

GEORGIA CASA CONFERENCE 2025

WORKSHOP BLOCK I: 10:30 – 11:45

Safe, Seen, and Supported: Connecting ACEs, Trauma, Resilience, and Psychological Safety

Facilitator: Debra Ross, Training Specialist, Georgia State University Child Welfare Training Collaborative

Description: Participants will explore how trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) affect a child's sense of psychological safety. Using a trauma-informed lens, examine how safety—both emotional and relational—is essential to advocacy and resilience. This workshop offers a foundational understanding of psychological safety and how it supports the CASA volunteer role in building trust with children and youth served.

Navigating Change: Child Advocacy in a Shifting Child Welfare Landscape

Facilitator: Melissa Carter, Clinical Professor of Law, Barton Child Law & Policy Center, Emory University School of Law

Description: This workshop will provide CASA volunteers with an up-to-date overview of the current state of child welfare, highlighting the potential for recent changes in federal policy and funding to reshape services for children and families. Participants will explore shifts in national priorities and examine how these trends impact CASA advocacy to support better outcomes in this evolving landscape.

Ready, Set, Grown: Equipping Youth for Real-World Adulthood

Facilitator: Ebony Harris, CEO, Youth Empowerment Success Services

Description: This workshop will explore practical strategies for preparing youth—especially those with lived system experience—for the realities of adulthood. Participants will learn how to support youth in building essential life skills, navigating adult responsibilities, and establishing healthy interdependence. Grounded in trauma-informed coaching and real-world tools, this workshop is designed for professionals who are committed to empowering youth beyond basic compliance and toward lifelong stability.

Navigating the Mental Health Maze: A CASA Volunteer's Compass

Facilitators: Gabby Smith, Clinical Director, LCSW, Live Life Counseling & Maureen Bixler, Owner, LCSW, Live Life Counseling

Description: In this workshop, CASA volunteers will explore various therapeutic modalities and levels of treatment in the areas of mental health and substance abuse. Therapeutic ethics and potential limitations and barriers to treatment will be outlined and guidance on how to navigate these sensitive areas.

Appointed to Advocate: Strengthening Your Courtroom Presence

Facilitators: The Hon. Carolyn Altman, Paulding County Juvenile Court & Jerry Bruce, Director, Office of the Child Advocate

Description: Strengthen in-court advocacy and presence by learning to improve written reports and in-court testimony. This workshop includes practical tips on testifying, answering questions from judges and lawyers, introducing new information, making service and placement recommendations, and increasing credibility as a witness and advocate.

WORKSHOP BLOCK II: 2:00 – 3:15

Ask the Judges Panel

Facilitator: TBD

Description: Engage in dialogue with a panel of judges on topics of law, process, procedure, and child welfare philosophy. Ask questions about decision-making, volunteer advocacy, CASA reports and recommendations, law interpretation, and trending issues in child welfare. Please note that specific cases will not be discussed.

Planning for Youth in Foster Care with Complex Needs

Facilitator: Dana Carroll, Deputy General Counsel, Department of Human Services – Division of Family and Children Services

Description: Planning for youth aging out of care presents unique challenges—especially for those with intensive medical, behavioral, or cognitive needs. This workshop explores how DFCS's Complex Needs Adult Transition Unit provides specific support for youth requiring ongoing care.

More Than a Seat at the Table: CASA's Role in Shaping Better Plans - Case Planning & Advocacy

Facilitators: The Hon. R. Michael Key, Ret., Troup County Juvenile Court & Lori Davis, Training & Development Specialist, Department of Human Services – Division of Family and Children Services

Description: The goal of this workshop is to empower you, as a CASA volunteer, with practical strategies to advocate effectively in and out of court for case plan goals and tasks that best meet the individual needs of the child, the parent, and the family as a unit.

Educational Legal Protections for Youth in Foster Care

Facilitators: Josette Franklin, PhD, Education Quality Specialist, Department of Human Services – EPAC & Tanesse Brown, Program Manager, Georgia Appleseed

Description: This workshop is designed to equip participants with practical tools and knowledge to effectively advocate for students—especially those in foster care or with disabilities—facing school discipline challenges. Participants will leave with a clear understanding of required interventions before exclusionary discipline, foster care education entitlements, and strengthened capacity to champion students' rights during disciplinary processes.

Let's Work Together: A Discussion of How CASA and CIP Can Collaborate to Make Courts Work Better for Families

Facilitator: Diana Rugh Johnson, Director, Georgia Court Improvement Program

Description: Georgia's Court Improvement Program is tasked with designing and executing projects to drive systemic improvements in Georgia's child welfare court system. While these projects are informed by data, many aspects of court culture and practice cannot be measured by data sources. Each CASA program's county-specific, case-level view of the child welfare court system can play a powerful role in filling this information gap by highlighting promising practices and identifying opportunities for improvement in how our courts serve Georgia's most vulnerable families.

WORKSHOP BLOCK III: 3:35 – 4:50

Building Resiliency in Ourselves and our Communities

Facilitator: Molly Abrokwah, LMFT, Lead Clinical Trainer, Amerigroup, in partnership with Wellroot

Description: This workshop introduces the six wellness skills of the Community Resiliency Model. These skills highlight how our nervous system responds to stressors and how wellness skills harness that power to build resilience.

Authentic Youth Engagement: Achieving Results for Change

Facilitator: Authentic Youth Engagement Collective, MAAC

Description: Georgia young leaders with lived experience in foster care have advanced many of their goals and achieved many key results since presenting at the Georgia CASA Conference in 2024! Catch up on all the exciting updates so you can inform the youth you serve as well as equip your CASA program network to be in the know! Consider this your annual invitation as a community champion to come strengthen your partnership with change agents across Georgia!

Reunification: The Journey There and Beyond

Facilitators: Colleen Puckett, CEO/Parent Mentor, Families' Anchor, LLC & Yazmine Glynn and Brittany Tucker, parents with lived experience

Description: Hear firsthand from parents who have courageously navigated the child welfare system to achieve reunification with their children. Gain valuable insights into the challenges they faced, the supports they found crucial throughout their journey, and the ongoing needs of post-reunification. This workshop provides a unique opportunity to learn from those who have lived through the process, offering invaluable perspectives for advocates.

Supporting Georgia's Youngest in Foster Care: The Role of CASA Volunteers, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, and the Safe Babies Approach

Facilitators: Gabrielle Howard, Consultant, Georgia THRIVE & Senior Judge Peggy H. Walker, Consultant, Georgia THRIVE

Description: In Georgia, children ages 0–3 represent the fastest-growing group entering foster care—and they come with distinct developmental and mental health needs. This workshop will explore those needs while introducing both the Safe Babies Approach and the Georgia THRIVE Infant-Toddler Court Program. Participants will learn how this approach can be integrated into the work of CASA volunteers to better support young children and their families. Retired Juvenile Court Judge Peggy Walker will share insights on how CASA volunteers, through their unique role in court and partnership with foster families, can be powerful advocates for infant and toddler well-being, helping to lay a strong foundation for lifelong success.

Engaging and Working with Fathers to Support Positive Child and Family Outcomes

Facilitator: Dr. Latrice Rollins, Assistant Professor, Morehouse School of Medicine / Fathers Matter ATL

Description: This interactive workshop will help professionals gain knowledge to facilitate positive father engagement and improve child and family outcomes. Research will be shared demonstrating how fathers play an essential role in the lives of their children and in strengthening families. Father-friendly principles and promising practices that can be adopted or implemented will also be shared. Participants will be provided an opportunity to work together on an action plan to apply their learning to their own individual practice, organization, and policies.