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# A case study: Examining the perceptions of national court appointed special advocate association volunteers on the current child welfare system in Illinois

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [Family and Consumer Sciences](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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A CASE STUDY: EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS  
OF NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE  
ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEERS ON THE CURRENT  
CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IN ILLINOIS

MACIEJEWSKI

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A CASE STUDY: EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL  
COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEERS  
ON THE CURRENT CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IN ILLINOIS  
(TITLE)

BY

ANNE MACIEJEWSKI

**THESIS**

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CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2003

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family and David Lindstrom because without their encouragement and support I would not be where I am today.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the children who are victims of abuse and neglect. It was their stories that inspired me to conduct this research.

### Acknowledgements

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### Abstract

The number of child abuse and neglect victims continues to remain high in the United States. It is important to examine the adequacy of child welfare agencies that encounter child abuse and neglect. The purpose of this study is to explore National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA) volunteers' perceptions related to the child welfare system in the state of Illinois. A survey was distributed to CASA volunteers in two counties in Illinois to gain insight on their perceptions of the current Illinois child welfare system. Twenty CASA volunteers served as participants in this study. The participants are divided in their responses of agree and disagree for the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children. The majority of the participants agree that some instances of child abuse are inadequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. The participants identify major challenges that occur in the Illinois child welfare system and possible solutions to these challenges. The majority of the participants believe that the Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs and provides adequate services to children and their families. Further research must be conducted to determine the adequacy of the Illinois child welfare system.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2003) there were approximately 903,000 children who were victims of child maltreatment in the United States in 2001. Child maltreatment includes neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological/emotional abuse. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicated that 59.2% of these children were neglected, 18.6% were physically abused, 9.6% were sexually abused, 6.8% were psychologically abused, and 19.5% endured other types of maltreatment. The number of children who have been victims of abuse and neglect continues to increase. According to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), there were 59,294 alleged victims of child abuse and neglect in 1982. DCFS also reported that there were 25,676 indicated victims of abuse and neglect in 1982. Twenty years later, in 2002, the number of alleged victims of abuse and neglect rose to 98,304 (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003). The number of indicated victims of abuse and neglect, however, remained relatively stable over the 20-year time period. DCFS reported that the number of indicated victims of child abuse and neglect in 2002 was 27,311. Furthermore, DCFS documented 13,847 children residing in substitute care (i.e., foster care and kinship care) in Illinois in 1985. As of 2001, 27,009 children were residing in substitute care.

Research has indicated a strong need for reform within the current child welfare system (Waldfoegel, 2000). This may be attributed to the challenges that occur within the child welfare system. Caseworkers may be prone to making placement errors. Children are sometimes unnecessarily taken out of their homes by child welfare agencies.

However, some children may not be removed from their homes when substitute care is warranted. Children and their families may not receive services to adequately meet their needs from child welfare agencies. Also, external factors (e.g., substance abuse and financial problems) may not always be addressed adequately by child welfare agencies.

The article, *Panel rips care to kids* (1991) indicated a need for reform in the Illinois child welfare system. This research also cited challenges within the Illinois child welfare system. One challenge reported was caseworkers' overload of cases, potentially leading to child placement errors. The research also reported that children were sometimes returned to abusive or neglectful situations.

#### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The following two sections will focus on the purpose and need for the study and the limitations of the study.

##### *Purpose and Need for the Study*

The purpose of this study was to explore National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA) volunteers' perceptions related to the child welfare system in the state of Illinois. The study also explored factors that may be associated with challenges related to the system.

Research has indicated an array of concerns regarding child protective services (Stone, 1970, Cox & Cox, 1985, Besharov 1998, Waldfogel, 2000). Although research addresses concerns of child protective services, limited literature is available on the Illinois child welfare system. Due to the increase of alleged child abuse and neglect in Illinois, it is important to examine and evaluate the state's child welfare system. Benefits of this study include but are not limited to: increased knowledge of the Illinois child

welfare system; increased awareness of challenges existing in the Illinois child welfare system; and possible reform ideas in response to these challenges.

### *Research Questions*

The following research questions were addressed:

1. Are child protective services provided by the Illinois child welfare system adequate?
2. Are all instances of child abuse and neglect adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system?
3. Does the Illinois child welfare system adequately address the needs of children and their families?
4. Are the child protective services in Illinois in need of reform?
5. What factors are associated with challenges that exist within the Illinois child welfare system?

### *Objectives*

The following objectives guided this study:

1. To identify perceived challenges within the Illinois child welfare system.
2. To identify factors contributing to challenges within the Illinois child welfare system.
3. To explore perceptions of social service volunteers related to the Illinois child welfare system.
4. To examine accountability for problems that may occur in the Illinois child welfare system.

5. To explore possible solutions for challenges existing in the Illinois child welfare system.

### *Limitations*

A limitation of this study was the sample size. A larger sample size may have yielded generalizable findings to the greater population. A smaller sample size may not accurately represent the entire Illinois child welfare system. Another limitation may have been geographical location. The CASA agencies that were examined in this study may not encounter the same challenges of other Illinois agencies. Time constraints may have been another limitation. If the research could be conducted over a longer period of time, findings would have provided longitudinal perspective. Instrumentation and survey distribution may have been limitations in this study.

### *Definition of Terms*

For the purpose of this study, the following terms have been defined:

1. Caseworker- a trained professional assigned to provide various services to families in need (Lindsey, 1994).
2. Child Abuse- inflicting any type of harm on a child, whether it is physical, sexual, or emotional (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).
3. Child Neglect- failing to meet the basic physical, educational and/or emotional needs of a child adequately (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).
4. Child Protective Services (CPS)- "a highly specialized set of laws, funding mechanisms, and agencies that together constitute the government's response to child abuse and neglect" (Waldfoegel, 1998, p. 5).

5. Educational Neglect- withholding education from children. Examples include: condoning truancy or not enrolling children in school (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).
6. Emotional Abuse- inflicting psychological or verbal harm on a child. Examples include: manipulating a child or verbally attacking a child (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).
7. Emotional Neglect- not meeting the socio-emotional developmental needs of a child. Examples include: condoning drug use by a child or abusing a significant other in the presence of a child (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).
8. Foster Care- the temporary placement of children outside of their home, occurring because of abuse, neglect, or other family problems (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003).
9. Foster Children- children removed from their homes and placed in substitute care because of abuse or neglect (Cox & Cox, 1985).
10. Foster Parents- adults who express the willingness to protect, nourish, nurture, educate, console, and care for children who have been abused, neglected, or encountered other family problems (Silver, 1999).
11. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)- A state agency designed to protect and ensure the well being of children (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003).
12. National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA)- An organization that recruits and trains volunteers to advocate for abused and

neglected children (National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association, 2003).

13. Physical Neglect- not providing the basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing to a child (Oates, 1996).

14. Reform- "to change into an improved form or condition; to amend or improve by change of form or removal of faults or abuses" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2003, p. 1).

15. Ward of State- A child whose legal guardian is the state. Guardianship may occur because the parents' rights have been legally terminated due to child abuse, neglect, or other circumstances. It may also occur when parents legally surrender their children over to the state (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003).



## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

When considering challenges facing child welfare agencies, a number of issues should be addressed. Lack of federal and state funding, overworked and under-trained caseworkers, and unclear guidelines implemented by child protective services are among some factors that may contribute to these challenges. The sections in this review are as follows: (a) defining child abuse and neglect; (b) a history of child welfare services; (c) an overview of DCFS; (d) the history of CASA; (e) deficiencies in child welfare services-1960's and 1970's research; (f) deficiencies in child welfare services-1980's and early 1990's research; and (g) deficiencies in child welfare services-late 1990's and current research.

### Defining Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse and neglect are problems encountered by numerous children and their families in the United States. Child abuse is defined as inflicting any type of harm on a child, whether it is physical, sexual or emotional (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Oates (1996) reported that it is not uncommon for a child to experience more than one type of abuse.

Physical abuse is defined as non-accidental physical injury inflicted on a child by an adult (Crosson-Tower, 2002). Physical symptoms that may indicate this type of abuse are: bruises, fractures, head and internal injuries, and burns. Following neglect, physical abuse is the second most common form of child abuse.

Another form of child abuse is sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is defined as "the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual

activities which they do not fully comprehend, are unable to give informed consent to, and that violate social taboos of family roles" (Oates, 1996, p. 10). A family member or someone outside the family can perpetrate sexual abuse. Incest refers to sexual abuse by a relative (e.g., parent, step-parent, sibling, or grandparent). Crosson-Tower (2002) reported that sexual abuse could be divided into three categories. The first is sexual molestation. This includes "petting, fondling, voyeurism, and all which results in the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator" (p. 125). Sexual assault is the second category. This consists of genital contact (manual or oral) of the perpetrator or the child. Forcible rape is the last category. This includes forcing sexual intercourse by using violence, threats and fear. Sexual abuse by a perpetrator or by a non-family member is known as pedophilia. This is defined as sexual relations occurring between an adult and a child. It also may result in the categories of sexual molestation and/or sexual assault.

Emotional abuse is defined by Crosson-Tower (2002) as a "repetitive, inappropriate emotional response to the child's expression of emotion and its accompanying expressive behavior" (p. 211). Examples of emotional abuse include verbally attacking or manipulating a child.

Neglect is another form of child maltreatment. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002), neglect is failing to meet the basic needs of a child. Basic needs include food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, education, and emotional support (Oates, 1996). There are various forms of neglect including, educational neglect, emotional neglect, and physical neglect. Educational neglect refers to not providing adequate educational opportunities to a child (i.e., allowing truancy or not enrolling her/him in school). Emotional neglect is not providing emotional support

and security to a child. This may include ignoring the child or not providing positive reinforcement to a child. Physical neglect refers to a lack of providing the basic essentials such as, food, clothing, and shelter to a child.

### A History of Child Welfare Services

Throughout American history, there have been instances of children placed in homes other than their own for various reasons. Examples of children in substitute care can be dated back to Colonial times. During this time, diseases and other complications contributed to an average life expectancy of 35 (Cox & Cox, 1985). The short life expectancy caused many children to be left without parents. To address this issue, laws were enacted to protect children without parents. Communities were held accountable for the poor, including children (Schene, 1998). The laws implemented in Colonial times required the community as a whole to be responsible for children in need of assistance. Schene (1998) referenced a law entitled *Parens Patriae*, which gave the government or ruler power to intervene in families. The government could step in and assess the parent-child relationship and determine whether the child could remain with her/his natural parent or be removed and placed in substitute care (Schene, 1998). Substitute care at this time resulted in indenture or vendue of these children (Cox & Cox, 1985). Indenture refers to selling a needy child to a family where the child is expected to learn a trade and work for that family (Cox & Cox). Government officials who were in charge of "poor relief" indentured impoverished children (Hasci, 1995). Although the government indentured many children, parents also indentured their children without government consent. Formal, as well as informal contracts, were established in regard to indenturing children. Some contracts indicated that children were to be provided with food, clothing,

shelter, and taught skills. The relationship between indentured children and their guardians was predominantly economical, rather than emotional. Indentured children were not limited to the poor. It was not uncommon at this time for children whose families were not poor to be indentured as well.

Apprenticeships were another form of substitute care for children during Colonial times. This was not limited to dependent children and their families. Wealthy families also bound out their children to serve as apprentices, as well. During this era, work was believed to be extremely important for moral development and molding individuals into upstanding citizens (Cox and Cox, 1985). The children were provided training to master a skill and/or trade. The goals of apprenticeships were to discipline children to become hard workers and have them learn from their experiences.

Another form of substitute care was vendue. This method of dealing with dependent children was inexpensive and consisted of the auctioning of the poor, which included children, "to the lowest bidder, i.e., the person who would care for the poor for the lowest price" (Cox & Cox, 1985, p. 4). It was assumed that the individual who was auctioned would work to earn her or his keep. Many children were victims of abuse in this substitute care arrangement and abuse was accepted and tolerated by communities. The demise of indenture and vendue was partially due to the emergence of slavery. Communities began using slaves for work, rather than children who were placed in substitute care. Toward the 1880's, substitute care shifted from these practices to placing orphaned or children in need of assistance in institutions. Prior to this era, protective care services were virtually non-existent. The first documented case of child abuse serves as a critical example.

"Mary Ellen" was a 10-year-old child who was severely abused and neglected by her guardians (Ashby, 1997). A neighbor reported the abuse to charity worker named Etta Wheeler. Wheeler investigated Mary Ellen's situation and made several attempts to remove the child from her home. During the late 1800s, there were no existent laws that protected children against cruel treatment. According to Ashby (1997), "courts generally refrained from acting in matters of child abuse and left matters of punishment and discipline to the discretion of parents" (p. 56). Determined to remove Mary Ellen from her home, Wheeler contacted Henry Bergh, the founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), for assistance. In 1874, Bergh and the ASPCA "brought Mary Ellen to court as a member of the animal kingdom" (p. 58). The ASPCA won its lawsuit and Mary Ellen was removed from her home. The case was widely publicized and, as a result, the child welfare movement began. In addition, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was created as a result of Mary Ellen's case.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, institutions were established for orphans and children in need of assistance. Almshouses began to surface and the focus of the community caring for needy individuals shifted to these institutions providing the care for them. According to Schene (1998), almshouses were facilities created to house poor people of all ages. Children who were impoverished or orphans resided in these institutions. Also, adults who were insane, poor, or had a disease lived in these facilities (Schene, 1998). The conditions of these institutions were poor and unsanitary, thus causing the death rate to rise among children (Cox & Cox, 1985). The public began to turn its attention to these

institutions because of the increase in children who were dying due to the living conditions.

Toward the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a reform of child welfare emerged. Orphanages were established as a result of unsanitary conditions of almshouses and other similar facilities. Orphanages received funds that were both public, as well as, private (Cox & Cox, 1985). During this time, charity organizations paid "caseworkers" and recognized that these workers needed some sort of training. The first training center for social workers was then established in 1898 in New York. The type of substitute care at this time vaguely resembles the current child welfare system.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, influential political decisions were made in regard to child welfare. There was an increase in mistreatment of children toward the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, partially due to immigration and industrialization. Due to the cost of living increase, children were forced to enter the workforce. Many children encountered abusive and neglectful situations. In 1877, New York passed a law that protected children from abuse and punished those who inflicted pain on children (Cox & Cox, 1985). In the early 1900s, many states adopted various forms of this law.

In the beginning of the 1900s, child welfare agencies were established. In 1920, the Child Welfare League of America was created. According to Zietz (1959), "the league promoted a better understanding of child welfare problems; formulated standards and improved methods in all forms of services to children, provided information on sound child welfare practice, and reported on successful efforts made by the agency" (p. 118). The Child Welfare League of America is still in existence today. The League continues to provide beneficial services to many individuals, as well as, child welfare

organizations. These services include: conducting and researching child abuse and neglect, publishing child welfare material, and promoting the well being of children, youth, and their families (The Child Welfare League of America, 2003).

In the 1960s and 1970s, there was an increased public interest in child welfare and protective services. This interest may be attributed to the various social reform issues that were taking place during this era. President John F. Kennedy took a vast interest in child welfare issues. Kennedy tried to decrease poverty in America by implementing various programs and provisions. Kennedy created and signed numerous amendments that were associated with child welfare. At this time, a clear definition of child welfare services was included in Part 3 of the Social Security Act in 1962. Federal support was given by these amendments that provided protective services with "job training and placement, casework to public assistance clients, attempted to make people on public assistance self sufficient" (Cox & Cox, 1985, p. 20). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, child welfare services were growing in number. For example, services such as Head Start, the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services were established during this time. Head Start was implemented in 1965 and designed to assist and provide services to low income families. The program focuses on preparing children from disadvantaged families ages birth to 5 for school. The Foster Grandparent Program was established in 1965. This program involved older adults volunteering to be caregivers, mentors, and tutors to children and youth who are considered "at-risk" and have special needs. According to the Senior Corps website (2003) as of 2001, there were more than 30,000 Foster Grandparents assisting children and youth in the United States.

### An Overview of The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

In the 1960s, child protective services and programs that exist today were being established. Among those programs was the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). DCFS was created in 1964, and was one of the first state agencies solely dedicated to assisting children and families (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003). Services provided by DCFS include child protection, foster care, and adoption, as well as a variety of other programs and resources for families.

#### *Services Provided by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services*

Child protection is a critical service of DCFS. The focus of child protection provided by DCFS is "to protect the best interest of the child, offer protective services in order to prevent any further harm to the child or other children in the family, stabilize the home environment, and preserve family life whenever possible" (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003, p. 1). In 1980, DCFS implemented one of the first toll-free hotlines, which handled reports of child abuse and neglect to protect the well being of children.

Another service provided by DCFS is foster care. As of February 2003, DCFS reported that 21,370 children in Illinois were residing in substitute care (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003). A child is placed in foster care by DCFS due to abuse, neglect, or dependency (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003). The goal of foster care is to return the child to her/his natural home. It is important to remember that foster care is a temporary placement of a child outside of the home.



Adoption is also a service provided by DCFS. According to DCFS statistics in 2002, 3,393 wards of the state were adopted through the agency (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003). A child may be placed for adoption after it is decided that he or she cannot be returned to his or her natural parent or guardian. DCFS provides funding to adoptive parents, which includes, Medicaid, childcare costs, monthly income (child's food, clothing, shelter, etc.), and family counseling services (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2003).

#### *Challenges and Criticisms of The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services*

Similar criticisms of child protective services can also be seen in early 1990s research. In 1991, a critique of DCFS was done by the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois (ACLU), as a result of a lawsuit filed by the ACLU. The ACLU charged that DCFS provided inadequate services to children in its care. The inadequate services included moving children in and out of different foster homes, providing children with insufficient educational opportunities, returning children to situations where they again encountered abuse and neglect, and charging that caseworkers were overloaded with cases, causing them to commit substantial errors. Due to the lawsuit filed, a judge ordered an examination of DCFS by a panel of 13 experts. Over a 2-month period of time, the experts reviewed DCFS documents, examined random cases, and conducted various interviews with children in the system, foster parents, and caseworkers ("*Panel rips care to kids*", 1991).

The panel documented several problems associated with DCFS. The problems were as follows: (a) DCFS had no evaluation plan to examine a child for medical, substance abuse, developmental, or mental health problems; (b) DCFS was unaware of

the location of its wards and their progress; (c) insufficient record keeping system; (d) caseworkers overload leading to errors in decision-making; (e) children were placed in substitute care based on convenience and lack of resources, rather than on quality of the care; (f) less than half of substantiated or founded cases of abuse and neglect received intervention and services from DCFS (*"Panel rips care to kids"*, 1991).

*Research Conducted by The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services*

Due to increased instances of abuse and neglect, DCFS has conducted its own research on this subject matter. To combat the rise of abuse and neglect, DCFS implemented the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP). The CERAP is an assessment used to identify immediate harm or present danger to the child. The CERAP consists of a safety assessment, a safety decision, and a safety protection plan (The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 1999). A safety assessment is an evaluation of a number of factors that may be associated with abuse and neglect. Based on the safety assessment factors, a safety decision is a judgment made by the caseworker in regard to environmental safety. The safety protection plan is the actions taken by the agency and the caseworker to protect the child and place her or him in a safe environment. The CERAP is completed within 24 hours of the initial investigation. There is a follow-up report that occurs 120 days after the first investigation (The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 1999). As a result of the use of this protocol, from 1996 to 1999, DCFS reported that there was a 28.6% decline of the number of abuse and neglect cases investigated by the agency (The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 1999). The development and implementation of this

protocol has decreased some of the problems that existed in the Illinois child welfare system.

#### The History of The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA)

Washington state Superior Court Judge David Soukup developed the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer program. He wanted to ensure that children were adequately represented in court. Judge Soukup received funding to enlist and train community volunteers to represent children in the courtroom. In January 1977, the program was implemented in Seattle, Washington as a pilot program (National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association website, 2003). In the program's first year, there were approximately 110 volunteers who assisted 498 children. A year after the program's implementation, it was selected as the "best national example of citizen participation in the juvenile justice system" (p. 1). CASA also received a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation of New York City. This grant helped expand the CASA program across the United States.

The effectiveness of the Washington state CASA program led to the establishment of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association in 1982. In 1985, CASA received the President's Volunteer Action Award. The Victims Abuse Act of 1990 ensured that "a court appointed special advocate shall be available to every victim of child abuse and neglect in the United States that needs such an advocate" (p. 1). Currently, there are over 950 CASA programs in the United States. According to the National CASA website (2003), the CASA association provides numerous services. These include but are not limited to awareness, training, fundraising, and support for new programs.

### Deficiencies in Child Welfare Services- 1960's and 1970's Research

Research has indicated that during the 1960s and 1970s, the foster care population exploded. According to Hasci (1995), "in 1960 there were almost twice as many children in foster care as there were in institutions, and in 1968 more than three times as many children were in foster care as in institutions" (p. 163). The increase may be attributed to the fact that the public's attention was focused on the well being of children. Child welfare had become a major reform issue at this time. Hasci (1995) reported that another reason for the rise in the foster care population was due to an increase in federal funding distributed to child protective services. There was more money to investigate situations where children were allegedly being abused or neglected. This, consequently, contributed to the rapid increase of children residing in foster care.

Burt and Blair (1971) investigated child welfare agencies in the Nashville-Davidson County in Tennessee (Lindsey, 1994). Burt and Blair identified two major problems that were occurring in child welfare agencies in the United States. One of the problems was that families were only provided services if the problem met certain criteria. Otherwise, the problem would not be adequately addressed. This caused a dismissal of families from the child welfare system that may have had an urgent need to receive services from these agencies. The other problem identified by Burt and Blair was that situations occurring in families requiring assistance could only be dealt with during office hours. There were no emergency services provided after the agencies closed, except for services provided by law enforcement (Lindsey, 1994). This led to an increase in children placed in protective services because the police were investigating the reports instead of child welfare agencies. According to Lindsey (1994), police follow different

guidelines when assessing an abusive situation. To protect liability on their part, the safest solution was to remove the child from the home.

Subsequent research conducted during this time also examined problems within child protective services. Stone (1970) reported that researchers defined six persistent problems that occurred in child protective services during the 1960's. The problems included: (a) Domain Boundaries; (b) Functional Dispersal; (c) Consistency; (d) Choice; (e) Continuity; and (f) Coherence (Stone, 1970). Each will be defined individually.

*Domain boundaries* refer to the lines formed between economic and social policies. A social service organization cannot properly function if there is little to no funding. Child protective services cannot provide adequate care to individuals without substantial capital. *Functional Dispersal* is the "distribution of similar functions among different agencies" (p. 216). Child welfare agencies should all follow relatively similar guidelines and formats to ensure proper functioning. *Consistency* refers to unattainable goals set by institutions. Agencies may encounter certain conflicts that result being unable to meet goals implemented by the service. *Choice* implied that agencies limit options given to the poor and minority groups. Options should not be based on race and income in regard to child welfare. *Continuity* refers to proper training of professionals. Many professionals are educated in one specific area and may not be knowledgeable about other topics. *Coherence* is "when a single problem requires multiple interventions" (p. 217). Abuse and neglect situations may have more factors influencing the problem that may not be adequately addressed.

### Deficiencies in Child Welfare Services- 1980's and Early 1990's Research

Criticisms of child protective services were evident in 1980s and early 1990s research. Cox and Cox (1985) identified four common factors that caused child welfare agencies to provide inadequate care to children and families, including: (a) unnecessary removal of children from their homes; (b) if children are removed from their homes, then they can be placed in inappropriate substitute care; (c) reunification of the family is not a priority by child welfare agencies; and (d) child welfare agencies fail to provide adequate monitoring of cases.

A criticism of child welfare agencies is that the removal of children from their homes occurs too often and unnecessarily. Cox and Cox (1985) reported that there are three reasons that children were needlessly placed in substitute care. One reason was a lack of resources available to caseworkers and removing the child from the home as the only solution. Cox and Cox (1985) indicated that, "services such as emergency housing, emergency shelters, day care, emergency cash assistance, homemakers, and intensive therapy aimed at the prevention of out-of-home placement of children do not exist" (p. xi). Another reason that many children were placed in substitute care was because caseworkers may be inexperienced or overloaded with cases. The third reason identified lack of "clear judicial standards for the removal of children" (p. xii). Guidelines and standards set by child protective services were unclear, which resulted in caseworkers basing removal decisions on their personal opinions.

Another criticism identified was that after children were removed from their homes they were placed in inappropriate substitute care. The new residence may have been too far away from their natural parents, which limited visitation. Geographical

distance issues resulted from not having enough foster parents available to take in children.

Cox and Cox (1985) also criticized child protective services for not promoting reunification. While a child is in protective custody, parent's rights are not terminated and they are still capable of making decisions concerning the well being of their child. Many times parents were not told that they were able to make decisions in their child's life, and parents began to lose some control. Child welfare agencies had rules and regulations in regard to parental involvement, but there were no set standards.

Failure by agencies to monitor cases was another problem noted by Cox and Cox (1985). Statistics and characteristics of foster children had not been documented. National statistics did not adequately represent foster children in the 1980's. Characteristics such as, age, sex, race and socioeconomic status had not been adequately examined by child protective services. Cox and Cox (1985) reported that there was no national standard form of data collection providing statistics on foster children and these data were not collected on a regular basis.

#### *Problems Associated with Child Protective Services in the Early 1990's*

McKelvey and Stevens (1994) also examined problems existing in substitute care in their book, *The Adoption Crisis*. One problem that they identified was that qualified foster families were decreasing, as the need for these families was increasing. This caused children to be placed in inappropriate substitute care environments. McKelvey and Stevens (1994) reported that child protective services failed to provide adequate care to older foster children. Foster children who were preparing for independent living were not provided with services to assist with the transition. Another criticism by the authors

was that the needs of children in foster care were becoming increasingly complex and there were not readily available resources to address these needs. Protective services may only have been equipped to deal with one of the child's problems. Yet, the child may have had numerous problems and complications requiring assistance.

McKelvey and Stevens (1994) also focused on abuse that occurred in the foster care system. Although there were small instances of reported abuse occurring in the foster care system, "it is ironic that any children are being abused in the system set up to protect them" (p. 41). One reason for abuse within the foster care system is emergency placements made by agencies. The agency may have placed more children in a foster home than the foster parents could actually handle or agencies may not adequately match children with the foster family's preferences. These are factors that can contribute to abusive situations in the foster care system.

#### Deficiencies in Child Welfare Services- Late 1990's and Current Research

There are still several problems existing in child protective services today. Current research has examined these problems in depth. Besharov (1998) identified various problems with the current child welfare system. One of the problems was that caseworkers are overloaded with cases. Because of case overload, caseworkers may have less time to extensively examine reports of children in dangerous situations. This may result in children remaining in dangerous environments. Another problem identified was a tendency for the agency to provide short-term supervision in cases, causing children to remain at risk. Abuse and neglect may reappear after the intervention, therefore, it is important for child welfare agencies to keep in contact with families in this situation.



Besharov (1998) also reported that there are inadequate guidelines set for kinship care by child protective services. Kinship care is when a child is placed in the home of relatives or extended family by child protective services. Although kinship care may be the optimal choice, there are negative aspects. Besharov (1998) stated that relatives are often in the same situation as the natural parents. Children may encounter the same type of problems and this would only harm the child rather than benefit her or him. For example, if a child is taken out of his or her home because of abusive parents and then placed with abusive grandparents, the child does not benefit from being placed in kinship care. Clearer guidelines for to kinship care may help place children in adequate living arrangements.

Another problem identified by Besharov (1998) was that children were often moved from foster home to foster home. Various factors such as behavioral problems or inadequate foster family care may have caused children to be placed in numerous residences. Besharov (1998) indicated that child protective services need to create stable and nurturing living arrangements for the child placed in alternative care. Constant replacement can lead to instability and inconsistency. Moving and transitioning from foster home to foster home can disrupt a child's emotional well-being.

Barbell and Wright (1999) examined the need for change in child welfare agencies. One concern is meeting the needs of special populations (Barbell & Wright, 1999). For example, children who are mentally delayed or youth with sexual identity issues reside in foster care. Barbell and Wright also addressed finding reliable and dependable foster parents as an essential factor in reforming the system. Cultural issues also need to be addressed. America is made up of diverse backgrounds and agencies need

to be sensitive to the needs of children with various cultural backgrounds. For example, language barriers may be present and child protective services should adequately address such issues so that children and their families fully understand their situations. Another concern included outcomes and accountability. Individuals need to be held accountable for their actions. If a child is abused in a foster home, caseworkers and child protective services may be held accountable, to a certain degree, for placing that child in that particular home.

#### *A Communitarian Approach to Existent Problems in Child Protective Services*

Watt (2000) examined problems existing in the child protective services through a communitarian point of view. Communitarianism promotes the involvement of the community to address specific goals as well as, rules and regulations (Watt, 2000). Watt (2000) reported, that research indicated that 1/3 of the children who were reunited with their family suffered additional abuse and neglect upon return. Problems associated with child protective services may be due to the ideology of the program (Watt, 2000). The current ideology is to focus on individualized problems instead of examining external factors. External factors include social and financial problems, which may inadvertently cause an abusive situation.

Watt's (2000) research involved children who were removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect and then reunited with their parents. In this study, case files were reviewed extensively and researchers attempted to identify external factors. The purpose of the study was to determine if child protective services addressed external factors that were correlated with abuse and neglect (i.e., substance abuse or financial difficulties). Watt (2000) found that caseworkers did identify external factors, but failed

to incorporate this information into their reports. Watt (2000) concluded that failing to extensively examine external factors and providing services to address these factors could be a potential flaw in the current child welfare system.

#### *Common Problems Occurring in the Current Child Welfare System*

Child protective service caseworkers make numerous decisions regarding the welfare of children. Due to the fact that caseworkers are human beings, they are subject to making human errors. Waldfogel (2000) evaluated child protection services and examined various errors that were present in the system. The common problems Waldfogel identified were: (a) overinclusion; (b) underinclusion; (c) capacity; (d) service delivery; and (e) service orientation. *Overinclusion* refers to unnecessarily placing children in child protective custody. This included children who were at lower risk for encountering abuse and neglect being hastily removed from their homes. *Underinclusion* refers to families that are in need of child protective services, but may not be receiving services. In these instances, cases may be overlooked by caseworkers. *Capacity* is a problem because the number of people who need assistance outweighs the number of services that can be provided. *Service delivery* refers to families that do receive support from child protective services, but they do not acquire adequate services to meet their particular needs. Families often have more than one problem that needs to be addressed and providing services for a single problem may not help the situation. *Service orientation* refers child protective services using a "one size fits all" approach (Waldfogel, 2000, p. 54 ). This approach may not benefit some families in the system because they might not receive adequate services.

Ezell, Casey, Pecora, Grossman, Friend, Vernon, and Godfrey (2002) conducted a study in which flaws that occurred within child welfare agencies in California were examined. Researchers implemented a management redesign in a child welfare agency in attempt to alleviate problems. The problems that the researchers identified in the agency were: (a) decision making; (b) communication; (c) high influenced culture; (d) lack of shared mission; (e) competing priorities; (f) we-they attitudes; and (g) leadership development. One of the problems addressed was *decision making*. There were no clear guidelines established that determined who made decisions in regard to removal of children from their homes. *Communication* was another problem present in this agency. Information was often unclear. Pieces of information were dispersed rather than the whole content. *High influenced culture* referred to the fact that caseworkers used their personal views to make judgment calls, instead of following guidelines provided by the organization. *Lack of shared mission* implied that caseworkers within the organization did not share the same concept of the agency's mission statement. This led to conflicting interpretations of the mission statement and subsequent implementation within the organization. *Competing Priorities* referred to lack of authority. No one was certain who was able to generate or terminate cases. Caseworkers had become more individualized instead of collaborative. *We-they attitudes* implied that caseworkers and their supervisors worked independently instead of together. *Leadership development* referred to the agency not empowering caseworkers to take charge. There were no advancement opportunities provided by the agency. As a result of the implementation of the management redesign, some of the challenges the agency faced began to subside. For example, the level of communication within the agency increased and staff turnover decreased.

*Summary*

In conclusion, child welfare has evolved considerably over time. For example, in colonial times, children in need of assistance were indentured or auctioned to the lowest bidder. Currently, children who are in need of assistance are placed in substitute care by child protective services with the goals of family reunification or permanent placement that results in a safe living environment for children. Research has indicated that numerous challenges exist in child protective services. Research in the 1960s and 1970s reported that there was a considerable increase in the number of children residing in substitute care, which may have increased challenges for child protective services. Research conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s explored challenges such as unnecessary removal of children from their homes and inappropriate substitute care. Current research examined challenges such as caseworker burnout and diversity issues. The Illinois child welfare system was also explored. Services provided by DCFS such as child protection and foster care were discussed. Challenges and criticisms, including caseworker overload and inadequate services, were examined. A brief history of CASA, including services provided by the program, was also explored.

## Chapter 3

### Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA) volunteers on the current Illinois child welfare system. The objectives of this study were to: (a) identify perceived challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (b) identify factors contributing to challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (c) explore perceptions of social services volunteers related to the Illinois child welfare system; (d) examine accountability for problems that may occur in the Illinois child welfare system; and (e) explore possible solutions for challenges existing in the Illinois child welfare system.

### Design of Study

This study was designed as a case study to examine the current Illinois child welfare system. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilized to gain insight of CASA volunteers' Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey. Surveys were administered by the researcher to 44 CASA volunteers during May and June of 2003. This method allowed the researcher to explore participants' perceptions based on their responses to the questions.

### Sample

Forty-four CASA volunteers were invited to participate in this study. Twenty CASA volunteers participated in this study yielding a 45% response rate. The participants were current volunteers for CASA in two counties in northern and east central Illinois.

### *Description of Sample*

A CASA volunteer is an individual who offers her or his time to advocate for children who have been abused or neglected. CASA volunteers are diverse individuals who differ in gender, age, ethnicity, and spirituality. Volunteers range from retired individuals to college students and many are employed full time.

CASA volunteers are asked to commit to the CASA program for a minimum of one year. For some, the time requirement may be longer due to prolonged cases. On average, CASA volunteers devote approximately 88 hours per year to the CASA program. CASA volunteers are required to attend training sessions that cover a variety of issues. Examples of these issues include information on child abuse and neglect, child development, interviewing techniques, advocacy, and related topics. According to the National CASA office, training requirements vary among programs.

A CASA volunteer is assigned to a child abuse or neglect case by a judge. The volunteer thoroughly researches the case by examining documents and conducting interviews with all individuals involved with the case. Volunteers report their findings to the court and make suggestions about the child's situation based upon case information and their conclusions. CASA volunteers contribute to judges making adequate decisions concerning the welfare of these children.

### *Selection of Sample*

Participants for this study were invited at their monthly CASA meeting, as well as through e-mail. The researcher attended a CASA monthly meeting and administered the surveys to the five individuals in attendance. The researcher also gained access to 39

CASA volunteers' e-mail addresses provided by a CASA agency in a county in northern Illinois and administered the survey via e-mail.

#### Instrumentation

The Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey (See Appendix B) consisting of nine questions was designed to address the objectives of the study. A total of 20 surveys, five completed by CASA volunteers from a county in east central Illinois and 15 completed by CASA volunteers in a county in northern Illinois, were administered in May and June of 2003. The first three questions on the survey pertained to demographic information. Four questions (# 4, 5, 8, and 9) referred to the adequacy of the Illinois child welfare system. These questions asked the participants to agree or disagree with the statements and also to provide an explanation for their answers. Two questions (# 6 and 7) referred to factors that may cause challenges in the Illinois child welfare system.

Reliability of this instrument has not yet been established because this was the first time of administration. Content validity was established by six experts in the field who reviewed the instrument. Three Family and Consumer Sciences faculty members, as well as, an east central Illinois DCFS director, an east central Illinois CASA volunteer coordinator, and a northern Illinois CASA management coordinator reviewed this instrument.

#### Procedure for Data Collection

CASA volunteers were invited to complete the survey that focused on their perceptions of the current child welfare system in Illinois. The surveys were distributed to CASA agency volunteers in a county in east central Illinois at their monthly meeting. The



volunteers were invited to complete their surveys during their meeting and to place them in a folder provided by the researcher to ensure confidentiality. The surveys were returned to the CASA office by the volunteer coordinator and the researcher collected them from the CASA office the following day. Surveys were also distributed to a CASA agency in a county in northern Illinois through e-mail. The researcher obtained the volunteers' e-mail addresses from the case management coordinator and case managers of this agency. The participants were asked to send their completed survey to the researcher via e-mail. The participants were given one week to complete the survey. The researcher removed all identification to ensure confidentiality.

#### Data Analysis

Each survey was analyzed by the researcher to understand the meanings and implications of the content provided by the participants. The data were analyzed using manifest and latent content analysis. Manifest content was implemented to determine the frequencies of words and or phrases used by the participants on the surveys. Latent content was used to determine the underlying meanings of the content provided by the participants on the surveys. Ideas expressed by the participants were examined for common themes and categorized by emerging patterns. Common themes and patterns were identified by a color-coding system. The questions on the survey and the objectives of this study were color coded and matched with one another. The objectives that were associated with questions on the survey were coded in the same color. Descriptive statistics were also used to determine frequencies, percentages, and ranges based on participants' responses. Frequencies were calculated by adding together the responses of each question. Percentages were determined by dividing the responses by the frequencies

of each question. Ranges were based on the highest and lowest responses given on each question.

## Chapter 4

### Results and Discussion

Content analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses to the Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey. The responses provided by CASA volunteers on questions 4 through 9 were examined and emerging themes and patterns were explored. The themes were categorized into positive and negative statements.

### Demographic Data

Participants were volunteers for CASA for periods ranging from five months to nine years. Sixty-five percent of the participants work in the social service field. Of the 65% employed in social services positions, participants' work experience outside of CASA varies from five months to 17 years. Participants' education levels are also varied. Two of the participants' highest degree was a high school diploma. Four participants had their Associate's degree. Seven participants had their Bachelor's degree. Six participants had their Master's degree. One participant had a Doctorate degree and one participant had received a paralegal certification, as well as, a high school diploma.

### Survey Questions

The following section will focus on participant responses to questions on the given survey.

#### *The Illinois Child Welfare System Adequately Protects Children (Question #4)*

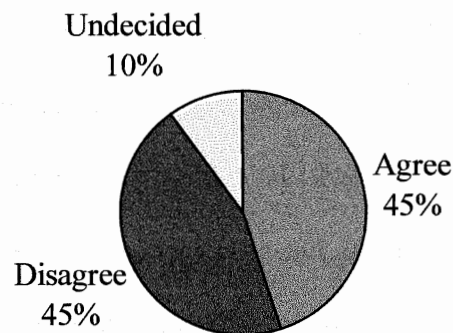
Survey question # 4 addresses objectives 1, 2, and 3. Objective one identifies perceived challenges with the Illinois child welfare system. Objective two identifies factors contributing to challenges within the Illinois child welfare system and objective

three explores perceptions of social service volunteers toward the Illinois child welfare system.

Nine (45%) of the participants agree that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children. Nine (45%) disagree with this statement and two (10%) are undecided (See Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Response to survey question # 4



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Note. The participants' responses indicates N = 9 for Agree, N= 9 for Disagree and N = 2 for Undecided.

#### *Positive Responses Focused on the Adequacy of the Illinois Child Welfare System*

There are two common themes participants indicate who agree that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children. The first theme focuses on caseworker performance and character. One participant states, "All the caseworkers I have worked with have done a fantastic job with the children and protecting them. In general, I think this is the case". Another participant states, "I believe they do try very hard. Lack of

money, personnel, etc. keep their hands tied. Caseworkers are dedicated and caring people in our community”.

The second theme focuses on performance of agencies, such as DCFS and the entire Illinois child welfare system. One participant states, “I do not know what hasn’t been brought into the system. In those cases on which I have worked, I have found that the DCFS and its other agencies, i.e., Catholic Charities, have been on top of the situation, made regular visits, and were caring people. A few have been less than that, but not the rule”. Another participant indicates, “I still have my first case. DCFS has done a good job providing care and services for my CASA child. Not perfect [in my opinion], but good”. One participant defines adequate stating:

Based on my experience, I would say the system adequately protects MOST children. I use the term ‘adequate’ to indicate the minimum standards are being met. I believe there is a lot more that can be done, but as long as DCFS workers are over worked [*sic*] and given strict monetary hurdles to contend with, there are bound to be some children who fall through the cracks with services and end up in unsafe environments. I would like to note that while the children may be protected from the actual abuse/neglect, they are not protected from the ‘system’ i.e. multiple foster homes, insufficient services, lack permanency. This shortcoming also damages children...it is just in a different way than the abuse/neglect.

Another participant also states, “As a general statement, I believe the above statement is true. In my 8 years as a CASA, I have not seen any instances of children that were not protected. I’ve noticed that there are many safeguards in place to help prevent any cracks in the system”.

Positive responses indicate that participants perceive caseworker performance and character as adequate. The responses also indicate that participants imply that child welfare agencies performances are adequate as well. Nine participants agree that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children, however, nine of the participants do not agree with this statement.

*Negative Responses Focused to the Adequacy of the Illinois Child Welfare System*

Participants who disagree with the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children identify two common themes. These themes include internal and external factors that may influence the adequacy of protection. Internal factors include things such as inadequate caseworkers or insufficient training provided by child welfare agencies. External factors include lack of funding and insufficient laws.

*Internal factors.* A participant focuses on overload stating, "Caseworkers are overloaded and do not always work in the best interests of the children. Many are unqualified, inexperienced, or negative personalities that actually make a child's life more difficult as they work through the system".

Another participant states:

Children's lives are directed by case workers with minimal supervision who are asked to provide services and maintain copious paper records, while the reality of the child's condition and progress is lost in the checklists and hollow court appearances of most DCFS or private agency workers. They are running from one crisis to the next with quality of care passing the test if the child is not in documented crisis. The court does not push beyond most of the checklists of

services. The children move through the system and are often 'lost'. The Illinois judge cannot order the DCFS worker to change placement, etc.

Other participants focus on the adequacy of agencies and or the Illinois child welfare system. One participant states, "The child welfare system doesn't have enough workers to adequately protect children". Another participant indicates, "It does not adequately protect all children. They are understaffed, overworked, and underfunded".

Participants' responses indicate that internal factors such as casework overload and insufficient staffing may be associated with existing challenges within the Illinois child welfare system. Along with internal factors, participants also identify external factors that may be associated with existing challenges.

*External factors.* Existing challenges within the Illinois child welfare system may also contribute to the efficiency of the system. One common word participants cite is funding. One participant states:

Illinois does not consistently fund the system they have in place. Programs are cut then reinstated when the funds become available. The system is antiquated at best. The forms they use are redundant and excessive. DCFS caseworkers are underpaid and overworked, leading to less than excellent people doing this job. The use of outside agencies is a mess. There is no oversight of their services or how the funds are being used.

Another participant replies, "The funding is never enough to have the manpower to protect children. More rules and regulations often mean more paperwork and less interaction and active advocacy for children". Also, one participant indicates, "Refer to increase of media stories of system failures. Personnel shortages & insufficient funding

causing problems with poor investigative work and risk taking has increased with a resultant misjudgement [*sic*] at the expense of children. The system appears to protect adequately only a portion 70% ? (est) [*sic*] of those children in the system". One participant refers to laws stating:

Illinois child welfare system does not adequately protect children. This situation is due more to inadequate laws than to failure of DCFS personnel to act to the best of their ability within the law. The day MUST come when the law views children as separate human beings with inalienable human right-not parental property.

Participants who do not agree that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children identify internal and external factors as the basis of their responses. Issues such as budget constraints and insufficient staffing are associated with exiting challenges. The participants are divided in their responses of agree and disagree for the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children, however, two participants do not agree or disagree with this statement.

#### *Neutral/Undecided Responses to the Illinois Child Welfare System's Adequate Protection of Children*

Two participants are undecided about the Illinois child welfare system adequately protecting children. One participant states:

I agree and disagree. As with any bureaucratic organization movement is slow and there is never enough money where you need it. Sometimes getting an approval on a decision or request has to go through many layers of supervisor's etc. In my time as a CASA working with the child welfare system I have found the DCFS workers and the contract agency workers for DCFS to be respectful of



my position as CASA and have worked together as a team for the benefit of the child. There is frequent turnover of caseworkers in the "abuse and neglect system". In my cases I am frequently the most consistent person.

Another participant indicates:

It's a case by case answer-there are a lot of questions that can be asked concerning the "welfare system" that can never be answered Agree or Disagree, but...I feel that our Illinois \_\_\_\_\_ Co. especially, has gone to great lengths to protect our children. Not every county has CASA! Without additional help CASA I feel the Ill. Child welfare system-DCFS-is overwhelmed! Define adequately means to get by + I guess we do this to the best of our Illinois abilities [*sic*].

Responses indicate that two participants are undecided in regard to the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children. Participants indicate that funding is a perceived challenge, however, caseworker performance is adequate.

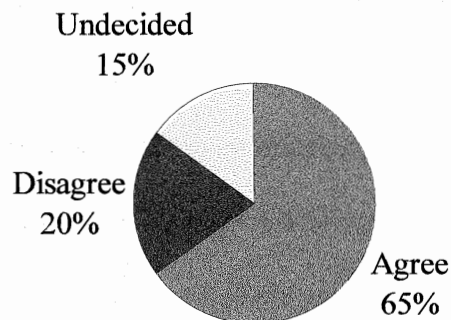
*Some Instances of Child Abuse Inadequately Identified by the Illinois Child Welfare System (Question #5)*

Question # 5 addresses objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4. The statement intends to (1) identify perceived challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (2) identify factors contributing to challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (3) explore perceptions of social service volunteers toward the Illinois child welfare system; and (4) examine accountability for problems that may occur in the Illinois child welfare system.

Thirteen (65%) participants agree with the statement that some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. Four (20%) participants disagree with the statement and three (15%) are undecided (See Figure 2).

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Figure 2. Responses to survey question # 5



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Note. The participants' responses indicate N = 13 for Agree, N = 4 for Disagree, and N = 3 for Undecided.

*Positive Responses Defending the Illinois Child Welfare System's Adequate Identification of Child Abuse*

The participants that disagree with the statement that some instances of child abuse are inadequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system base their responses on their experiences. The common theme is that participants did not witness instances of abuse that were inadequately identified. One participant indicates, "I have not experienced this". Another participant states, "In my 8 years as a CASA, I have not seen any instances of child abuse that were not adequately identified".

Responses indicate that participants disagree with the statement that some instances of child abuse are inadequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. The participants did not encounter a situation where abuse was not identified. Although four participants disagree with this statement, the majority of participants agree that some instances of abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

*Negative Responses to Inadequate Identification of Instances of Abuse by the Illinois Child Welfare System*

The negative statements reflect three emerging themes and patterns. The first theme focuses on child abuse reporting. One participant states:

I think this statement is true, but I'm not sure that the 'fault' lies solely in the hand of DCFS. I think that it is difficult to confirm abuse at times due to the unwillingness of some people to get involved. I also believe that the blatant abuse is often noted more readily, but the more subtle forms may be harder to document & 'prove' [sic]. Unfortunately...there are bound to be mistakes because no human is 100% predictable, and sometimes people that seem likely abusers, would never think of hurting their children. Likewise, some people can present very calm and collect, but may be on the verge of instability that may lead to abuse...They may fool the world until it is too late to help the kids.

Another participant indicates, "reluctancy to report on part of abused + those who know" [sic]. Participants make reference to the child abuse hotlines. One participant states, "Hot line calls are not all adequately investigated". Responses indicate that the public, as well as, child welfare agencies do not adequately utilize child abuse hotlines. This may contribute to existing challenges within the Illinois child welfare system.

The second emerging theme participants identify is inadequacies of agencies and/or the Illinois child welfare system that may be associated with instances of child abuse that are not identified. One participant states, "DCFS is too initially focused on supporting the family success through services that the child is left at risk and does not get removed until terrible damage is experienced". Another participant replies, "There is more abuse than there are workers to deal with the problem especially in a large metro area like Chicago. Also the system protects parental rights better than children's rights. And this is a difficult situation in a democratic country for people should expect to have their privacy protected". One participant also describes a situation where DCFS did not provide proper intervention. The participant states, "In 1998 I along with several DCFS workers, a CASA Case Manager and a pro-bono attorney, heard a DCFS supervisor dismiss intergenerational incest as a cultural quirk that did not harm unless called to the attention of the victim. This was reported by the CASA Case Manager and the pro-bono attorney but the supervisor was not removed". Participants imply that inadequacies within the agencies such as insufficient staffing and protecting parents instead of children are associated with existing challenges.

The third emerging theme includes external factors that may cause instances of child abuse to be inadequately identified. A common phrase the participants cite is inadequate funding. One participant states, "Again, it depends on the funding. People will tell you that the system gets flooded with kids taken into custody when there is a release of state funding. Where were these kids before?". Another participant indicates, "At present abuse will be ignored unless DCFS is forced to acknowledge it. This, again, is mainly due to an under-funded system rather than to callousness among DCFS

personnel". One participant also indicates, "There was a dramatic drop in cases appearing in court that coincided with less funding and little new hiring at DCFS".

The majority of participants agree that some instances of abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. The participants identify inadequacies associated with child abuse reporting, inadequacies existing within child welfare agencies, and external factors such as budget constraints as factors that may contribute to unidentified instances of abuse. Although most participants agree that some instances of abuse are not adequately identified, three participants did not agree or disagree with this statement.

*Neutral/Undecided Responses to the Illinois Child Welfare System's Adequate Identification of Some Instances of Abuse*

Two of the participants did not agree or disagree with the statement that some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. A participant states, "I can't recall any instances in my personal experience that I know that child abuse has not be adequately identified" [sic]. Another participant indicates, "How can you identify if you don't have all of the information?! [sic]It's time consuming-state funding expensive and information poor for the most part-this makes it hard to adequately identify".

*Identifying Some of the Major Challenges that May Exist in the Illinois Child Welfare System (Question #6)*

The statement intends to (1) identify perceived challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (2) identify factors contributing to challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (3) explore perceptions of social service volunteers toward the Illinois

child welfare system; and (4) examine accountability for problems that may occur in the Illinois child welfare system. Participant responses reflect these objectives.

There are three emerging themes from the responses to question #6. The first theme is insufficient staffing. This includes factors such as overload, turnover, and the quality and quantity of the staff employed by Illinois child welfare agencies. Nine participants cite insufficient staff nine times in their responses. One participant identifies challenges such as, "Not enough case workers and they aren't paid enough to do what they are expected to do. The case loads are incredible! CASAs [*sic*] are a fantastic addition to the court system. They are often times the only eyes and ears the court has to report for the children". Another participant states, "Again, low pay for workers and not enough of them. They get burned out and leave and their cases fall on the shoulders of other already overburdened workers". One participant discusses insufficient staff:

I think the primary issues deal with caseworkers that are stretched too thin and budget 'rules' that constantly put limitation on caseworkers and the services they are allowed to provide. Caseworkers spent a ridiculous amount of time pushing paper when they could be more hands on with the families. Rules also seem [*sic*] to change so rapidly that workers often don't know what end is up.

Responses indicate that insufficient staffing is an existing challenge within the Illinois child welfare system.

Another emerging theme is budget constraints. The participants cite lack of funding eight times. One participant states, "I think that there is a rather recent lack of state money that could harm the children in the system". Another participant describes the child welfare system and funding stating:

More money is needed for DCFS, parenting classes for those who don't follow the rules are needed and attendance should be mandatory and last for a long period of time. Perhaps a triage plan is needed. Some people who are parents are not good at it and they should be identified rather quickly and the children that are abused by them should be taken away sooner rather than later.

Budget constraints were another factor that contributes to existing challenges within the Illinois child welfare system.

The third emerging theme is insufficient resources. Participants cite insufficient resources five times. An insufficient resource includes factors such as technology and available programs. One participant identifies insufficient resources as, "Insufficient support agencies ie therapy type groups" [*sic*]. Another participant states, "More resources are need for children in system...including development of excellent group homes or foster home "villages" to counter balance the many standard foster homes with questionable motivation and/or inadequate personal nurturing and development skills for raising children".

Two participants cite lack of computers and technology. One participant states:

The system is OLD. The computers that the field offices use are 20 years old, with useless software. I met with a regional supervisor who said she cannot even view the reports that she creates. She does not have clearance. A complete overhaul of the system is necessary but it will take more than 4 years. What happens when the election come??? [*sic*].

Another participant states, "Besides unsupportive laws and inadequate funding, they suffer from an almost impossibly poor computer system. This wastes time and energy better employed elsewhere".

Participants identify three common themes associated with existing challenges within the Illinois child welfare system. These center around insufficient staffing, which may contribute to high turnover rates, lack of funding, and insufficient resources. The participants also identify possible solutions to these challenges.

*Identifying Some Possible Solutions to Challenges (Question # 7)*

Question 7 was addresses objectives 1 and 5. Objective 1 intends to identify perceived challenges within the Illinois child welfare system. This question also explores possible solutions for challenges existing in the Illinois child welfare system; (objective 5).

There are five themes and patterns that identify possible solutions to challenges that may occur in the Illinois child welfare system. The first theme is funding. Six participants cite funding six times. One participant describes an increase in funding by stating, "I think that increased funding would go a LONG way toward eradicating many of the problems". Another participant indicates that, [Illinois should] "Assign private agencies to less severe cases so that more funds could come from the private sector". Participants also associate funding with caseworkers. One participant states, "Needless to say, paying the workers better could only help. If the field was more lucrative, more workers would stay. If the state could afford to hire more workers, that would help too". Another possible solution that a participant suggests is to "Develop & fund excellent group homes and subsidized foster home 'villages' ". Participants identify funding as a



possible solution to existing challenges such as insufficient staffing and inadequate resources.

Another theme participants identify is re-evaluating foster care. The participants cite solutions centering around foster care four times. One participant describes the promotion of foster care:

One thing that would be helpful is to develop a campaign that really shows foster care in a positive light. My husband and I are foster parents and have has [sic] a wonderful experience with it. Everyone who sees us says, "I don't know how you do it!" which is ridiculous-anyone can love a child. It is all too easy. I think foster parenting needs to be sold to the more affluent, suburban families who will not do it just for the money. We have extra bedrooms, disposable income, good schools, etc. Suburbanites have the potential to be great foster parents. With an abundance of quality foster homes, you eliminate the problem of the "lost child" within the system. The case-workers will have less of a burden if the children are in quality homes as well. Many suburban families have the ability to provide sibling visits, transportation to counseling, etc. that will ultimately help the children as well.

Another participant suggests that, "Separate foster care & placements from investigation & family services...two accountable agencies". One participant also describes foster care screening stating that, "Better screening of foster parent [sic], allow time to check up on foster parent and child, lighter case load for case worker". Another participant indicates:

Currently each agency has their own foster families. With all children in the system there are foster families waiting months, even a year for a placement. Bring the private agencies under control or stop contracting with them. Put more

funding oversight in place. Payments are made for child care that never get where they are intended to go.

Participants identify re-evaluating foster care as a possible solution to challenges such as inappropriate placement and inadequate foster homes.

A third emerging theme was increasing the quality and quantity of caseworkers.

Participants cite this four times. One participant suggests:

Revamping/consolidating some of the paperwork that is REQUIRED would allow caseworkers to focus more on the family than on the formalities. If caseworkers could allow themselves the latitude to at least glance at the 'best interest of the child' without worrying about paperwork and money...it would help".

Another suggestion is that "IL. [sic] Needs to hire more qualified social workers and pay them a lot more money, with a reduced work load.

Another participant states, "attracting good candidates, raising the respect level of social workers or the agency in the eyes of potential candidates, making this viable long-term career (10+ years as average stay)"[sic]. Responses indicate that an increase of better-qualified caseworkers would decrease existing challenges, such as inappropriate placement.

Technology was another emerging theme. Participants cite technology factors three times. One participant states, "an adequate computer system and elimination of a culture that protects a few workers who should not be there would all help". Another participant suggests, "Get a comprehensive computer system in place. Put in a comprehensive listing of foster families on line for all agencies to access". Participants imply that the

implementation of technology such as an adequate computer system would decrease existing challenges within the Illinois child welfare system.

The fifth emerging theme is the implementation of better laws and clearer definitions. Participants cite this three times. In regard to clearer definitions, one participant states:

As I mentioned a triage system for getting children away from the incorrigibles. Putting children who are merely neglected in a separate category from abused children so the court proceedings are minimized and the neglectful parent should get the help needed and not have to jump through humiliating hoops. "Neglect" is a fuzzy term often determined by middle class white people. So if a child is neglected because food isn't put away, or his clothes are dirty or he is yelled at and spanked (not beaten mind you) then show the parent how to put food away and why it is a good idea, tell them that dirty clothes are O.K. but sometimes they have to be changed and try to show a parent alternative means of discipline. But don't put the parent guilty of neglect before a judge any more than necessary. I've witnessed that they are treated well by judges but it is perceived as punitive to be before a judge.

Another participant suggests, "The system needs to keep better track of timelines and Judges need to do a beter [*sic*] job of enforcing. Judges need to start making hard decisions when needed. If a family cannot be fixed than the children need a permanent, long term, living arrangement".

Participants identify five common themes associated with possible solutions to existing challenges within the Illinois child welfare system. These solutions include

increasing funding, re-evaluating foster care, increasing the quality and quantity of caseworkers, increased technology, and the implementation of improved laws with clear definitions.

*The Illinois Child Welfare System's Adequate Assessment of the Needs of Children and their Families (Question 8)*

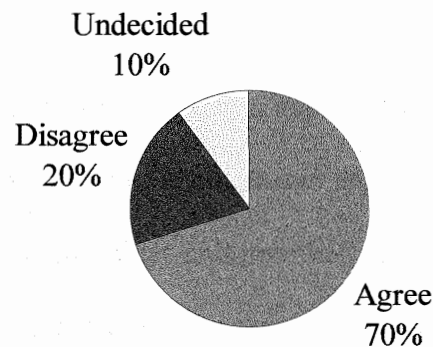
Question 8 addresses objectives 1, 2, and 3. These objectives intend to:

(1) identify perceived challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (2) identify factors contributing to challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; and (3) explore perceptions of social service volunteers toward the Illinois child welfare system.

Fourteen (70%) participants agree with the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families. Four (20%) participants disagree with this statement and two (10%) participants are undecided (See Figure 3).

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Figure 3. Response to survey question # 8



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Note. The participants' responses indicate N = 14 for Agree, N = 4 for Disagree, and N = 2 for Undecided.

*Positive Responses to the Illinois Child Welfare System's Adequate Assessment of the Needs of Children and their Families*

The emerging theme is that the participants believe that the Illinois child welfare system and/or agencies adequately assess the needs of children. However, participants cite limitations that exist in the assessment of needs. One participant states:

While they [Illinois child welfare agencies] may do a fine job of assessing the needs of the children, I believe they [Illinois child welfare agencies] fail when it

comes to implementation. Budget constraints seem to be the driving factor in many situations, and therefore, decisions are often made for monetary reasons rather than an effort to best meet the needs of each individual child. i.e. rushing to move a child from a group home environment to save money, failure to follow through with agreed upon services due to transportation expenses (homemaker), trying to return a child home or complete an adoption hastily to save more \$ [sic].

Another participant replies:

I believe that the child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children, but sometimes cannot follow through on those needs because of policies and procedures. For example; older children that need a firm hand and/or need to be disciplined, soon find out that they can get away with almost anything. The only consequences are DOC when they have finally gone too far.

Another participant indicates, "It (the Illinois child welfare system) tries very hard but lack of money, mandated paperwork, lack of common sense being applied to a situation and of course shortage of manpower make it a very difficult job". Participants also describe the quality of assessment. One participant states:

My CASA child has had psychy. evals. [sic], instant hospitalizations for threatened suicide, counseling, mostly decent, good and excellent foster homes, good group homes, decent to excellent case workers [sic]. She is not doing well despite all this attention, but I don't know what else can be done to help her. My niece is a drug addict who had a baby 8 months ago, and her 11 year old child lives with me. The 11 year old was in the DCFS system 6-9 years ago. They received good care and services. My niece and her husband did the tasks that

DCFS said were necessary to get their child back, and all was well for 3 years, until they started using [drugs] again and couldn't maintain a home. The other CASA workers that I talk to have not told me many complaints, except that there have not been as many cases.

Another participant discusses services, as well as, challenges:

We have had a great support system that has been provided since we became foster parents. I have seen that the state really does try to provide its children and families with community services. Much of the problem lies in the fact that many of those parents really do not want to use what is offered. They do not want to work to change. They want someone to do it for them. Many of them are provided with counseling, parenting classes, substance abuse programs, etc., but they do not attend, or attend only sporadically. My foster children were provided with both speech and physical therapy as soon as I raised concerns. The services are there, but people have to want to use them. Foster parents are given great training so that they will be able to assess (or at least recognize) some potential problems.

Then the services seem little more than a phone call to a case worker away.

Another participant states, "I have found that our case workers have an in-depth understanding of family needs, history and current involvements. The ACRs [*sic*] [American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois] are quite involving and service plans are expected and followed". The majority of participants (n=14) agree that the Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families. Participants identify examples of positive assessments that they have witnessed from child welfare agencies.

*Negative Responses to the Illinois Child Welfare System's Adequate Assessment of the Needs of Children and their Families*

Participants identify funding as a common theme in regard to inadequate assessment of the needs of children by the Illinois child welfare system. One participant states, "They try, but again it's a matter of funding. Every political candidate says they want to improve the lives of the children in Illinois but the first thing that gets cut in a budget crunch is the funding for counseling, group homes, etc.". Another participant states, "Currently the agencies are satisfied when the check boxes are marked that steps have been taken to service the child within the limited finances available. The child's actual needs are far overshadowed by the "satisfaction" at the agency that the child is receiving all that they could possibly provide them". One participant indicates, "This [assessment] appears to be a cost driven process that determines if services are approved or rejected. Child needs in many cases are secondary in the decision making process". Another participant suggests that, "Assessments are often rushed an [sic] not thorough. Putting out fires rather than coming up with viable solutions"[sic]. Responses imply that the Illinois child welfare agencies inadequately assess the needs of children and their families, due in part to budget constraints.

*Neutral/Undecided to the Illinois Child Welfare System's Adequate Assessment of the Needs of Children and their Families*

Two of the participants are undecided about the Illinois child welfare system's adequacy in assessing the needs of children and their families. One participant states, "They (the Illinois child welfare system) do the best they can to assess the needs of children and their families under the handicaps already listed".



The majority of the participants (n=14) agree that the Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families. The participants indicate that child welfare agencies provide adequate assessment. Four participants disagree with the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families. This may be attributed to lack of funding. Two of the participants are undecided.

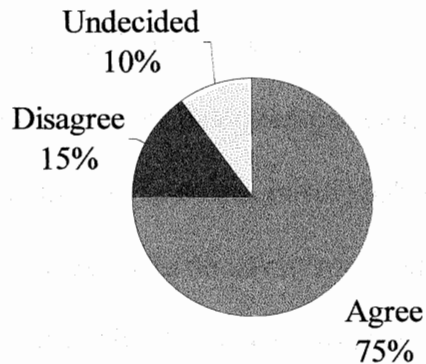
*The Illinois Child Welfare System's Provision of Adequate Services to Children and their Families (Question # 9)*

Question #9 addresses objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4. These objectives intend to:

(1) identify perceived challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (2) identify factors contributing to challenges within the Illinois child welfare system; (3) explore perceptions of social service volunteers toward the Illinois child welfare system; and (4) examine accountability for problems that may occur in the Illinois child welfare system.

Fifteen (75%) participants agree that the Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families. Three (15%) participants disagree with this statement and two (10%) participants are undecided (See Figure 4).

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Figure 4. Responses to survey question # 9

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Note. The participants' responses indicates N = 14 for Agree, N = 3 for Disagree, and N = 2 for Undecided.

*Positive Responses to the Illinois Child Welfare System's Provision of Adequate Services to Children and their Families*

A common theme is that the Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families; however, there are challenges involving the provision of services. These challenges may be lack of funding or the unwillingness of parents to utilize the services.

One participant discusses funding: "Services are adequate for those in the system and when funding is available. Expiring budgets affect decisions".

Another participant describes the lack of parental involvement:

Agree but they just need more of them [services] and these services have to be available at convenient times and convenient locations [sic]. Also parents MUST realize that certain tasks must be completed SATISFACTORILY if they are really going to be good parents. I've observed that most parents I've seen in the system do not realize that parentling [sic] is a life long job. They are impatient if a two year old isn't potty trained or has a temper tantrum or interferes with the things the parent wants to do. It's the babies raising babies that bother me so much.

Another participant states, "Parents do not always take advantage of services offered to them". Another participant describes the lack of involvement:

The Illinois child welfare system is designed to put families back together. This appears to be the foundation of almost each and every policy. The services that this system provides are geared to this belief. As a CASA [sic] I have seen people fail the system, but I have not seen any instance of the system failing the people.

One participant discusses the involvement of families stating, "I think the services provided are adequate in \_\_\_\_ County. I don't know about the entire state. Whether families choose to take advantage of services offered is up to them". Another participant discusses the adequacy of the services that the Illinois child welfare system provides. The participant states:

I am amazed at the kind and variety of services that the children, their families and guardians have been able to receive. I can't imagine all of the dollars spent on this. I believe that they are well spent, but, still, I am amazed that the these

additional [sic] are there. I have worked with case workers who have all tried to investigate and provide what could be done for the children.

The majority of participants (n=15) agree that the Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families. The participants indicate that they observe adequate services provided by child welfare agencies. Three participants disagree that the Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families. This may be attributed to lack of parental participation in the services provided by the Illinois child welfare system. Two participants are undecided.

*Negative Responses to the Illinois Child Welfare System's Provision of Adequate Services to Children and their Families*

The common emerging theme involves limited services provided by the Illinois child welfare system due to funding constraints. One participant explains:

It seems like we (CASA) are always pushing for additional services from the Department. Once a number of services are already in place, each additional request for new services become less and less likely because of budgetary restrictions. I have heard several times that ...we are already doing service A, service B and Service C, so I don't know if I can get funding for services D and E approved. It is like we need to settle because we are doing something, rather than pushing to make sure we are doing everything. I realize that this VERY difficult for caseworkers because they need to worry about \$\$\$ [sic] and CASA is fortunate enough to only address the child's best interest.

Another participant states:

The services may seem appropriate and adequate but often the service providers are under contract at a far reduced rate (often over burned with caseload numbers) and the services are looked at as charity cases by the psychiatrists, counselors, etc. Limited funding often makes services like family counseling provided for a short period or under limited depth.

Responses imply that limited funding is associated with limited services. Participants identify challenges in the provision of services when there are budget constraints.

*Neutral/Undecided Responses to the Illinois Child Welfare System's Provision of Adequate Services to Children and their Families*

Two participants are undecided about the adequacy of services provided to children and their families. One participant states, "Once again, they (the Illinois child welfare system) do the best they can for the most part given their circumstances".

Another participant replies, "Not enough workers-easy burn out-time constraints-red tape-make it difficult to provide adequate services-current administration has cut many services [*sic*].

The majority of participants (n=14) indicate that the Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families. The participants indicate that limited funding may cause child welfare agencies to provide inadequate services to children and their families. Two of the participants are undecided.

The results of this study are varied. The participants are divided in their responses of agree and disagree for the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children. The majority of participants agree that some instances of child abuse

are inadequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. The participants identify insufficient staffing, budget constraints, and inadequate resources as existing challenges in the Illinois child welfare system. The participants identify increasing funding, re-evaluating foster care, increasing quality and quantity of caseworkers, increasing technology, and implementing improved laws with clearer definitions as possible solutions to these challenges. The majority of participants agree that the Illinois child welfare system provides adequate assessment and services to children and their families.

### Discussion

The perceptions of 20 CASA volunteers related to the Illinois child welfare system were explored in this study. Common themes and patterns emerged based on participants' responses to nine survey questions. Participants were evenly split with responses of agree and disagree in reference to the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children. The participants based their perceptions on internal and external factors that may contribute to existing challenges occurring in the system. Internal factors are issues occurring within the child welfare system (e.g., insufficient staffing or casework overload). External factors are issues occurring outside of the child welfare system (e.g., lack of funding, which contributes to existing challenges).

#### *External Factors and the Child Welfare System*

External factors included issues such as, insufficient laws and lack of funding. For example, participants indicated that laws focused more on parental and/or guardian rights rather than the rights of children. Cox and Cox (1985), however, indicated that child protective services do not promote family reunification and that parental rights are not

taken into consideration. For example, parents lost their ability to make decisions concerning their children because they were not properly informed of their rights. Cox and Cox's (1985) findings indicate that some perceptions and challenges existing within the child welfare system have changed over time with regard to family reunification.

Participants cited lack of funding as a contributing factor to existing challenges in the child welfare system. Past research indicated that lack of funding may contribute to challenges that occur in child protective services. For example, Stone (1970) discussed *Domain Boundaries*, which referred to the lines formed between economic and social policies. Stone's 1970 research indicated that lack of funding could lead to inadequacies in social service organizations. The correlation between Stone's research and the results of this study indicate that challenges in the child welfare system of the 1970's are still existent today.

#### *Internal Factors and the Child Welfare System*

The participants identified internal factors such as, inadequate caseworkers and insufficient training. Factors that contributed to inadequate caseworkers were case overload, poor qualifications, and negative attitudes. Cox and Cox (1985) reported that a criticism of child welfare agencies was that children were unnecessarily placed in substitute care, due to caseworkers inexperience or case overload. Besharov (1998) identified caseworkers who were overloaded with cases as a challenge in child protective services. Besharov (1998) indicated that caseworkers who were overloaded with cases may have less time to extensively investigate alleged child abuse and neglect cases. Consequently, this may lead to a child remaining in an abusive or neglectful situation. Research conducted by the ACLU concluded that DCFS caseworkers were overloaded

with cases and this led to substantial decision-making errors ("*Panel Rips Care to Kids*", 1991). The results of past research (Cox & Cox, 1985; Besharvo, 1998; "*Panel Rips Care to Kids*", 1991) imply that challenges existing in the child welfare system over the past 30 years are still present today and have remained consistent over time.

Participants also cited insufficient training as a possible factor contributing to inadequacies in the Illinois child welfare system. Specific references were made to foster and kinship care. One participant indicated that foster parents are required to participate in extensive training. However, relatives or extended family members do not have to participate in this type of training. Research conducted by Besharov (1998) also indicated that clearer guidelines and standards needed to be implemented for kinship care. Extended family members may encounter the same type of challenges that occurred in the parent's or guardian's home. For example, a child who was removed from her or his home because of abuse may encounter abuse in the grandparents' home, as well.

#### *Identification of Child Abuse and Neglect*

The majority of participants indicate that some instances of child abuse were not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. One participant indicates that instances of abuse are not adequately identified because DCFS is more focused on supporting family success than on the safety of children. Research conducted by the ACLU indicates that DCFS returns children to situations where they again encounter abuse and neglect. Watt (2000) reported that research indicated that 1/3 of the children who were reunited with their family suffered additional abuse and neglect.

One participant also indicates that some instances of abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system because there are not enough caseworkers



to address the number of abuse cases. Waldfogel (2000) identified capacity as a challenge in child protective services. Capacity refers to the number of people in need of assistances outweighing the number of services.

*Assessment of Children and Families Needs and Provisions of Services*

The majority of participants agreed that the Illinois child welfare system provides adequate assessment and services to children and their families. Participants implied that DCFS provides adequate assessment, however, limitations such as budget constraints and lack of parental involvement are challenges. Research indicated that DCFS has tried to increase the quality of assessment by implementing the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP). The CERAP is an assessment tool used to identify immediate harm or present danger to the child (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 1999). As a result of the implementation of the CERAP, DCFS reported a 28.6% decline of the number of abuse and neglect cases investigated by the agency from 1996 to 1999.

The majority of participants also cited that the Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families. Research conducted by Burt and Blair (1971) suggested that historically, child welfare agencies did not provide adequate services to children and their families. Burt and Blair (1971) indicated that families were only provided with services if the problem met a certain criteria. This caused a dismissal of families that may have required urgent services from child welfare agencies. Burt and Blair (1971) also reported that services were only provided to families during regular business hours. There were no emergency services provided by child welfare agencies after these hours. Waldfogel (2000) reported that children and their

families did not receive adequate services. Waldfogel (2000) referred to *Service Delivery* as families who do not receive support from child protective services, when in fact, they do require services to meet their particular needs. Waldfogel (2000) suggested that families often have more than one challenge that needs to be addressed. However, services are commonly only provided for one specific problem.

Some findings of this study are comparable to previous research findings. For example, participants in this study identify insufficient staffing as a major existing challenge. Past research (Cox & Cox, 1985; Besharov, 1998; "*Panel rips care to kids*", 1991) also identified factors such as caseworker overload and overburdened staff as challenges in the child welfare system. This supports that existing challenges have remained consistent over time. Challenges of 20 years are still present in today's society.

Pervious research findings also contradict the findings of this study. For example, the majority of participants in this study indicate that child welfare agencies provide adequate services to children and their families. Past research (Burt & Blair, 1971, Waldfogel, 2000) findings indicated that child welfare agencies did not provide adequate services to children and their families. Participants in this study indicate that the Illinois child welfare system is overly focused on family reunification and parental rights. Past research (Cox & Cox, 1985), however, suggested that child welfare agencies are less than concerned with family reunification and have not adequately informed parents of their rights. However, the review of literature in this study spans a 30-year time period and past decades have undoubtedly involved some changes in the child welfare system. Furthermore, contradicting findings may reflect variations from state to state, as well as

different sample participants. Future research must be conducted to gain further insights on the adequacy of the current child welfare system.

## Chapter 5

## Summary, Implications and Recommendations, and Conclusion

The number of child abuse and neglect victims continues to remain high in the United States. It is critically important to examine the adequacy of child welfare agencies that encounter child abuse and neglect cases. The purpose of this study was to explore National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA) volunteers' perceptions related to the child welfare system in the state of Illinois. The survey was distributed to CASA volunteers in two counties in Illinois to gain insight on their Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey. Twenty CASA volunteers served as participants in this study. The data were qualitatively analyzed using content analysis to identify common themes and patterns and descriptive statistics.

The results of the research were varied. The participants were divided in their responses of agree and disagree for the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children. The majority of the participants agreed that some instances of child abuse are inadequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. The participants identified major challenges that occur in the Illinois child welfare system and possible solutions to these challenges. For example, participants identified lack of resources such as an up-to-date computer system, as well as, caseworker overload and burnout as major challenges occurring within the system. The participants identified increased funding and the implementation of clearer guidelines and standards as possible solutions to existing challenges. Results also indicated that the majority of the participants felt that the Illinois child welfare system adequately assessed the needs and

provided adequate services to children and their families. Further research must be conducted to determine the adequacy of the Illinois child welfare system.

Implications and Recommendations: Research, Funding,  
Policies, and Practice

This study indicates that there are several existing challenges within the Illinois child welfare system. Future research, funding, laws, policies and practice should be addressed in order to minimize and eliminate these challenges.

*Future Research*

Future research must be conducted to examine the adequacy of the current child welfare system in the United States. Challenges that occur in the child welfare system, as well as, possible solutions to these challenges should be explored. It would be beneficial to include investigators, caseworkers and supervisors as participants in future studies to gain insight on their perceptions of the current child welfare system. It would also be beneficial to conduct interviews with participants rather than administering surveys. Interviews may lead to more detailed and in-depth responses. Challenges that occur such as, caseworker overload, budget constraints, and inadequate training should be a focus of future research. Possible solutions to existing challenges including increased funding and training should also be explored.

Future research studies should explore inadequacies occurring in the Illinois child welfare system. It would be beneficial to focus on existing challenges and possible solutions from an internal perspective. For example, caseworkers and supervisors, as well as, foster parents and former foster children could serve as participants in these studies. Individuals who are indirectly involved with the child welfare system may have

unrealistic views of existing challenges and possible solutions. Conclusions in regard to challenges and solutions can hastily be made when an individual is indirectly involved with the system. Caseworkers, foster parents, and former foster children may offer a more realistic view and first hand account of challenges because of their direct encounters and experiences. Child welfare agencies such as the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and affiliated agencies should be included. Further research could identify the major challenges occurring in today's child welfare system and help minimize inadequacies within the system.

### *Funding*

The results of this study implied that insufficient funding contributed to challenges occurring within the Illinois child welfare system. For example, budget constraints may have led to the elimination of beneficial programs and services provided by child welfare agencies. Lack of funding also may have led to caseworker overload because child welfare agencies could not afford to hire an adequate number of caseworkers. Currently, the amount of individuals and families requiring assistance far exceeds the funding available to provide services.

An increase of state and federal funding could potentially decrease challenges such as case overload, high turnover rates, and the elimination of valuable programs. Increased funding could also lead to the implementation of more training and educational programs. Currently, caseworkers and investigators in Illinois are required to attend 20 hours of training each year. New training programs could address issues that include: work related stress, effective communication with co-workers, supervisors, and families,

diversity issues, adolescent parents, and accurate and quality assessment family functioning and challenges.

### *Policies*

Sufficient policies need to be implemented for child protection. Child welfare agencies may be overly-focused on family reunification rather than on the rights and protection of the child. For example, a child may be returned to an abusive situation due to the promotion of family reunification by child welfare agencies. In these situations, accountability needs to be determined. Policies should be implemented that hold all responsible parties accountable for the unnecessary placement of children in abusive or neglect situations.

Clearer guidelines and standards for family reunification, placement, and removal should be established and followed by all child welfare agencies. The guidelines and standards should be clear and consistent. The implementation of clearer guidelines and standards may lead to a decrease in challenges that currently exist in the child welfare system. Clearer guidelines and standards for placement may decrease the instances of children who are placed in inappropriate care. Also, implementing clearer guidelines and standards for family reunification may decrease the instances of children who are returned to abusive and/or neglectful situations.

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 was created to ensure that children would be removed from their homes and placed in substitute care if their safety was in question. Agencies were also responsible for making all possible efforts to reunite children with their families if they were placed in substitute care. Challenges,

however, occur due to the implementation of this act. Gelles (1996) stated "Nowhere in the federal legislation, state policy, or ensuing legal decisions in state courts were reasonable efforts ever clearly defined" (p. 94). Not having clear guidelines for family reunification has led to continuous child abuse and neglect and even death. For example, in 1990, a 15-month-old child named David Edwards was suffocated by his mother. Despite the fact that his older sister was removed from the home because of severe abuse and authorities had received reports that David was being abused, he still remained with his parents (Gelles, 1996). Removal of children from their homes also requires consistent guidelines and standards. Implementing these guidelines and standards may decrease the number of inappropriate removals of children from their homes.

Clearer guidelines and standards in child welfare agencies may also lead to more effective communication among caseworkers, supervisors, and other agencies. Consistent guidelines and standards would ensure that caseworkers, supervisors, agencies and affiliates would follow the same rules and this could potentially reduce judgment errors. For example, if caseworkers had clear and consistent guidelines to follow, they would not solely or heavily rely on their personal judgments when making placement decisions.

### *Practice*

The creation of more volunteer based programs, such as CASA, may eliminate some existing challenges in the current child welfare system. For example, agencies such as DCFS could have volunteers assist in abuse and neglect cases. The volunteers could assist caseworkers with paper work and monitoring families who require services. This may decrease the instances of caseworker overload and inappropriate placement.



Volunteer programs focused on foster care could also be implemented. Foster parents as well as former foster children, could assist agencies with training and education. The volunteers could assist in identifying potential foster parents. Former foster children could serve as mentors to children currently in the system. This may decrease potential challenges that occur within foster care and/or homes, such as placing a child in an inappropriate foster home.

A volunteer-based program may also be implemented to focus on services and programs. Individuals who specialize in child development and family relations may contribute their time by teaching parenting classes to families who require services. Also, individuals who specialize in issues, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, or family counseling, could assist families. This type of volunteer-based program may increase beneficial services provided by child welfare agencies and address funding constraints.

### Conclusion

This study focused on both positive and negative aspects of the child welfare system. It was determined that participants equally agreed and disagreed with the statement that the Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children. The majority of participants felt that some instances of child abuse were inadequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system. The majority of participants, however, believed that the Illinois child welfare system provided adequate assessments and services to children and their families.

Challenges that exist in the Illinois child welfare system, as well as, possible solutions were explored. Budget constraints, insufficient staffing, and lack of training

were among the challenges identified. These challenges adversely affect children across the state of Illinois. For example,

Jovan was born in 1990 and has been in DCFS care since shortly after birth.

DCFS has moved Jovan at least fourteen times, placing him in thirteen foster homes, one diagnostic group home and one psychiatric hospital. Growing up in DCFS care, Jovan has developed enuresis, encopresis and destructive behavior.

In 1996, Jovan received an inpatient evaluation, which recommended that he not return to his previous foster home due to the use of corporal punishment. DCFS disregarded the hospital's recommendation and returned Jovan to the foster home. Just over a year later, DCFS placed Jovan in a diagnostic group home for an evaluation. Jovan was diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Attachment Disorder, Learning Disorder Not Otherwise Specified, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Physical Abuse of Child and Neglect of Child. It was recommended that Jovan be placed in an intermediate-term residential care group home. Again DCFS did not follow the recommendation for placement, and moved Jovan through a series of foster homes. In late 2001, Jovan was psychiatrically hospitalized. The discharge recommendation was for a highly structured therapeutic residential setting. DCFS once again ignored the placement recommendation. Jovan is currently placed with a foster parent in her seventies who has chronic health problems (Cook County Public Guardian, 2003, p. 1).

It is recommended that future research be conducted that examines inadequacies present in the child welfare system. It is also recommended that issues such as funding, laws, policies, and practice be explored by future research

and individuals associated with the child welfare system. The child welfare system holds the influential power to advocate and ensure safety for children, young and precious lives dependent upon our valuable efforts. For those children and for their safety and well-being, our system must succeed.

Appendix A

Letter to Participants

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Anne Maciejewski and I am a Family and Consumer Sciences graduate student at Eastern Illinois University. I am conducting a research study that examines CASA volunteers' Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

Below is the survey that consists of questions related to the Illinois child welfare system.

Please send your reply with the completed survey to [annecmaciejewski@yahoo.com](mailto:annecmaciejewski@yahoo.com).

Please complete the survey by June 5<sup>th</sup>. If you have any questions, please e-mail me.

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time,

Anne Maciejewski, B.S.

## Appendix B

## Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study will be to explore CASA volunteers' perceptions related to the child welfare system in the state of Illinois. The study will also explore factors that may have been associated with challenges within the system.

**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.



## Appendix C

### Participant Responses

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study will be to explore CASA volunteers' perceptions related to the child welfare system in the state of Illinois. The study will also explore factors that may have been associated with challenges within the system.

**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

Based on my experience, I would say the system adequately protects MOST children. I use the term 'adequate' to indicate that minimum standards are being met. I believe there is a lot more that can be done, but as long as DCFS workers are over worked and given strict monetary hurdles to contend with, there are bound to be some children who fall through the cracks with services and end up in unsafe environments. I would like to note that while the children may be protected from the actual abuse/neglect, they are not protected from the 'system' i.e. multiple foster homes, insufficient services, lack permanency,. This shortcoming also damages children...it is just in a different way than the abuse/neglect.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   Disagree           

Please explain.

I think this statement is true, but I'm not sure that the 'fault' lies solely in the hand of DCFS. I think that it is difficult to confirm abuse at times due to the unwillingness of some people to get involved. I also believe that the blatant abuse is often noted more readily, but the more subtle forms may be harder to document & 'prove'. Unfortunately...there are bound to be mistakes because no human is 100% predictable, and sometimes people that seem likely abusers, would never think of hurting their children. Likewise, some people can present very calm and collect, but may be on the verge of instability that may lead to abuse...They may fool the world until it is too late to help the kids.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

I think the primary issues deal with caseworkers that are stretched too thin and budget 'rules' that constantly put limitations on caseworkers and the services they are allowed to provide. Caseworkers spent a ridiculous amount of time pushing paper when they could be more hands on with the families. Rules also seem to change so rapidly that workers often don't know what end is up.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

I think that increased funding would go a LONG way toward eradicating many of the problems. Additionally...revamping/consolidating some of the paperwork that is REQUIRED would allow caseworkers to focus more on the family than on the formalities. If caseworkers could allow themselves the latitude to at least glance at the 'best interest of the child' without worrying about paperwork and money...it would help.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

While they may do a fine job of assessing the needs of the children, I believe they fail when it comes to implementation. Budget constraints seem to be the driving factor in many situations, and therefore, decisions are often made for monetary reasons rather than in an effort to best meet the needs of each individual child. i.e. rushing to move a child from a group home environment to save money, failure to follow through with agreed upon services due to transportation expenses (homemaker), trying to return a child home or complete an adoption hastily to save more \$

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

It seems like we (CASA) are always pushing for additional services from the Department. Once a number of services are already in place, each additional request for new services becomes less and less likely because of budgetary restrictions. I have heard several times that ...we are already doing service A, service B and service C, so I don't know if I can get funding for services D and E approved. It is like we need to settle because we are doing something, rather than pushing to make sure we are doing everything. I realize that this is VERY difficult for the caseworkers because they need to worry about \$\$\$ and CASA is fortunate enough to only address the child's best interest.

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study will be to explore CASA volunteers' perceptions related to the child welfare system in the state of Illinois. The study will also explore factors that may have been associated with challenges within the system.

**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_



4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

I still have my first case. DCFS has done a good job providing care and services for my casa child. Not perfect [in my opinion], but good

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

It is impossible to do a perfect job no matter what field one is in. It is so high-profile in the news when DCFS fails, that I think there is a false perception of too many failures.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

I think that there is a rather recent lack of state money that could harm the children in the system. I think that there is a rather recent lack of state money that could harm the children in the system.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges:

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   Disagree           

Please explain.

My CASA child has had pschy. evals., instant hospitalizations for threatened suicide, counseling, mostly decent ,good and excellant foster homes, good group homes, decent to excellant case workers. She is not doing well despite all this attention, but I don't know what else can be done to help her. My niece is a drug addict who had a baby 8 months ago, and her 11 year old child lives with me. The 11 year old was in the DCFS system 6-9 years ago. They received good care and services. My niece and her husband did the tasks that DCFS said were necessary to get their child back, and all was well for 3 years, until they started using again and couldn't maintain a home. The other CASA workers that I talk to have not told me many complaints, except that there have not been as many cases

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   Disagree           

Please explain.

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

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**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_8\_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_0\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_0\_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate\_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree\_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_X\_\_\_

Please explain.

It does not adequately protect all children. They are understaffed, overworked,  
and underfunded.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child  
welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_X\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

There was a dramatic drop in cases appearing in court that coincided with less  
funding and little new hiring at DCFS.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

Funding, understaffing.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

Have volunteers work at DCFS if they can't possibly fulfill all needs themselves.

Also, more thorough evaluations of workers and higher expectations of them.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   Disagree           

Please explain. For the most part they do what they can to help both children and families and look at the whole picture.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   Disagree           

Please explain.

Once they take a case they usually offer all the necessary services. Following up and making sure the services are used may be lacking.

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

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**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ years

\_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ years

\_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_



4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

Inadequate resources

Drug and alcohol abuse

Mental illness

Poverty

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

Unfortunately, these problems will always be with us.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

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**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Caseworkers are overloaded and do not always work in the best interests of the children. Many are unqualified, inexperienced, or negative personalities that actually make a child's life more difficult as the work through the system.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree   X   \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Assessments are often rushed and not thorough. Putting out fires rather than coming up with viable solutions.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Once identified and ordered, needed services are provided

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

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**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_



4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree\_\_\_\_\_

Disagree\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Refer to the increase of media stories of system failures.

Personnel shortages & insufficient funding causing problems with poor investigative work and risk taking has increased with a resultant misjudgement at the expense of children . The system appears to protect adequately only a portion 70% ?( est ) of those children in the system .

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree\_\_X\_\_\_\_

Disagree\_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Again notice the increase in failures in the media daily failures.

.Budget availability affecting numerous decisions and services provided

. Shortage of personnel to investigate

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

- .Funding
- .Staffing
- .Policies of confidentiality
- .Insufficient support agencies ie therapy type groups.
- .agency conflicts
- .parental abuse of the welfare system

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

- . Develop two seperate agencies that would manage the system based on the severity of the case.
- .Change the confidentiality laws so offenders are publicly exposed
- .Assign private agencies to less severe cases so that more funds could come from the private sector.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree   X   \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

.This appears to be a cost driven process that determines if services are approved or rejected. Child needs in many cases are secondary in the decision process.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Services are adequate for those in the system and when funding is available. Expiring budgets affect decisions.

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

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Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_X\_\_\_

Please explain.

Children's lives are directed by case workers with minimal supervision who are asked to provide services and maintain copious paper records, while the reality of the child's condition and progress is lost in the checklists and hollow court appearances of most DCFS or private agency workers. They are running from one crisis to the next with quality of care passing the test if the child is not in documented crisis. The court does not push beyond most of the checklists of services. The children move through the system and are often "lost." The Illinois judge can not order the DCFS worker to change placement, etc.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_X\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Hot line calls are not all adequately investigated and DCFS is too initially focused on supporting the family success through services that the child is left at risk and does not get removed until terrible damage is experienced.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

- Minimal public awareness or willingness to be pro-active (abuse is a subject hated but avoided)
- It is a conflict of interest to have the foster care system managed by the same state agency which also provides services to the family and the offenders.
- More accountability and scrutiny of individual caseworkers is critical. Less children per case load...
- More resources are needed for children in system...including development of excellent group homes or foster home "villages" to counter balance the many substandard foster homes with questionable motivation and / or inadequate personal nurturing and development skills for raising children.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

- Separate foster care & placements from investigation & family services...two accountable agencies
- Public awareness and public action as opposed to "looking the other way"
- Develop & fund excellent group homes and subsidized foster home "villages"

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_X\_\_\_

Please explain.

Currently the agencies are satisfied when the check boxes are marked that steps have been taken to service the child within the limited finances available. The child's actual needs are far overshadowed by the "satisfaction" at the agency that the child is receiving all that they could possibly provide them.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_X\_\_\_

Please explain.

The services may seem appropriate and adequate but often the service providers are under contract at a far reduced rate (often over burdened with caseload numbers) and the services are looked at as charity cases by the psychiatrists, counselors, etc. Limited funding often makes services like family counseling provided for a short period or under limited depth.

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

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**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_0\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_0\_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate\_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree\_\_x\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_Graduate of Diploma Nursing School\_\_\_\_\_



4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

I agree and disagree. As with any bureaucratic organization movement is slow and there is never enough money where you need it. Sometimes getting an approval on a decision or request has to go through many layers of supervisor's etc. In my time as a CASA working with the child welfare system I have found the DCFS workers and the contract agency workers for DCFS to be respectful of my position as CASA and have worked together as a team for the benefit of the child. There is a frequent turnover of case workers on a child in the "abuse and neglect system." In my cases I am frequently the most consistent person on the case. Attorney's change, judges change, foster parent's change, case worker's change.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree   X  

Please explain.

I can't recall any instances in my personal experience that I know that child abuse has not be adequately identified.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

I have read newspapers articles about placement of children with abusive foster parents. I have not seen this on any of my cases. Good case workers.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

Better screening of foster parent, allow time to check-up on foster parent and child, lighter case load for case worker.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

Most generally it does, to my knowledge.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_X\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Most generally it does, but the wheels of action turn slowly.

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

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Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_6\_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_0\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree   X  

Please explain.

Illinois does not consistently fund the system they have in place. Programs are cut then reinstated when the funds become available. The system is antiquated at best. The forms they use are redundant and excessive. DCFS case workers are underpaid and overworked, leading to less that excellent people doing this job. The use of outside agencies is a mess. There is no oversight of their services or how the funds are being used.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Again, it depends on the funding. People will tell you that the system gets flooded with kids taken into custody when there is a release of state funding. Where were these kids before??

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

The system is OLD. The computers that the field offices use are 20 years old, with useless software. I met with a regional supervisor who said she cannot even view the reports that she creates. She does not have clearance. A complete overhaul of the system is necessary but it will take more than 4 years. What happens when the election come???

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

Get a comprehensive computer system in place. Put in a comprehensive listing of foster families on line for all agencies to access. Currently each agency has their own foster families. With all the children in the system there are foster families waiting months, even a year for a placement. Bring the private agencies under control or stop contracting with them Put more funding oversight in place. Payments are made for child care that never get where they are intended to go.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree   X  

Please explain.

They try, but again it's a matter of funding. Every political candidate says they want to improve the lives of the children in Illinois but the first thing that gets cut in a budget crunch is the funding for counseling, group homes, etc.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree   X  

Please explain.

As above



Sorry, I could not respond either on my home computer or at work. My answers are:

1. 6 years as a CASA volunteer.
2. Same for social service field
3. High school graduate with some college
4. Illinois child welfare system does not adequately protect children. This situation is due more to inadequate laws than to failure of DCFS personnel to act to the best of their ability within the law. The day MUST come when the law views children as separate human beings with inalienable human right-not parental property.
5. I agree. At present abuse will be ignored unless DCFS is forced to acknowledge it. This, again, is mainly due to an under-funded system rather than to callousness among DCFS personnel. However, in 1998 I along with several DCFS workers, a Casa Case Manager and a pro-bono attorney, heard a DCFS supervisor dismiss intergenerational incest as a cultural quirk that did no harm unless called to the attention of the victim. This was reported by the Casa Case Manager and the pro-bono attorney but the supervisor was not removed.
6. Besides unsupportive laws and inadequate funding, they suffer from an almost impossibly poor computer system. This wastes time and energy better employed elsewhere.
7. Enlightened, well considered laws, priority funding, an adequate computer system and elimination of a culture that protects a few workers who should not be there would all help.
8. They do the best they can to assess the needs of children and their families under the handicaps already listed.

9. Once again, they do the best they can for the most part given their circumstances.

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\_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

All the case workers I have worked with have done a fantastic job with the children and protecting them. In general, I think this is the case.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree           

Disagree   X  

Please explain.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

Not enough case workers and they aren't paid enough to do what they are expected to do. The case loads are incredible! CASAs are a fantastic addition to the court system. They are often times the only eyes and ears the court has to report for the children.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

IL. needs to hire more qualified social workers and pay them a lot more money, with a reduced work load.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

I agree in \_\_\_\_\_ County with Judge Brokaw. But I think it depends where one lives and how much of a case load the case workers have. How effective can anyone be if they have 50 ongoing cases at one time? And what if a case worker isn't adequately trained? In \_\_\_\_\_ County I tend to see kids placed with family members when possible and proper counseling assigned when needed.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

I think the services provided are adequate in \_\_\_\_\_ County. I don't know about the entire state. Whether families choose to take advantage of services offered is up to them

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Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_0\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate\_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree\_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

I do not know what hasn't been brought into the system. In those cases on which I have worked, I have found that the DCFS and its other agencies, i.e., Catholic Charities, have been on top of the situation, made regular visits, and were caring people. A few have been less than that, but not the rule.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree           

Disagree   X  

Please explain.

I have not experienced this.



6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

Turnover of staff

Mature (not just out of school) employees

Case demands within work "week"

Time spent in court, often just waiting

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

Improved salaries, attracting good candidates, raising the respect level of social workers or the agency in the eyes of potential candidates, making this a viable long-term career (10+ years as average stay)

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

I have found that our case workers have an in-depth understanding of family needs, history and current involvements. The ACRs are quite involving and service plans are expected and followed.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

I am amazed at the kind and variety of services that the children, their families and guardians have been able to receive. I can't imagine all of the dollars spent on this. I believe that they are well spent, but, still, I am amazed that the these additional are there. I have worked with case workers who have all tried to investigate and provide what could be done for the children and families.

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\_\_\_\_\_8\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_0\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X   Disagree           

Please explain.

As a general statement, I believe the above statement is true. In my 8 years as a CASA, I have not seen any instances of children that were not protected. I've noticed that there are many safeguards in place to help prevent any cracks in the system.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree            Disagree   X  

Please explain.

In my 8 years as a CASA, I have not seen any instances of child abuse that were not adequately identified .

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

In the Illinois child welfare system it appears that there are a number of people that use the system. These people stonewall and screw up over and over again, while their children wait for them to "get it together". It is good to have a system that will give a 2nd or 3rd chance. But the system, sometimes, is far too lenient on a small minority of people.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

The system needs to keep better track of timelines and Judges need to do a better job of enforcing. Judges need to start making hard decisions when needed. If a family cannot be fixed then the children need a permanent, long term, living arrangement.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

I believe that the child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children , but sometimes cannot follow through on those needs because of policies and procedures. For example; older children that need a firm hand and/or need to be disciplined, soon find out that they can get away with almost anything. The only consequences are DOC when they have finally gone too far.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

The Illinois child welfare system is designed to put families back together. This appears to be the foundation of almost each and every policy. The services that this system provides are geared to this belief. As a CASA I have seen people fail the system, but I have not seen any instances of the system failing the people.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA

3 years, 1 month

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

Just during my CASA volunteer experience--3 yrs., 1 m.

3. Please place an x on the line that indicates your education level.

Master's Degree

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Disagree. While DCFS requires all prospective foster parents to complete training, it only requires relatives to complete 7 hours. Many extended family members are not better solutions for the child, and the training is inadequate for them. The hours required for other prospective foster parents are extensive, which may help to weed out those who are less serious about it. Also, the system is overburdened. There are not enough caseworkers, they are underpaid, understaffed. The Catholic Charities office I deal with does not even have computers. There are not enough foster parents, let alone not enough quality ones. There are not enough checks and balances to protect the children when there is not enough staff to keep track of them.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Disagree. There have been times when the hotline is so overburdened that it refuses to look into calls of suspected abuse. Also, there is little follow-up in many cases, particularly in areas where there is a higher incidence of this type of report. We still give birthparents too many chances before removing the children

permanently, if at all.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

Again, low pay for workers and not enough of them. They get burned out and leave and their cases fall on the shoulders of other already overburdened workers. Also, the court system itself is slow-moving. It took three years for my CASA case to go from removal of the children by DCFS to termination of parental rights and adoption. While it is true that changes in family dynamics due to substance abuse, etc. may take time to correct, the children get older and older and become less adoptable as the days go by.

Unfortunately, too, is the fact that the people whose children are in the system are having more and more children. Many of the parents are dealing with substance abuse issues, mental illness, etc., yet they continue to have children that the state removes and must find a place for. Many of the children are placed in homes or facilities only because there is space. There is never time to place a child in a home that matches the child's needs.

7. Please identify some possible solution to these challenges.

Yikes! Where do you start? One thing that would be helpful is to develop a campaign that really shows foster care in a positive light. My husband and I are foster parents and have had a wonderful experience with it. Everyone who sees us says, "I don't know how you do it!" which is ridiculous--anyone can love a child. It is all too easy. I think foster parenting needs to be sold to the more affluent, suburban families who will not do it just for the money. We have extra



bedrooms, disposable income, good schools, etc. Suburbanites have the potential to be great foster parents.

With an abundance of quality foster homes, you eliminate the problem of the "lost child" within the system. The case-workers will have less of a burden if the children are in quality homes as well. Many suburban families have the ability to provide sibling visits, transportation to counseling, etc. that will ultimately help the children as well.

Needless to say, paying the workers better could only help. If the field was more lucrative, more workers would stay. If the state could afford to hire more workers, that would help too. They are just too understaffed to do a better job than they are doing now.

Technology needs to be introduced to the individual agencies and there needs to be training so that workers can use it. Computers in each agency that would eliminate a lot of what is now done by hand would be wonderful. To have the ability to contact foster parents and other agency personnel via e-mail and instant messaging would save so much time that is lost waiting for phone calls.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Agree. We have had a great support system that has been provided since we became foster parents. I have seen that the state really does try to provide its children and families with community services. Much of the problem lies in the fact that many of those parents really do not want to use what is offered. They do not want to work to change. They want someone to do it for them. Many of them

are provided with counseling, parenting classes, substance abuse programs, etc., but they do not attend, or attend only sporadically. My foster children were provided with both speech and physical therapy as soon as I raised concerns. The services are there, but people have to want to use them. Foster parents are given great training so that they will be able to assess (or at least recognize) some potential problems. Then, the services seem little more than a phone call to a case worker away.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Agree. See above.

Answers to survey:

1. CASA since 11/1998

2. Since 1998

3. Bachelor Degree, 1961

4. Disagree - The funding is never enough to have the manpower to protect children.

More rules and regulations often mean more paperwork and less interaction and active advocacy for children.

5. Agree - For the same reasons as above. There is more abuse than there are workers to deal with the problem especially in a large metro area like Chicago. Also the system protects parental rights better than children's rights. And this is a difficult situation in a democratic country for people should expect to have their privacy protected.

6. Preventing abuse is often like preventing a bad auto accident. In a perfect world we would all be kind to each other, never lose our temper, have the best parents, etc and we would drive within the speed limit, never drive while under the influence, have a safe vehicle, etc. Most of us are following the rules most of the time but some of us are not. Obviously the more that we can identify those who do not follow the rules most of the time the safer society will be. More money is needed for DCFS, parenting classes for those who don't follow the rules are needed and attendance should be mandatory and last for a long period of time. Perhaps a triage plan is needed. Some people who are parents are no good at it and they should be identified rather quickly and the children that are abused by them should be taken away sooner rather than later.

7. As I mentioned a triage system for getting children away from the incorrigibles. Putting children who are merely neglected in a separate category from

abused children so the court proceedings are minimized and the neglectful parent should get the help needed and not have to jump through humiliating hoops. "Neglect" is a fuzzy term often determined by middle class white people. So if a child is neglected because food isn't put away, or his clothes are dirty or he is yelled at and spanked (not beaten mind you) then show the parent how to put food away and why it is a good idea, tell them that dirty clothes are O.K. but sometimes they have to be changed and try to show a parent alternative means of discipline. But don't put the parent guilty of neglect before a judge any more than necessary. I've witnessed that they are treated well by judges but it is perceived as punitive to be before a judge.

8. Agree - it tries very hard but lack of money, mandated paperwork, lack of common sense being applied to a situation and of course shortage of manpower make it a very difficult job.

9. Agree - but they just need more of them and these services have to be available at convenient times and convenient locations. Also parents MUST realize that certain tasks must be completed SATISFACTORILY if they are really going to be good parents. I've observed that most parents I've seen in the system do not realize that parenting is a life long job. They are impatient if a two year old isn't potty trained or has a temper tantrum or interferes with the things the parent wants to do. It's this babies raising babies that bothers me so much.

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1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_17\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate\_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree\_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree\_\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_? \_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_? \_\_\_

Please explain.

It's a case by case answer-there are a lot of questions that can be asked concerning the "welfare system" that can never be answered = Agree or Disagree, but...I feel that our Illinois \_\_\_ county especially, - has gone to great lengths to protect our children. Not every county has CASA! Without additional help = CASA, I feel the Ill. Child welfare system - DCFS - is overwhelmed! Define adequatley- means to get by- + I guess we do this to the best of our Illinois abilities

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_? \_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_? \_\_\_

Please explain.

How can you identify if you don't have all of the information?! It's time consuming- state funding expensive and information poor for the most part- this makes it hard to adequatley identify

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

- fiscal budget
- short staffing
- inadequate information
- poor judgement
- indiscisiveness
- increase in lower unemployment rate which causes staff shortage + increase in families that can become involved in DCFS due to stress- unemployment-financial strain

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

If they were identifiable- we would have no challenge I feel our system is doing the best they can

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree ☒ x ☐

Disagree ☐

Please explain.

WIC- CASA- DCFS, etc.- Our country is Way- A-head- of any other country

Only-change- "concerned" "compassionate" lawyers.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree ☒ x ☐

Disagree ☐

Please explain.

Same as above



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\_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_X\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Up to a point- even once a child is in system, it's easy to slip through cracks- all  
need an advocate-should be mandated!

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_X\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Often doesn't surface til 'damage' done- reluctance to report on part of abused +  
those who know.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

Abuse of system- happens not only in welfare but east to manipulate when child concerned-

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

A child needs a advocate

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ *in the middle* Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Short of help

Short of trained help

Short of PR re: availability of help this has changed considerably in last 10 years-

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Not enough workers-easy burn out- time constraints- red tape- make it difficult to provide adequate services- current administration has cut many services

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1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   x  

Disagree           

Please explain.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   x  

Disagree           

Please explain.



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Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_ 6+ \_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_ 6+ \_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_ X plus \_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other paralegal certification \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

I believe they do try very hard. Lack of money, personnel, etc. keep their hands tied. Caseworkers are dedicated and caring people in our community.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

Custody cases.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree X Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree x Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Parents do not always take advantage of services offered to them.

Perceptions of the Current Illinois Child Welfare System Survey.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study will be to explore CASA volunteers' perceptions related to the child welfare system in the state of Illinois. The study will also explore factors that may have been associated with challenges within the system.

**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following statements and explain your response as requested. To maintain confidentiality, surveys will be printed with all identifying information removed.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

1. Please specify how long you have been a volunteer for CASA.

\_\_\_\_\_9\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

2. Please state how long you have worked in the social service field.

\_\_\_\_\_9\_\_\_\_\_ years                      \_\_\_\_\_ months

3. Please place an X on the line that indicates your education level.

High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. The Illinois child welfare system adequately protects children.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_X\_\_

Please explain.

The child welfare system doesn't have enough workers to adequately protect children.

5. Some instances of child abuse are not adequately identified by the Illinois child welfare system.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree \_\_x\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain.

Child abuse is not always reported.

All of these questions need more information than agree or disagree.

6. Please identify some of the major challenges that may exist in the Illinois child welfare system.

7. Please identify some possible solutions to these challenges.

8. The Illinois child welfare system adequately assesses the needs of children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree   X  

Disagree           

Please explain.

9. The Illinois child welfare system provides adequate services to children and their families.

Place an X next to Agree or Disagree.

Agree      X     

Disagree           

Please explain.

The parents don't always take advantage of those services



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