

2001

The Influence of a Court Appointed Special Advocate on the Length of Time in Out -Of -Home Care.

Nancy Loker Hart

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation

Hart, Nancy Loker, "The Influence of a Court Appointed Special Advocate on the Length of Time in Out -Of -Home Care." (2001). *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*. 341.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/341

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

**THE INFLUENCE OF A COURT APPOINTED
SPECIAL ADVOCATE
ON THE LENGTH OF TIME IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE**

A Dissertation

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

In

The School of Social Work

**by
Nancy L. Hart
B.S., Louisiana State University, 1971
M.S.W., Louisiana State University, 1988
August 2001**

UMI Number: 3021430

Copyright 2001 by
Hart, Nancy Loker

All rights reserved.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3021430

Copyright 2001 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

**©Copyright 2001
Nancy L. Hart
All rights reserved**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The pursuit of a Ph.D. seemed formidable in the early days of my pursuit. As time went on, I realized there were numerous people who would be helping me along the way. God provided just the right support for me at just the time I needed it.

This work is dedicated to my father, Maurice James Loker, who instilled in me the value of education and my ability to accomplish any goal. In addition, I wish to thank my Mother, Pauline Loker, for her love and confidence in me. My husband, Jack Hart, has been a great support, computer expert, and loving husband. My sister, Jane Douciere, Ph.D., has been an inspiration as I followed her lead in educational pursuit, and has always shown me unconditional love. My children, Lauren and Brian Hart, who are both my heart, have always been supportive of me which I greatly appreciate.

I wish to thank my committee; Dean Kenneth Millar, Dr. Brij Mohan, Dr. Michael Burnett, Dr. Margo Abadie, and Dr. Bert Boyce. I feel very fortunate to have had Dean Millar as my chair, and thank him for the opportunity to evaluate the CASA program, which resulted in my dissertation topic. Dr. Mohan has given me unconditional support and assurance throughout this process for which I am very grateful. Dr. Michael Burnett has given me his time generously as well as all his

**research expertise. He is truly a natural born teacher. I wish to thank Dr.
Margo Abadie for her continuous encouragement and support.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
*ABSTRACT.....	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
Rationale	1
Objectives.....	14
LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Historical Overview	17
Summary of Studies	23
METHODOLOGY	29
Population and Sample	29
Instrumentation.....	29
Data Collection	30
Data Analysis.....	31
FINDINGS.....	33
Objective One.....	33
Objective Two.....	40
Objective Three	43
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	51
Summary	51
Conclusions and Recommendations	56
REFERENCES	63
APPENDIX: RECORDING FORM	68
VITA	69

LIST OF TABLES

1.	Age of Children in Foster Care	34
2.	Ethnic Background of Children in Foster Care	35
3.	Nature of Abuse of Children in Foster Care	36
4.	Number of Siblings of Children in Foster Care	37
5.	Whether or Not Children in Foster Care Were Placed Initially With their Siblings	37
6.	Whether or Not Children in Foster Care Were Placed within 30 Miles of their Original Home	38
7.	Length of Time in Out-of-Home Placement for Children in Foster Care	39
8.	Crosstabulation of Whether or Not Children in Foster Care Were Placed within 30 Miles of their Original Home and Whether Or Not They Had a CASA	42
9.	Chi-Square Tests of Independence for Whether or not Children In Foster Care Had an Assigned CASA and Selected Demographic Characteristics	43
10.	Relationship Between Selected Demographic Characteristics and Length of Time in Out-of-Home Care for Children in Foster Care	47
11.	Multiple Regression Analysis of Length of Time in Out-of-Home Care for Children in Foster Care	48

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of participation in a CASA child advocacy program on the length of time in out-of-home placement among children in foster care. Two groups of children, one group having a CASA volunteer, and the other not having a CASA volunteer, were compared on selected characteristics. Also, this study sought to determine if a model existed that explains a significant portion of the variance in the length of time in out-of-home placement among children in foster care.

The demographic information analyzed was obtained using recorded information from the computerized files of the local CASA office and information recorded from interviews with assigned caseworkers for children in foster care. The study used data on 289 subjects, CASA group (n=193) and Non-CASA group (n=96), which was the entire population of children in foster care during the period of July 1, 1998-June 30, 1999.

The results of this study indicated that the subjects were diverse in ages and mostly African-American. The majority was male and neglect was the most prevalent reason for initial placement. Most were placed with their siblings at the time of their initial placement and most were placed initially within 30 miles of their original home.

Comparing the CASA and Non-CASA groups revealed that the CASA group was younger and found to be more likely to have been placed within 30 miles of their original home. Also, the CASA group of children was found to have spent a significantly shorter time in out-of-home care.

Using a regression analysis, it was found that a model does exist that explained a significant portion of the variance in the length of time in out-of-home placement among children in the study. This model included three factors; whether or not the child had a CASA, age, and whether or not the child was biracial.

This study offers considerable support for the position of those that believe that a CASA program is an important aspect of reducing the length of time a child spends in foster care.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Child abuse and neglect is a grave problem in the United States. The birthrate of women in minority groups, the percentage of mothers in the workforce, and the proportion of children living in poverty have all increased. The Child Welfare system has failed and the number of children living in out-of-home care has markedly increased. One out of every three girls and one out of every five boys are estimated to be sexual abused based on reports of child abuse. Researchers and practitioners both estimate that the incidence of abuse of boys probably equals that of girls, but boys are less likely to report (Hunter, 1990).

In 1989, 4.3 million children were living in working-poor families, by 1995, the number of poor children increased to 5.6 million. The poverty rate was 13.8%, after reaching a high of 15.1% in 1993 (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1997).

In the United States, being actively employed does not guarantee a refuge from poverty. In 1995, 3.6% of families who had a family member working year round full time were still poor. Over the last 30 years, the poverty rate for female headed households has been persistently four times or more the poverty rate for households in which a male wage earner is present. In 1995, the poverty rate for families headed by

women was 36.5% (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1997). Incidences of neglect and physical abuse are highest among the poor. Research indicates that poor single parents are the most likely to engage in physical violence (Hay & Jones, 1994).

According to the census data, American children under age 15 made up 22% of the population in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). Approximately 15-22% of the U.S population in the coming decade will be children. In 1995, Child Protection Service (CPS) agencies investigated reports alleging the maltreatment of almost three million children (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 1997). The majority of Child Protection cases involve neglect, approximately one-quarter involve physical abuse, one-fifth involve sexual abuse, and the remainder involve emotional maltreatment (NCCAN, 1992). Each year, there are approximately 160,000 reported cases of serious injury and 2,000 deaths due to child abuse and neglect (McClain, Sack, Froehlke, & Ewigman, 1993).

In the United States, the poor are becoming poorer, and the rich, richer. The gap between the richest and poorest segments of our population has grown since the 1960s. The disparity in income and wealth that exist between these groups is a testament to this growing inequality. It is important to examine poverty rates for children, because

the economic deprivation of children impedes their normal development and well being (Gustavsson and Segal, 1994).

When resources are not readily available to ensure that children receive what they need, children experience deficits in their well-being. For minority children, deficits are intensified. Minority children are consistently and disproportionately represented among poor children in the nation (Dryfoos, 1990) and they tend to spend longer periods of time in distress compared to their non-minority counterparts (Duncan and Rodgers, 1985).

Statistics on child abuse and neglect for the year 1997-98 in the state of Louisiana show 14,738 children were victims of abuse or neglect and 5,813 children were in foster care. According to the Child Welfare League of America, approximately 483,000 children were living in out-of-home care in the U.S at the end of 1995, which is an increase from 302,000 children in 1980. Of the almost half of a million children, 49% were living in family foster care, 23% in kinship care, 15% in residential group care, 1.7% in therapeutic foster care, and 11.3% in other facilities such as emergency shelters and psychiatric hospitals. The majority of abused children are white, 56.4 %, but African American children are disproportionately overrepresented at 26.4% of victims. The vast majority

of perpetrators are parents. The victims are girls; 52.3 % and boys; 46.7% (Petit & Curtis, 1997).

Our children have been wronged by a culture that finds comfort in the politics of denial. We have failed to address the basic needs of children who suffer abuse and neglect. The culture of abuse and neglect exists despite scientific and material progress (Epstein, 1999).

In the closing of its 1990 report, the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and neglect concluded that "the scope of the problem of child maltreatment is so enormous and serious, and the failure of the system designed to deal with the problem so catastrophic, that the crisis has reached the level of a national emergency. In its 1993 report, the Board reaffirmed this view, stating, "the status of emergency remains in effect and may be even more dire today [in 1993] than it was in 1990". It described the child protection system as "broken" (Zigler, Kagen, & Hall, 1999).

Research has shown the serious effects of child abuse and neglect on children's academic achievement and school disciplinary problems. Adequate school performance is an important developmental milestone, and poor school performance can have serious long-term effects. Good grades and low rates of behavior problems during elementary school reduce the risk that maltreated children will become delinquent as they

mature (Zingraff, Leiter, Johnsen, and Myers, 1994). Neglected children perform more poorly than their nonmaltreated counterparts, having lower grades, more suspensions, more disciplinary referrals, and more grade retention, even when controlling for gender of child and socio-economic status (Kendall-Tackett & Eckenrode, 1999).

It is widely known that the staffs of most public child welfare agencies are overburdened and cannot afford the time needed for the slow, patient process of winning over the confidence of suspicious families, especially those who did not ask for their services and usually do not want them. The large size of most protective service workers' caseloads and the tremendous increase in the number of cases reported both verify worsening conditions. In some offices, workers' caseloads are reported to be as high as 100 or more cases per worker (Child Protection Services, 1992).

By the mid 1990's, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Child Abuse and Neglect concluded that 2,000 children died of abuse and neglect annually, far above the 1,111 deaths counted by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1997). By 1996, the management of child welfare was so inadequate that agencies were placed under court supervision (Epstein, 1999).

Child well being refers to the extent to which children develop to their full potential both physically and mentally. Children residing in southern states in the U.S. fare worse on indicators of deficits in social well-being compared to children in the western, midwestern, and northeastern regions of the country (Whitaker, 1999). Southern children are more likely than other American children to die, be in poor health at all ages, and lack adequate health and economic supports (Kids Count, 1992).

With the passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (1974), a Guardian Ad Litmus (GAL) was appointed for any child in court or the child welfare system. This meant attorney representation for these children, but the costs were great and advocacy efforts were sometimes poor (Duquette, 1990).

In January of 1977, juvenile court judges in Washington began using citizen volunteers for children involved in the welfare system. A Seattle judge conceived the idea of using trained community volunteers to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children in court, out of concern over making decisions about their lives without sufficient information (Johnson, 1979). The program would work within and with the support of the courts, but not by the courts. Even though a child welfare agency or department of social services represents the child's needs, it is difficult to be objective about petitioning to remove a child

from his home. Judges need independent evaluations of what is in the child's best interest (Goldstein, 1979).

Decisions regarding the placement that is best for a child requires information about the child such as age, developmental stage and the effect of abuse or neglect. Information about the parents (strengths, weaknesses, and the capacity to change), environmental stresses (external stresses to the family), and available helping systems (forms of assistance in the community) are also needed. A judge must determine whether or not the facts of a case as alleged in court are true. Also, the judge must make a normative judgement that is a value judgement, as to whether or not the facts as presented violate the community's minimum standard of child care below which a parent shall not fall lest the state intervene on behalf of the child (Blady, 1981).

Nothing in a lawyer's training has equipped him or her to assess parental conduct, to appraise the harms to a child presented by his environment, to recognize strengths in the parent-child relationship, or to evaluate the soundness of an intervention strategy proposed by the social service agency. The attorney for a child in an abuse or neglect case has a very complex role. He must synthesize the results of the protective services investigation, the child's psychological, developmental, and physical needs, the child's articulated wishes, his

own assessment of the facts, and the treatment sources available (Ramsey, 1983). A lawyer's conclusions should be reached by independent thought processes even though the protective services worker may be the person most often relied upon to supply fact. The role of the child's attorney is not that of advocate but rather that of technical watchdog. He examines pleadings and other material in the file and ascertains that the proceedings that affect the child are legally correct. In child protection proceedings, the child needs more than a technician does to ensure legal precision, more than a passive observer and adviser to the court, he needs an advocate. Volunteer CASAs (Court Appointed Special Advocate), trained in the legal and social aspects of child protection cases, can perform important functions economically with legal consultation and service as needed.

The Children in Placement Committee of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges began developing guidelines to assist the juvenile justice system in protecting the child's right to a safe and permanent home in the fall of 1977. The committee voted to use the Seattle volunteer concept as a model and coined the term "CASA" for volunteers following a clearly defined role as a friend of the court in dependency matters. A CASA volunteer presents an evaluation with

recommendations for what is in the child's best interest, both immediate and long-term.

For a foster care system to be effective, all parties need to perform their proper functions and fulfill their responsibilities. A CASA volunteer can help ensure that all parties do what is necessary to establish a permanent home for the child.

There are more than 850 local CASA programs nationwide today, with over 45,000 men and women serving as CASA volunteers. The National CASA Association, established in 1982, provides leadership for CASA programs across the United States and the Virgin Islands. The association keeps volunteers up to date on legislation, research, practice, case law, and program development through its quarterly newsletter. An annual conference is held to provide an opportunity for CASAs to share their experiences. By 1996, CASA volunteers had advocated for over a half million abused and neglected children in court (Litzelfelner, 1997).

CASA volunteers are usually assigned by a judge, one case at a time until the case is closed (the child is permanently placed in a safe environment). The CASA volunteer makes reports to the court after reviewing all pertinent documents and interviewing the child and significant parties involved (this includes, but is not limited to, the

biological and foster parents of the child, teachers, social workers, attorneys, and psychologists). Often, the social worker and attorney for a child do not have the time to carefully deliberate on a case. The CASA volunteer usually takes only one case at a time, which gives more time to explore services, monitor the child's progress and to see that parents use what services are offered. The CASA also works toward ensuring that the child is receiving services the court has recommended such as counseling or special education testing. The CASA volunteer serves as a stable force as the child moves through an often confusing system, always striving for the best interests of the child (National CASA Association, 1995).

CASAs complete a 30-hour training program to learn about the social service system, child abuse issues and courtroom procedures. An additional 10 hours of in-service training is given after being assigned a case. The CASA volunteer is asked to make a commitment for one year (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1985).

A volunteer program developed in Florida, Texas and Missouri as a result of the National Council of Jewish Women's (NCJW) study, Children Without Justice, written in 1975. The report stated that lawyers appointed to represent juveniles were "ill-attuned to the legal and social atmosphere of the juvenile court." It reported that lawyers spent only a

few minutes talking with children in a court waiting room just before their case was called. The NCJW suggested a program of volunteer guardians *ad litem* (Latin for "for the case"). This program was later developed into a CASA program. (Blady, 1981).

The CASA volunteer program tries to ensure that a child's right to a safe, permanent home is acted on by the court in a sensitive and expedient manner. Child abuse and neglect cases are complicated and emotional. Maintaining family relationships between parents and children can be a difficult task. The goal of the child welfare system is to manipulate the child's external environment to protect his emotional development and his physical growth. This involves a prediction about who, among the child's alternatives, holds the most promise for meeting the child's psychological and physical needs. Continuity of relationships, surroundings, and environmental influence are essential for a child's normal development.

Therefore, all child placements should, except for cases where the child's well being requires separation from the parent(s), be as permanent as possible. Child placement decisions should take into account the law's incapacity to supervise interpersonal relationships and the limits of knowledge to make long-range predictions. A CASA can, through extensive interviewing of the parties involved, identify whom

among the presently available adults, has the capacity to become the best psychological parent to enable the child to feel wanted. Approaching the best interests of the child from a family perspective is consistent with the ecological theory of human behavior (Brenfenbrenner, 1979), which holds that behavior is a result of the dynamic interaction of the individual with the settings in which the individual operates. An ecological orientation to social work and social support services can improve the effectiveness of child abuse intervention (Miller and Whitaker, 1988). The younger the child and the more extended the period of uncertainty or separation, the more detrimental it will be to the child's well being (Mnookin, 1985). This makes it even more urgent to place the child permanently as quickly as possible.

Outcome processes that are studied to evaluate program effectiveness in the child welfare system are based on a set of beliefs about what is in the best interest of the child. Case resolution is accomplished when a decision is made regarding the permanent placement of a child. A child's Permanent placement consists of reunification with the biological family, placement with relatives or legal guardians, or adoption. Long term foster care is not regarded as permanent placement. Re-entry rates are sometimes used as a measure of safety and permanency for a child. Re-abuse rates are hard to

measure since re-abuse of children after discharge from the child welfare system often goes unreported. Timely achievement of permanency is important since it is accepted that a child fares better if he moves through the child welfare system as quickly as possible and is established in a family home. Case processing time is the time from the initial protective custody order of petition to the initial court hearing. Court processing time can influence the time it takes to move a child out of the child welfare system and into a permanent home. Case plan goals help facilitate permanent placements in biological family homes, homes of relatives or adoptive homes. Child welfare agencies are mandated to write case plans with goals to achieve permanency by the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (Public Law 96-272). In addition, it is mandatory that Case plan reviews take place every six months by both the judicial system as well as the child welfare agency.

Court continuances can slow down the process of making good decisions for children who need permanency as soon as possible. Placement in the least restrictive setting is considered to be in the best interest of the child. Placement stability is also important for a child in the child welfare system. Multiple foster care placements are considered to be detrimental to the child's well being. Services received by families and

children in the child welfare system are considered to be a positive outcome (Duquette & Ramsey, 1987).

One essential service is managing Visitation between the child and his family. During the placement period, it is crucial to sustain and enhance connections, particularly parents, siblings and caregivers. Parent-child visiting in foster care has been described as a crucial determinant of the outcome of foster care services (Hess & Proch, 1988) and as the "heart of family reunification" (Warsh, Maluccio, & Pine, 1994, p. 49). Child welfare agencies are required to encourage quality visitation to promote a child's timely return home or make possible a determination that he or she cannot return to full-time care in the family. Whether or not children are able to return home, visits maintains family ties that are essential to a child's healthy development (Warsh et al., 1996).

Objectives

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the influence of participation in the CASA child advocacy program on the length of time in out-of-home care among children in the foster care system in Louisiana. Specific objectives formulated to guide the researcher include the following:

- 1. To describe children in the foster care system in Louisiana on the following demographic characteristics:**
 - a. age**
 - b. race**
 - c. gender**
 - d. nature of abuse/neglect**
 - e. number of siblings**
 - f. whether or not siblings were placed together**
 - g. distance from original home; and**
 - h. length of time in out-of-home placement**
- 2. To compare children in the foster care system in Louisiana who have participated in the CASA program with those who have not participated in the CASA program on the following demographic characteristics:**
 - a. age**
 - b. race**
 - c. gender**
 - d. nature of abuse/neglect**
 - e. number of siblings**
 - f. whether or not the siblings were placed together**
 - g. distance placed from original home; and**

- h. length of time in out-of-home placement**
- 3. To determine if a model exists that explains a significant portion of the variance in the length of time in out-of-home placement among children in the foster care system in Louisiana from the following personal and program characteristics:**
 - a. age**
 - b. race**
 - c. gender**
 - d. nature of abuse/neglect**
 - e. number of siblings**

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Overview

A review of the literature on CASA program effectiveness produced only ten studies done since CASA began. The studies were based on child outcomes and court and foster care processes. Types of child outcomes include length of time children are under court jurisdiction, type of final placement, re-entry into the child welfare system, and case resolution. Foster care and court processes studied were case plan goals, case plan reviews, court continuances, placement stability, placement in the least restrictive setting, court processing time, and the number and type of services provided to children and families.

In 1986, Wert, Fein, and Haller conducted a study in Connecticut, examining outcomes for children in the child welfare system. Two groups of children were compared from the cities of Bridgeport and Hartford, with similar demographic disposition. Hartford had a group of highly trained volunteers called the Children-in-Placement (CIP) project. The Bridgeport group had no volunteers. The authors concluded that the presence of trained volunteers (CIP) was associated with a more rapid movement of cases through the judicial system than occurred in the Hartford group. Children were available for adoption in less time and cases took approximately nine weeks less time to reach case closure.

Duquette and Ramsey (1987) compared the effectiveness of three groups; attorneys, law students, and lay volunteers who had all been trained, with a control group of attorneys who received no specialized training. They found that the data indicated that carefully trained lay people representing children in child abuse and neglect legal proceedings under lawyer supervision, performed similarly to trained lawyers and law students in the way they approached their duties and case outcomes achieved. The trained volunteers' performance was significantly different from attorneys who, consistent with the practice in nearly all the United States, received no special training in child advocacy. The authors concluded that who is trained seems to be less important than that some training has taken place.

Case closure was more likely for children with volunteers than children without volunteers. The children with trained attorneys were likely to re-enter foster care at a later date than children with untrained attorneys. Duquette and Ramsey concluded that there was no difference in the amount of time children spent in the home of the biological parent or relative based on the assignment of a trained volunteer. It is generally accepted that while involved in the child welfare system, children should be placed in the least restrictive setting consistent with their needs.

Condelli (1988) conducted a two-year nationwide study of five models of representation for children in the child welfare system. These models included; staff attorney, law student, private attorney, CASA volunteer and CASA volunteer teamed with a staff attorney. Two hundred and twenty-five cases were chosen in nine different sites ($n=225$). The data was collected from case files. The author found few differences among the five models of representation regarding the amount of time children spent under court jurisdiction. Condelli found no differences in court processing time based on the model of representation or the appointment of a CASA volunteer. Also, the author reported that children with CASAs had a higher number of case goals changed from reunification to adoption than children with other types of representation. Children with CASA representation had less time between court reviews than those under other models. Condelli found no differences in the amount of time children spent in the home of a biological parent or relative based on the model of representation of the assignment of a CASA volunteer. However, the study did show those children with CASAs as representatives were more likely to be placed with siblings while in care than children without CASA volunteers. Condelli found no difference in the number of placements for children under the five models of representation.

CSR, Inc (1990) did a follow-up study of Condelli's 1988 study. The study compared three models of representation for children; staff attorney, private attorney and volunteer CASA. The focus was on describing the roles and activities of the different models. No conclusions were made regarding the effectiveness of a CASA volunteer.

Poertner and Press (1990) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Kansas City, Missouri. Outcomes were compared of children who had a CASA (n=61) and children who had a staff appointed attorney (n=148) as their representative. Information was used from case records. The authors found no difference in the re-entry rates for children assigned CASAs or court appointed attorneys and concluded that children with CASA representation did as well as children with attorney representation in terms of re-entry rates. They also found no significant differences in the amount of time children with CASAs spent under court jurisdiction compared to children with attorney representation. Also, no differences were found in court processing time or in the number of case reviews or court continuances. The authors stated that children with CASAs spent less time in their own home than children with attorney representation. Also, more services were ordered for the family for those with a CASA than those without a CASA.

Leung (1990) used data from the Denver Juvenile Court system to compare outcomes for children with CASA volunteers ($n=66$) to those without CASA volunteers ($n=131$) in a quasi-experimental study. The two groups used in this study were composed of an experimental group that received CASA services over a 3 year period compared to a group randomly selected from all cases without CASA involvement in the juvenile court during the same time period. The author concluded that children with CASA volunteers spent less time in out-of-home placements than children without CASA volunteers. Also, children with CASA volunteers spent less time in their third and fourth placements than children without CASAs.

Abramson (1991) used an experimental design to conduct a study of children in a CASA program in Fresno, California. Children entering the court system were randomly assigned to either have a CASA volunteer ($n=60$) or to be in the control group ($n=62$) without a CASA volunteer. Both groups had attorney representation. The author found that adoption was more likely to be planned or achieved for children with a CASA volunteer than for those children in the control group. Petitions alleging new incidents of abuse or neglect were more frequently filed in the control group than in the group with a CASA volunteer. Abramson also found that children with CASAs were more likely to have case plan goals

of placement with parents, relatives, or adoption. Also, those children without CASA volunteers were more likely to have long term foster care as their case plan goals.

Smith (1992) used state database records to evaluate a CASA program. Children with a CASA volunteer ($n=307$) were compared to children without a CASA volunteer ($n=306$). The author concluded that children with CASAs were more likely to be adopted or emancipated at case closure. Also, children with a CASA volunteer were found to be under court jurisdiction longer than children without a CASA volunteer (36.4 months compared to 25.7 months). The author also found that children with CASA volunteers had more placements than children without CASAs (5.86 compared to 4.76).

The Oregon Task Force Project (1994) collected data retrospectively from state records and informal surveys regarding effective representation for children. Outcomes were compared for children who had been represented by either a CASA or an attorney with those without any representation. Children with representation (either a CASA or an attorney) averaged 26 months in care while those children without representation averaged 37 months in care. Also, children without any representation spent 11 months longer in out-of-home care than children with representation (37 months compared to 26 months).

Litzelfelner (1997) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Kansas from 1994-1996. The case status of children with CASA volunteers ($n=119$) was compared to children without CASA volunteers ($n=81$). All of the children had attorney representation.

The author found no difference in case closure rates or final placement permanency for children with CASA volunteers compared to those without CASA volunteers. Children with CASAs were found to be under court jurisdiction longer than children without CASAs (26 months vs. 23 months). No difference was found in court processing time or in the number of court continuances between the two groups. The author reported no differences between the two groups in the type of placement or amount of time spent in the home of a biological parent or relative. Children with CASAs did experience fewer moves (2.5 as compared to 5.25) and did receive more services than the children without CASAs.

Summary of Studies

The studies on the effectiveness of CASAs and GALs (Guardian Ad Litmus) are inconclusive but appear to favor the positive effectiveness of advocacy for children in the child welfare system. The Abramson study, which used a true experimental design, showed that children were less likely to re-enter the foster care system if they had a CASA volunteer. Three studies found that children with a CASA were more likely to be

adopted. One study found that children with a CASA were more likely to have their case resolved than those children without a CASA.

One of the studies showed that children with a CASA spent less time in the court system. Two studies found that children with CASAs were more likely to have case plan goals that involved permanency such as placement with biological parents or relatives, or adoption. The number of moves while in care for children with a CASA was found to be less in one study. The type of placement did not favor either children with a CASA or children without a CASA. Children with a CASA were found in three studies to have more services ordered by the court and more services provided by the child welfare agency.

In the studies where no differences were found between children with a CASA and those children without a CASA, results can still be interpreted as a positive outcome for CASA programs since CASA volunteers cost less than an attorney. The average cost per child for a CASA volunteer is \$484.00 per year as estimated by the National CASA Association (1995).

Only one study used full power random assignment (Abramson) and only one accounted for the influence of case characteristics on the variables in the study (Litzelfelner). However, the studies overall did

show that children with CASA volunteers did as well or better than those children without CASAs.

Overall, the studies cited do not answer all the questions about CASA effectiveness yet there are indications those children are as well or better served by a CASA volunteer. It can be concluded that additional support to the child and his family by a CASA volunteer can improve the outcomes of children who are abused and neglected. The number of child abuse reports has more than quadrupled in the United States in the last 20 years and the number of children in foster care is rising (Lindsey and Doh, 1996). These negative trends are not distributed randomly, they are concentrated among poor children. Research has shown an association between poverty and child involvement in the child welfare system (Testa, 1992). About one-half of all foster care placements nationally are funded by Aid to Families with Dependent Children Foster Care (AFDC-Foster Care) (Courtney, 1996) which indicates that most of foster care placements originate in low-income homes where families depend on public assistance. The child poverty rate has increased; as of 1990, one-fifth of U.S. children were living below the poverty line (Danziger & Danziger, 1993).

In 1998, the Child Welfare Work Force Initiative was legislated to assist with the growing crisis of high caseloads and low wages for child

welfare social workers. There has been some promising discourse as a result, but no specific reform. Caseloads sometimes reach 30 per month even though the suggested national standard is only 15. In many states, lawsuits have been won in federal and state supreme courts on the grounds that their child welfare systems are inadequate (Pear, 1996). States are unable to make changes in hiring more caseworkers or raising salaries because of budget limitations. Reports of abuse and neglect have been forced higher by rising poverty rates, especially in urban areas.

It is impossible to know if all children are better served by the court because of having a CASA volunteer. It seems logical (and accepted in the child welfare community), that overall frequent visitation, timely processing of cases and placement stability are in the best interests of the child. Yet it is possible that visitation with family members could be harmful to a child and that a delay because of a court continuance could facilitate cooperation of family members.

It is important to individualize each child's case and realize there is no universal prescription for solving the problems in the child welfare system. CASA volunteers can exercise individualized judgement on behalf of the child to whom they are assigned.

Outcome data can only indicate general trends since it is aggregated. These trends are indications of what is good for a child in the welfare system, in a broad sense. A CASA program can take this a step further and learn what is good for the individual child. This involves the CASA's role as continuous, proactive and focused, both in the court process and the personal aspects of the child's involvement in the child welfare system. The quality of representation for a child in the child welfare system logically would be better from a CASA volunteer assigned to an individual case than from an attorney with many cases.

In 1997, President Clinton signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act. This is reported to be the most significant overhaul of the American foster care system since 1980 and hopefully will be a significant effort on behalf of America's abused and neglected children. Its goal is to refocus efforts to speed the process of a child's adoption into a loving family. This act preserves vital funding and services to reunify children with their families when it is sage to do so.

Permanency has a new priority. For those children who have had to wait too long in the foster care system, the best option for permanency is often adoption into a safe and loving home. Sometimes reunification is the appropriate option. In some families, caring relatives or friends are the best choice for raising abused and neglected children. The Adoption

and Safe Families Act endorses a range of choices, all of which allow social workers, CASA volunteers, lawyers and judges to make the best, safest, and most efficient decisions about children in their care (Curtis, Dale & Kendall, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The target population for this study was defined as minor children who have been referred to the child welfare office and have been placed in out-of-home care. The accessible population was defined as the minor children who have been referred to the child welfare office in a primarily urban parish in southern Louisiana and were in out-of-home care during the period of July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999. The frame of the accessible population was identified as the complete list of children currently placed in out-of-home care and was provided by the Regional Office of Community Services. The research sample included a 100% sample of the defined accessible population.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument used in this study was a recording form (see Appendix) designed to gather the relevant variables of investigation. For subjects in the experimental group (those children with an assigned CASA volunteer) this information was recorded directly from computerized files of the CASA Office. For subjects in the control group (those without an assigned CASA volunteer) the recording form was used as an interview schedule and data were recorded based on interviews with the assigned caseworker for each subject.

Data Collection

Data were collected for this study in two phases. The first phase involved the data for the experimental group and included the following process. Initially, permission was sought from the Executive Director of the local CASA Office to include the children involved in the CASA program in the study. Once this permission was granted, an interview was scheduled with the program coordinator who also serves as the primary data analyst for the CASA office. Working with this individual, the recording form was designed that provided the needed research variables from the information available in the program computer files. This information was then provided to the researcher as a computer file.

In phase two of the data collection, the information was sought for those individuals defined as members of the control group (those without an assigned CASA volunteer). However, all of the needed information was not available in records for the control group of subjects. Therefore, the recording form used in phase one of the data collection was used as an interview schedule, and the researcher scheduled personal interviews with the assigned case worker from the Office of Community Services for each of the children defined as a member of the control group. These caseworkers brought with them to the interview the case file for the child being researched, and the data were provided to the researcher by the

case worker. This data was then recorded by the researcher into the recording form. Using the personal interview technique for this phase of data collection seemed to enhance the acquisition of needed information since complete data were obtained on all but one of the research subjects. Mailed questionnaires would likely have yielded a much lower response rate, perhaps as low as 50%.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the study included the following:

1. To accomplish objective one, the total group (both experimental and control groups) were described using descriptive statistics. For variables that were measured on an interval or higher scale of measurement, this included primarily presentation of means and standard deviations. For variables that were measured on a categorical scale of measurement (nominal or ordinal) the summary included primarily the presentation of frequencies and percentages in categories.
2. To accomplish objective two of the study, the researcher compared the experimental and control groups on each of the variables of investigation. For those variables measured on an interval or higher level of measurement, the comparisons were made using an independent t-test to compare the mean value of the two groups on each

variable. For variables that were measured on a categorical level of measurement, chi-square tests of independence were used to determine if each of the variables is independent of the variable treatment level.

3. To accomplish objective three of the study, the researcher used a multiple regression analysis with the length of time in out-of-home placement as the outcome measure (dependent variable). The following variables were treated as independent variables in the analysis: treatment level (experimental or control), age, race, gender, nature of abuse, number of siblings, whether or not the siblings were placed together, and distance from original home.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this section of the research report is to present the findings of the study. They are organized by the study objectives.

Objective One

The first objective of this study was to describe the children in foster care in Louisiana on selected demographic characteristics. The demographic information analyzed is a result of recorded information from the computerized files of the local CASA office and information recorded from interviews with assigned caseworkers for children in foster care. One of the characteristics on which students were described was their age. Age was calculated from the information collected in the study on the subject's date of birth. Their birth date was used to compute their age to the nearest month. In addition, since some of the subjects in the study were born during the study period (July 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999), age was determined as of the end of the study period (June 30, 1999).

The children's ages ranged from a low of .17 years (2 months) to a high of 18.67 years with a mean age of 9.93 (SD = 4.71). When the data regarding age was examined in categories, the largest group appeared in the 9-11 age category (n = 62, 21.5%) (see Table 1).

Children in foster care were also described on the variable gender. The data indicated that there was a slightly larger proportion of males. Females numbered 134 (46.4%) and males numbered 155 (53.6 %).

Table 1

Age of Children in Foster Care

Age in years	Frequency	Percent
0-2	15	5.2
3-5	36	12.5
6-8	54	18.7
9-11	62	21.5
12-14	51	17.6
15-17	57	19.7
>17	14	4.8
<u>Total</u>	289	100

Note: Mean = 9.93 SD = 4.71

The race of the children was another characteristic examined. Four categories were used to describe the children; African-American, Caucasian, Asian, and Biracial. The largest group in the study was African-American, with a total of 263 children (91.0%). The second largest group was Caucasian, with a total of 21 children (7.3%). The

other two race categories comprised less than 2% of the study participants (see Table 2).

Table 2

Ethnic Background of Children in Foster Care

Race	Frequency	Percent
African-American	263	91.0
Caucasian	21	7.3
Biracial	3	1.0
Asian	2	.7
Total	289	100

On the next variable, the children were described on the nature of abuse, which caused them to be placed in foster care. The categories of abuse and neglect included were neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, death (of caregiver), or combination of two or more forms of abuse. The majority of the children were classified as being in the category of neglect ($n=229$, 79.2%). The smallest groups were in the death of caregiver ($n=2$, .7%) and sexual abuse ($n=2$, .7%) categories (see Table 3).

Table 3**Nature of Abuse of Children in Foster Care**

Abuse	Frequency	Percent
Neglect	229	79.2
Combination	30	10.4
Physical	26	9.0
Death	2	.7
Sexual	2	.7
Total	289	100

Children were also described on the variable, number of siblings. The range of number of siblings was from 0-13 with a mean of 2.5 (SD=2.08). The largest group was children who had 3 siblings (n=80, 27.7%). The next largest group was children with no siblings (n=65, 22.5%). The smallest group was children with 13 siblings (n=3, 1.0%). (See Table 4).

The next variable studied was whether or not siblings were placed together at the time of the initial out-of-home placement. For children who had no siblings (n =63, 21.8%) this measurement was not applicable. For the remaining subjects in the study, 128 (56.6%) were reported to have been placed with their siblings, while the remaining 98 (43.4%) were not placed initially with their siblings (see Table 5).

Table 4**Number of Siblings of Children in Foster Care**

Number of Siblings	Frequency	Percent
0	65	22.5
1	16	5.5
2	58	20.1
3	80	27.7
4	23	8.0
5	30	10.4
6	7	2.4
7	7	2.4
13	3	1.0
Total	289	100

Note: Mean = 2.5 SD 2.08

Table 5**Whether or Not Children in Foster Care were Placed Initially with their Siblings**

With Siblings	Frequency	Percent
No	98	43.4%
Yes	128	56.6%
Total	226	100

Note: 63 of the study participants had no siblings, therefore this item was not applicable

The next variable the children were described on was whether or not they were placed initially within 30 miles of their original home. The majority of the children were placed within 30 miles of their original home ($n=268$, 93.1%) (See Table 6).

Table 6

Whether or Not Children in Foster Care Were Placed within 30 Miles of their Original Home

Within 30 Miles	Frequency	Percent
No	20	6.9
Yes	268	93.1
Total	288	100

Note: Information on one subject was missing

When subjects were described on the variable length of time in out-of-home placement, the range of time periods was from 0 years (indicating that the child spent less than one month in out-of-home placement) to a maximum of 18.08 years. This was calculated by subtracting the child's date of first referral (hold date), from the date the case was closed. If the date was not closed, the date of first referral was

subtracted from the date of the end of the study. The number was then calculated to the nearest month. The mean number of years in out-of-home placement for the 289 subjects in the study was 3.66 years (SD = 3.28).

To further summarize this information, the researcher grouped the length of time in out-of-home placement into eight categories of time.

Table 7

Length of Time in Out-of-Home Placement for Children in Foster Care

Group	Frequency	Percent
< 1.00 yr.	53	18.3
1.0-2.99 yr.	116	40.1
3.0-4.99 yr.	37	12.8
5.0-6.99yr.	39	13.5
7.0-8.99 yr.	19	6.6
9.0-10.99 yr.	19	6.6
11.0-12.99 yr.	1	.3
13 or > yr.	5	1.7
Total	289	100

The frequency and percentage of children in each of these categories is presented in Table 7. The largest group of subjects was in the time category of from 1 year to 2.99 years in out-of-home placement ($n = 116$, 40.1%). The second largest category regarding the number of subjects was less than one year with 53 children (18.3%) in this group.

Objective 2

The second objective of this study was to compare the children in foster care in Louisiana who had a CASA with those who did not have a CASA, on selected demographic characteristics. The two groups were compared on age, race, gender, nature of abuse, number of siblings, whether or not siblings were initially placed together, whether or not initial placement was within 30 miles of their original home, and length of time spent in out-of-home placement.

Since the variables age, number of siblings, and length of time in out-of-home placement were measured as continuous data, the researcher utilized the independent t-test procedure to compare the groups on these 3 variables. Regarding the comparison on the variable age, the CASA group ($n=193$) was found to have a mean age of 9.13 years ($SD=4.63$) while the Non-CASA group ($n=96$) had a mean age of 11.54 years ($SD=4.48$). Results of the t-test revealed that the Non-CASA group was significantly older than the CASA group ($t_{287}=4.21$, $p<.001$).

When the study groups (CASA and Non-CASA) were compared on the variable total number of siblings, the CASA group ($n=193$) had a mean number of siblings of 2.51 ($SD= 2.05$) and the Non-CASA group ($n=96$) had a mean number of siblings of 2.71 ($SD =2.20$). The groups were not found to be significantly different on this variable of investigation ($t_{287}=0.76$, $p=.45$).

For the variable length of time in out-of-home care, the CASA group had a mean number of 2.67 years ($SD = 2.13$), and the Non-CASA group had a mean number of 5.63 years ($SD = 4.18$). The groups were found to be significantly different on this variable of investigation ($t_{287} = 8.02$, $p <.001$). The children with a CASA spent a significantly shorter time in out-of-home care than the children without a CASA.

For variables which were measured on a categorical scale of measurement, the Chi-square test of independence was used to determine if the variable, whether or not the subjects had a CASA, was independent of each of the following selected variables; race, gender nature of abuse, whether or not the siblings were placed together, and whether or not the child was placed within 30 miles of their original home. When these analyses were examined, whether or not the children had a CASA was found to be independent of each of the variables

examined except whether or not they were placed within 30 miles of their original home (See Table 8).

The variable whether or not the child was placed within 30 miles of their original home was not found to be independent of whether or not they had a CASA ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 9.70, p = .002$) indicating that these variables were related. The nature of this relationship is examined in Table 9. The group that had a CASA had a higher proportion of children that were placed within 30 miles of their home (96.4%) more than the group that did not have a CASA (86.5%).

Table 8

Crosstabulation of Whether or Not Children in Foster Care Were Placed within 30 Miles of Their Original Home and Whether or Not They Had a CASA

Placed within 30 miles Of Original Home	Non-CASA	CASA
No	13 13.5%	7 3.6%
Yes	83 86.5%	185 96.4%
Total	96 100%	192 100%

Note: $\chi^2_{(1)} = 9.70, p = .002$

Table 9**Chi-Square Tests of Independence for Whether or Not Children in Foster Care Had an Assigned CASA and Selected Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic Characteristic	N	df	χ^2	p
Placed within 30 miles	289	1	9.70	.002
Race	289	3	6.38	.09
Sibs Placed Together	289	1	1.32	.25
Nature of Abuse	289	4	4.47	.35
Gender	289	1	0.40	.53

Objective Three

Objective three was to determine if a model existed that explained a significant portion of the variance in the length of time in out-of home placement among children in foster care in Louisiana from selected demographic characteristics. These characteristics included age, race, gender, nature of abuse, number of siblings, whether or not siblings were placed together, whether or not the child was placed initially within 30 miles of their original home, and treatment level (whether or not they had a CASA).

This objective was accomplished using multiple regression analysis, with length of time in out-of-home care as the dependent variable. The other variables were treated as independent variables and stepwise entry of the variables was used because of the exploratory nature of this part of the study. In this regression equation, variables were added that increased the explained variance by one percent or more as long as the regression equation remained significant.

To meet the assumptions for the use of regression analysis, each variable used as an independent variable must be either measured at the interval level of measurement or be dichotomous in nature. The variables age and number of siblings were measured at the interval level. In addition, the variables gender, whether or not siblings were placed together in their initial placement, whether or not the child was placed within 30 miles of their original home, and treatment level (whether or not the child had a CASA) were measured as true dichotomies. However, the variables race and nature of abuse were measured at the nominal level of measurement, and therefore, dummy coding was used to create a series of dichotomous variables from each of these two independent variables.

The variable race included measurements for African-American, Caucasian, Asian, and Biracial. Each of these levels of the variable was

coded so that a separate variable was formed to indicate the presence or absence of the characteristic. For example, each subject was coded as being African-American or not African-American. Then three of the four created variables were entered into the regression analysis. The use of only three of the four newly formed variables was to avoid the creation of excess multicollinearity among the independent variables in the analysis.

The other variable for which dummy coding was used was nature of abuse. This variable had five levels of measurement in the study including physical, neglect, sexual, death (of caregiver), and a combination of two or more of the forms of abuse. As with the variable race, five separate dichotomous variables were created from this data (one for each of the variable levels). Following this, four of the five variables were entered into the regression analysis. The newly formed variable for physical as a form of abuse was omitted from the analysis to avoid excess multicollinearity among the independent variables. Physical was chosen for omission since it had the lowest correlation with the dependent variable in the study.

The next step was to examine the independent variables to be included in the analysis for the presence of multicollinearity. Although several techniques exist for conducting a multicollinearity test, Lewis-Beck (1980) states that the most powerful method for assessing

multicollinearity is to "Regress each independent variable on all the other independent variables" (p.60). The strength of this method lies in the fact that it takes into account the relationship of each independent variable with all other independent variables and a combination of other independent variables. Whenever the cumulative R^2 values approach 1.0, there is high collinearity. To ensure that there were no cases of collinearity between the independent variables, the cumulative R^2 was checked for all the independent variables. When this was done, there were no instances of excess multicollinearity.

As an initial step in the process of conducting the multiple regression analysis, the researcher first examined the bivariate correlations between each of the independent variables in the analysis and the dependent variable, length of time in out-of-home placement. These bivariate correlations are presented in Table 10.

For interpretation of correlation coefficients, Davis' proposed set of descriptors was used. The coefficients and their descriptions are as follows:

Coefficient	Description
.70 or higher	very strong association
.50 to .69	substantial association
.30 to .49	moderate association

.10 to .29

low association

.01 to .09

negligible association

Table 10

Relationship Between Selected Demographic Characteristics and Length of Time in Out-of-Home Care for Children in Foster Care

Variable	<u>r</u>	<u>p</u>
Group ^a	-.43	<.001
Age	.33	<.001
Within 30 Miles ^b	-.14	.01
# of Siblings	.11	.03
Biracial	-.09	.07
Siblings Together ^c	-.09	.07
Gender ^d	.08	.09
Sexual ^e	-.06	.15
Asian	-.06	.15
African-American	.04	.25
Combination ^f	.03	.33
Neglect ^g	.02	.42
Death ^h	-.02	.38

Note : ^aWhether or not the child had a CASA

^bWhether or not the child was placed within 30 miles of their original home

^cWhether or not siblings were placed together at original placement

^dFemale was coded 1 and male was coded 2

^eWhether or not sexual abuse was the nature of abuse

^fWhether or not the nature of abuse was a combination of sexual, physical, and/or neglect

^gWhether or not the nature of abuse was neglect

^hWhether or not death of a parent was the reason for placement

Four variables were found to have significant zero order correlations with length of time in out-of-home placement. The highest among these correlations with length of time in out-of-home placement was with whether or not the subjects had a CASA ($r = -.43$, $p < .001$). This correlation was classified using descriptors developed by Davis (1971) as a moderate association. One other identified relationship was classified in the moderate association category. This was with the variable age of the child in foster care, and the correlation was $r = .33$, ($p < .001$).

Table 11

Multiple Regression Analysis of Length of Time in Out-of-Home Care for Children in Foster Care

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Ms</u>	<u>F-ratio</u>	<u>p</u>
Regression	2	263.95	32.71	<.001
Residual	285	8.07		
Total	288			

Variables in the Equation

<u>Variables</u>	<u>R² Cumulative</u>	<u>R² Change</u>	<u>F Change</u>	<u>p Change</u>	<u>Beta</u>
Group	.183	.183	64.256	.001	-.392
Age	.237	.054	20.259	.001	.231
Biracial	.256	.019	7.336	.007	-.140

(table cont.)

Variables not in the Equation		
Variable	t	Sig. t
Gender ^a	1.757	.080
Sexual ^b	-1.124	.262
# of Siblings	1.026	.306
Combination ^f	.734	.463
Sibs Together ^c	-.726	.469
Asian	.627	.531
African-American	.583	.561
Within 30 Miles ^d	-.574	.567
Neglect ^e	-.472	.638
Death ^h	-.309	.758

Note : ^aWhether or not the child had a CASA

^bWhether or not the child was placed within 30 miles of their original home

^cWhether or not siblings were placed together at original placement

^dFemale was coded 1 and male was coded 2

^eWhether or not sexual abuse was the nature of abuse

^fWhether or not the nature of abuse was a combination of sexual, physical, and/or neglect

^gWhether or not the nature of abuse was neglect

^hWhether or not death of a parent was the reason for placement

Results of the multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 11. The variable that entered the regression model first was whether or not the child had a CASA. Considered alone, this variable explained 18% of the variability of the dependent variable, length of time in out-of-home care. The second variable that entered the model was age. It added 5.4% to the explained variance in the model. The third variable entered was whether or not the child was biracial. This variable added an additional 1.9% to the explained variance in the model. All three variables had a significant effect together (explaining a total of 25.6%) and independently.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the influence of participation in the CASA child advocacy program on the length of time in out-of-home care among children in foster care in Louisiana.

Objective one was to describe children in foster care in Louisiana on the following demographic characteristics; age, race, gender, nature of abuse, number of siblings, whether or not siblings were placed together, distance from original home, and length of time in out-of-home placement.

Objective two was to compare children in foster care in Louisiana who have participated in the CASA program with those who have not participated in the CASA program on the following demographic characteristics; age, race, gender, nature of abuse, number of siblings, whether or not the siblings were placed together, distance placed from original home, and length of time in out-of-home placement.

Objective three was to determine if a model exists that explains a significant portion of the variance in the length of time in out-of-home placement among children in foster care in Louisiana from the following personal and program characteristics; age, race, gender, nature of abuse, number of siblings, whether or not the siblings were placed

together, distance placed from original home, and treatment level (whether or not the child had a CASA).

The target population for this study was the minor children who were referred to the child welfare office and placed in out-of-home care. The accessible population was the minor children who were referred to the child welfare office and were in out-of-home care during the period of July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999. The frame of the accessible population was the complete list of children who were in out-of-home care during the period of July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999, provided by the Regional Office of Community Services. The research sample included a 100% sample of the defined accessible population.

The primary instrument used in this study was a recording form designed to gather the relevant variables of investigation (see Appendix). For subjects in the experimental group (those children with an assigned CASA volunteer) this information was recorded directly from computerized files of the CASA Office. For subjects in the control group (those without an assigned CASA volunteer) the recording form was used as an interview schedule and data were recorded based on interviews with the assigned caseworker for each subject.

Data were collected on 289 children, 193 from the group of children with a CASA, and 96 from the group of children without a CASA.

The subject's ages ranged from 2 months to 18.67 years with a mean age of 9.93 years. There was a slightly larger proportion of males (155), than females (134). When examining race, 91% (263) of the children in the study were African-American. On the next variable, nature of abuse, the majority (79.2%) of the children was classified as being in the category of neglect. The smallest groups were death (of caregiver) and sexual abuse with both groups having 2 children, or .7% of the total.

The number of siblings' variable was examined, with a range of 0-13 siblings. The largest group on this variable was children who had 3 siblings ($n = 80$, 27.7%). The next largest group was children with no siblings ($n = 65$, 22.5%). Whether or not siblings were placed together at the time of the initial out-of-home placement was the next variable examined for children with siblings ($n = 226$). A total of 128 (56.6%) children were reported to have been placed with their siblings, and 98 (43.4%) were not placed with their siblings.

Whether or not the children were placed initially within 30 miles of their original home was the next variable analyzed. Most of the children (268 or 92.7%) were reported to have been placed within 30 miles of their home. Length of time in out-of-home care was described with a range of from less than one month (0 years), to a maximum of 18.08 years. The mean number of years was 3.66 years ($SD = 3.28$). The

largest group of children ($n=116$, 40.1%) spent from one year to less than three years in out-of-home placement.

Comparing the children who had an assigned CASA with children who did not have a CASA, on the demographic characteristics, was the focus of Objective Two. When examining the variable age, an independent t-test found the CASA group ($n=193$) to have a mean age of 9.13 years ($SD = 4.63$) while the Non-CASA group ($n=96$) had a mean age of 11.54 years ($SD = 4.48$). The Non-CASA group was found to be significantly older than the CASA group ($t_{287} = 4.21$, $p < .001$).

On the variable, number of siblings, the CASA group had a mean number of siblings of 2.51 ($SD = 2.05$) and the Non-CASA group had a mean number of siblings of 2.71 ($SD = 2.20$), which was not found to be significantly different ($t_{287} = 0.76$, $p = .45$).

On the variable, length of time in out-of-home care, the CASA group spent a mean number of 2.67 years ($SD = 2.13$) in out-of-home care. The Non-CASA group was found to have spent a mean number of 5.63 years ($SD=4.18$) in out-of-home care. The Non-CASA group of children spent a significantly longer time in out-of-home care than the CASA group children ($t_{287} = 8.02$, $p < .001$).

The Chi-square test of independence was used to determine if the variable whether or not the subjects had a CASA was independent of the

variables; race, gender, nature of abuse, whether or not siblings were placed together and whether or not the child was placed within 30 miles of their home. The variable whether or not the child was placed within 30 miles of their original home was not found to be independent of whether or not they had a CASA which indicated that these variables were related. The group that had a CASA had a higher proportion of children that were placed within 30 miles of their home (96.4%) than the group that did not have a CASA (86.5%).

A multiple regression analysis was used to determine if a model existed that explained a significant portion of the variance in the length of time in out-of-home placement from the characteristics; age, race, gender, nature of abuse, number of siblings, whether or not siblings were placed together, whether or not the child was placed initially within 30 miles of their original home, and treatment level (whether or not they had a CASA). Treatment level (whether or not they had a CASA), explained 18% of the variability of the dependent variable, length of time in out-of-home care. The variable age added 5.4% to the explained variance in the model and the variable whether or not the child was biracial added an additional 1.9% to the explained variance in the model. All three variables had a significant effect together (explaining a total of 25.6%) and independently. These findings revealed that a model did exist that

explained a significant portion of the variance in the length of time in out-of-home placement among children in foster care ($F = 32.71$, $p < .001$).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions and recommendations were drawn by the researcher.

1. The children in foster care during the time period studied were diverse in ages.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. The children's ages ranged from a low of .17 years (2 months) to a high of 18.67 years with a mean of 9.93.

2. There was a slightly larger proportion of male children in the study. This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. Females in the study numbered 134 and males numbered 155.

3. The majority of the children in the study were African-American. This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. Ninety-one percent ($n = 263$) of the children in the study were found to be African-American.

Since the majority of the children in foster care in this study were found to be African-American, this researcher recommends further research to identify societal factors which contributed to the higher incidence of displacement of this specific group of minority children.

4. The primary reason for out-of-home placement for the children in the study was neglect.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. A total of 229 (79.2%) children were placed in out-of-home care because of neglect. In addition, 30 (10.4%) were placed in out-of-home care due to a combination of two or more forms of abuse, some of which may have included neglect. Other forms of abuse made up a relatively small percentage of the reasons for out-of-home placement.

Based on this conclusion and these findings the researcher recommends that State Boards of Secondary Education establish a curriculum requirement for educational programs on the responsibilities of parenting. Parenting skills can be learned if they have not been modeled.

5. There was a large range in number of siblings of the children in the study.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. The number of siblings ranged from 0-13 for the children in the study with a mean 2.5, and the majority of children having 3 siblings (80).

6. The majority of the subjects in the study were placed with their siblings at the time of their initial out-of-home placement.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study.

Of the children who had siblings, a total of 128 children (56.6%) were placed with their siblings at their initial placement.

7. The majority of the children in the study were placed within 30 miles of their original home at the time of their initial placement.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. A total of 268 (93.1%) children were placed within 30 miles of their original home.

8. Time spent in out-of-home placement for the children in foster care is extremely variable.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. The time spent in out-of-home care ranged from less than one month to 18.08 years, with a mean of 3.66 years.

9. The children with a CASA and those without a CASA in this study were similar demographically.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. The majority of the children in both groups were male, African-American, had a similar number of siblings, and were victims of neglect. There was no statistical difference between the groups on these variables.

10. The children in the CASA group were found to be younger than the children in the Non- CASA group.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. The children in the CASA group had a mean age of 9.13 years while the Non-CASA group had a mean age of 11.54 years. These means were found to be statistically significant in difference ($t_{287} = 4.21, p < .001$).

11. The CASA group of children was found to be more likely to have been placed within 30 miles of their original home.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study. The variable whether or not the child was placed within 30 miles of their original home was not found to be independent of whether or not they had a CASA, ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 9.70, p = .002$) indicating that these variables were related.

The literature indicates that placement within 30 miles of a child's original home is an important aspect of minimizing the detrimental effects of out-of-home placement (Warsh, et al., 1996). Since frequent visitation with family members could facilitate the child's adjustment, more research is warranted in this area. Perhaps a study could be designed to compare a group of foster care children placed within 30 miles of their original home with a similar group not placed within 30 miles of their original home. Length of time in out-of-home placement, case closure, placement stability, and re-entry into the child welfare system are all

foster care processes that could be measured in relation to placement within 30 miles of their original home.

12. The CASA group of children was found to have spent less time in out-of-home placement than those who did not have a CASA.

This conclusion is based on the following findings from the study.

The CASA group of children spent a mean number of 2.67 years in out of home care, while the Non-CASA group spent a mean number of 5.25 years. The groups were found to be significantly different on this variable of investigation ($t_{287} = 8.02, p < .001$).

This is consistent with results from the study by Leung (1990) where children with a CASA were found to have spent less time in out-of-home care than children without a CASA.

It is important to note that Litzelfelner's (1997) study which found CASA children to have spent a longer time under court jurisdiction than Non-CASA children was not measuring the length of time in out-of-home care.

The researcher recommends that the CASA program be expanded to include more areas, with the ultimate goal of all children in foster care to be assigned a CASA volunteer to advocate for them in this crucial time in their lives. The researcher further recommends that all children in foster care in areas where the CASA program is in place be assigned a CASA

volunteer. It is also recommended that members of CASA boards of directors use the information in this and other studies to justify the establishment of CASA programs in areas where one does not currently exist.

13. A model does exist that explains a significant portion of the length of time in out-of-home placement among the children in the study. This model included 3 factors; whether or not the child had a CASA, age, and whether or not the child was biracial.

This conclusion was based on the following findings from the study.

A multiple regression analysis determined that whether or not a child had a CASA explained 18% of the variability of the dependent variable, length of time in out-of-home care. The variable age added 5.4% to the explained variance in the model and the variable whether or not the child was biracial added an additional 1.9% to the explained variance of the model. All three variables had a significant effect together (explaining a total of 25.6%) and independently.

The goal of a CASA program is to ensure that a child's right to a safe, permanent home is acted upon by the court, in a sensitive and expedient manner. Therefore, a reduction in the time in out-of-home care for a foster child would indicate a successful CASA program. The cost

effectiveness of a CASA program is another important reason for reducing the length of time a child spends in foster care.

Further dimensions of the differences between cases with a CASA volunteer and those without could likely be ascertained through a qualitative study of selected cases. Such a study might uncover nuances not revealed by the quantitative nature of this report.

REFERENCES

Abramson, S. (1991). "Use of court appointed advocates to assist in permanency planning for minority children. Child Welfare, 70, 477-487.

Blady, M." Special child advocates: A volunteer court program". Children Today, 10, 3 (May-June 1981): 32-36.

Brenfenbrenner, U. The Ecology of Human Development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Child Protection Services. (1992, Spring). Virginia Child Protection Newsletter. In Department of Health and Human Services (1993, September). Neighbors helping neighbors: A new national strategy for the protection of children (p. 14). U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect. Fourth Report. Department of Health and Human Services (Stock No. 017-092-00106-1). Washington, DC.

Condelli, L. (1988). National evaluation of the impact of guardian ad litem in child abuse and neglect judicial proceedings. National Center of Child Abuse and Neglect for the Administration of Children, Youth and Families. Washington D.C.:CSR, Inc.

Courtney, M. (1996). Kinship foster care and children's welfare: The California experience. Focus, 17(3), Spring, 42-48.

CSR, Incorporated. (1990). National study of guardian ad litem representation. Washington, D.C.: CSR, Inc. (unpublished report).

Curtis, P., Dale, G., & Kendall, J. (1999). The foster care crisis. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.

Danziger, S.K., and Danziger, S. (1993). Child poverty and public policy: Toward a comprehensive antipoverty agenda. Daedalus.

Davis, J.A. (1971). Elementary survey analysis. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prentice Hall.

Dryfoos, J. 1990. Adolescents at risk. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duncan, G.J. and W. Rogers. 1985. The prevalence of childhood poverty. Unpublished manuscript, The University of Michigan, Survey Research Center, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Duquette, D., and Ramsey, S. (1987). "Representation of children in child abuse and neglect cases: An empirical look at what constitutes effective representation." Journal of Law Reform, 20,2 Winter, 341-408.

Epstein, W.M. (1999). Public child welfare and the politics of denial. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Goldstein, J. (1979). Beyond the Best Interests of the Child. New York: The Free Press.

Gustavsson, N., and E. Segal. (1994). Critical issues in child welfare. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Hay, T., Jones, L. (1994). Societal interventions to prevent child abuse and neglect. Child Welfare, 17, 213-225.

Hess, P., & Proch, K.O. (1988). Family visiting in out-of-home care: A guide to practice. Washington DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Hunter, M. (1990). Sexually abused boys. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Johnson, C.L. Much more to do about something: The Guardian ad Litem in child Protection Proceedings. Regional Institute of Social Welfare Research, Inc., Athens, GA (1979).

Kendall-Tackett, K.A. & Eckenrode, J. (1999). The effects of neglect on academic achievement and disciplinary problems: A developmental perspective. Child Abuse and Neglect, 20, 3, 161-169.

Kids Count Data Book 1992. Annie Casey Foundation, Washington, DC.

Leung, P. (1990). Is the court appointed special advocate program effective? A longitudinal analysis of time involvement and case outcomes. Child Welfare. May/June, 1996.

Lewis-Beck, Michael (1980). Applied Regression: An Introduction. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Lindsey, D., and Doh, J. (1996). Family preservation, family support and California's children. Sacramento: California Family Impact Seminar

Litzelfelner, P.J. (1997). Assessing the impact of court appointed special advocates in achieving positive outcomes for children in foster care. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

McClain, P., Sack, J., Froehlke, R., & Ewigman, B. (1993). Estimates of fatal child abuse and neglect: United States, 1979 through 1988. Pediatrics, 91,338-343.

Miller, J.L., and Whitaker, J.K. (1988). "Social Services and Social Support: Blended Programs for Families at Risk for Maltreatment." Child Welfare, 67, 2(March-April), 161-174.

Mnookin, R. (1985). In the Interest of Children. New York: Freeman & Co.

National CASA Association, (1995). Annual Program Survey. Seattle, WA.: National Casa Association.

NCCAN (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect). (1992). National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. Working paper no. 1. 1992 Summary Data Component. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Oregon Governor's Task Force on Juvenile Justice. (1995). Effective Advocacy for dependent children" A systems approach. Salem, OR (unpublished report).

Pear, R. (1996). "Many states fail to meet mandates on child welfare". New York Times. CXLV, 50, 369, March 17, 1996, 1,14.

Petit, M. & Curtis, P. (1997). Child Abuse & Neglect: A Look at the States; The CWLA stat book. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Poertner, J. & Press, A. (1990). Who best represents the interests of the child in court? Child Welfare, 69, 537-549.

Ramsey, S.H. (1983). Representation of the child in protective proceedings: The determination of decision making capacity. Family Law Quarterly, 17,287.

Smith, S. (1992). The effects of CASA volunteers on case duration and outcomes. Texas Department of Protection and Regulatory Services. (unpublished report).

Statistical Abstracts of the United States. (1997). U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Testa, M.F. (1992). Conditions of risk for substitute care. Children and Youth Services Review, 14 27-36.

U. S. Bureau of the Census. (1992). Current population reports, 23-181. Households, Families and Children: a 30-year perspective. By Terry Lugalía, U.S Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1997). Child Protection Statistics. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Justice. (1985). "Introducing CASA". Juvenile Justice Bulletin, Washington DC: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Warsh, R., Maluccio, A., & Pine, B. (1994). Teaching family reunification: A sourcebook. Washington DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Warsh, R., Pine, B., & Maluccio, A. (1996). Reconnecting families: A guide to strengthening family reunification services. Washington DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Wert, E. S., Fein, E., & Haller, W. (1986). Children in placement: CIP-A model for citizen-judicial review. Child Welfare, 65, 2, 199-201.

Whitaker, I. (1999). Child social well being in the U.S.: Unequal opportunities and the role of the state. New York: Garland Publishing.

Zigler, E., Kagan, S., & Hall, N. (1996). Children, families and government: Preparing for the twenty-first century. New York: Cambridge.

Zingraff, M., Leiter, J., Johnsen, M., & Myers, K. (1994). The mediating effect of good school performance on the maltreatment-delinquency relationship. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 31, 62-91.

APPENDIX
RECORDING FORM

NAME

DATE OF BIRTH

RACE

SEX

HOLD ORDER DATE

CLOSE DATE

NUMBER OF SIBLINGS

**NATURE OF ABUSE- PHYSICAL SEXUAL NEGLECT
COMBINATION**

SIBLINGS TOGETHER WHILE IN CARE?

INITIAL PLACEMENT WITHIN 30 MILES?

INITIAL PLACEMENT WITH SIBLINGS?

INITIAL TYPE OF PLACEMENT?

SERVICES PROVIDED AS PLANNED?

VISITATION OCCURRED AS PLANNED?

VITA

Nancy L. Hart was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She attended elementary, middle and high schools in Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and New York. She received a bachelor of science in elementary education, a master's degree in social work, and is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in social work from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This degree is to be awarded in August 2001.

Her career in social work has included work in psychiatric hospitals, substance abuse and private practice in clinical social work. She is currently in private practice in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with a focus on marriage and family therapy, children and adolescents. She is a licensed clinical social worker, a certified trauma resolution therapist, and is currently obtaining certification in clinical hypnosis.

She is a member of the National Association of Social Workers and the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis.

DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Nancy L. Hart

Major Field: Social Work

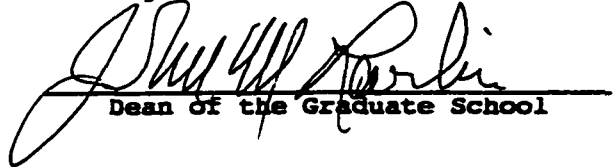
Title of Dissertation:

The Influence of a Court Appointed Special Advocate on the
Length of Time in Out-of-Home Care

Approved:



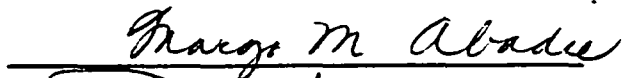
Major Professor and Chairman

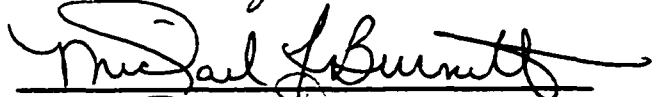


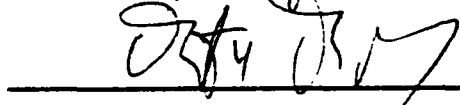
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:









Date of Examination:
