

Bench Survey

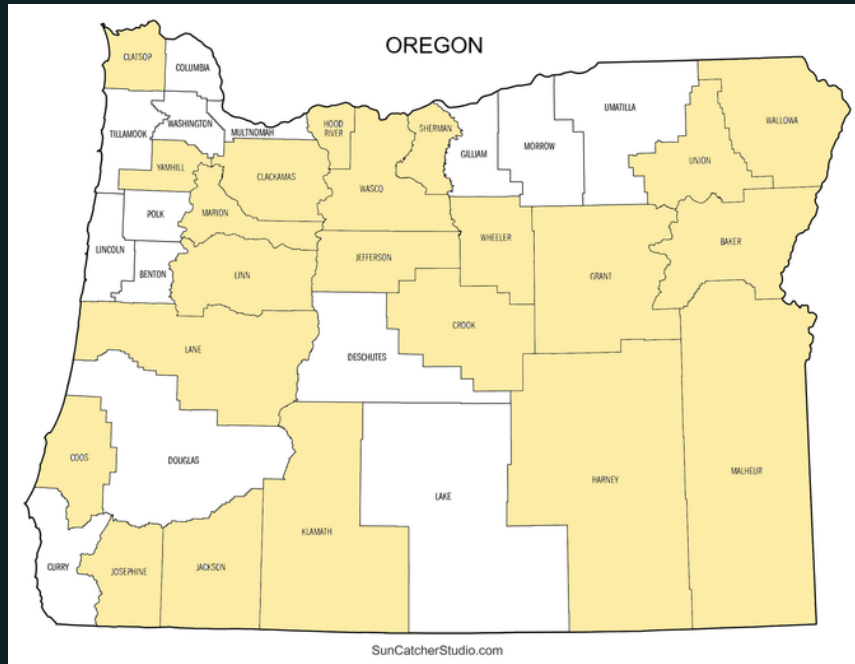
2026

Prepared For

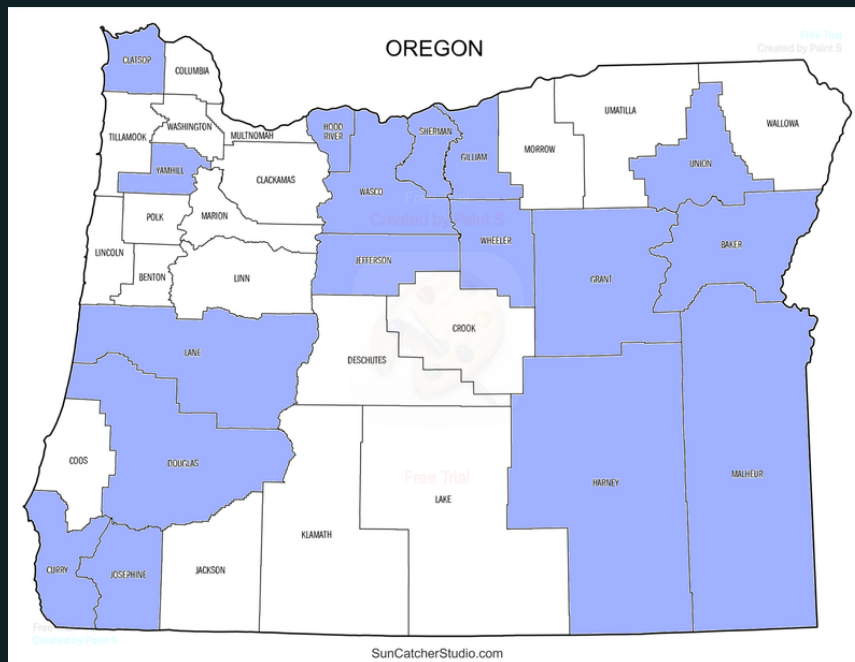
OCN NETWORK &
JUDICIAL PARTNERS



Representation



2024 Bench Survey response representation.



2026 Bench Survey response representation.

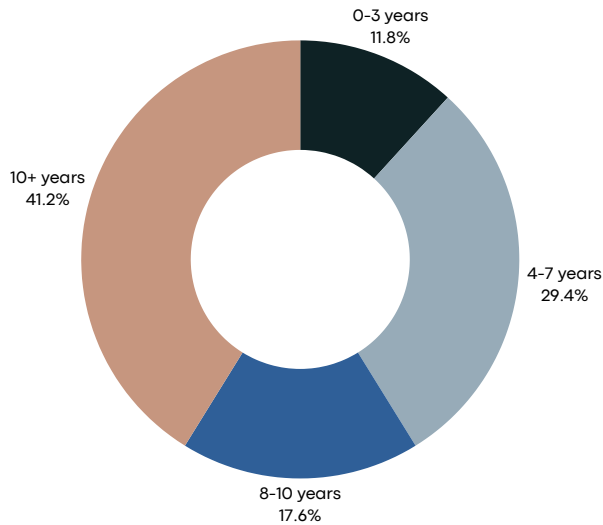
The Bench Survey was developed by the OCN's Data Work Group. The survey was distributed to local CASA Program Executive Directors to relay to their local judges. The EDs were responsible for contacting their respectable judges to complete the survey. The survey remained open from 4/13/2026 to 7/10/2026.

As of 7/10/2026, programs missing submissions had not received any return correspondence from their judges. CASA for Children, Inc. did not distribute this survey to Multnomah, Washington, Columbia, and Tillamook counties as they conduct their own internal Bench Survey. Most of the questions on their survey could not be directly incorporated into this summary but can be consulted as an [addendum](#) to this report.

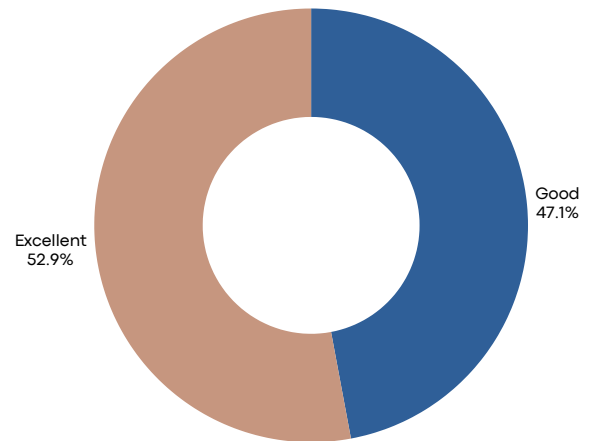
22 counties were represented by submissions in 2024. 2026 representation was reduced to 17 counties. Of the 17 counties, 1 is classified as urban, 1 suburban, 8 are rural, and 7 are frontier/remote.

Generic Information

How long have you been a dependency judge?

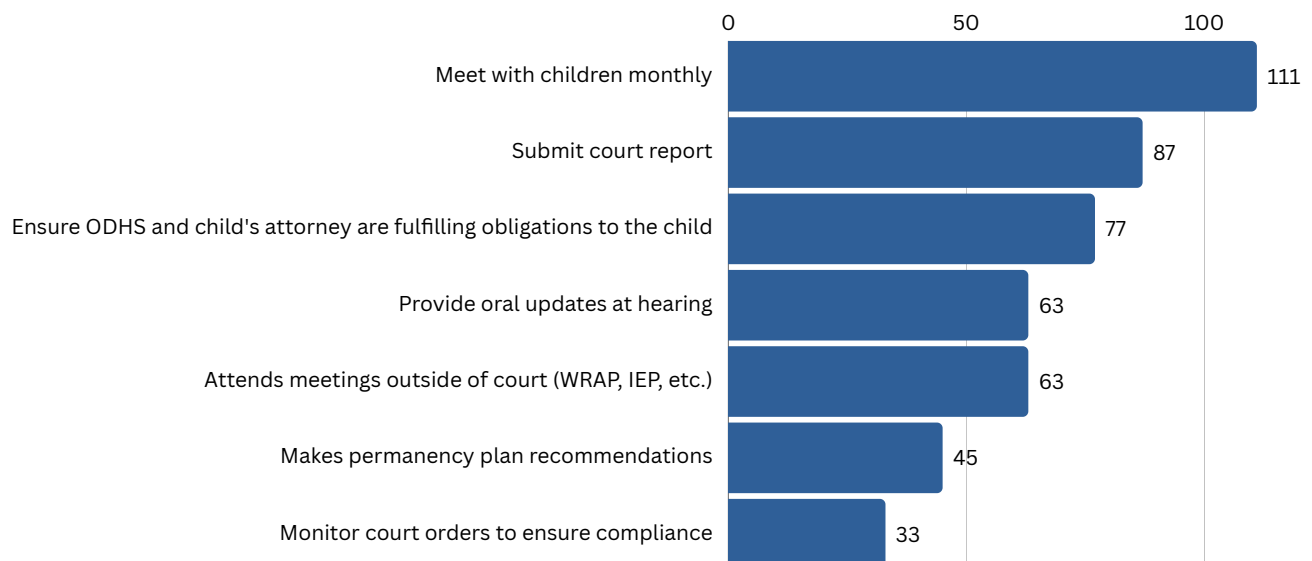


How would you rate your understanding of a CASA Volunteer's role and responsibilities?
(Options: Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent)



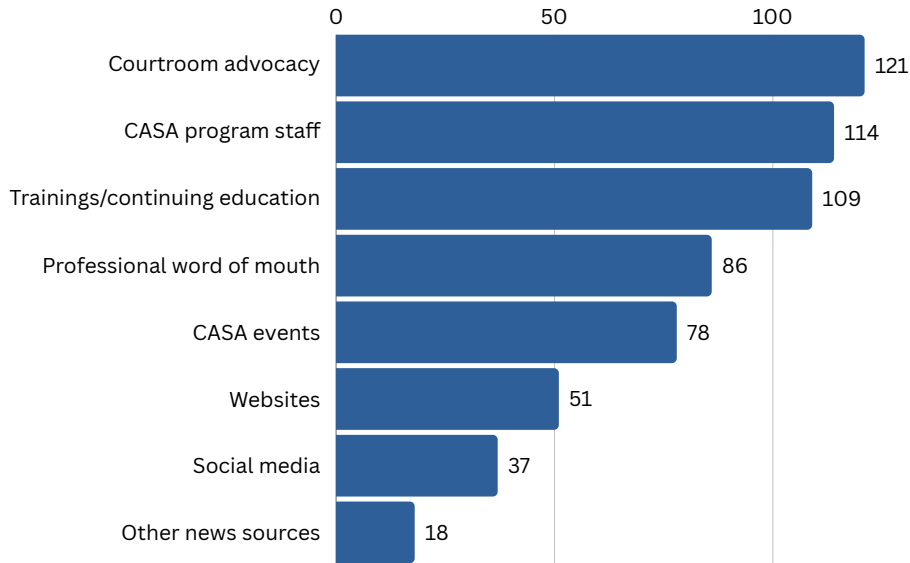
Rank the following CASA responsibilities from most important to least important:

(Weighted Ranks: 1=7 points, 2=6 points, 3=5 points, 4=4 points, 5=3 points, 6=2 points, 7=1 point), sum of all points used to determine summary ranking.



Rank the following sources that have contributed to your understanding of the CASA role from most impactful to least impactful.

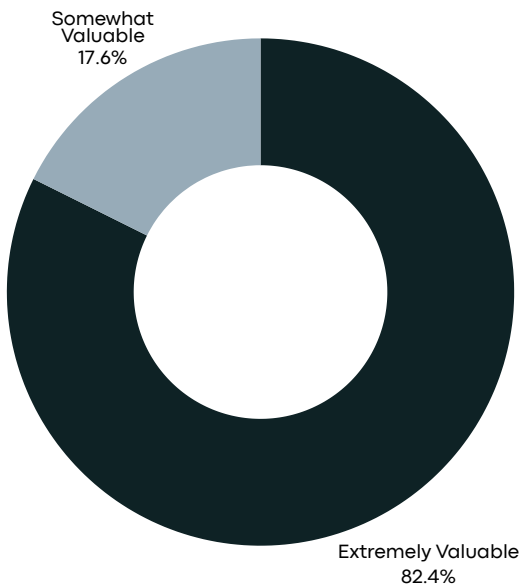
(Weighted Ranks: 1=8 points, 2=7 points, 3=6 points, 4=5 points, 5=4 points, 6=3 points, 7=2 points, 8=1 point), sum of all points used to determine summary ranking.



CASA Advocacy

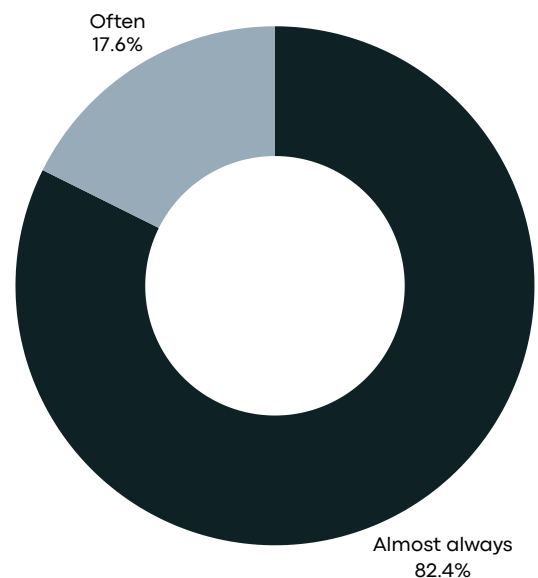
I find information provided by CASAs to be:

(Options: Not valuable, Somewhat valuable, Extremely valuable)



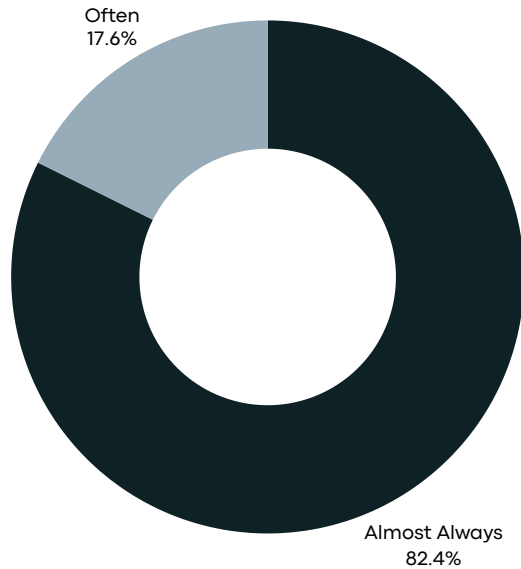
I look to CASA volunteers for recommendations regarding the best interest of the child.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



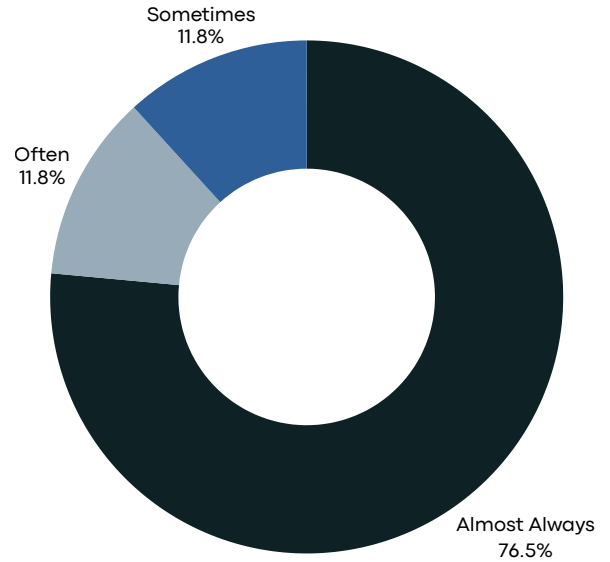
I look to CASA volunteers for current information regarding children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



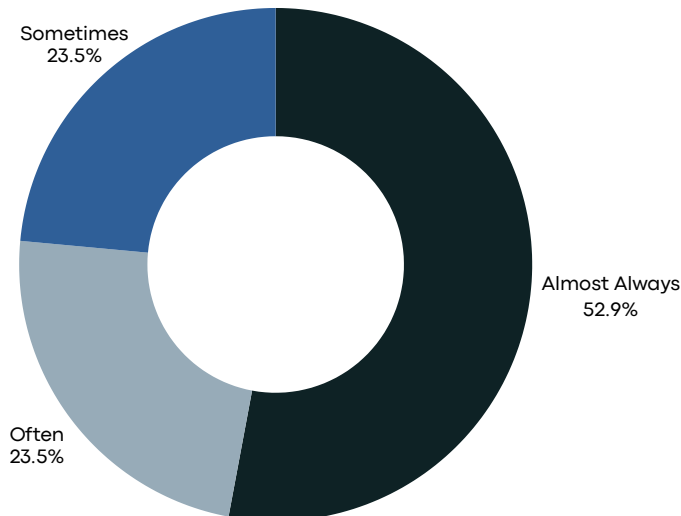
I look to CASA volunteers for services needed or received by children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



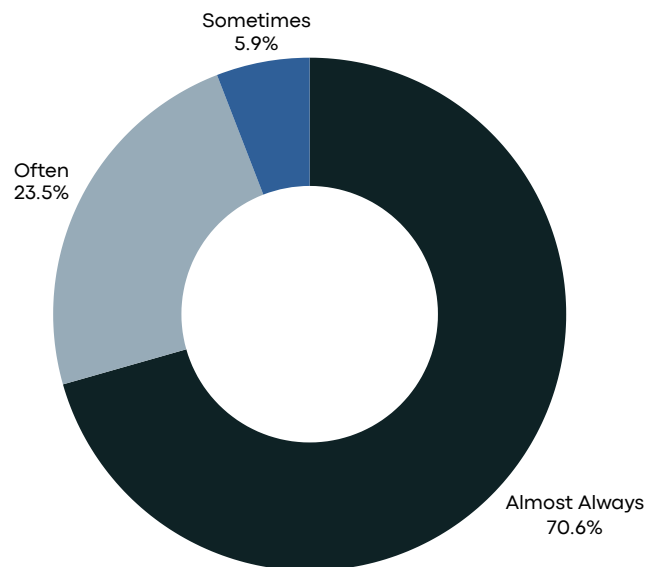
I look to CASAs for the status of sibling and kin relationships of children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



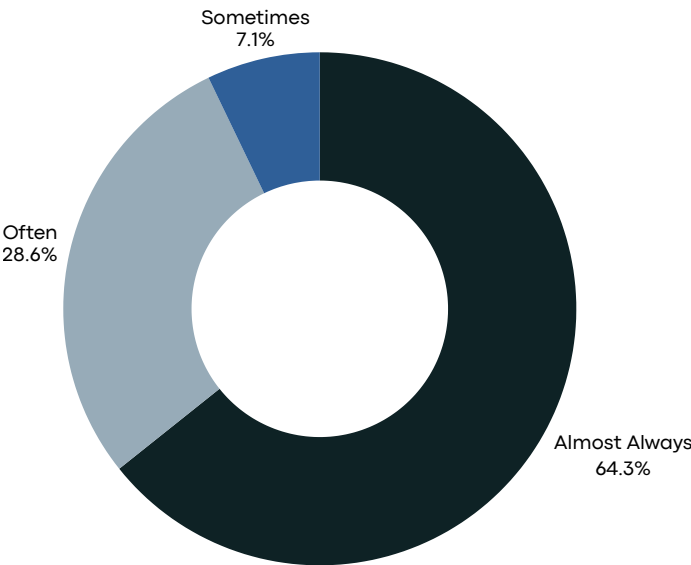
I look to CASAs to understand academic progress and needs of children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



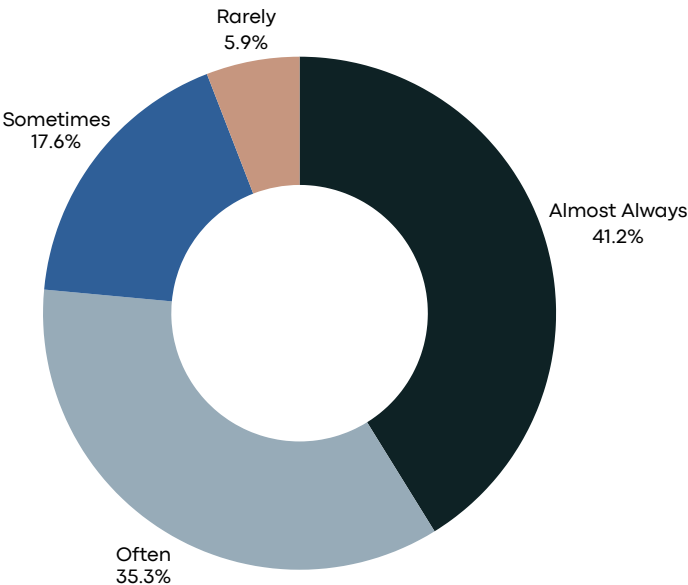
I look to CASAs for medical services needed and received by children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



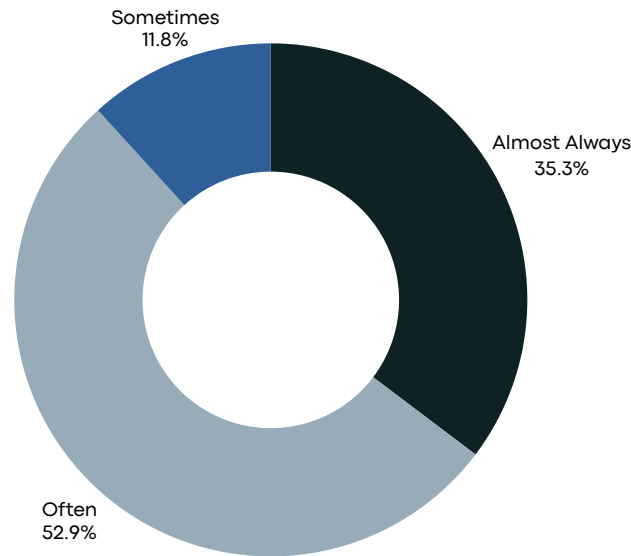
I look to CASAs to understand the child's wishes.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



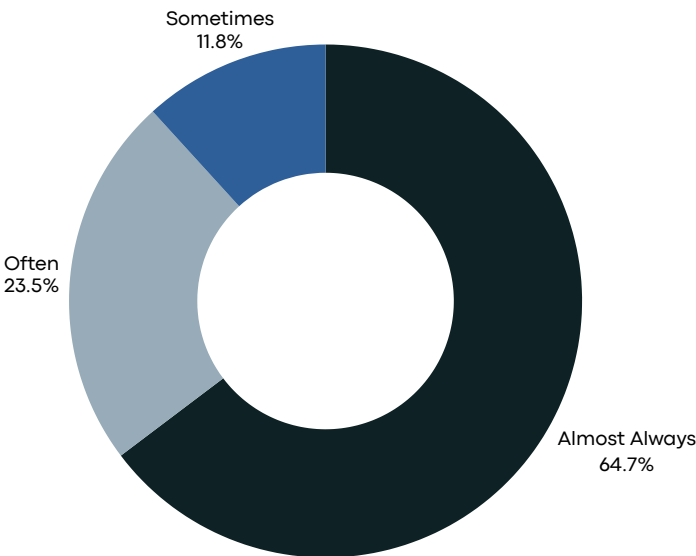
I look to CASAs to understand identity needs and cultural practices of children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



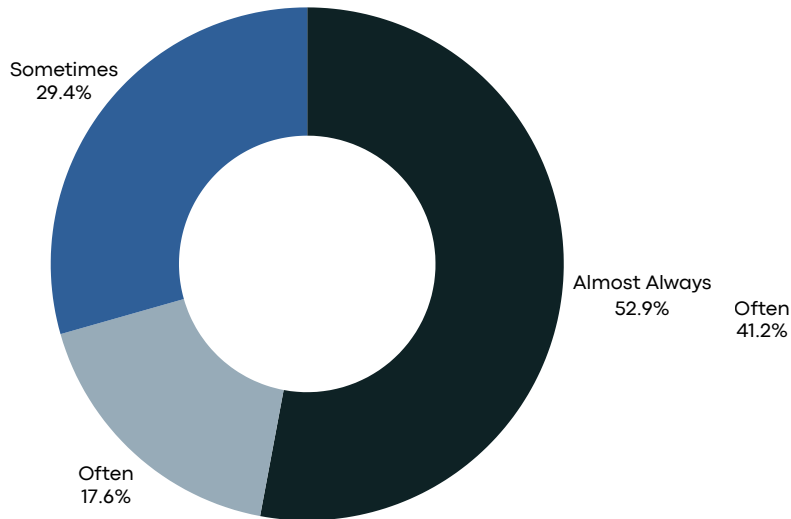
I look to CASAs for placement updates and recommendations of children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



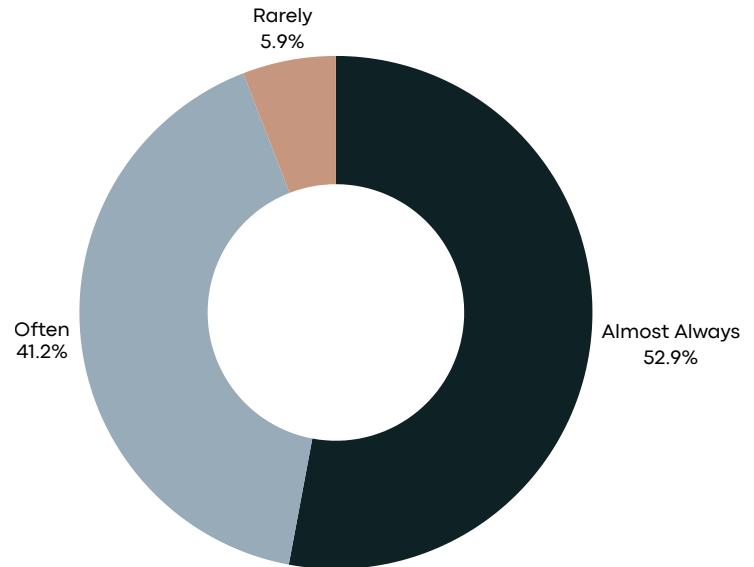
I look to CASAs for recommendations about permanency goals.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



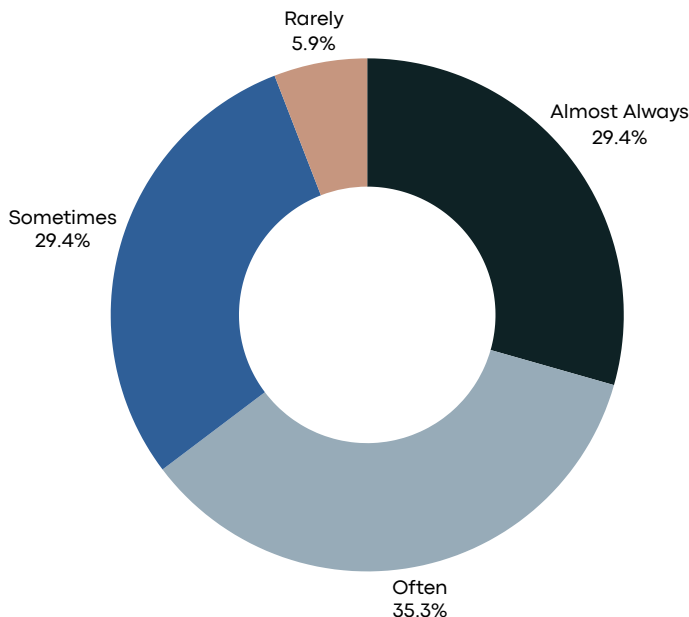
I look to CASAs for information about parent visitations and contact of children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



I look to CASAs for updates regarding active/reasonable efforts.

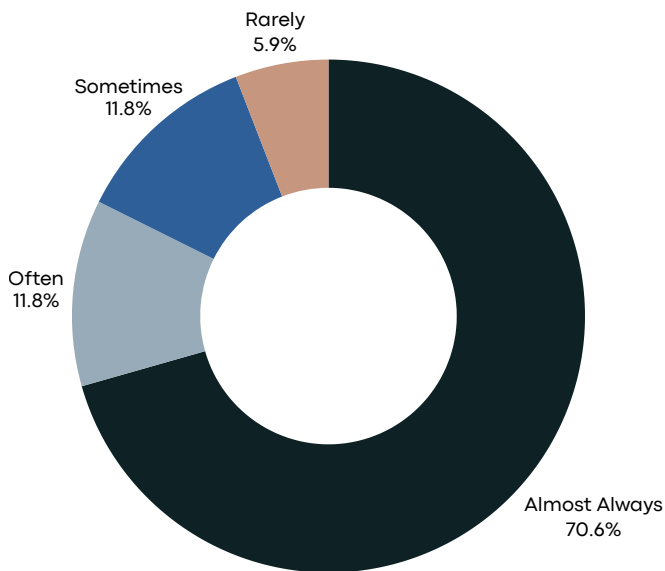
(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



Communications

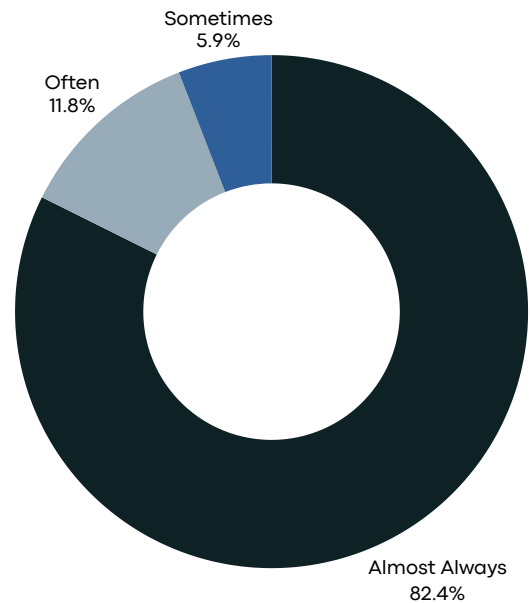
CASAs bring important information to my attention.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



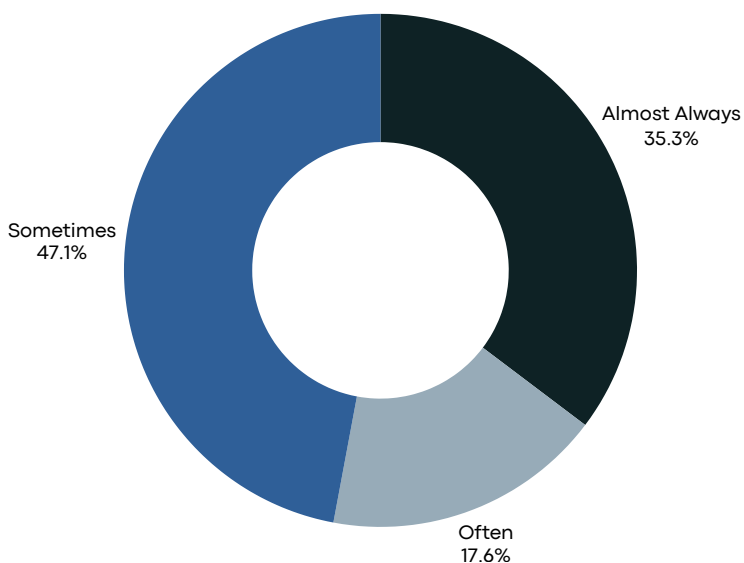
CASAs work with integrity, respect, and collaboration amongst all parties on a case.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



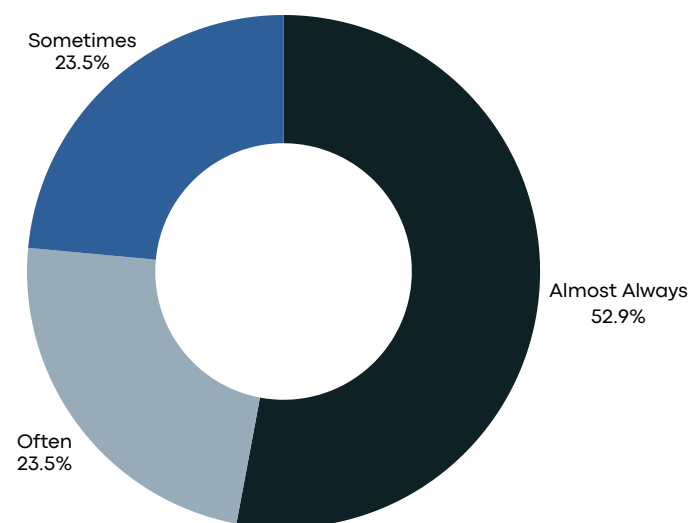
CASAs have strong and confident voices in the courtroom.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



Court reports from CASAs are thorough, detail-oriented, and fact-based.

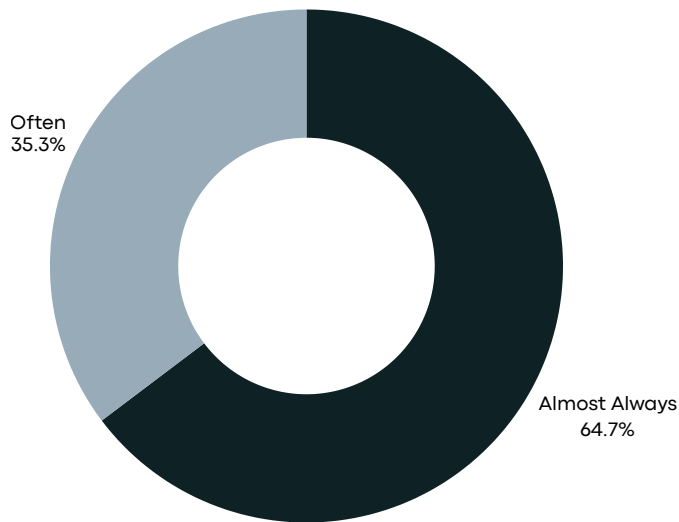
(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



Community Responsiveness

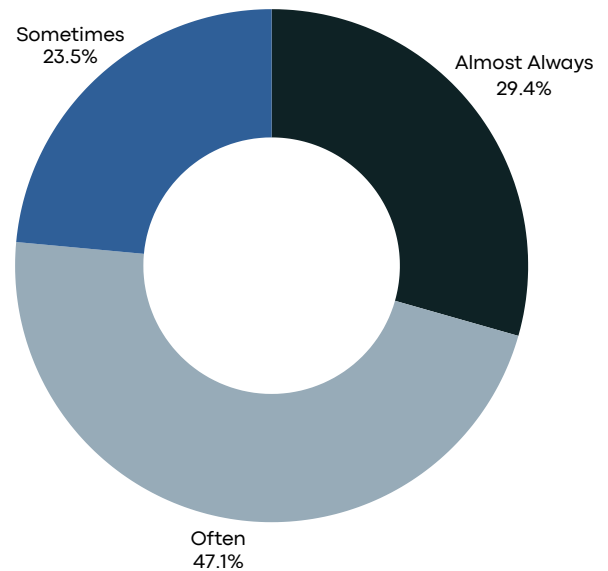
CASA advocacy is culturally-responsive and unbiased.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



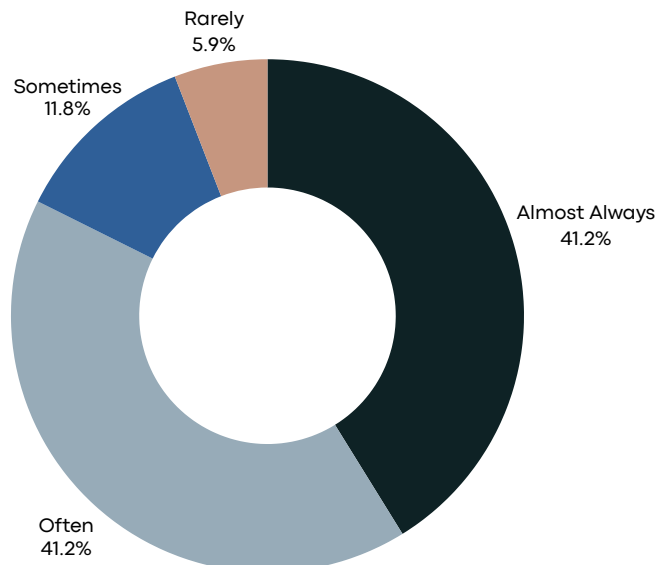
CASA advocacy highlights identity needs and cultural practices in recommendations, hearings, and reviews.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



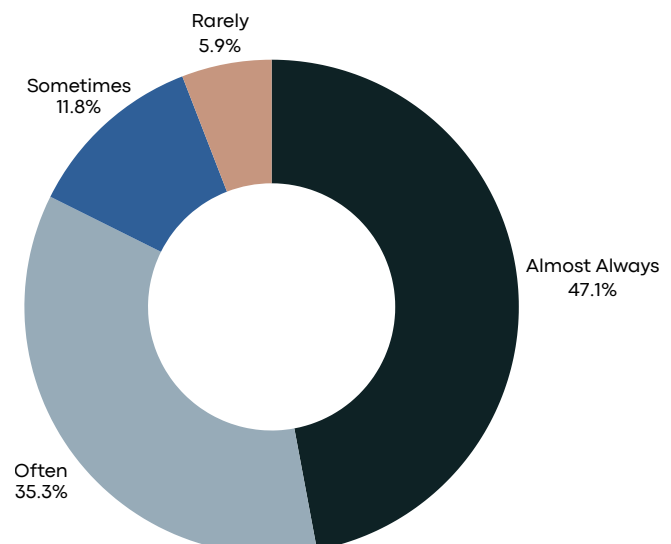
CASAs demonstrate understanding of minimally-sufficient level of care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



CASAs consider lived experiences of children and parents in recommendations (e.g. mental health, addictions, domestic violence, disabilities, neurodivergence, poverty, medical needs, etc.)

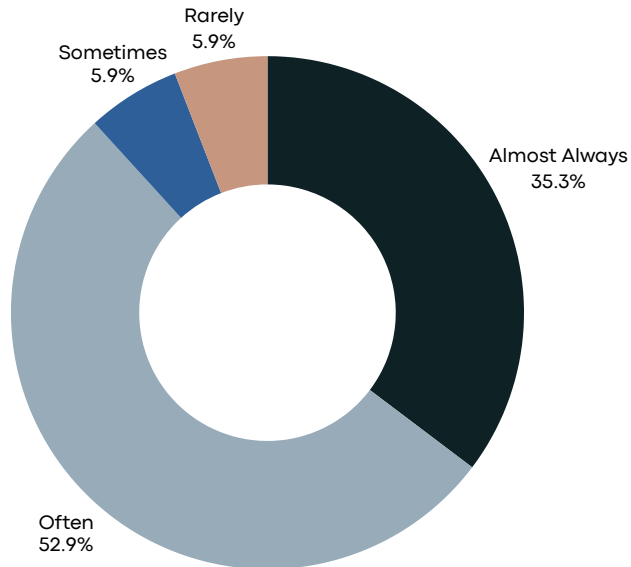
(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



Sound Judgment

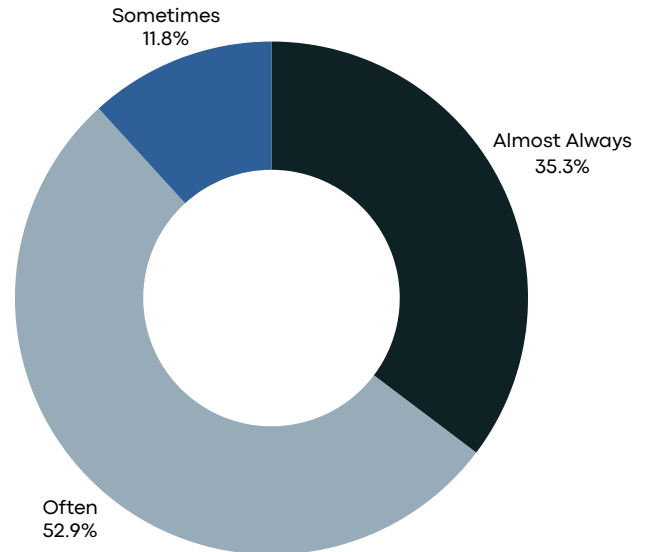
CASAs are collaborative when case changes and challenges arise.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



CASAs are thorough with referencing available information from multiple sources in their recommendations.

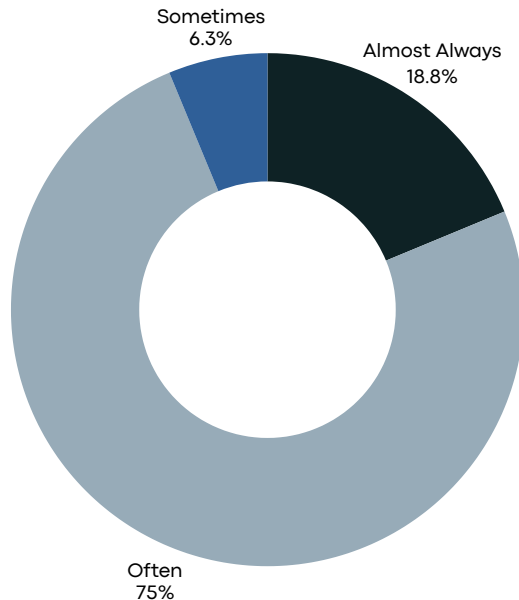
(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



Initiative & Impact

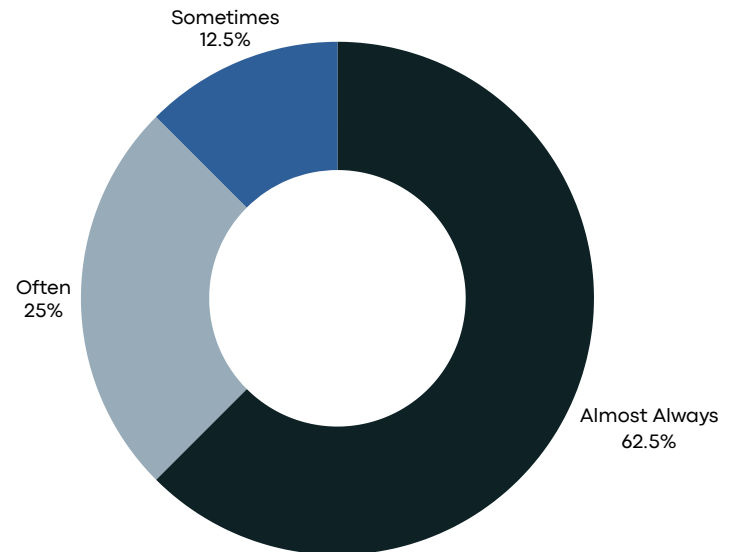
How often do you agree with CASA recommendations for permanency plan orders.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



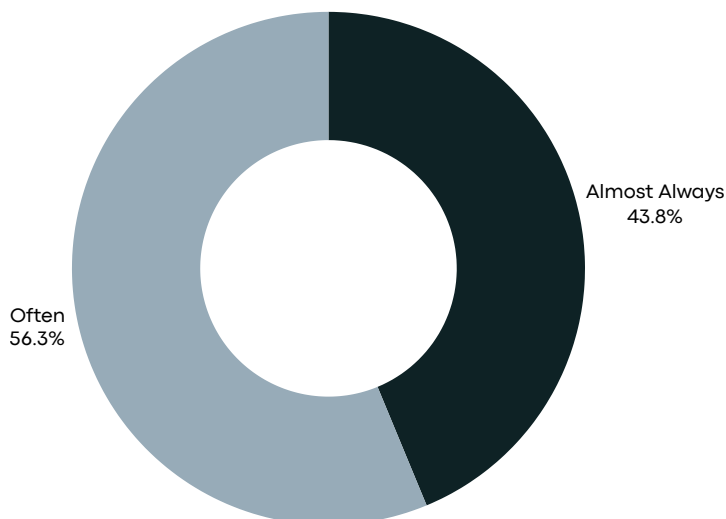
CASAs provide regular and consistent face-to-face time with children experiencing substitute care, as evidenced by information brought forward in court reports and hearings.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



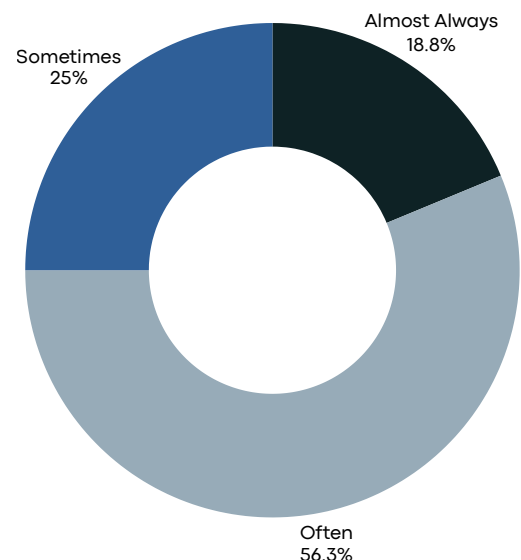
CASAs influence decisions that support the child's best interest.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



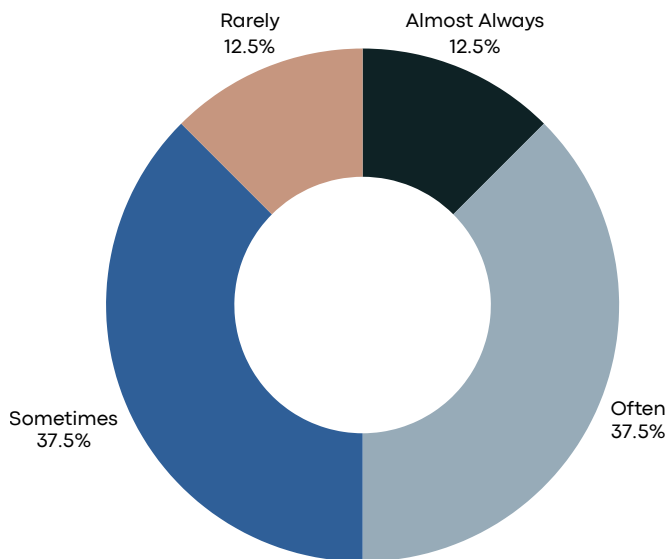
CASA advocacy leads to more placement stability.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



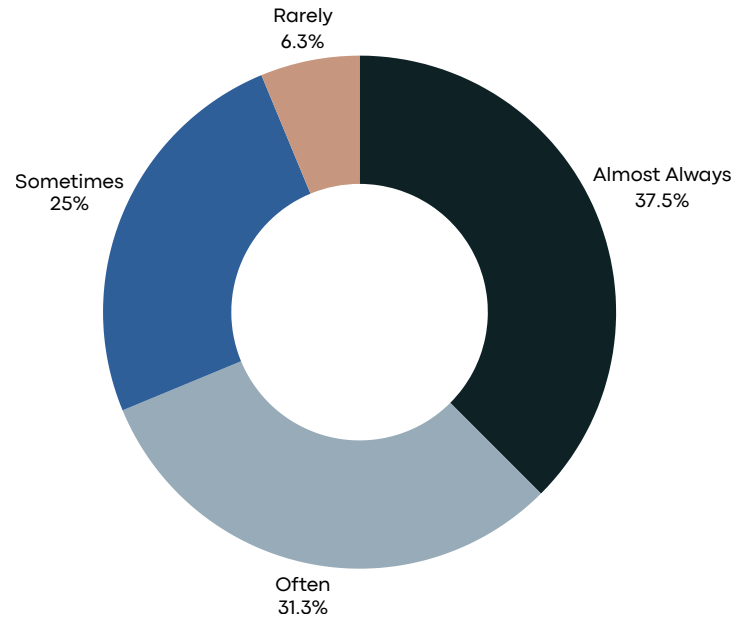
CASAs work to identify kin for relational support and possible placements for children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



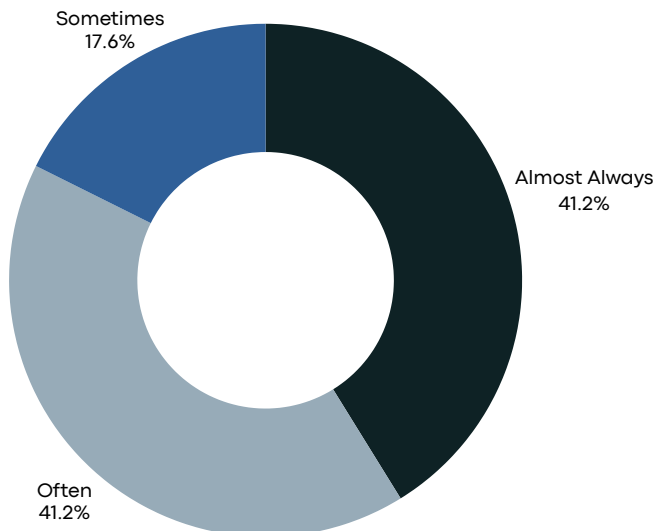
CASAs influence positive family connections for children experiencing substitute care.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



CASAs influence improving services received by children experiencing substitute care.

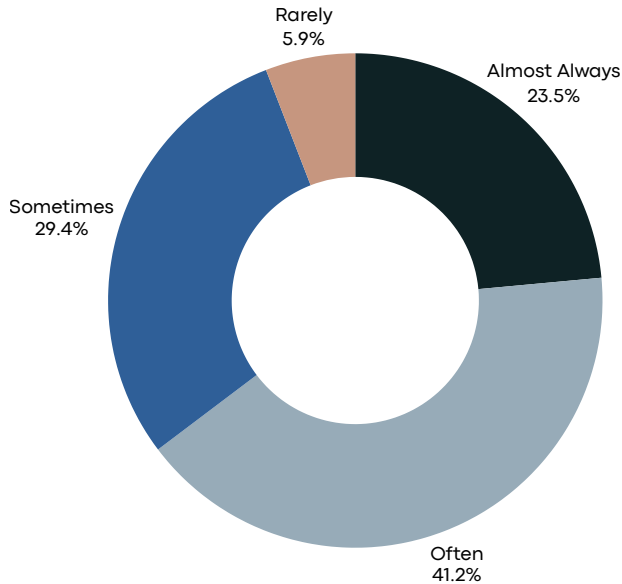
(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



Foundations of Knowledge

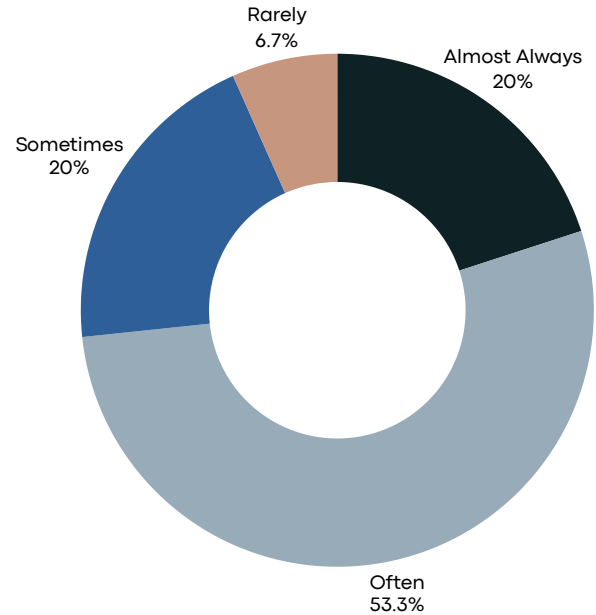
CASA advocacy is based on child/family strengths, not weaknesses.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



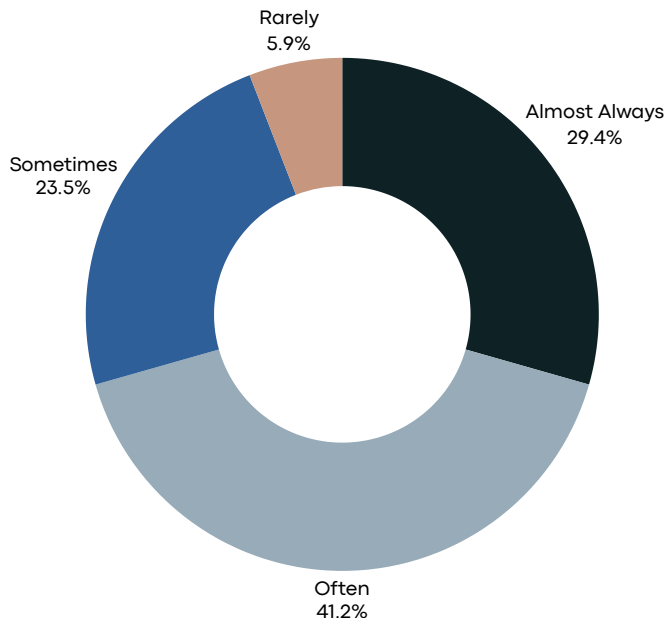
CASAs demonstrate understanding of all permanency options.

(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



CASAs demonstrate understanding of concurrent planning.

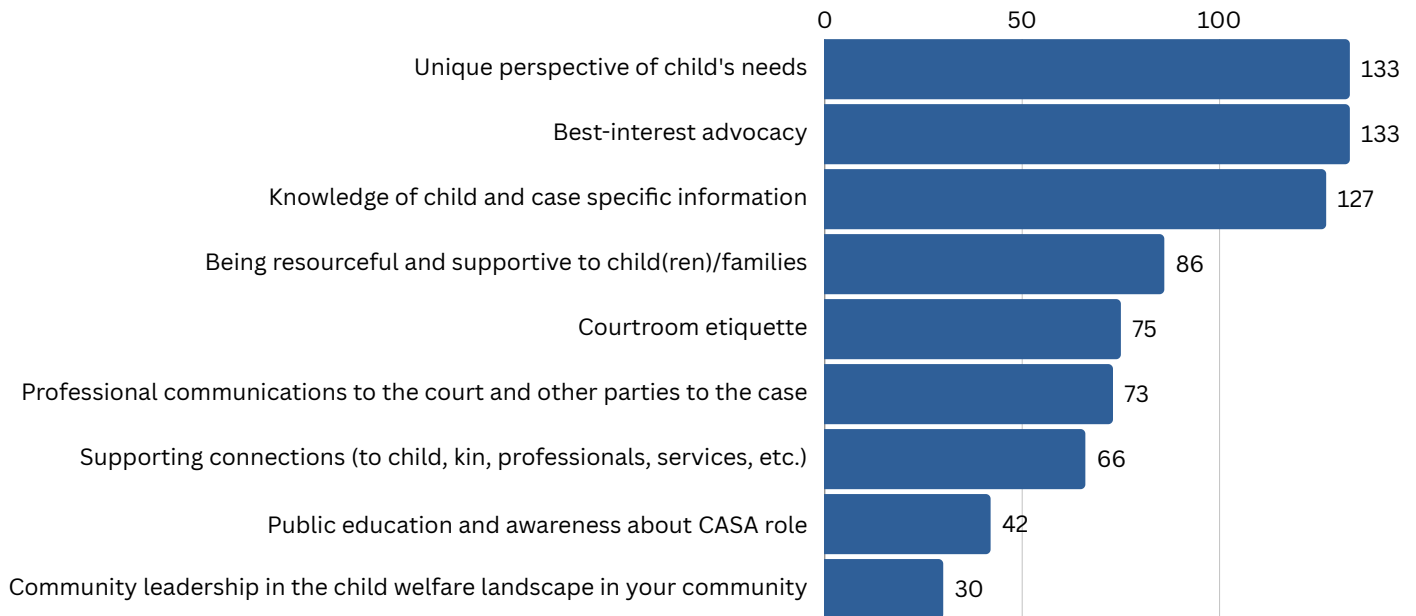
(Options: Almost always (76-100% of the time), Often (50-75% of the time), Sometimes (26%-49% of the time), Rarely 1-25% of the time), Never (0% of the time)



Quality Improvement

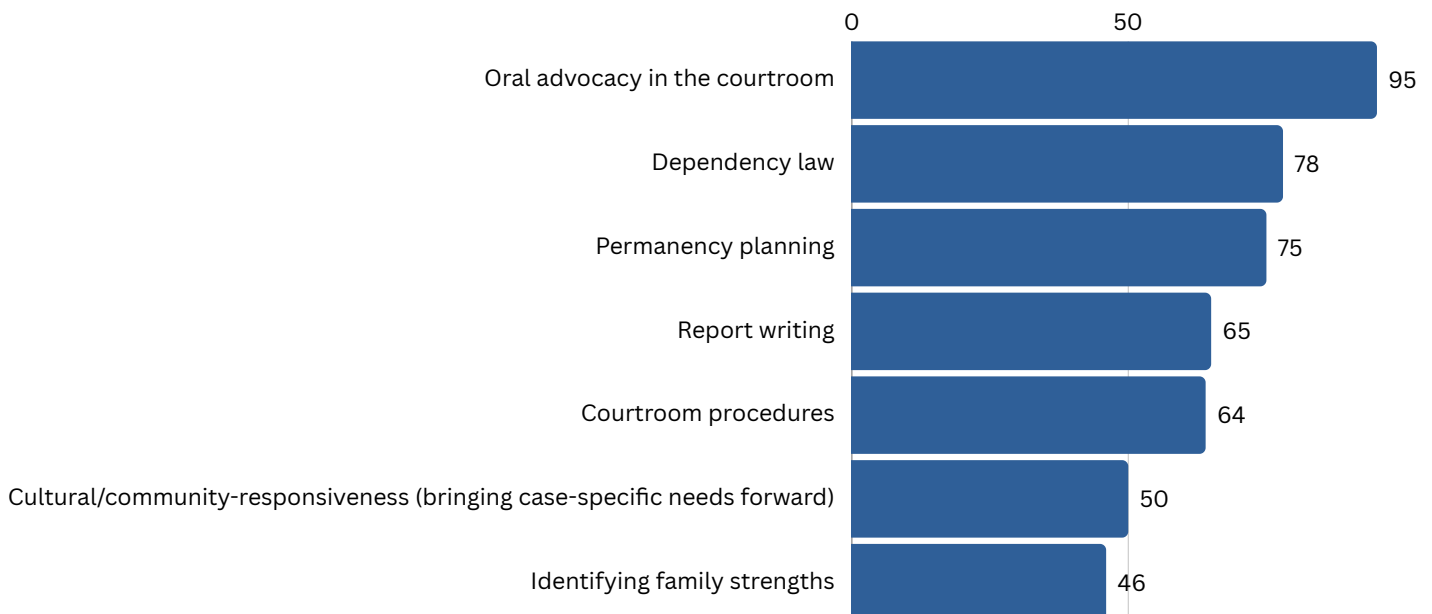
From you experience, what are your local CASA programs top FOUR strengths?

Weighted ranks: 1=9 points, 2=8 points, 3=7 points, 4=6 points, 5=5 points, 6=4 points, 7=3 points, 8=2 points, 9=1 point, sum of all points used to determine final ranking.



In what areas would you recommend additional training for CASAs.

Weighted ranks: 1=7points, 2=6 points, 3=5points, 4=4 points, 5=3points, 6=2 points, 7=1 points, sum of all points used to determine final ranking.



Executive Summary

Judges in Oregon, especially in remote/frontier and rural communities, find CASA advocacy to be valuable (82.4% extremely valuable, 17.6% somewhat valuable). They also find CASA's top strength to be bringing a unique perspective of the child's needs to the case. This strength is tied with CASAs providing advocacy that is focused on the best-interest of the child. All judges that responded to this survey look to CASAs for best-interest recommendations as well as current information regarding children experiencing substitute care (82.4% almost always, 17.6% often) look to CASAs for best-interest recommendations and current information about a child). Judges also experience CASAs working with integrity, respect, and collaboration with all parties on a case (82.4% almost always, 17.6% often) experience this.

Areas of improvement that were identified include statements identified in this section. The perspectives about the remaining statements regarding CASA advocacy, while still inherently positive (almost always and often), demonstrated more variation. If 'almost always' and 'often' made up less than 80% of the total responses, they were considered inconsistent. The ones that stood out to be experienced with the least consistency include: looking to CASAs for information regarding active/reasonable efforts (29.4% almost always, 35.3% often, 29.4% sometimes, 5.9% rarely), CASAs having strong and confident voices in the courtroom (35.3% almost always, 17.6% often, 47.1% sometimes), CASAs highlight identity and cultural needs of children and families (29.4% almost always, 47.1% often, 23.5% sometimes), CASAs demonstrate understanding of minimum sufficiency level (41.2% almost always, 41.2% often, 11.8% sometimes, 5.9% rarely), CASAs influence placement stability (18.8% almost always, 56.3% often, 25% sometimes), CASAs work to identify kin for relational supports and placement options (12.5% almost always, 37.5% often, 37.5% sometimes, 12.5% rarely), CASAs influence positive family connections (37.5% almost always, 31.3% often, 25% sometimes, 6.3% rarely), CASA advocacy is based on child/family strengths, not weaknesses (23.5% almost always, 41.2% often, 29.4% sometimes, 5.9% rarely), CASAs demonstrate understanding of all permanency options (20% almost always, 53.3% often, 20% sometimes, 6.7% rarely), CASAs demonstrate understanding of concurrent planning (29.4% almost always, 41.2% often, 23.5% sometimes, 5.9% rarely).

Overall, judges' perspectives from this survey deem CASA a valuable asset especially in communities that may otherwise experience less access to services and resources for children and families experiencing substitute care. The top strengths CASA programs and advocates bring forward are the unique perspective of a child's needs, best-interest advocacy, knowledge of the child and case-specific information, and being resourceful to children and families. Areas of improvement that was identified includes oral advocacy (strengthening voices in the courtroom), understanding dependency law, and permanency planning.

Considerations & Future Work

One of the longstanding needs that continues to impact CASA work is getting more volunteers. Many judges provided written statements that praised programs for their work but indicated they have cases that need CASAs and programs are required to work with a waitlist that prohibits cases getting assigned a CASA early in a case (or at all). In some cases where CASA programs are assigned a case but a CASA is unavailable, that program will use staff to monitor case needs and development until a CASA can be assigned. This can impact the degree and efficiency of advocacy a judge experiences from case to case. Something our local CASA programs have done to alleviate this dilemma is utilizing a case prioritization policy or procedure to ensure that cases with higher needs or severity get assigned a CASA first. If you're curious about how this works in your area, reach out to your local CASA program for more information or to provide feedback and suggestions for this process. Additionally, CASA programs spend a lot of their time fundraising and grant writing just to maintain staff that support their current service level. Unfortunately, state funding on average makes up only 25% of a CASA program's budget. Getting involved in local events and legislative advocacy is another way to support the recruitment need in your area.

Some variation can be influenced by what contributions typically come from other parties on the case. Things like parent visitations might be more likely sought from ODHS, a child's wishes may be sought from the child's attorney, while CASA should always have something to contribute to these areas of information, they're likely not the only ones influencing it. Another contributing factor to variation seen in this survey can be due to different scopes of work that occur across jurisdictions. More simply stated, every court has different ways of handling dependency proceedings and the judges influence what is required in the court report from a CASA. For one example, a judge may require identity and cultural considerations in their court report where another judge does not. If a judge wants to see more information regarding a child's needs (services, medical, academic progress, etc.) the best way is to work with the local CASA program to update the court report so it is ensured that information is always included for review. All CASA programs should have current MOUs with the court. If a program's MOU is up for review and reinstatement, this is also another good opportunity to develop goals and expectations.

Over the last two years, the Oregon CASA Network (OCN) has been working to address some of the training needs identified in this survey. The OCN Staff attorney has worked with programs on individual cases that require additional support related to permanency and dependency laws, as well as helping mitigate conflicts that may arise during a case. The Staff Attorney has initiated a learning series for CASAs to learn more about current case laws, permanency plans, and dependency processes. It's important for partners and supporters of CASA to understand that each CASA volunteer already undergoes 35-40 hours of pre-service training before ever taking a case. They are then required to fulfill 12 hours of continuing education annually on top of the 8-12 hours they commit to their cases each month. The local CASA programs and OCN work together to address trends in training and service needs but are always limited by capacity (and sometimes the trends addressed might not apply to another community). One of the best ways to support your program's training needs is to directly communicate with them what you believe CASAs in your community need to learn about. CASA programs in Oregon have seen greater success and confidence in the courtroom when their judge is directly involved in training opportunities.

THANK YOU

To all of the judges that took time to submit a response to this survey.
We deeply value your thoughts and feedback if you have additional
questions or thoughts regarding the findings in this summary please
feel free to reach out to us!

Sincerely,

The OCN

State Director, Stephanie Brown

sbrown@oregoncasanetwork.org

Staff Attorney, Chris Hinkel

chinkel@oregoncasanetwork.org

Project Manager, Aubrey Henshaw

ahenshaw@oregoncasanetwork.org