

# **Evaluation of the Arapahoe County & El Paso County GAL/CASA Pilots**

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# Executive Summary

*CASA volunteers are trained to monitor and advocate for the interests of [abused and neglected] children and to report on their needs to the juvenile court...The juvenile court of the future should have larger, stronger CASA programs.*

— Honorable Leonard Edwards, Santa Clara County Juvenile Court  
**The Future of the Juvenile Court, 1996.**

In Colorado, as nationally, efforts are underway to identify the best methods for collaboration and cooperation between the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer and the attorney appointed as a *guardian ad litem* (GAL) to represent the best interests of the abused or neglected child. This report documents the experiences of two of Colorado's nine CASA programs, one in Arapahoe and one in El Paso County, which have instituted pilot projects to set standards for GAL/CASA collaboration.

The data in this analysis include: (1) 54 Arapahoe County cases assigned a GAL, but not assigned a CASA, (2) 52 Arapahoe County cases assigned both a GAL and a CASA under the traditional approach; and (3) 53 Arapahoe County and 15 El Paso County cases assigned a GAL and CASA as part of a special collaborative pilot project.

The analysis of this case data suggests that:

## **Compared to the traditional CASA model or the GAL-only model, the collaborative pilots help to speed case processing.**

- Less time elapses between the appointment of a GAL and the receipt of the case by the CASA agency.
- Less time elapses between the receipt of the case and the assignment of a CASA.
- Less time elapses between the assignment of the CASA and the first case staffing.

## **The pilot model promotes more information sharing.**

- The CASA is more likely to be involved in the case staffing.
- The CASA has more early contact with professionals in the case.
- The court is more likely to receive a report within the first 120 days of the case.
- More reports to the court are signed by both the CASA and the GAL.
- More complete information is entered in the case file.

### **The pilot model promotes more contact and time on the case.**

- The pilot increases the number of CASA-family contacts.
- Under the pilot, the CASA spends more hours on the case and has more professional contacts during the first 120 days.
- The number of hours the GAL spends on pilot and non-pilot cases is quite comparable in pilot and non-pilot cases.

While only a preliminary study, the results of this evaluation suggest that there may be substantial benefits to programs that set out clear expectations about GAL/CASA collaboration. Most notably:

### **Any approach that helps to move cases along more rapidly is of value.**

Current law places stringent limits on the amount of time that is allowed to elapse between key case processing points. This is true for all dependency cases in general, and is especially true if the case fits the Early Permanency Planning criteria. The pilot model helps to speed up the referral for a CASA, the appointment of a CASA, the first CASA-GAL contact, and the first case staffing, and as a result, it makes a significant contribution.

### **Promoting information sharing and contact helps to ensure better case outcomes.**

Current law stresses the need for concurrent planning, that is, planning simultaneously for ways to reunify the family and alternative permanent plans. The best means of ensuring concurrent planning is to encourage early and frequent information sharing and contact among all the parties involved in the case.

Frequent and ongoing information sharing can also ensure that the best possible decisions are made, encourage joint decision making, and promote a sense of shared responsibility in the case. It can also ensure that the professionals provide consistent, rather than contradictory, feedback to the family.

The pilot models do a better job than the traditional model of ensuring that the CASA is part of this ongoing planning. It also does a better job of promoting contact with the family and it results in more information being available to the court.

# Introduction

*The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program was started by a juvenile court judge who was concerned that abused and neglected children were not getting the special attention they deserve. CASA volunteers are trained to monitor and advocate for the interests of these children and to report on their needs to the juvenile court...The juvenile court of the future should have larger, stronger CASA programs.*

— Honorable Leonard Edwards, Santa Clara County Juvenile Court  
The Future of the Juvenile Court, 1996 .<sup>1</sup>

## The Role of the CASA in Complex Cases

The first Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program began over 21 years ago in Washington State to help address the needs of children who are the subject of dependency and neglect filings. Today CASA programs are operating in all 50 states with more than 38,000 volunteers. The overall intent of the Program has remained consistent throughout the years: to train volunteers to serve as advocates for children in abuse and neglect proceedings.

Child abuse and neglect cases are typically quite complex, and adequately investigating and serving these families can be exceedingly demanding. Previous research in Denver County,<sup>2</sup> for example, found that the investigation of these cases generally involves interviews with:

- Child victims;
- Offending and non-offending parents;
- Siblings of the victim;
- The party making the maltreatment report;
- Relatives;
- School personnel.

Among open child abuse and neglect cases in Denver County, this same study found the following family profile:

Over three-quarters of the parents (76%) earned less than \$10,000 annually.

Two-thirds of the child victims were experiencing problems such as emotional difficulties, chronic illnesses, learning disabilities, or acting out behaviors.

About a third of the offending parents had substance abuse problems.

Two-thirds of the offending parents had some type of known problem, including not only drug and alcohol use, but mental illness, chronic physical illnesses, and a prior history as an abused or neglected child.

Meeting the diverse needs of these families would be difficult under the best of circumstances. Further complicating coordinated investigations and service delivery is the fact that, once the case is opened, a large number of professionals generally become involved. Information must be gathered from, and disseminated to:

The parents;

Attorneys for the parents;

The social worker;

The county attorney representing the social worker;

The child victim and siblings;

The *guardian ad litem*;

The foster parents;

The court;

The professionals providing treatment plan services.

In addition, cases sometimes involve extended family members, school staff, tribal representatives, or attorneys for other parties with legal standing in the case.

Given the many service needs of the families, and the large number of parties involved in dependency cases, there is a clear need to ensure information sharing and coordinated action. Too often this does not happen and the result is unsatisfactory for both the family and the system. For the family, the lack of a coordinated response can lead to case delays, contradictory messages, heightened stress, and general confusion. For the legal system, the lack of information sharing undoubtedly affects the quality of the court ordered case plan, and probably contributes to last minute settlements, leading one Colorado judge to note, “It used to be settling on the courthouse steps. Now it’s settling in the courtroom doorway.”<sup>3</sup>

The lack of joint efforts can also lead to a sense of isolation and frustration in the social services system. One author points out that the lack of joint efforts means that:

Child protective service workers are open target for public criticism. Society is quick to blame them if a child is re-injured or killed. But society is also quick to blame them for the number of children “snatched” from their parents and placed in the “limbo” of foster care.<sup>4</sup>

The CASA can serve a unique role in complex cases. Unlike the other professionals in the case, the CASA typically serves only a single child or group of siblings at one time. This allows the CASA to spend more time interacting with the child, collecting information, and providing feedback to the court. To maximize the effectiveness of the CASA, it is essential that the CASA and professionals coordinate their interventions, and share the resulting information and insights.

In Colorado, as nationally, efforts are underway to identify the best methods for collaboration and cooperation between the CASA volunteer and the attorney appointed as a *guardian ad litem* (GAL) for the abused or neglected child. This report documents the experiences of two of Colorado’s nine CASA programs. Arapahoe Advocates for Children instituted a pilot project in 1997 to set standards for GAL/CASA collaboration. In El Paso County, the pilot to promote GAL/CASA collaboration began in July 1998.

The Arapahoe County pilot program tested two approaches to GAL/CASA representation:

- One third of all cases with CASA assignments were made under the traditional approach, known as the Friend of the Court (FOC) Model. This model is based on the State’s clear expectation that when both a GAL and CASA are appointed in a given case, they will closely collaborate to ensure that full and complete information is available to the court, to prevent duplication of efforts, and to represent the child’s best interests. However, the GAL and CASA are not given specific instructions about how to collaborate beyond the general admonition to coordinate their efforts.
- One third of the cases were assigned to the pilot project. Under the experimental approach, GALs are given office space at the CASA office, agree to observe regular “office hours” at this site at which time they will be available to CASAs, agree that both the GAL and the CASA will participate in any case staffings, and generally agree to make themselves available on an as-needed basis to the assigned CASA.

In El Paso County, the pilot program assigned all cases to the collaborative model. This model, briefly described below, also expedited CASA assignment, and instituted procedures to create closer GAL/CASA working relationships.

This evaluation was designed to address the following research questions:

- Compared to the traditional CASA model, do collaborative approaches result in the more rapid assignment of the CASA?
- Do collaborative approaches result in faster contact between the CASA and GAL?
- Do collaborative models result in earlier staffings?
- Do collaborative models result in greater CASA representation at staffings?
- Do collaborative approaches result in more CASA interactions with professionals in the case?
- Do collaborative models result in more rapid contact between an advocate and the child?
- Do collaborative approaches result in more CASA interactions with the parents or family?
- Do collaborative models result in more information being available to the court?
- Do collaborative models result in information reaching the court in a more timely manner?
- Do collaborative models reduce the amount of time the GAL spends on the case, thus producing cost savings?
- How do the professionals in the child welfare system rate the pilot approach to GAL/CASA collaboration?

## Description of the Pilots

Traditionally the CASA and GAL have operated fairly independently and have separately offered their feedback to the court regarding the family's and the child's needs. Under the pilot programs, the focus on communication and collaboration meant that the GAL and CASA were encouraged to explicitly divide information gathering tasks and share the resulting information with each other.

Both the Arapahoe and El Paso pilot programs stressed the following elements:

- Getting the CASA appointed as quickly as possible following the GAL appointment;
- Quick up-front planning by the CASA and GAL regarding what needed to be done on a given case;

- Expediting the first contact between the CASA and the family;
- Holding the first staffing soon after the appointment of the GAL and the CASA;
- Encouraging the professionals in the case to include the CASA in all staffings;
- Frequent communication between the CASA and the GAL;
- Regular and frequent reporting to the court.

In order to make the programs work, both sites specially selected for the pilot those GALs who were thought to be receptive to working with a CASA in a collaborative manner. In addition, both programs assigned pilot cases to a special CASA supervisor who played a key role in facilitating the communication and collaboration. For example, in Arapahoe County the pilot CASA supervisor attended court and typically met with the GAL immediately following the GAL's appointment to discuss the appointment of a CASA, the type of CASA, and the needs of the case. Even outside of court, the special supervisor played a key role. The GALs participating in the Arapahoe pilot noted that it was common to have 25 or more telephone contacts with the special CASA supervisor in the span of a single week. In El Paso County, the supervisor met with the CASA and the GAL, and the case worker as needed, to help facilitate case planning. In this site as well, the GAL and supervisor were in close contact to ensure that the case continued to progress.

In Arapahoe County the GALs were also required to maintain office hours for a minimum of three hours each week at the CASA agency. This was intended to maximize the opportunity for the CASA to have direct contact with the GAL.

# Methodology

## The Data

In order to address the research questions outlined above, information was generated on three groups of cases:

- Cases assigned to the GAL/CASA experimental pilots (Arapahoe and El Paso Counties);
- Cases assigned a GAL and CASA which were not part of the experimental pilot program (Arapahoe County only); and
- Cases served by a GAL, without the assignment of a CASA (Arapahoe County only).

The cases for this study included virtually all pilot cases assigned a GAL/CASA from the inception of each pilot. In Arapahoe County, the non-pilot CASA comparison group consisted of cases assigned to a non-pilot project GAL and CASA during approximately the same time period. The GAL-only cases were selected from the caseloads of seven GALs whose files were available for review.

Information related to the research questions outlined above was extracted for each case from the computerized records maintained by the CASA programs and/or records maintained by GALs. In addition, some data were generated from the court system data base, known as ICON.

The data in this analysis include:

- A total of 54 Arapahoe County cases assigned a GAL, but not assigned a CASA. These are referred to as GAL-only cases.
- Another 52 Arapahoe County cases assigned both a GAL and a CASA. Under this traditional approach (sometimes referred to as the Friend of the Court or “FOC” model), the GAL and CASA were simply instructed to work together in serving the best interests of the child.
- Another 53 Arapahoe County cases assigned both GALs and CASAs as part of a special pilot project. The pilot project outlined specific expectations for collaboration and coordination of efforts on the part of both the GAL and the CASA.
- A total of 15 El Paso County cases assigned a GAL and CASA as part of the special collaborative effort.

In comparing outcomes across El Paso pilot cases, Arapahoe pilot cases, traditional FOC CASA cases, and GAL-only cases, no attempt was made to control for background case characteristics that may influence outcome measures. However, there is no reason to assume that the three groups differed significantly on any of these characteristics. For example, the degree of parental cooperation may influence the number of GAL-parent or CASA-parent contacts, but there is no reason to assume that cooperative parents are assigned to one type of representation or advocacy, while non-cooperative parents are assigned to another. In addition, many of the outcome variables under consideration, for example the number of court reports and the timeliness of these reports, should not be affected by parental cooperation or other background characteristics of the case.

In Arapahoe County, GAL-only and traditional FOC CASA cases were matched as closely to the pilot cases as possible on the number and ages of the children since these two variables were viewed as key determinants of the amount of time a CASA and GAL spend on a case and the types of contacts they make. For example, only non-truancy cases and cases involving children under 12 years of age were included. As Table 1 indicates, the groups were quite similar with respect to numbers of children, although children in the pilot cases were somewhat younger.

<b>Table 1. Ages and Numbers of Children by Representation/Advocacy Model</b>				
	Arapahoe GAL-only	Arapahoe FOC GAL/CASA Model	Arapahoe Pilot Project GAL/CASA Model	El Paso Pilot Project GAL/CASA Model
Average number of children	1.9	2.2	2.1	1.3
Average age of children	9.8	9.7	7.0	4.5
<i>Sample size</i>	54	52	53	15

## Study Limits

This research is a preliminary effort to assess the impact of collaborative models of GAL/CASA representations. As such, the evaluation has a number of limits. Most notably, the research relies on relatively small sample sizes. In addition, the quality of the data varied significantly. Typically, pilot cases had far more detailed information than did non-pilot cases, and the least information was available for GAL-only cases. In addition, this evaluation cannot control for the possibly confounding effect of the introduction of Expedited Permanency Planning (EPP) legislation. Most of the GAL-only and traditional FOC CASA cases had petitions filed prior to the introduction of EPP, while pilot cases in both counties were post-EPP. As a result, the possibility exists that some of the benefits attributed to the pilot may be, at least in part, attributable to the EPP legislation.

# Results

## Faster Appointment of CASA

The pilot CASA projects met the goal of reducing the amount of time elapsing between the appointment of the GAL and the receipt of the case by the CASA program. Under the traditional

FOC model, an average of 133.8 days elapsed between the GAL appointment date and the date the case was received by Arapahoe Advocates. Even when one exceptional case is removed from analysis, the time lapse remains 115.8 days. By contrast, pilot cases were received by Arapahoe Advocates an average of 7.0 days following GAL assignment. In El Paso County, the CASA agency received the referral, on average, within 1.5 days of the GAL appointment. Statistically, this is not significantly different from the 7.0 days reported in Arapahoe.

The pilot programs also met the goal of allowing less time to elapse between the receipt of the case by the CASA program and the appointment of the *individual* CASA. Pilot cases had a CASA assigned, on average, 6.8 days after a case was received in Arapahoe and 3.9 days after a case was received in El Paso, compared to 15.9 days in the Arapahoe FOC CASA group. In addition, under the pilot model, the GAL often had contact with the CASA pilot supervisor on the day of the GAL appointment.

The combination of faster referrals to CASA programs, and the faster assignment of CASAs following the referral, translated into pilot CASAs being in place, on average, 12.5 days following the GAL appointment in Arapahoe County and 5.4 days in El Paso County. Under the Arapahoe FOC model, CASAs were assigned an average of 134.9 days following the GAL appointment.

Finally, the pilot CASAs had their first contact with the GAL an average 5.5 days following the CASA assignment in Arapahoe County and 4.0 days in El Paso County. Unfortunately, comparable information was generally not available for Arapahoe County FOC cases.

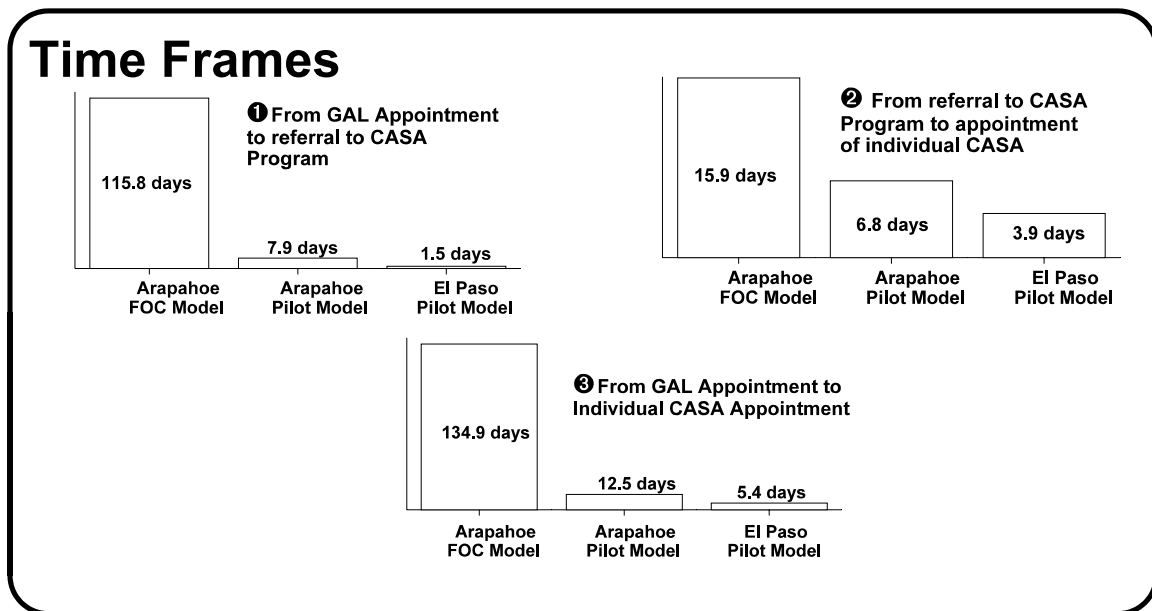


Figure 1

## Case Staffings

There is evidence that the Arapahoe County pilot decreased the amount of time that elapses between the assignment of the CASA and the first staffing in the case. Staffings bring together the key professionals in the case to discuss case strategy, progress and the family’s needs. Faster staffings generally mean fewer unnecessary case delays and the more rapid delivery of services to the family.

The average number of days between the assignment of the Arapahoe County CASA and the first staffing was 18.0 days for the FOC cases, compared to 8.7 days for pilot cases. Thus, on average, pilot staffings occurred two full working weeks ahead of FOC cases.

The pilot models also do a better job of involving CASAs in the case staffing. As Table 2 indicates, the CASA was nearly always involved in the staffing under the pilot models. Under the traditional FOC model, CASAs attended less than three-quarters of the staffings.

**Table 2. Individuals Attending First Case Staffing by Advocacy Model**

	Arapahoe FOC GAL/CASA Model	Arapahoe Pilot Project GAL/CASA Model	El Paso Pilot Project GAL/CASA Model
GAL attended	61%	75%	93%
CASA attended	71%	96%	93%
Case worker attended	48%	47%	60%
Sample size	52	53	15

, Differences between the pilot groups and the FOC are statistically significant at .05

## Contact With Professionals

As Figure 2 indicates, during the first 120 days following their assignment, CASAs in the Pilot Programs had more contact with the professionals in the case than did the CASAs assigned under the traditional approach. Under the pilot models, CASAs had between 42 and 50 contacts with professionals. Under the traditional CASA model, the figure is about half, or 22 contacts. The differences between the pilot groups and the traditional FOC model are statistically significant at the .05 level.

In addition, both pilot and non-pilot CASAs had significantly more contact with the professionals in the case during their first 120 days than did the GAL in GAL-only cases. Within the first 120

days of their assignment, the GALs had an average of 5.8 contacts with the other professionals in the case.

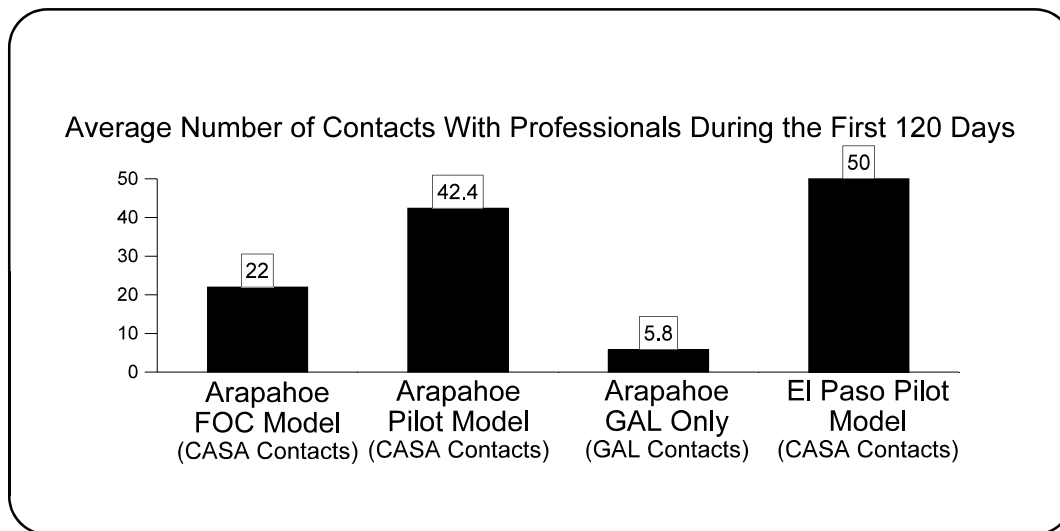


Figure 2

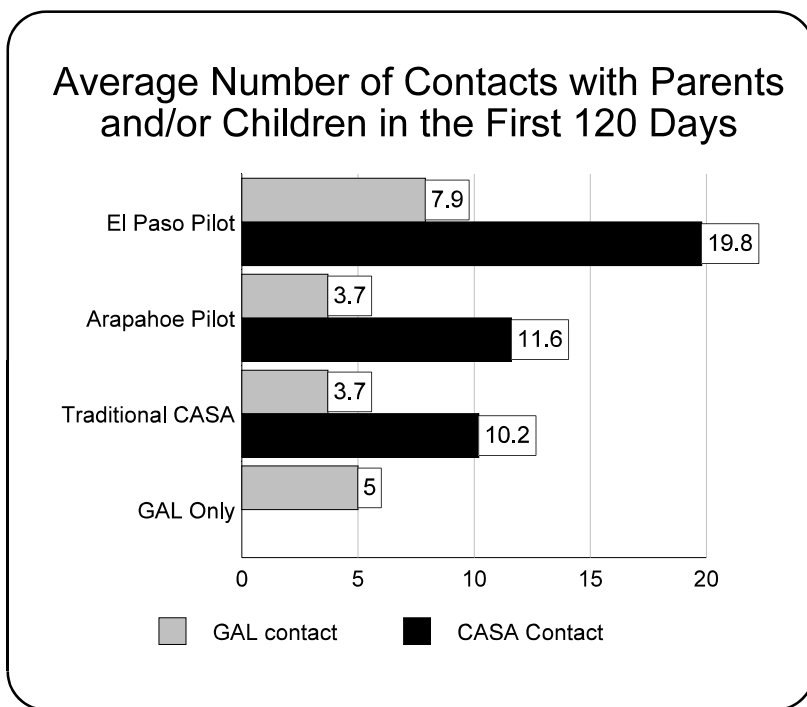
## Contact With Child and Family

Two goals of the pilot were related to improvements in GAL/CASA contact with the family. The pilots were designed to encourage faster contacts by both the CASA and the GAL and to encourage more contacts. Measuring the time lapse between the CASA appointment and the first CASA contact with the family proved to be difficult. Unfortunately, less than a quarter of the traditional CASA cases in this analysis included such information. Where it is available it appears that under the traditional FOC model, the CASA first saw the child an average of 12.3 days following assignment.

On average, the first CASA-child contact under the pilot models in Arapahoe County and El Paso County occurred on average 17.3 days and 12.9 days, respectively, following the CASA assignment. The differences between the traditional and pilot groups are not statistically significant.

With respect to GAL-child contact, the pattern was for GAL contact with the child to occur somewhat faster under the pilot models, although not significantly so. Among pilot cases the average lapse of time between the appointment of the GAL and the first contact with the child averaged 33.7 days in Arapahoe County and 7.3 days in El Paso County. Among FOC and GAL-only cases, the average lapse of time between appointment and first contact with the child was 62.7 and 62.4 days, respectively.

Finally, Figure 3 indicates the average number of contacts with either parents or children (including



**Figure 3**

visits at the foster home) completed by the CASA within the first 120 days. It also indicates the total number of GAL contacts within the first 120 days of the GAL assignment.

The pilots met the goal of increasing the number of CASA-family contacts. Arapahoe pilot cases averaged 11.6 contacts within the first 120 days of being assigned, compared to 10.2 contacts in the traditional Arapahoe CASA group. These differences are

statistically significant at the .05 level. The average number of contacts in El Paso County was 19.8.

On the other hand, there were no differences in Arapahoe County among the pilot, traditional CASA, and GAL-only cases with respect to how often the GAL saw the child during the first 120 days following the GAL appointment. The average in all three groups was around 4.5 times. In El Paso County, the average number of GAL contacts in the first 120 days was 7.9 times.

## Providing Information to the Court

The data collected for this evaluation allows us to compare the traditional CASA model and the pilot CASA models with respect to the number of reports submitted to the court within the first 120 days following the appointment of the CASA. Only written reports, not oral reports, are included in the analysis.

The results, shown in Table 3, indicate that the pilot approaches met the goal of providing more information to the court. Within the first 120 days most FOC cases (71%) had no court report, while

most pilot cases had at least one report to the court. Overall, within the first 120 days, the FOC model produced an average of 0.3 court reports, compared with 1.1 and 1.0 under the pilot models.

The pilot model not only produces more reports, it also appears to increase the likelihood that the court hears from both the CASA and the GAL. Table 3 indicates that within the first 120 days following the CASA appointment, CASAs submitted reports (either alone or along with the GAL) in almost three times as many pilot cases as traditional CASA cases (29% vs. 74% and 70%). Joint reports by the GAL and CASA were also more common under the Arapahoe County pilot model, which encouraged joint submissions. Only two percent of the traditional Arapahoe CASA cases had a joint report, compared to more than a quarter of the pilot cases.

<b>Table 3. Reports to the Court in the 120 Days Following CASA Assignment</b>			
Within first 120 days...	Arapahoe FOC CASA/GAL Model	Arapahoe Pilot Project GAL/CASA Model	El Paso Pilot Project GAL/CASA Model
Number of reports submitted to the court			
None	63%	10%	33%
One	31%	58%	40%
Two or more	6%	32%	27%
, Average number of reports submitted to the court	0.5	1.1	1.0
, Percentage of cases with a report signed by the CASA	29%	74%	70%
, Percent with a report submitted jointly by CASA & GAL	2%	28%	-NA-
<i>Sample size</i>	52	53	15
, Differences between the FOC and pilot cases are statistically significant at .05			

On the other hand, there is no evidence of differences between the traditional and pilot CASA programs with respect to how far in advance of the court hearing the requested report was filed. Most of the reports in all three groups were timely and were submitted an average of 7-9 days prior to the court hearing.

## **Summary of CASA Hours and Actions**

This report has considered the number of contacts pilot and traditional model CASAs have with families and professionals and the number of court reports they make in the first 120 days of their

assignment. This summary combines all these types of actions to generate an overall comparison of pilot and traditional FOC CASA activity during the first 120 days of assignment.

When contacts with professionals during the first 120 days are combined with contacts with parents/children/foster home visits, we see that pilot CASAs had an average of 49.7(Arapahoe) and 55.6 (El Paso) contacts, compared to 27.5 in the Arapahoe FOC CASA group. The differences between the pilot and FOC cases are statistically significant at the .06 level.

The greater number of contacts also appears to have contributed to a greater number of overall hours in the pilot groups. The average number of hours worked by a CASA in the El Paso County pilot was 42.7. In the Arapahoe County pilot, the average was 50.0, compared to 37.9 hours for the Arapahoe County FOC CASAs.

## **GAL Hours and Cost Savings**

Do pilot GALs spend less time on each case because of their close working relationship with the CASA? Although this was the underlying assumption of the pilots, and pilot GALs therefore agreed to a reduced payment per case, there is no real evidence substantiating this assumption. Figure 3 has indicated that the three groups — the pilot model, the FOC model and the GAL-only model — have equal numbers of GAL-family contacts in the first 120 days following the GAL appointment. This certainly suggests that there is *not* a noticeable reduction in the GAL workload under the pilot model.

In addition, interviews with selected pilot GALs also raise serious questions about the basic assumption that GALs will need to spend less time on cases if the CASA shares the workload. While the contribution of the CASA was valued enormously by the GALs, the families are viewed as so troubled and in need of help that any time the GAL had available was easily consumed.

One Arapahoe County GAL explained that the pilot project led to more information being available about the case. Comprehensive information is invaluable in ensuring that the family's needs are addressed and that the court has complete information available when making critical case decisions. However, "the more the GAL knows about the case, the more there is to do." Indeed, it seems likely that the pilot GALs agreed to accept a reduced reimbursement for pilot cases because they were committed to the idea of collaboration, not because they believe it would be possible to reduce the hours they expended on these cases.

However, for a variety of reasons, the present data are insufficient to draw final conclusions about how various CASA models affect the GAL workload. First, few dependency cases are closed within 120 days of the GAL assignment. As a result, the true impact of the CASA on the GAL workload can only be measured over a much longer period of time. Such data is, unfortunately, not available for the present evaluation. Second, information was not available to indicate the actual number of hours billed by GALS under the FOC and pilot models.

## User Reactions

Both pilots conducted an internal evaluation to determine how the program was rated by the local child protective services agencies. Workers who had pilot cases were asked to respond to a few open-ended questions assessing the program. Feedback was obtained from 14 of the possible 19 workers in Arapahoe County and 7 workers in El Paso County. Both programs report consistently positive feedback from workers. Specifically, workers appreciated that CASAs took an active role in supervising visits, thus allowing for more parent-child contact than would otherwise have been possible. CASAs were also credited with assistance in facilitating visits that went beyond supervision. For example, in one case the child was able to avoid changing school during the last six weeks of the school year because the pilot CASA assumed a major responsibility in transporting the child.

Workers also appreciated the additional input on cases that is available when a CASA is assigned. The communication and collaboration between the worker and the CASA allows the worker to compare his/her impressions with those of another informed observer. Not surprisingly, a number of workers said that they felt more reassured about their decisions when another objective third party reached the same conclusions. One El Paso caseworker noted:

I loved working with [the CASA]. The CASA is another set of eyes and ears to protect children and maybe see something I can't.

It is important to note, however, that these positive reactions to CASAs may have been equally positive regardless of whether the CASA was assigned under the traditional approach or the pilot collaborative model.

As part of this evaluation, interviews were conducted with two of the three GALS who participated in the pilot in Arapahoe County. These interviews indicate that the level of communication and

collaboration between the CASA and the GAL was unique to the pilot. One of the GALs explained how the pilot CASA and FOC CASA models differ:

The biggest difference was that from *day one* [the pilot CASA supervisor] and I were a team in the courtroom. It was another set of eyes right away.

This GAL concluded that ultimately the pilot made a difference for her as a GAL and for the families:

Did I do a better job as a GAL [under the pilot]? No question about it . . . I think the families felt that more people were working with them to get them through the crisis they were in.

The greater information available on the case was also perceived to produce more customized services for the family. Sometimes this helped the family to reunify. When it did not, it ensured that all reasonable efforts to reunify were made in an expedited manner, thus allowing the difficult decision that reunification is not the goal to be made with less anxiety and delay.

## Summary and Discussion

This analysis has drawn a number of comparisons between CASAs operating under traditional Friend of the Court expectations and CASAs participating in special pilot programs to promote GAL/CASA coordination. Both FOC and pilot CASA programs have been compared to patterns in cases without CASA representation. The results suggest that:

**Compared to the traditional CASA model or the GAL-only model, the collaborative pilots help to speed case processing.**

Specifically, under the pilots:

- Less time elapses between the appointment of a GAL and the receipt of the case by the CASA agency.
- Less time elapses between the receipt of the case and the assignment of a CASA.
- Less time elapses between the assignment of the CASA and the first case staffing.

**The pilot model promotes more information sharing.**

Specifically, under the pilot model:

- The CASA is more likely to be involved in the case staffing.
- The CASA has more early contact with professionals in the case.
- The court is more likely to receive a report within the first 120 days of the case.
- There are more reports to the court signed by both the CASA and the GAL.
- There is more complete information entered in the case file.

**The pilot model results in more contact and time being spent on each case.**

Specifically, compared to the traditional approach, the pilot:

- Increases the number of CASA-family contacts.
- The CASA spends more hours on the case and has more professional contacts during the first 120 days.
- The number of hours the GAL spends on pilot and non-pilot cases is quite comparable.

Of course, these findings must be viewed with some caution. The study necessarily relied on small sample sizes. The data available at the time of this evaluation did not allow some critical questions, such as the amount of contact between the GAL and the CASA, to be addressed. The study only considers the time period immediately following the CASA appointment. The CASAs were often appointed late in the case and GAL information was not available for cases handled through the FOC CASA model.

Despite these limitations, the results suggest that there may be real benefits to CASA approaches that set out clear expectations between GAL/CASA collaboration. Most notably:

**Any approach that helps to move cases along more rapidly is of value.**

Current law places stringent limits on the amount of time that is allowed to elapse between key case processing points. This is true for all dependency cases in general, and is especially true if the case fits the Early Permanency Planning criteria. If the pilot model helps to speed up the referral for a

CASA, the appointment of a CASA, the first CASA-GAL contact, and the first case staffing, it has made a significant contribution.

**Promoting information sharing and contact helps to ensure better case outcomes.**

Current law stresses the need for concurrent planning. That is, planning simultaneously for ways to reunify the family and alternative permanent plans. The best means of ensuring concurrent planning is to encourage early and frequent information sharing and contact among all the parties involved in the case.

Frequent and ongoing information sharing can also ensure that the best possible decisions are made, encourage joint decision making, and promote a sense of shared responsibility in the case. It can also ensure that the professionals provide consistent, rather than contradictory, feedback to the family.

The pilot models do a better job than the traditional model of ensuring that the CASA is part of this ongoing planning. It also does a better job of promoting contact with the family and it results in more information being available to the court.

Further research will be needed to confirm these preliminary findings and to assess outcomes not considered by this research, such as the number of GAL/CASA contacts, differences in services under collaborative and traditional models, and differences in ultimate case outcomes. However, the information available to date provides a strong incentive to promote cooperative models of CASA-GAL representation.

# Endnotes

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2. Thoennes, Nancy and Patricia Tjaden. *The Experiences of Abused and Neglected Children and their Families in Protective Service Agencies and the Courts*. Final Report to the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, Department of Health and Human Services, December, 1990.
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4. Drews, Kay. "The Role Conflict of the Child Protective Service Worker: Investigator - Helper," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 4, 1980: 247-254.