As a result, both Facebook and Instagram favor posts that have high levels of early engagement after being posted. Therefore, it is essential that CASA posts on Instagram during active times so engagement will be maximized.

From our survey (See Appendix G), the

majority of CASA volunteers were most active on social media from 7:00 pm - 10:00 pm as shown in Figure 9. This is contradictory to the results from the research, so we postulate that CASA’s volunteer base of mainly older individuals are less likely to be using social media during the work day. To synthesize these findings, the best days and times to post for each platform are outlined in the heat map we created for our sponsor as shown in Figure 10. The dark green represents the best times to post, light green is good, yellow is okay, and red should be avoided posting at all. To encourage engagement with CASA’s current volunteer base, 7:00 pm - 10:00 pm is a favorable time to post on Facebook.

### Tone

A key aspect of an effective social media presence is the tone of the posts. Berger and Milkman stipulate that posts with a more positive than negative tone are more likely to go viral.<sup>25</sup> Berger further doubles down on his claiming, stating that “sadness (**sic**) articles were actually 16 percent less likely to make the Most E-Mailed list.”, essentially that sad content was shared demonstrably less than its

likely to make the Most E-Mailed list.”, essentially that sad content was shared demonstrably less than its counterpart (medium). However, due to the nature of CASA Worcester County’s work, it is important that they balance posts that explain the reality of child abuse with posts that are more hopeful and positive. It is vital that CASA does not misrepresent the work that they do with overly sugary posts or post exclusively depressing content. For CASA Worcester County’s posts to be successful, there must be a balance between positive and negative content.

Our two focus groups gave insight into how CASA volunteers interpret tonally varied posts. Test Post 1 in particular that got a lot of attention was of an abused girl being held by a man with a terrified look in her eyes (Test Post 1). The volunteers liked that picture almost too extreme and would most likely scare away potential volunteers. Another, Test Post 2, featuring a hand made of abusive language, got a similar treatment (Test post 2). Although the violence in Test Post 2 is less anthropomorphous because of the composition of the hand, the CASAs still thought that it was very frightening to its detriment. Due to the nature of CASA’s work, it would be easy for their social media posts to be entirely negative, but the focus group and prior literature review illustrates that such posts are ineffective. Having considered the volunteers thoughts, Test Post 3 was created. This post was effective with the volunteers because while still negative in tone, it is far more tempered and less graphic than Test Posts 1 and 2.

The focus group volunteers had similar negative reactions to posts that are overly happy in tone. Test Post 4 was not well received, as volunteers felt that the children in the post do not look like the children that CASA serve. One volunteer even went as far to say that the children in the post look like they are “going to an Easter party.” However, the volunteers were far more receptive to Test Post 5, as they felt that the children did not seem overly happy in a manufactured way. They liked that the children were outside and that the group was diverse, diversity being an essential aspect to being a CASA in Worcester County. The general opinion of the two focus groups is that CASA’s social media post content cannot be too overly dramatic in either direction. Therefore, striking a balance between happy and sad posts is paramount to CASA’s effectiveness in both appealing to the current volunteer base and increasing outreach to potential volunteers.

## Message

Creating a genuine message that is relevant to the issue being discussed is essential for making the posts easy to understand. If the message is unclear the viewer may feel as if they are being misled, or they will be confused on what is being asked of them. Our focus groups demonstrated the importance of a clear message because the members valued posts that accurately conveyed the reality of the issue of child abuse, and showed the role that a CASA could play in helping. They disliked content that did not portray a believable situation, rather they resonated more strongly with posts that gave hard statistics. Test post 3 and 6 were determined to be effective because they conveyed the reality of the situation of child abuse and the impact that CASAs can have. Having the takeaway from the post be that the issues that CASA deals with are grounded in reality gives CASA’s social media presence credibility.

The members of our focus groups gave helpful feedback that about how they felt the message of some posts could be improved. They advised us to ensure that the message and theme of the post be easily identifiable in the content we use because potential volunteers will need to know what they are likely to experience. For example, they felt as though the girls in Test Post 4 did not accurately portray the demeanor of the children that CASAs usually work with, and they were with, and they were automatically able to identify that the kids in the picture were not from CASA because of their overly happy demeanor. Potential volunteers may be misled into assuming that CASAs deal with relatively privileged kids. Including a question in the post was also suggested in order to further engage viewers. For example, one advocate recommended combining Test Post 1 with the images of the girls in test post 4, and ask the question “Which world would you rather live in?” because asking a question would be an effective way of highlighting the message. On the other hand, the group liked Test Posts 3 and 5 because they included the message was clear and it related to the content shown. For example, they said the statistic in Test Post 3 gave them a sense of urgency, but they also felt like they could make an impact by joining CASA. Test Post 5 gave a hopeful message by letting the viewer know that they can be the one to support suffering children.

The point brought up about posing questions

aligned with the research we conducted that suggested including a clear and direct question to ask the audience in the post is an effective way of creating a message. Forbes recommends making posts that influences audience interaction, i.e. posts that ask a question of the audience.<sup>26</sup> For CASA, posts that ask their followers to share their stories and opinions about their cases (while keeping privacy in mind) or statistics in Worcester County regarding child abuse will be effective. liked Test Posts 3 and 5 because they included the message was clear and it related to the content shown. For example, they said the statistic in Test Post 3 gave them a sense of urgency, but they also felt like they could make an impact by joining CASA. Test Post 5 gave a hopeful message by letting the viewer know that they can be the one to support suffering children.



Figure 11: Group working on test post

1600 Abused and Neglected Children enter Foster Care every year in Worcester

Be the one to tell their story

Become an advocate at <https://www.thecasaproject.org/volunteer/>

Test Post 1

"I understand how a parent might hit a child-its because you can look into their eyes and see a reflection of yourself you wish you hadn't" -Jodi Picoult

Test Post 2

casa\_worcester • Following Worcester, MA

Over 1,700 children in Worcester County were placed into foster care in 2018.

They need you now more than ever.

Test Post 3

MAKE A DIFFERENCE THIS SPRING

VISIT [WWW.THECASAPROJECT.ORG](http://WWW.THECASAPROJECT.ORG)

Court Appointed Special Advocates/Guardian Ad Litem (CASA/GAL) of Worcester County is a not-for-profit organization committed to speaking for the best interests of abused and neglected children in the Worcester County Courts. The CASA Project, a member of the National CASA Association, recruits, screens, and trains community volunteers to become Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), also known as Guardians ad Litem (GAL). Appointed by judges to help on the most heart-breaking cases in the foster care system, CASAs help abused and neglected children navigate the Worcester County Juvenile Courts, one child or sibling group at a time.

Test Post 4

CASA SUPPORTS THE CHILDREN OF WORCESTER YOU CAN TOO!

Find out more about CASA at <https://www.thecasaproject.org/about/>

Test Post 5

casa\_worcester • Follow

OUR IMPACT

85,000+ Volunteer advocates help change children's lives every day

260,000+ Children have a CASA volunteer advocate speaking up for their best interests

A child with a CASA volunteer finds a forever home 25% faster

CASA volunteer advocates help close about 100,000 cases every year

A child with a CASA advocate is much less likely to re-enter the foster-care system

Liked by casa and 10 others

casa\_worcester Want to make a difference? Become a CASA today!

Test Post 6

were automatically able to identify that the kids in the picture were not from CASA because of their overly happy demeanor. Potential volunteers may be misled into assuming that CASAs deal with relatively privileged kids. Including a question in the post was also suggested in order to further engage viewers. For example, one advocate recommended combining Test Post 1 with the images of the girls in test post 4, and ask the question “Which world would you rather live in?” because asking a question would be an effective way of highlighting the message. On the other hand, the group liked Test Posts 3 and 5 because they included the message was clear and it related to the content shown. For example, they said the statistic in Test Post 3 gave them a sense of urgency, but they also felt like they could make an impact by joining CASA. Test Post 5 gave a hopeful message by letting the viewer know that they can be the one to support suffering children.

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### Aesthetic

A final theme that the focus groups touched upon was the aesthetic quality of posts. Shea Bennett states that images in color rather than black and white get shared up to 42% more.<sup>27</sup> To account for this, we showed the focus groups the same image twice in black and white and in color as shown in Figure 12. Interestingly, many of the volunteers were more receptive to the black and white image, saying that it had a “sophisticated, nostalgic” quality. While the demographic makeup of the two focus groups was



Figure 12: Color and black and white of the same photo

Engaging	Informative	“Call to Action”
<p>Posts that are aimed at grabbing the attention of viewers through visuals.</p> <p>E.g. Pictures of kids, videos and pictures from CASA events, catchy quotes</p>	<p>Posts that educate the audience. These posts can be information pertinent to both current and potential volunteers.</p> <p>E.g. statistics about children entering foster care, CASA milestones, information from DCF, volunteer resources, CASA event information</p>	<p>Posts that ask something of the viewer, typically in the caption of the post.</p> <p>E.g. “Like this post!”, “Share this post!”, “Comment (x)!”, “Go to (x) website!”</p>






















Table 1: Descriptions of categories for posting.

mainly older women, a younger, college aged women said that the colored image appealed more to her. Furthermore, the popularity of Test Post 3 and unpopularity of Test Post 4 highlight the focus groups’ preference for black and white over color. Therefore,

CASA’s social media posts should be a mix between black and white and color in order to increase engagement with their current following and reach out to a wider audience.

March 2019

Figure 13: Posting time for the month of March

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4  "Call to Action"	5	6  Informative  Engaging	7	8  "Call to Action"  Engaging	9
10	11	12  Informative  "Call to Action"	13  Engaging  Engaging	14	12  Informative	16
17  Engaging  Engaging	18	19	20	21  Informative	8  Engaging	23
24	25  Engaging	26  "Call to Action"  Informative	27	28  Informative  Engaging	29	30
31   Volunteer of the Month!						

*"Call to Action"*

*Engaging*


*Informative*



Speak on behalf of a child.  
Become a  
**CASA today!**



**CASA**  
Leading Children  
Down the Right Path



**#GIVINGTUESDAYLBK**

#GIVINGTUESDAY is a global movement to promote the act of giving back to your community.

THANKSGIVING | 50%+ | CYBER MONDAY | **GIVING TUESDAY NOV. 28th**

## Specific Plans for CASA’s Social Media

Considering CASA’s main goal is to recruit more volunteers, the majority of the focus will be on uploading engaging material that is likely grab the attention of potential volunteers on Instagram and Facebook, while the rest of the efforts will be put towards more educational content on Facebook. Having considered the findings from the research completed, survey, and focus groups, we have created a social media strategy for our sponsor. We divided up the posts for CASA to make into three types: “Engaging”, “Informative”, and “Call to Action”. “Engaging” (Test Post 3) posts are highly visually interesting and the goal is to get high levels of early engagement. “Informative” posts (also Test Post 6) are more strictly factual, and can include resources for volunteers, CASA event descriptions, or hard statistics. Finally, “Call to Action” posts (Test Post 5) demand something of the viewer, such as liking, sharing, or commenting on a prompt. A more thorough description of these categories is shown in Table 1, and further recommendations for social media are found in a comprehensive guide (Appendix J). These posts are interspersed throughout our calendar Figure 13, with

more Engaging posts targeted towards potential volunteers on Instagram and more Informative posts on Facebook to appeal to the current volunteer base. Our calendar is for three months with each month similar to one another with a focus on both expanding their current social media presence and effectively engaging with their current base. This allows CASA to effectively get the attention of non-volunteers, and encourage interaction with existing volunteers at the same time.

Alongside the calendar and heat map, hashtags on Instagram are an effective way to promote posts to the wider public. It is important for CASA to be meticulous in what hashtags they post in, as some hashtags have many more posts tagged with them than

others. Social Media Examiner explains that businesses should use 15-20 hashtags on their posts with the specificity of the hashtags ranging from extremely broad, down to hashtags for the business itself.<sup>28</sup> Table 2 outlines how many hashtags to select from each type, and how many posts are associated with the hashtag. In order to maximize engagement on Instagram, CASA will have to use hashtags effectively. Following the present research regarding hashtags, we researched various hashtag popularity levels on Instagram and created an easy to follow table of hashtags for our sponsor as shown on Table 3 In conjunction with the calendar and guide, hashtag usage can lead to CASA’s growth on Instagram.

5-7 extremely popular hashtags	100,000 to 500,00 posts associated with them
5-7 moderately popular hashtags	10,000 to 100,000 posts associated with them
3-5 niche specific hashtags	< 10,000 posts associated with them
1-3 branded hashtags	used exclusively for CASA Worcester County

Table 2: Hashtags relationship with post association.

Extremely popular	Moderately popular	Niche	Branded
#volunteerwork	#givebacktothecommunity	#courtappointedspecialadvocate	#thecasaproject
#advocacy	#childabuseawareness	#becomeacasa	#casaworcestercounty
#advocate	#childabuseprevention	#becomeanadvocate	#casaworcesterma
#giveback	#fostercareawareness	#volunteeringopportunities	#casaworcester
#dogood	#fostercare	#worcesternassachusetts	
#communityservice	#childabusepreventionmonth		
#nonprofit	#fostercare		
#nonprofitorganization			
#worcester			
#worcesterma			

Table 3: Categories and Recommendations for Hashtags.

## Objective 2: Produce an educational and promotional video

### Pre-production



We performed an initial literature review of video production strategies and techniques. From our research, we found that there were key questions that needed to be considered in determining the success of a promotional video. These questions are as follows:

1. Does the ad tell a story?
2. Are you entertained while watching the ad?
3. Does the ad make you feel anything?
4. Can you identify what the ad wants you to do?
5. Can you tell what demographic the ad is for?
6. Is there a central truth in the ad that you can identify with?<sup>29</sup>

Ensuring that the video meets these criteria was our priority. We wanted our video to have a strong emotional aspect to it by incorporating sad music and children. Also, we wanted our video to tell a story about an abused child before and after having an advocate. The video should explicitly demonstrate what it wants the audience to do by including data regarding abused children and ending with “Learn how you can help today.” We also analyzed several viral commercials such as “My Dad’s Story”, a popular commercial created by Metlife.<sup>30</sup> We found that many of the strategies used in this video aligned with the key factors that we previously outlined. These strategies included emotional and happy scenes to grab the attention of the audience, black/white scenes to enhance emotion, sad music, and a story to follow. They waited until the end to introduce the company and its need, which demonstrates which demographic the video was targeting. Structuring the video in this way allowed for the video to captivate 15 million viewers.<sup>30</sup> However, as we want our video to be both educational and persuasive, it is vital that we strike a balance between information and emotion. In order for a video to be successful, the main objective and view personas should

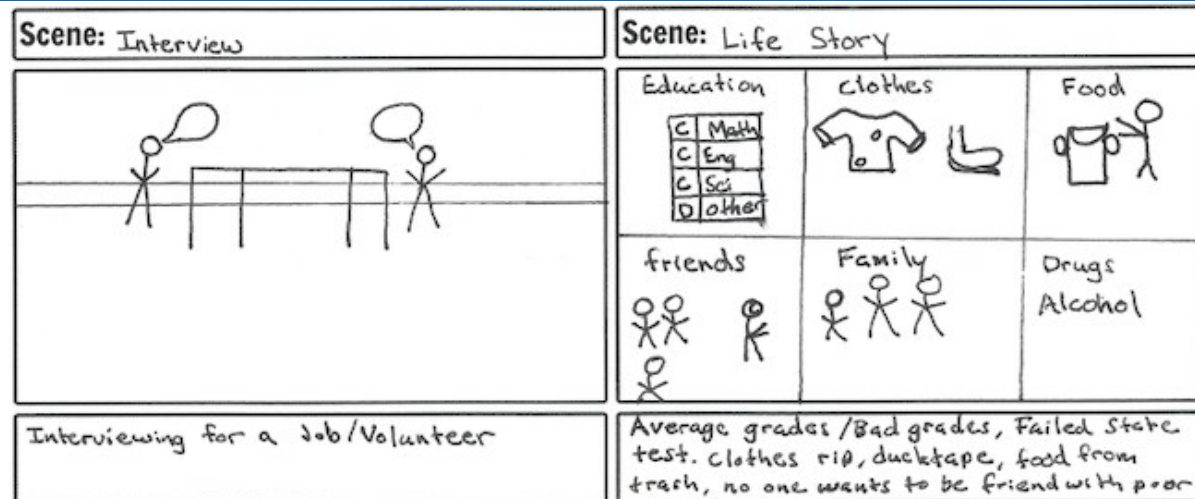


Figure 14 Storyboard for the first half of the video.

be identified.

Once we had confidently identified strategies for successful videos, we examined the set of current CASA videos as a baseline for our video project.<sup>31</sup> These videos effectively used testimonies from interviews to accurately portray the need of CASA. However, they mostly lacked engaging storylines, and failed to create an emotional response from the viewers, and included many repetitive scenes. Based on this analysis we decided to limit the video to 5 minutes, and implement a story that keeps the audience interested.

After conducting a literature review, we drafted two storyboards for our video. We then brought these storyboards to the CASA office to get feedback on them. Our sponsor appreciated the narrative of our storyboard and suggested that we add statistics on children removed from foster care due to abuse and neglect in Worcester county. Based on this feedback, we edited the chosen storyboard to present for any additional feedback. Our sponsor was very pleased with our storyboard and suggested that, if possible, we should obtain clips of children to use in the video. We then created a script for the video.

Our final storyboard (Figure 14) has an overarching narrative of someone who was served by a CASA in their youth. This “someone” serves as the narrator to our video, and states that in the midst of all of the change and instability in their life, everything

changed “because of you,” i.e. the CASA. Each “because of you,” is said by a different child, and the video will show the faces of the different CASAs we interviewed. The narrator then states how their life changed positively, with clips of the interviews interspersed throughout the video that feature the interviewees speaking candidly about what they do as CASAs, what they gain from it, and how they impact children’s lives. The video then closes with clips of the same children from before saying, “Thank you for being a CASA,” followed by statistics on children’s removal due to abuse in Worcester County and how “you,” can help by becoming a CASA.

### Production



We included filmed interviews of CASA volunteers in our video. The interview process gave our video much needed credibility, and displayed to audiences that being a volunteer for CASA is rewarding and meaningful. We interviewed experienced, passionate legal advocates that speak positively of their time as a CASA. We did the interviews at the CASA office to ensure that the interviewees were in a comfortable, familiar environment. During each interview, the interviewer asked questions, and someone else operated the camera to ensure the subject was in

frame and the audio could be heard (See Appendix E - Research Instruments). The interviews were filmed in such a way so that the interviewee is the main focus in the shot. In essence, the interviewer was not featured in the footage of the interview. This framing of the interview lets the audience feel more personally connected to the interviewee and what they say.

From our five interviews, we were able to identify common values or experiences held by the CASA volunteers. These findings are shown in the form

of short clips in our video in order to educate the audience about the work of a CASA and the impact it has on the volunteers. Across the five interviews we conducted, many of the volunteers spoke of the rewarding nature of the work they do, the connections they form, and finally how effective the support systems in place for them are. A synthesis of these common themes is displayed in Table 4.

Having finished filming the five interviews, a voice over was recorded for our narrative that plays over

images to describe his life experiences. We also filmed the clips of the five children mentioned prior and brief clips of the narrator in front of a green screen to give us flexibility in the background without having to go directly to locations. Furthermore, we combed through our interview footage to select clips to include in the video. After compiling all of the footage we shot, we then moved into the final stage of producing our video.

## ***Themes Prevalent in Interviews with CASAs***

### Connection

Many of our interviewees also touched upon the connections they form by being a CASA. They spoke of how people they encounter can be very resilient, dedicated, and surprising. Joe expressed the importance of forming lasting relationships with the children he works with. To help the children loosen up, he asked for them to “Call me Joe. Call me Papa, if you want. Let’s get relaxed here.” He then went on to describe how he does a special handshake with each of the children, and further how a more casual, friendly approach to being a CASA results in the children opening up to him. In forming this connection with the children, Joe was not only able to better serve the children, but also come to realize the resilience and tenacity that many of the children have. Helen and Suzanne expressed similar sentiments, but also emphasized how the parents of the children can be incredibly impressive in their own right. Both of them took on cases where the mother suddenly “step(ped) up to the plate” to adequately care for her children. Helen recounted her first case where the mother had not been seen for three months, stating, “One day, I received a call stating that she wanted to speak with me...we did meet in person...in the end she actually did step up to the plate, finish a program, then continued as an outpatient. She did get her children back.” Suzanne told of a similar experience. However, she went even further to say that, “There’s a lot of diversity in the city...I’ve met a lot of people from different cultures, different professions, different walks of life, different backgrounds that I might not have come across. People are people, so that’s been a positive side of the experience. I’ve met some really incredible people across the board.” For her, being a CASA has allowed deeper engagement with the Worcester community.

### Growth

The most frequently emphasized aspect of being a CASA was the growth that the children experience as the CASA works alongside them. The first interviewee, we spoke to discussed how she had been on one case for five years as of now, and that being able to see the children grow and change over the years due to the work she does is very fulfilling. Our second interviewee, Joe, specifically stated that, “You have the distinct opportunity to take a family that is in disarray and just move things a little bit to the left, a little bit to the right down a different pathway. Somehow, somehow, those children flourish.” Jim had similar thoughts saying that you should, “Just start and do this. It can unfold in a rewarding way.” Furthermore, our fifth interviewee, Anne, expressed that when searching for a volunteer opportunity, she “wanted something that she could do long term, really make a difference.”, even going as far to say that “It’s not overwhelming...it’s eye-opening.”

### Support

A final point of emphasis over the course of our interviews was the importance of having a support network and how CASA as an organization fulfills this. In fact, our first interviewee, Helen, began to cry while touching on the difficulty of some of her cases. Many of them stressed that progress on cases is nonlinear at times. However, she does believe that “...the important thing is for you to have a good support system.”, and further describes how she is able to meet with her CASA supervisor if need be. We recognize the trepidation that potential volunteers may have about working with children that have been abused, so our video highlights that CASA the organization has a strong, capable support network in place to care for the CASAs themselves.

**Table 4: Common themes from CASA interviewees.**



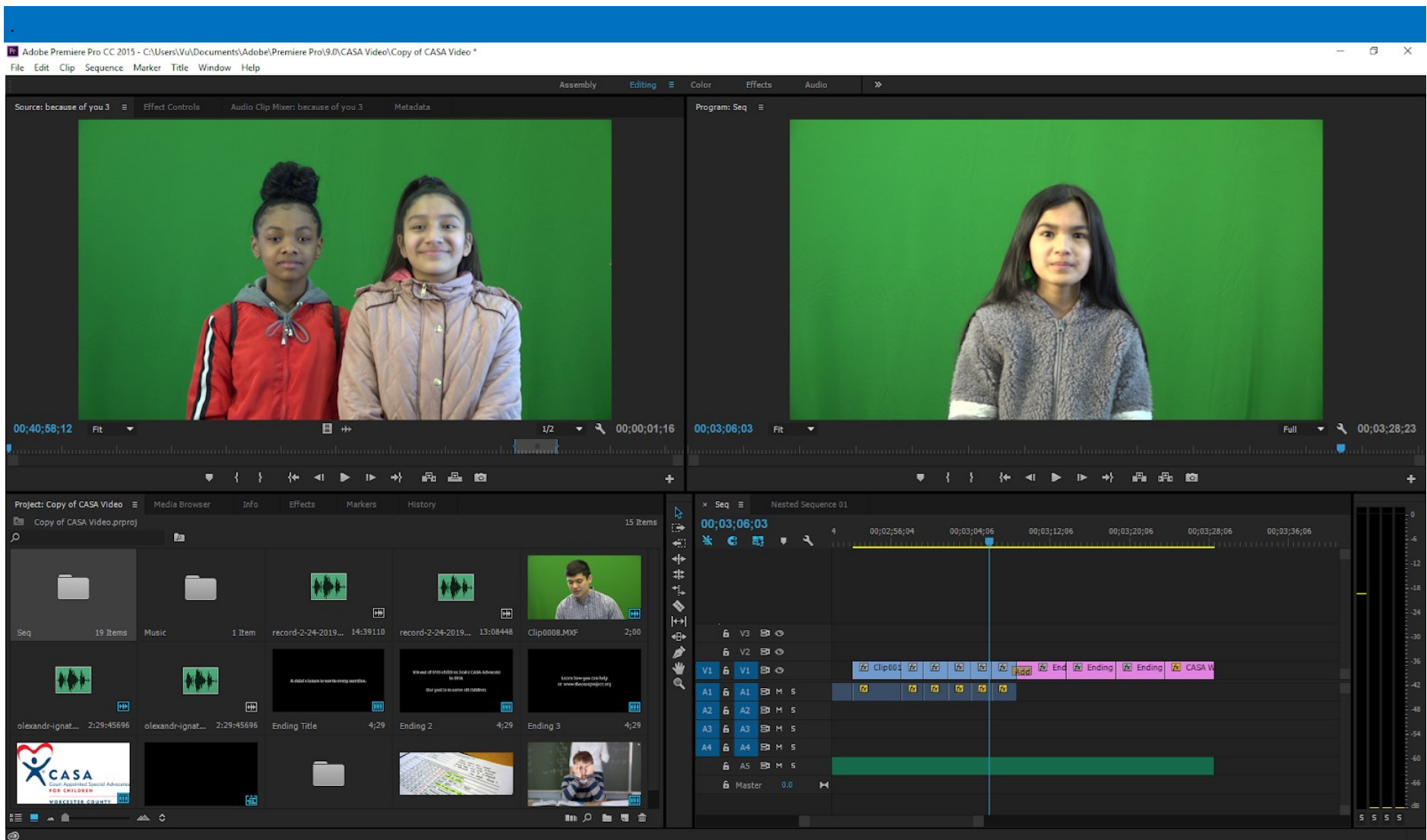


Figure 15: Editing the clips of children in Adobe Premiere Pro.

## Post-Production

To complete our video, we shifted into post-production, which is essentially editing our video. Our editing was completed using Adobe Premiere Pro (Figure 15). In total, we had approximately 1 hour and 55 minutes of raw footage and our sponsor stipulated

that the video should be around 5 minutes in length, so cutting down our interview footage and only including the parts of interest was essential. We then selected images and other clips from existing CASA videos that work to further enforce our video's narrative structure. The entirety of the compiled clips and images was then assorted to follow the voice over, which we imported into Adobe to play over the video. We then selected

music appropriate for the initially somber then hopeful tone of our video and overlaid it over the voice over and footage. The volume of the audio parts had to be adjusted individually in order to maintain vocal clarity of the voice over. Finally, we added black frames with white text that show statistics on the child abuse victims entering foster care, as well as directions for the audience to volunteer through CASA's website.



Why am I here?



Weeks would go by, and I still had no medicine



No one to care for me



All I remember is that they went into my room, and they started packing my clothes in a trash bag



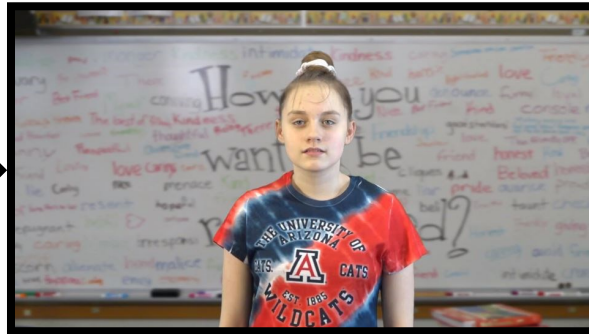
Everything started to change because of you



I got that regular check up with the doctor



And I was seeing a therapy regularly



Thank you for being a CASA



Ending title

## Recommendations and Conclusions: Improving CASA's Online Presence Going Forward

We produced two deliverables for CASA Worcester County in order to give them tools to try to increase the volunteer applications they receive. Our social media strategy gives CASA Worcester County a guide they can follow to potentially bolster their presence on Facebook and Instagram, and our video serves as promotional material to potential volunteers. In the future, our sponsor wants to engage more with a younger audience, so generally we suggest that CASA Worcester County determines what resonates more with the targeted 28-34 year old demographic, and subsequently adjust their strategies accordingly. CASA Worcester County's Facebook and Instagram page would be the best platforms to use to raise awareness and for any updates/events. Based on the results from our research, surveys, and focus groups, CASA should include content on foster care children, success stories, and messages from current volunteers in order to engage and inspire current and potential volunteers. The best time to post would be from 12:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. as well as 7:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m. By posting during those time periods, CASA will maximize user activity and expand audience interaction. Many CASAs may also be against the use of social media, as we discovered in our conversations in the focus groups. To work around this issue CASA should email those who do not use social media some of the important posts, so that can stay informed and share it with friends.

### Evaluating Promotional Video Effectiveness

Since the promotional video will be uploaded onto YouTube, we recommend for CASA Worcester County to track the popularity of the video using YouTube own analytics tool. With this, CASA Worcester County can track the number of views per

day, like and dislike ratio, subscriber fluctuations, and the demographic information of the viewers. In order to increase video engagement, our sponsor should promote the video on their social media. We suggest the video to be posted semi-regularly on Facebook and occasionally as a clip in the form of an Instagram video. Specifically, we propose for our sponsor to prioritize posting the video on Facebook because CASA Worcester County's presence there is stronger than on Instagram. This will ensure that the video is shared and reaches a wider audience. Furthermore, depending on the level of engagement that the video receives, our sponsor may consider either producing unique video content themselves or consulting an agency to do it for them.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the promotional video on a more qualitative front, we have devised questions that CASA Worcester County may ask their volunteer base:

- *Was the video engaging? Why or why not?*
- *Did the video leave an emotional impact on you?*
- *Did you learn about being a CASA in the video?*
- *If you were not a CSA, would you be motivated to become one after seeing the video?*
- *Is there anything that the video did not include that should be including?*
- *Conversely, is there anything that the video included that should not be included?*

### Tracking Social Media Engagement

As more posts are uploaded on Instagram, we recommend to track the age range and gender ratio of the viewers, to ensure that a younger age group (late twenties-mid thirties) and a somewhat even ratio of males to females are active. In order to maintain and increase their demographic, CASA should track which posts the audience engages with the most. CASA should look at which posts are receiving the most likes and take into account which hashtags they included, how many hashtags were used, amount of comments and shares each post has, and the overall aesthetic of the post. Because Facebook is the owner of Instagram, CASA should track similar analytics when it comes to Facebook. The only difference between these two

platforms is that CASA should expect an older demographic for Facebook since most CASAs already follow their Facebook page. CASA should track audience engagement, amount of comments and shares each post has, and overall aesthetic of the post.

### Social Media Platforms Should Constantly Mature

After analyzing the rate of engagement for each type of posts and getting a clear understanding of the demographic of viewers, CASA should begin to adjust their strategies to effectively reach a larger audience. If it is apparent that the target demographic is not being reached or there is a lack of engagement or interaction with posts (likes, comments, shares) the following steps should be taken:

1. Find the posts that have higher levels activity among the targeted demographic and identify any trends found within the collection.
2. Create sample post that model the same format found in the trend and upload the posts to the same platform.
3. Pay close attention to differences in the levels of activity between the sample posts and the original content.
4. Determine if the adjustments made to the sample posts were successful at creating more activity after waiting a week from the time it was posted.
  - a. If the post has greater activity within the targeted demographic continue creating content using the same format.
  - b. If the post has lower or the same levels of activity as the original posts try looking for other trends found within the posts and repeat steps 1-4

Following these steps will ensure that CASA's social media campaign remains adaptable and effective at recruiting the maximum amount of volunteers. The results may not show in early stages of the campaign, but through continuous adaptation and effort, more people are likely to be reached.

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