

Child Outcomes and Volunteer Effectiveness Study

Determining the Effectiveness of CASA on Child Outcomes

Evaluation Plan

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Introduction and Purpose

In September 2014, the Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (Texas CASA) contracted with Dr. Cynthia Osborne and the Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin to design a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the state's CASA services. The broad goals of the Child Outcomes and Volunteer Effectiveness (COVE) evaluation are to determine the extent to which Texas CASA is effectively serving the needs of children and to identify the factors that enhance or limit the successful implementation of services. Through the COVE evaluation, we aim to learn *whether* the services work; but equally important will be to learn *why* they work or why not, for whom do they work best, and what are the environmental or community factors that affect services.

Four related, but separate studies of the 71 Texas CASA programs will be conducted to inform the COVE evaluation and assess the effectiveness of CASA services statewide. Each study will enhance and support the other pieces of the COVE evaluation, but will stand alone as separate research aims. The first study (Selection Bias Study) will begin in fall 2015 and will examine the differences in baseline case, family, and child characteristics between cases a set of cases that were assigned a CASA volunteer advocate and cases that were not. CPS cases are not randomly assigned a CASA volunteer, and each jurisdiction has a different process for assigning a volunteer to a case. If the characteristics of cases or children assigned a CASA volunteer differ significantly from those not assigned a CASA volunteer (e.g. cases with a CASA volunteer are more complex or have more serious allegations), then it is possible that it those differences in case or family characteristics that affect the outcomes of the case, rather than the CASA volunteer per se. The inability to account for this potential selection bias has vexed most of the prior research on the effects of CASA on child outcomes. Our ability to carefully identify this potential selection bias will inform the analyses of the subsequent research aims.

The second study (Child Outcomes Study) will examine differences in child and case outcomes between cases assigned and not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate. This study will answer the broad question of whether CASA services are associated with better outcomes for children. The outcomes will include the wellbeing of children while in care (e.g. receiving needed medical services, age-for-grade in school, etc.), as well as intermediate outcomes of the case (e.g. number of placement, time to permanency, return to the system within one year). Using sophisticated analysis techniques (e.g. propensity score matching), we will account for the selective characteristics of cases assigned a CASA volunteer identified in the first study in order to identify the real impact of the CASA services on the outcomes.

The third study (Volunteer Effectiveness Study) will identify the activities and characteristics of more effective CASA volunteer advocates. The results of this study will inform training of CASA volunteers and will answer the question of *why* CASA makes a difference. This study will focus only on cases assigned a CASA volunteer and determine the activities, characteristics, and experiences of CASA volunteer advocates associated with better child and case outcomes.

The final study (Implementation Study) will analyze how external and contextual factors that are largely outside the control of a CASA volunteer advocate, such as judicial policies and procedures or a CASA program's training budget, impact CASA advocates' ability to impact case and child outcomes. This largely qualitative study will inform Texas CASA and local programs as to the supports that volunteers need and provide insight into how factors beyond CASA's control impact child and case outcomes

The proposed COVE evaluation will provide Texas CASA the opportunity to learn how CASA is valuable to the children in the child welfare system and about potential strategies to improve the effectiveness of CASA volunteer advocates statewide and nationally.

Background

OVERVIEW OF TEXAS COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES (TEXAS CASA)

Texas CASA, Inc. is a membership organization made up of 71 CASA programs across the state of Texas. The organization was founded in 1989 to support member CASA programs in effectively advocating for abused and neglected children. The first CASA program in Texas was established in 1980 in Dallas. Today there are 71 programs independent CASA affiliates that are members of Texas CASA. Specially trained community volunteers known as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), or CASA volunteer advocates, work to make the voices of abused and neglected children heard, representing the child and advocating for the child's needs in the foster care system. Currently, there are approximately 7,600 CASA volunteer advocates working throughout the 71 local programs in Texas, serving approximately 24,000 children in the foster care system.

Although the process differs across the state, in most areas family court judges decide if and when to assign a CASA volunteer advocate to a child involved with an abuse and neglect case. Many CASA staff and volunteer advocates assert that the most complex cases typically are assigned a CASA volunteer advocate, but assignments vary by jurisdiction depending on judges and the availability of volunteer advocates. In a small number of jurisdictions, all children are assigned a CASA volunteer.

CASA volunteer advocates serve a unique purpose on the case and potentially alleviate the workload of caseworkers and attorneys assigned to the case. CASA volunteer advocates engage in a number of activities to serve the needs of the child while in care. These activities include such things as: meeting with the child regularly; communicating with the parents, foster parents, medical and educational providers, caseworkers, and other parties on the case; gathering important information about the child and the family; identifying appropriate services for the child; and making recommendations to the judge. CASA volunteer advocates aim to secure a safe and permanent home for each child, be a strong support for the child, and ensure the needs of the child are met throughout his or her time in care.

Although the current evidence base on the effects of volunteer advocates on child outcomes is inconclusive, some prior studies have shown that children with a CASA volunteer advocate receive more services, are more likely to find a safe and permanent home, are more likely to have fewer placements while in care, and are more likely to achieve academic success than children without a CASA volunteer advocate. The present evaluation will examine these and other outcomes to determine the measureable impact of Texas CASA volunteer advocates on the outcomes of the cases and children they serve.

Overview of the Evaluation

Texas CASA received funding from National CASA to develop a thorough evaluation plan that will be used to implement an evaluation of the effectiveness of CASA services. The broad goals of the Child Outcomes and Volunteer Effectiveness (COVE) evaluation are to determine the extent to which Texas CASA is effectively serving the needs of children and to identify the factors that enhance or limit the successful implementation of services. Through the COVE evaluation, we aim to learn *whether* the services work; but equally important will be to learn *why* they work or why not, for whom do they work best, and what are the environmental or community factors that affect services.

The Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) plans to conduct a mixed-methods study that explores the impact of CASA volunteer advocates on the outcomes of the children served and identifies the activities and experiences of the volunteers that leads to better outcomes. The evaluation will examine how CASA volunteer advocates are assigned to cases, how the outcomes of cases and children are impacted by having a CASA volunteer advocate, what specific activities and characteristics of a CASA volunteer advocate are associated with the best case and child outcomes, and how external factors impede or enhance the ability of CASA volunteer advocates to impact case and child outcomes.

Judges do not randomly assign volunteer advocates to cases. If CASA volunteers were randomly assigned to cases, then determining the impact of CASA volunteers on child and case outcomes would be fairly straight forward. However, the lack of randomization has prevented prior studies from attributing causal impacts on case and child outcomes to the assignment of a CASA volunteer advocate. To overcome the inability to randomly assign cases, the present study will use propensity score matching to mimic the strengths of a randomized controlled trial. Cases without a CASA volunteer advocate will be matched to cases with a CASA volunteer advocate on as many characteristics as possible that are associated with differential case outcomes. These characteristics may include child age, race, family characteristics, reasons for removal, legal status of the case, level of care during foster care placement, and geographical region, among others. Analyses will also take into account important external factors that may affect the volunteers' ability to effectively advocate for children, such as regional differences in the relationship between CASA and county judges and CPS, the judicial system and court processes, and the length of time each program has been established. CASA will collect information from the CASA volunteer advocates, the Information Management Protecting Adults and Children in

Texas (IMPACT) system, which is the CPS data collection system, and from other case documentation such as court reports and CASA internal reports.

Importantly, this evaluation is not attempting to measure the effect that a specific local CASA program or CASA volunteer advocate has on case and child outcomes. Rather, Texas CASA desires to determine the overall impact of CASA programs in Texas on child and case outcomes in order to improve the CASA evidence base and to develop better support and training for CASA programs across the state and nationally.

CASA will focus on four major research aims:

1. **Selection Bias Study:** What are the differences in the baseline child and case characteristics between cases assigned a CASA volunteer advocate and those not assigned a CASA volunteer?
2. **Child Outcomes Study:** What are the differences in child and case outcomes between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and those without a CASA volunteer advocate?
3. **Volunteer Effectiveness Study:** Which activities, characteristics, and experiences of CASA volunteer advocates are associated with better child and case outcomes? What do more effective CASA volunteer advocates do to produce better child and case outcomes?
4. **Implementation Study:** How do external factors support or impede the ability of CASA volunteer advocates to impact case and child outcomes?

RESEARCH AIM 1: SELECTION BIAS STUDY

Children in Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) and Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) face a wide variety of challenges and have experienced many different types of neglect and abuse. A CASA volunteer may assist these children, and through providing a combination of activities and services not available to children without a CASA volunteer, the CASA volunteer may improve the outcomes of the children while in care and ultimately lead to better case outcomes.

Children, however, are typically not randomly assigned to have a CASA volunteer advocate or not. In many instances, judges use their discretion to determine if a case would benefit from a CASA volunteer. CFRP interviewed and surveyed dozens of CASA staff and volunteers throughout the state, and found that Texas judges typically assign a CASA volunteer to more complex cases, if a choice is necessary. Therefore, a simple descriptive comparison of child and case outcomes of cases assigned a CASA volunteer and those that are not may actually conclude that CASA-assigned cases have worse outcomes than cases not assigned a CASA volunteer. In evaluation studies, this phenomena is called selection bias – that is, the *characteristics of the cases* that receive the “treatment” are responsible for the differences in the outcomes between those receiving the treatment and not, rather than the treatment itself.

When random assignment to a treatment is not possible, selection bias is typically present. If this bias is not accounted for in the analyses of outcomes, then evaluation results may state that a program is not effective when it actually is, and vice versa. We aim to avoid these incorrect or invalid conclusions by identifying and reducing the amount of selection bias in all subsequent analyses.

The purpose of research aim 1 is to understand the differences in baseline child and case characteristics that exist between cases that are assigned a CASA volunteer advocate and cases that are not. Based on preliminary interviews and surveys of CASA program affiliates, the process through which a case is assigned a CASA volunteer advocate varies considerably across the state. In some jurisdictions, 100 percent of cases are assigned a CASA volunteer advocate and therefore no selection bias exists. In other jurisdictions where there are not enough CASA volunteer advocates available for every case, some programs report that judges assign CASA volunteer advocates to cases randomly, whereas others indicate that judges specifically select more complex and difficult cases for CASA volunteer advocates. Because the current evaluation is focused on the statewide impact of CASA, it is important to determine if there are overall differences statewide in cases assigned and not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate. Analyses will also be conducted by region to determine the extent to which selection varies across the state.

The existing literature on CASA programs has often suffered from the aforementioned issues of selection bias, which has resulted in a limited rigorous evidence base for CASA¹. Although some prior studies have investigated differences between cases that were assigned and not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate, not all of the studies found the same differences and therefore did not control for all potential selection issues. The present evaluation will enrich the existing evidence base by examining as many potential differences as possible between the cases assigned and cases not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate, in order to control for these during the subsequent analyses.

To inform the first research aim, we conducted a literature review to develop a list of potential selection criteria. Several prior studies have shown that cases involving children who have experienced extreme neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse,^{2,3,4,5,6,7} serious mental health issues of the parents,⁸ more placement instability, and cases with conflicting case information are more likely to be assigned a CASA volunteer.⁹ An evaluation conducted for National CASA in 2004¹⁰ found that children with a CASA volunteer advocate were significantly more likely than children without a volunteer advocate to have had a prior report, investigation, and substantiated incidence of maltreatment. An evaluation of CASA programs in the state of Kansas reported that cases with a CASA volunteer advocate had higher rates of parent substance abuse and had a greater number of siblings in TMC or PMC.¹¹ In order to ensure a valid analysis of child and case outcome of Texas CASA, it is critical to answer the question of how child and case characteristics differ between cases assigned and not assigned a CASA to account for these factors in subsequent analyses.

RESEARCH AIM 2: CHILD OUTCOMES STUDY

Past research has attempted to determine the impact of having a CASA volunteer advocate on a child's case and wellbeing outcomes. Although several studies have attempted to answer this question, many are outdated and several have had serious flaws in research methods that make any results questionable. Many prior studies were hindered by an inability to randomly assign volunteer advocates to cases. A lack of randomization makes it difficult to ascertain the true effect of the CASA volunteer advocate on the outcomes of interest. A quasi-experimental research design with matched groups can provide important findings on potential ways that CASA volunteer advocates impact outcomes. However, many studies on the impact of CASA volunteer advocates with quasi-experimental research designs have not adequately controlled for differences in case and child characteristics between cases assigned and not assigned to CASA volunteer advocates¹².

The current study will use a quasi-experimental research design because it is not possible to randomly assign cases to volunteer advocates in Texas. Therefore, research aim 2 is dependent upon the successful completion of research aim 1, which will uncover any selection bias in how cases are assigned. Any selection bias discovered can then be controlled for when conducting the outcomes analysis. Additionally, it is important to control for when during the length of a case a CASA volunteer was assigned. The impact of a CASA volunteer may differ depending on how long a case was open prior to being assigned a CASA volunteer.¹³

There are several outcomes of interest to Texas CASA that a CASA volunteer advocate may impact throughout a child's time in care. A specific list of short and intermediate term outcomes was defined through an inclusive process of qualitative interviews of program affiliates and Texas CASA staff as well as surveys of both CASA Executive Directors and CASA volunteer advocates across the state and an extensive review of the literature. For each analysis, propensity score matching will be used to match cases assigned to a CASA volunteer advocate to cases not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate on a variety of characteristics including child age, child gender, child race, family structure, severity of allegations and substantiated incidents of maltreatment, conservatorship status (temporary or permanent) and any other selection variables uncovered during the selection analysis.

Notably, relevant outcomes may differ by the age of the child served. It is likely that analyses will be separated into age groups so that the outcomes measured are applicable to the population. For instance, academic success would only be measured for children between the ages of 5 to 18 years and would exclude newborns and children through age 4. Some outcomes will be applicable to all age groups, such as access to medical services. Additionally, some outcomes may be more applicable to cases in TMC than to cases in PMC. Analyses will be separated by managing conservatorship status as needed.

The main questions that fall under this research aim are:

- 2.1 Are there differences in outcomes between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and cases without a CASA volunteer advocate while the children involved in the case are under TMC and/or PMC?
- 2.2 Are there differences in the final case outcomes between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and cases without a CASA volunteer advocate?
- 2.3 Are there differences in child and case outcomes between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and cases without a CASA volunteer advocate after case closure?

2.1: Outcomes While in Care

Data from qualitative interviews and surveys of Texas CASA program affiliates and volunteer advocates indicate that CASA volunteer advocates may have the greatest impact on children's outcomes while the children are in TMC or PMC. Although external factors may still influence and limit the ability of the CASA volunteer advocate to affect the case and child outcomes while the child is in TMC or PMC, qualitative data indicate that Texas CASA staff and volunteer advocates believe they are able to have the biggest effect on outcomes while they are serving on a case. There is a moderate evidence base supporting the direct impacts of CASA volunteer advocates on child outcomes while a child is in care; however, findings across studies often contradict each other or are flawed due to poor research methodology. The current study will focus on uncovering any selection bias and working to eliminate it from outcomes analyses. Additionally, a large sample size will increase the power of the study and allow for better representativeness.

A few studies have compared academic success between children with and without a CASA volunteer advocate. One study, which used various cognitive and academic testing scales, found no difference in academic success between children with a CASA and those without,¹⁴ while another study that assessed whether children had passed all their courses and examined expulsion data found that children with a CASA volunteer advocate performed better in school than those without one.¹⁵ This variety in findings is most likely due to differences in study methodology, especially as it relates to accounting for selection bias. Additionally some of the studies had very small sample sizes, limiting the validity and generalizability of the results. In the present study, academic success will be operationalized as the placement of the child in the correct grade for his or her age while in care. This measure will be examined for children with and without a CASA volunteer advocate and propensity score matching will be used to reduce selection bias.

Several studies have examined the number of services ordered to determine if children with a CASA volunteer advocate received more services than children without a CASA. Some studies, including a systematic review of CASA evaluation research, found that children with a CASA volunteer advocate receive more services.^{16,17,18} However, it is again unclear if these findings are valid due to issues with selection bias and study design. It is possible that children with CASA volunteer advocates receive more services because their cases are more complex or the children have higher levels of need. The present study will examine the number of services ordered while controlling for these and other possible selection issues.

Consistent visitation with family and siblings while in care, when appropriate, has been shown to lead to improved child well-being.¹⁹ However, the occurrence of visitation between a child and his or her parents or siblings while in care has not been widely measured among evaluations of CASA programs. One study found that children with a CASA volunteer advocate had slightly more contact with their siblings while in care, although this difference was not statistically significant.²⁰ More studies examined the visitation recommendations made by CASA volunteer advocates and found that cases with a volunteer advocate are more likely to explicitly state visitation recommendations to the court than those without one.^{21,22} To enhance the current evidence base, the present evaluation will measure if planned parent visits and sibling visits occur more frequently for children with a CASA volunteer advocate than those without a CASA volunteer.

Child welfare professionals often view kinship placements as more favorable than foster care placements for children during their time in out-of-home care. Research shows that children in kinship placements experience more placement stability, experience better behavioral development, have improved mental health functioning, are less likely to experience maltreatment, and are more likely to be satisfied with their placement than those placed in a foster home.^{23,24} However, existing research also reveals some negative consequences of kinship placements, such as reduced training and financial support for caregivers and increased case duration.^{25,26} Few evaluations of CASA programs have examined the effect of the CASA volunteer advocate on the type of temporary placement a child receives while in care. When comparing child outcomes while in care for children with a CASA volunteer advocate and those without, one study found that children with a CASA volunteer advocate were less likely to be placed in kinship care than those without a CASA volunteer advocate.²⁷ More research is needed to determine if and how a CASA volunteer advocate affects a child's temporary placement while in care. The present evaluation will control for the selective bias between CASA and non-CASA cases to determine the true impact of CASA on ensuring secure and nurturing placements while a child is in care.

Ensuring children are placed in a home that allows them to continue in the same school they attended prior to removal reduces the disruption caused by foster care. A meta-analysis of studies examining the effects of school mobility reported that higher rates of school mobility are associated with lower achievement levels in reading and math.²⁸ A recent study looking at the effect of school mobility on children in the foster care system found that more school moves leads to poorer socio-emotional competence for children in foster care with lower learning skills.²⁹ An extensive literature review found no past CASA evaluations have analyzed school placement and a CASA volunteer advocate's ability to impact those placement decisions. The present evaluation will examine change in school placement after removal and determine whether children with a CASA volunteer advocate are more likely to be placed in homes that allow the children to attend the same school they attended prior to removal than those without a CASA Volunteer Advocate.

Data from qualitative interviews of CASA staff and leadership, as well as quantitative data from surveys of CASA staff and volunteer advocates, will inform the short term outcomes measured in the present study. The current study will add to the existing literature by examining the impact of CASA on several short-term outcomes including whether the child is in the correct grade for his or her age, the number of services the child receives while in care, the frequency with which parental and sibling visitation occurs, whether the child is placed in a safe and nurturing home while in care, and whether the child had to change schools after moving into care. Although the current study is not able to randomize participants, by strictly controlling for selection bias, the results should reflect the true isolated impact of the CASA volunteer advocate on the short term outcomes of the children served.

Understanding the specific outcomes that CASA volunteer advocates affect *while* they are serving children in care may lead to more uniform training across programs and will provide important evidence of the effectiveness of Texas CASA in improving children's lives while in TMC and PMC and after leaving care.

2.2: Final Case Outcomes

The final outcomes of a case are dependent on many factors but there is some evidence to support the idea that a CASA volunteer advocate assigned to a case can have a positive effect on the final outcomes of that case.³⁰ Again, many prior studies on the effects of a CASA volunteer advocate on the final case outcomes are hindered by an inability to randomly assign volunteer advocates to cases and some studies have lacked an appropriate matched group within a quasi-experimental design. A lack of randomization makes it difficult to ascertain the true effect of the CASA volunteer advocate on the outcomes of interest. However, a quasi-experimental research design combined with the use of propensity score matching can provide important findings on potential ways that CASA volunteer advocates impact outcomes. The current study will examine the final case outcomes of children with a CASA volunteer advocate compared to the final case outcomes of children without a CASA volunteer advocate and will control for any potential selection bias to determine the isolated effect of the CASA volunteer advocate.

Data from qualitative interviews and surveys of CASA program affiliates and volunteer advocates indicate there are many external factors that may affect case outcomes, such as the characteristics of the case, the judicial system and court proceedings, the relationship that CASA has with judges and other professionals involved in the case, and the characteristics of the child being served, among others. As much as possible, these external factors will be controlled for in analyses to determine the true effect of CASA on the final case outcomes. Although external factors may affect case outcomes, a review of the existing literature indicates that placement type at case closure is often measured to evaluate the impact of CASA advocates. Permanent placement, which includes adoption, reunification, and guardianship, is generally considered a successful case outcome while remaining in long-term foster care, known as Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC), is considered an unsuccessful case outcome.³¹ In qualitative surveys of CASA program affiliates and volunteer advocates, it was

noted that adoption, reunification, and guardianship are not always recommended by CASA depending on the circumstances of the case; however, usually at least one of these outcomes is preferable to the children transitioning to PMC.

As with short-term outcomes, findings related to final case outcomes in prior research are often contradictory. Some studies have found that adoption is more likely to occur for children with a CASA volunteer^{32,33} while other studies reported no difference in the rates of adoption^{34,35} or found that other factors such as child age were more predictive of adoption than whether the child had a CASA volunteer.³⁶ Evidence demonstrating CASA volunteer advocates have an impact on the court's decision to recommend reunification is also weak. Some studies found that cases with a CASA volunteer advocate were more likely to end in reunification,³⁷ though the findings were sometimes not statistically significant.^{38,39} In the present evaluation we will attempt to examine the differences in case outcomes while controlling for confounders such as age and case characteristics.

Another case outcome that prior literature has examined is length of time to permanency. There is some evidence demonstrating that cases with a CASA volunteer advocate have shorter case durations than cases without a CASA volunteer advocate.^{40,41} However, again there are many external factors that may affect case duration such as case characteristics and the court policies and procedures within a jurisdiction. Most prior studies found no differences in case duration between cases with and without a CASA^{42,43,44,45} and one study found the final permanency decision was related to the length of the case duration, regardless of CASA assignment, with reunification associated with the shortest case durations.⁴⁶ The present evaluation will examine differences in case duration after controlling for the final case outcomes and other confounders.

The present study will also examine the number of placements at case closure a child experienced over his or her time in care to determine if children with a CASA volunteer advocate experienced more or fewer placements. Prior studies have shown that experiencing frequent placement moves in care is associated with poorer child outcomes.^{47,48,49,50} Although a smaller number of placements seems to be better because it signals more stability, qualitative data from interviews with CASA program affiliates and survey data from CASA stakeholders indicate CASA volunteer advocates may advocate for a child's removal from a specific placement if they notice the child is not thriving in a specific environment. This could result in a higher number of placements for children with CASA volunteer advocates compared to those without an advocate. One prior study conducted in Texas found that children with a CASA volunteer advocate experience a higher number of placements than children without a CASA.⁵¹ Other studies have found that children with a CASA experience more placement stability while in care^{52,53} and still others have found no difference in the number of placements between children with and without a CASA volunteer advocate^{54,55}. The current evaluation will focus on determining the true impact of the CASA volunteer advocate on the number of placements a child experiences while controlling for any issues with selection.

Finally, incidents of re-abuse while in care will be examined at the time of final case closure to examine whether children assigned to a CASA volunteer advocate are more or less likely to experience re-abuse while in care compared to children not assigned to a CASA volunteer advocate. There is little research on the effect of a CASA volunteer advocate on reducing a child's chance of being maltreated while in the foster care system. The present study will fill a gap in the literature by examining whether there is a difference in the incidence of abuse or maltreatment while in care between children with and without a CASA volunteer advocate.

2.3: Outcomes After Case Closure

The current study has a limited timeframe and a lack of access to longitudinal data after a child leaves the child welfare system. Therefore, the present evaluation will include only limited analyses of long-term outcomes that occur after case closure. The main long-term outcome measured in the present study will be recidivism, also known as reentry into the child welfare system. Few studies of CASA programs have examined reentry because it is harder to measure within the scope of many research studies⁵⁶. Of the studies that have examined reentry, some have found lower rates of reentry among cases with a CASA compared to those without a CASA but in most of these studies, the differences were not statistically significant^{57,58}. The present study will examine the number of cases in which one or more children re-enter foster care after a case is closed within two years after case closure and compare the rates of reentry between cases that originally had and did not have an assigned CASA volunteer advocate.

RESEARCH AIM 3: VOLUNTEER EFFECTIVENESS STUDY

CASA volunteer advocates work diligently to ensure the children they serve achieve the best possible outcomes while in care, at case closure, and indirectly, throughout their childhood and adulthood after leaving the child welfare system. However, with the limited resources and time available from each volunteer, it is crucial to understand which volunteer activities are most effective at improving child and case outcomes. The third research aim will examine how volunteer activities vary among CASA volunteer advocates and which activities are associated with better case and child outcomes as defined in research aim 2. The volunteer effectiveness analysis is not dependent upon the successful completion of research aims 1 and 2 because the third research aim will focus on within CASA variation. Cases assigned to CASA volunteer advocates will be compared to each other to determine which CASA cases result in the best outcomes and how volunteer activities and characteristics vary among these cases.

The main question that falls under this research aim is:

- 3.1 How do the activities, attitudes, and personal characteristics of CASA volunteer advocates who served on cases with positive case outcomes differ from those of CASA volunteer advocates who served on cases with negative case outcomes?

There is little conclusive evidence on the association between specific CASA volunteer activities and child and case outcomes. Several studies have examined and catalogued the types of activities in which CASA volunteer advocates engage but do not link these activities to specific

case or child outcomes. A recent study reviewed case records to examine the CASA investigative, monitoring, and advocacy activities, including the number of court reports submitted by CASA volunteer advocates, how many and what types of services CASAs recommended, the number of people a CASA volunteer advocate contacted per case, types of reports reviewed by CASA volunteer advocates, and concurrence between the CASA volunteer advocate and the social worker on the visitation plan, placement plan, and permanency plan.⁵⁹ Although these measures will inform the measures for the third research aim of the current study, the results of the prior study are not generalizable because of a smaller than expected sample size and considerable regional differences in findings. Another earlier study also examined the activities of CASAs and Guardian Ad Litem (GALs) prior to cases' judicial hearings but did not link these activities to case or child outcomes.⁶⁰ A study that examined judges' perspectives on the impact of CASA volunteer advocate activities found that judges report CASA volunteer advocates are most effective in considering the best interests of the child and monitoring the case.⁶¹ However, this study did not tie the judges' assertions to any objective measures of case or child outcomes. Another examined the activities on which CASA volunteer advocates spend the most time and found that appearing in court, attending CASA trainings, writing court reports, and interviewing persons involved in the case take up the majority of a CASA volunteer advocate's time on a case.⁶²

It is unclear from the current literature how the time spent on specific volunteer activities is associated with case or child outcomes. By comparing the activities of CASA volunteer advocates serving on cases with specific positive and negative outcomes, the present research aim will better clarify the activities that are associated with positive outcomes. These findings will inform CASA volunteer advocate training and could help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which CASA volunteer advocates spend their time on a case. Again, the analysis will take into account any differences found among regions of the state or jurisdictions to better understand the true impact of the CASA volunteer advocate. CFRP will also examine the barriers to effective advocacy volunteer advocates may have experienced while serving a case.

RESEARCH AIM 4: IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

Factors outside the control of CASA volunteer advocates may influence their ability to perform certain activities and achieve desired child and case outcomes. These external factors may include the relationship between CASA volunteer advocates, judges and other parties in their jurisdiction, funding and training available for CASA volunteer advocates, the location of a child's placement, jurisdictional laws and policies, and how and when cases are assigned to CASA volunteer advocates. It is important to understand and to take into account these outside forces that may impact child and case outcomes. External factors differ among jurisdictions, specifically in the relationships CASA has with judges and other parties and how volunteer advocates get assigned to cases. This research aim will examine how external factors impact case and child outcomes and volunteer advocate activities to inform analyses examining the differences between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and those without one, as well as to inform the analyses of the variation among cases that have CASA volunteer advocates.

The main question that falls under this research aim is:

1. How do external factors support or impede the ability of CASA volunteer advocates to impact case and child outcomes?

Past studies have examined the effect of external factors on case outcomes but most have failed to define a clear link between external factors and differences in child and case outcomes. Several studies that surveyed different parties involved in the child welfare system have found judges generally have positive opinions of CASA volunteer advocates^{63,64,65} while child welfare caseworkers generally have negative opinions of CASA volunteer advocates.⁶⁶ However, these studies do not link child and case outcomes to the relationships between CASA and these parties. The fourth research question aims to determine how the relationships between a CASA volunteer advocate and outside parties affect the advocate's ability to impact outcomes. When and how CASA volunteer advocates are assigned to cases may also impact outcomes and may impact the activities CASA volunteer advocates are able to perform. One study examined when during a case a CASA volunteer advocate was assigned and found better outcomes for cases when CASA was assigned pre-disposition versus when they were assigned post-disposition.⁶⁷ The full impact of CASA volunteers' advocacy on outcomes will not be accurately measured without acknowledging the differences in when CASA volunteer advocates are assigned throughout jurisdictions.

Laws and policies can vary between jurisdictions not only in how CASA is assigned to cases but also in what CASA volunteer advocates can do in their role. In Florida, Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) programs found a vast improvement in the relationship between GALs and children, specifically regarding trust, communication, and access to activities and services, after the passage of a law that allowed GALs to transport children.⁶⁸ Certain policies can help facilitate the relationship between a CASA volunteer advocate and a child. This research aim will uncover how policies vary throughout jurisdictions in Texas and how those policies can impact differences in volunteer effectiveness.

Differences in advocate training among CASA programs also may have considerable impacts on child and case outcomes. According to the National CASA protocols, all CASA volunteer advocates are required to complete 30 hours of training prior to serving on a case and 12 hours of training per year once they begin their advocacy work.⁶⁹ However, certain jurisdictions require different amounts of training and may provide additional training opportunities in specialized topics which may improve the effectiveness of a volunteer advocate. Current research on CASA programs does not take into account the differences in advocate training that can lead to differences in outcomes. This study will attempt to capture the differences in these inputs to determine their effect on CASA volunteer advocates' ability to impact case and child outcomes.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHILD WELFARE KNOWLEDGE BASE

This evaluation will contribute to the knowledge base of child welfare and court appointed special advocates in several ways. First, there is limited conclusive evidence on the impacts of CASA volunteer advocates on the short, intermediate, and long term outcomes of the children served by CASA. By employing a solid research design that takes into account any selection bias that occurs in the assignment of CASA volunteer advocates to cases, the current study will provide a robust understanding of the impacts of CASA volunteer advocates on a variety of child and case outcomes. This in turn can help CASA programs nationwide to better understand what aspects of a case a CASA volunteer advocate should focus on to ensure the greatest benefits to the child and the child welfare system.

Second, the short, intermediate, and long term outcomes examined in the current study will include measures that have not been analyzed in prior studies of CASA programs. Although outcomes such as normalcy experienced while in care may be more difficult to measure, qualitative interview and quantitative survey data from CASA stakeholders indicate that measures such as these are critical to uncovering the true impact of the CASA volunteer advocate. These innovative measures will enhance and deepen the understanding of how CASA volunteer advocates make an impact on the children they serve.

Third, this evaluation will focus on understanding which of the many CASA volunteer advocate activities and efforts are most important to ensuring positive case and child outcomes, as well as how external factors such as outside opinions of CASA and differences in advocate training affect volunteer advocates' impact on case and child outcomes. Texas CASA has prioritized understanding the activities and characteristics of CASA volunteer advocates in order to better streamline training programs for maximum impact of CASA volunteer advocates on case and child outcomes. Additional information on the impact of training and other differences among programs and jurisdictions will inform programs' training and marketing efforts.

Data Sources

CASA and CFRP will use several data sources to answer the four research aims of COVE including data currently being collected by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) through IMPACT, and data collected by CFRP through surveys of CASA volunteer advocates, surveys of members of the judiciary, and through the analysis and coding of court reports and other CASA documentation. An overview of the data sources for the evaluation is presented below, followed by the analytic method for each research aim.

CASE-LEVEL QUANTITATIVE DATA

Information Management Protecting Adults and Children in Texas (IMPACT)

DFPS caseworkers collect demographic and case information on every child welfare case opened. CASA has contracted with DFPS to securely access the data from all cases that opened between September 2012 and August 2015. The demographic and case data will be the source for most of the child and case characteristics to be included in analyses to control for selection bias and confounding variables. It is also the primary source of data for the case outcomes analyses.

CASA Manager

CASA Manager is a software program used for case and volunteer management by 61 programs in Texas. It can be used to track a variety of case and child outcomes. It is unclear at this time how programs are using the software program and what data are available at a statewide level. Texas CASA and CFRP will be able to access and use the statewide data housed within the CASA Manager software system. These data will be used to supplement the data obtained from IMPACT for the volunteer effectiveness and external factors studies.

CASE-LEVEL QUALITATIVE DATA

Court Reports

In addition to the data collected by each CPS caseworker through IMPACT, CASA volunteer advocates and CPS caseworkers submit court reports at every case hearing. The reports provide updates based on factual information regarding visits with the child, interviews with others involved in the case, and descriptions of the child's emotional and physical well-being and academic success. The court report also documents any services the child and parents have received as well as any special needs uncovered. The CASA volunteer advocates and CPS caseworkers may also include an assessment of any visitations observed. There is also a section in the report where CASA volunteer advocates can mention any concerns they have with how the case is being handled and a section that lists the CASA volunteer advocates' recommendations to the court.⁷⁰ Qualitative data from the court reports will be coded and analyzed to better understand any significant variation at the volunteer level in relation to volunteer activities and child outcomes and may be used in the external factors analysis to determine differences among CASA programs and jurisdictions.

SURVEY DATA

Survey of Members of the Judiciary

An online survey of Texas judges working in CASA program jurisdictions will help to inform the all of the COVE research aims. This survey is dependent upon the receipt of separate grant funding. The survey will ask judges to report how they assign cases to CASA volunteer advocates to inform the first and fourth research aims and will ask how judges view CASA volunteer advocates' unique contributions to case decisions and child outcomes to inform the third research aim. The survey will be emailed to members of the judiciary across the state of Texas. The instrument will ask judges to rate the importance of a variety of case and child characteristics to their decision to assign a CASA volunteer advocate to determine the variation in decision criteria across the state. Additionally, the survey will uncover how judges view the effectiveness of CASA volunteer advocates and what characteristics and activities they believe are most important for a CASA volunteer advocate to possess in order to best serve the child or case.

Survey of CASA Volunteer Advocates

In July 2015, CASA conducted an online survey of CASA volunteer advocates. Through the survey, CASA collected data on volunteer advocates' perspectives on how they impact the outcomes of the cases and children they serve and what activities and characteristics are most important to achieving positive outcomes. The survey was emailed to all 71 of the CASA program executive directors in Texas who then distributed the survey to their volunteer advocates. Approximately 450 volunteer advocates responded to the survey. Data collected from these surveys will help to inform the CASA volunteer survey for the CASA evaluation, which will ask volunteer advocates to reflect on a specific case they served. Volunteer advocates will be asked about the challenges associated with the case, the activities they engaged in during the case to advocate for the child/children's best interests, and how they believe their actions affected the outcomes of the case and the child. The CASA Volunteer Advocate Case Survey will be distributed by CASA Program affiliates Executive Directors. A random selection of 1400 cause numbers (approximately 20 per CASA program) will be chosen from the IMPACT data system and CASA executive directors will be asked to match these cause numbers to the case and CASA volunteer advocate assigned to the case. These CASA volunteer advocates will then be asked to submit a survey with questions detailing their experiences with the case.

Analytic Sample

The size of the analytic samples will vary by analysis. Analyses exploring the selection of CASA volunteer advocates to cases will include all available IMPACT data on cases that opened and closed during the time period of September 2012 to August 2015, approximately X cases. The outcomes evaluation analysis will include all opened and closed cases from IMPACT assigned to a CASA during the time period of September 2012 to August 2015 and all opened and closed IMPACT cases during the same time period that were not assigned to a CASA but match CASA cases on a variety of selection characteristics and potential confounding variables. A random selection of 1400 cases from IMPACT data available during the time period of September 2012 to August 2015 will inform the third and fourth evaluation research aims. The final sample for the third and fourth research aims will be dependent on the number of valid responses to the CASA Volunteer Advocates Survey, which will be the primary source of information on volunteer activities, characteristics, and external factors impacting volunteer effectiveness.

Analytic Method

RESEARCH AIM 1: SELECTION BIAS STUDY

The purpose of research aim 1 is to understand the differences that exist at case opening between cases that are assigned a CASA volunteer advocate and cases that are not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate on a statewide level and regionally. This research aim will be addressed by comparing the IMPACT data from the cohort of children assigned a CASA volunteer advocate to the IMPACT data of the cohort of children not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate whose cases opened during the timeframe of September 2012 to August 2015.

Data from IMPACT will be the main data source for analysis of the first research aim. Cause numbers for each case in IMPACT will be matched to the cause numbers provided by CASA program affiliates to determine which cases were assigned to CASA. The dependent variable in each analysis, CASA assignment, will be coded as 1 if the case had an assigned CASA volunteer advocate and 0 if a CASA volunteer advocate was not assigned.

Descriptive analyses of the case and child characteristics at the time of case opening for the cohorts will provide details on the differences between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and cases without a CASA volunteer advocate.

Regression analyses will be used to examine how characteristics of the cases and children assigned to a CASA volunteer advocate differ from those of cases and children not assigned to a CASA volunteer advocate; multiple logistic regression analyses will determine which characteristics are most predictive of assignment to a CASA volunteer advocate. Case characteristics examined will include but are not limited to legal status of case, county of removal, previous removals to CPS care, previous CPS investigations, confirmed allegations, and reasons for removal. Child characteristics examined will include but are not limited to child age, race, gender, language, country of citizenship, emotional/mental health indicators, medical

health indicators, and disabilities. Parent/caregiver characteristics examined will include age, race, gender, language, country of citizenship, and characteristics that contributed to removal. Further subgroup analyses may be conducted to determine if the strongest predictors of selection to CASA differ by, for example, the child’s age, race, gender, or by the case allegations or jurisdiction in which the case is opened.

An overview of the analysis plan for the first research aim is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis Plan for Research Aim #1: Selection

| Question | Data Sources | Analyses | Analytic Sample |
|---|---|--|--|
| 1. How do cases assigned a CASA volunteer advocate differ from cases not assigned a CASA? | <p>IMPACT data: Case characteristics, child characteristics, family characteristics</p> <p>Casa Program Affiliates reporting: Cause numbers assigned to Texas CASA programs</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive analyses of cases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How many cases are assigned and not assigned to CASA by region and/or jurisdiction ○ Demographics of cases ○ Reasons for removal • Regression analyses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Independent variable (IV): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Case, child, and parent characteristics ○ Dependent variables (IV): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dichotomous variable of assignment to CASA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMPACT data: All Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) and Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) cases opened and closed during September 2012 to August 2015 • CASA Program Affiliates reporting: All TMC and PMC cases assigned to a CASA volunteer in Texas during September 2012 to August 2015 |

RESEARCH AIM 2: CHILD OUTCOMES STUDY

The analyses for the first research aim, which will examine differences in case and child characteristics between cases assigned and not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate, will be critical to ensuring the analyses of the second research aim are valid and accurate. This research aim will examine differences in short, medium, and long term case and child outcomes between cases assigned and not assigned a CASA volunteer advocate to determine how CASA volunteer advocates make an impact on the cases and children they serve. Again, cause numbers from IMPACT will be matched to cause numbers provided by CASA program affiliates to determine which cases were assigned to a CASA volunteer advocate in all analyses. The independent variable in each analysis, CASA assignment, will be coded as 1 if the case had an assigned CASA volunteer advocate and 0 if a CASA volunteer advocate was not assigned.

We will control for any selection bias uncovered in research aim 1 through propensity score matching. Propensity score matching is a statistical matching technique used to reduce the effect of covariates that have been shown to predict selection to a specific group in order to accurately estimate the effect of the variable of interest. The propensity score can be defined

as the conditional probability of being in a specific group, or assigned to a CASA volunteer in this case, given specific covariates. This technique is useful when employing a quasi-experimental research design as it achieves a more accurate estimate of the isolated effect of the variable of interest. However, findings should still be regarded with caution because it is possible that unobserved selection variables may not be accounted for during the propensity score matching process.

Descriptive analyses of the short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for the cohort examined will provide details on the differences in outcomes, if any, found between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and cases without a CASA volunteer advocate.

Five short-term outcomes including if child is in correct grade for age, number of services needed that child receives, whether child receives planned visitations with a parent, placement type, and change in school placement from school attended prior to removal, will be examined to determine the impact of CASA volunteer advocates on the case and children while they are serving on a case. Data on short-term outcomes will be pulled from the DFPS IMPACT data system. It is unclear at this time whether the data elements needed to measure short term outcomes can be pulled from IMPACT in aggregate or whether the information is only available in individual case files and must be coded by hand. If information must be coded by hand individually, it will impact how data are collected and the sample size examined. Some short-term outcome measures are not available from the IMPACT system such as normalcy experienced while in care. These data will be examined in the third research aim but will be excluded from the main outcomes analyses. See Appendix B for a detailed description of the short-term outcomes and how they will be measured.

Final case outcomes including final placement type, time in foster care, number of placements while in care, and incidents of re-abuse while in care will also be examined to determine if there are differences in final case outcomes for cases with a CASA volunteer advocate. Data on case outcomes will be pulled from IMPACT. Again, it is unclear at this time whether the data elements needed to measure case outcomes can be pulled from IMPACT in aggregate or whether the information is only available in individual case files and must be coded by hand. If information must be coded by hand individually, it will impact how data are collected and may influence the sample size and the number of case outcomes analyzed. See Appendix C for a detailed description of the intermediate-term outcomes and how they will be measured.

Finally, recidivism rates will be examined to determine if outcomes differ after case closure between cases assigned and not assigned to CASA volunteer advocates. Due to the short time frame of the project and the data available from IMPACT, reentry into the system will be limited to the time frame for which the project has IMPACT data, from September 2012 to August 2015. Cases will be coded with a 1 if they reenter the child welfare system during this time period and coded with a 0 if there is no reentry during this time frame. See Appendix D for a detailed description of the long-term outcomes and how they will be measured.

Regression analyses will be used to examine how outcome measures are associated with assignment to a CASA volunteer advocate. Cases will be matched using propensity score matching to account for any selection bias uncovered during the selection evaluation.

An overview of the descriptive and quantitative analyses that will examine the impact of CASA on child and case outcomes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Analysis Plan for Research Aim #2: Impact of CASA Volunteer Advocates on Outcomes

| Question | Data Sources | Analyses | Analytic Sample |
|---|--|--|--|
| 2.1. Are there differences in outcomes between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and cases without a CASA volunteer advocate while the children involved in the case are under TMC and/or PMC? | <p>IMPACT data: Case characteristics, child characteristics, family characteristics</p> <p>Casa Program Affiliates reporting: Cause numbers assigned to Texas CASA programs</p> <p>Court reports and case files</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive analyses of short-term outcomes displayed by CASA cases vs no CASA cases • Regression analyses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IV: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CASA assignment dummy variable ○ DVs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dummy variable for in correct grade for age ▪ # services received/# services ordered or needed ▪ Dummy variable for receiving at least X% of planned number of parental visits ▪ Placement type: Dummy variable for kinship home, dummy variable for in foster home, dummy variable for in institutions/RTCs ▪ Dummy variable for school change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMPACT data: All Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) and Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) cases opened and closed during September 2012 to August 2015 • CASA Program Affiliates reporting: All TMC and PMC cases assigned to a CASA volunteer in Texas during September 2012 to August 2015 |
| 2.2 Are there differences in the final case outcomes between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and cases without a CASA volunteer advocate? | <p>IMPACT data: Case characteristics, child characteristics, family characteristics</p> <p>Casa Program Affiliates reporting: Cause numbers assigned to Texas CASA programs</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive analyses of final case outcomes displayed by CASA cases vs no CASA cases • Regression analyses and chi-square tests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IV: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CASA assignment dummy variable ○ DVs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Final placement type: Dummy variable for adoption, dummy variable for reunification, dummy variable for in guardianship, dummy variable for PMC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMPACT data: All Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) and Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) cases opened and closed during September 2012 to August 2015 • CASA Program Affiliates reporting: All TMC and PMC |

| Question | Data Sources | Analyses | Analytic Sample |
|---|--|--|--|
| | Court reports and case files | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Time in foster care (days) ▪ Number of placements while in care ▪ Dummy indicator for incident of re-abuse while in care | cases assigned to a CASA volunteer in Texas during September 2012 to August 2015 |
| 2.3 Are there differences in child and case outcomes between cases with a CASA volunteer advocate and cases without a CASA volunteer advocate after case closure? | <p>IMPACT data: Case characteristics, child characteristics, family characteristics</p> <p>Casa Program Affiliates reporting: Cause numbers assigned to Texas CASA programs</p> <p>Court reports and case files</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive analyses of after case closure outcomes displayed by CASA cases vs no CASA cases • Chi-square test: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IV: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CASA assignment dummy variable ○ DVs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recidivism/re-entry into care: Dummy variable for reentry into care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMPACT data: All Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) and Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) cases opened and closed during September 2012 to August 2015 • CASA Program Affiliates reporting: All TMC and PMC cases assigned to a CASA volunteer in Texas during September 2012 to August 2015 |

RESEARCH AIM 3: VOLUNTEER EFFECTIVENESS STUDY

The third research aim will provide a more in-depth picture of short and intermediate case and child outcomes that CASA volunteer advocates may impact; this evaluation will focus on within-CASA variation and therefore is not dependent on the success of the first research aim to determine issues with selection. These analyses will focus on the measures defined in research aim 2 including short, intermediate, and long term outcomes to determine differences in case and child outcomes among CASA volunteer advocates. In addition to the outcomes analyzed in the second research aim, researchers will examine survey data, court reports, and case files to measure other short-term and intermediate outcomes such as the number of CASA recommendations additional to or in conflict with those of DFPS caseworker recommendations that are accepted by the judge; whether child experiences normalcy while in care; and whether the child's cultural needs are identified and met. See Appendices B, C, and D for detailed information on the outcomes examined and how they will be measured.

A random sample of 1400 cases (approximately 20 cases per CASA program) that were assigned to a CASA volunteer advocate will be chosen and surveys will be sent to each program for distribution to the volunteer advocates who served on these cases. After controlling for

external factors and baseline child and case characteristics, the random sample of 1400 cases will be analyzed and coded to determine whether each resulted in positive or negative outcomes including while in care outcomes, final case outcomes, and after case closure outcomes. Subsequently, survey data from the CASA volunteer advocates assigned to these cases will be analyzed to determine the differences in volunteer activities, attitudes, and personal characteristics that may be associated with positive case and child outcomes. Volunteers may be grouped by the types of activities in which they engaged during a case, or by other characteristics, for analysis purposes.

At least one pilot study will be conducted to calibrate the coding of case outcomes as positive or negative and to ensure all variation is measured and accounted for in the analyses.

Descriptive analyses will demonstrate the differences in case and child outcomes among cases assigned to CASA volunteers as well as the differences in the types of activities, attitudes, and personal characteristics of CASA volunteers.

Regression analyses will be conducted to determine which activities and characteristics of CASA volunteer advocates are most important to ensuring positive case outcomes. This analysis will control for baseline case and child characteristics as well as external factors to isolate the effect of the CASA volunteer advocate. Additionally, latent class analysis or cluster analysis may be conducted to determine whether there are certain types of volunteer advocates, grouped by characteristics and activities, who have better case outcomes compared to other groups of volunteer advocates. The theory behind which activities and characteristics are associated with better outcomes will be informed by the first survey of the CASA volunteer advocates in which they were asked to rate the importance of specific advocacy activities and personal characteristics.

An overview of the descriptive and quantitative analyses that will examine the impact of volunteer advocate activities and characteristics on child and case outcomes is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis Plan for Research Aim #3: CASA Volunteer Advocate Effectiveness

| Question | Data Sources | Analyses | Analytic Sample |
|--|---|---|---|
| 3.1 How do the activities, attitudes, and personal characteristics of CASA volunteer advocates who served on cases with positive case outcomes | <p>IMPACT data: Case characteristics, child characteristics, family characteristics</p> <p>Casa Program Affiliates reporting: Cause numbers assigned to</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive analyses of short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes among CASA cases • Regression analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IVs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Activities of volunteers ▪ Attitudes of volunteers ▪ Personal characteristics of volunteers ○ DV: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dummy variable for positive or negative case outcome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMPACT data and supplemental court report/case file data and survey data: a random sample of 1400 Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) and Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) cases opened |

| Question | Data Sources | Analyses | Analytic Sample |
|--|--|--|---|
| differ from those of CASA volunteer advocates who served on cases with negative case outcomes? | Texas CASA programs Court reports and case files Volunteer survey data | (short, intermediate, or long-term) • Latent class analysis or cluster analysis | and closed during September 2012 to August 2015 |

RESEARCH AIM 4: IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

The fourth research aim will inform the other components of the COVE study by determining whether factors outside the control of CASA volunteer advocates influence the advocates' ability to perform certain activities and achieve desired child and case outcomes. These factors can then be controlled for during the outcomes analysis and the volunteer effectiveness analysis. Measures examined will include region and jurisdiction, judges' opinion of CASA and CASA volunteer advocates, relationship of other parties involved in the child welfare system to CASA and CASA volunteer advocates, differences in policies for CASA volunteer advocates among regions and jurisdictions, and differences in advocate training among CASA programs.

Descriptive analyses will demonstrate the differences in external factors among cases assigned to CASA volunteer advocates.

Regression analyses will analyze how external factors are associated with positive or negative case outcomes among cases assigned to CASA volunteer advocates. These factors can then be controlled for in other COVE analyses as applicable.

An overview of the descriptive and quantitative analyses that will examine the impact of external factors on child and case outcomes of cases assigned to CASA volunteer advocates is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Analysis Plan for Research Aim #4: Impact of External Factors

| Question | Data Sources | Analyses | Analytic Sample |
|--|--|---|--|
| 4.1 How do external factors support or impede the ability of CASA volunteer advocates to impact case and child outcomes? | IMPACT data: Short, intermediate, and long term outcomes Casa Program Affiliates reporting: Cause numbers assigned to Texas CASA programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive analyses of external factors for cases assigned to CASA volunteers • Regression analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IVs: External factors including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Region ▪ Jurisdiction ▪ Dummy variable for positive or negative opinion of CASA – judges ▪ Dummy variable for positive or negative opinion of CASA – | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMPACT data and supplemental court report/case file data and survey data: a random sample of 1400 Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) and Permanent Managing Conservatorship |

| Question | Data Sources | Analyses | Analytic Sample |
|----------|---|---|---|
| | <p>Court reports and case files</p> <p>Volunteer survey data</p> <p>Judicial survey data</p> | <p>other parties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dummy variable for positive or negative policies for CASA volunteer advocates ▪ Number of additional trainings provided to CASA volunteers by region or program <p>○ DV:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dummy variable for positive or negative case outcome (short, intermediate, or long-term) | <p>(PMC) cases opened and closed during September 2012 to August 2015</p> |

Deliverables and Timeline

The table below provides an overview of the deliverables CFRP will submit to CASA associated with the COVE project, on or about the listed date.

| Time Period | Activities |
|--------------------------|--|
| July – August 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect survey data from CASA program affiliates to inform the final COVE evaluation plan Collect survey data from CASA volunteer advocates to inform the final COVE evaluation plan Clean survey data Coalition meeting to discuss survey results and final evaluation plan |
| | <p>Deliverable 1: Evaluation plan Deliverable 1 will detail the evaluation approach, timeline, data collection, and analytic methods that will be used to answer the research questions agreed upon by CASA and CFRP.</p> |
| September – January 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive IMPACT data for first cohort: September 2012-August 2013 Conduct initial selection analyses Conduct final selection analyses and initial outcomes analyses Pull sample of 20 cases per CASA program (approximately 1400 cases total) and send to programs to match with volunteer advocates Present final evaluation plan and preliminary analyses at Texas CASA Conference Develop case survey for volunteer advocates Write Deliverable 2: Preliminary Selection Analysis Report Develop survey for members of the judiciary |
| | <p>Deliverable 2: Preliminary Selection Analysis Report Deliverable 2 will detail the methods and preliminary results of the initial research aim to determine differences between cases assigned and not assigned to CASA</p> |
| January – April 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with CASA leadership to discuss Deliverable 2 Send survey to volunteer advocates and collect data through January 31 Pull and code case files related to cases sampled Continue pulling and coding case files related to cases sampled Clean and analyze volunteer advocates case survey data Send survey to judiciary members and collect data through February 26 Receive IMPACT data for remaining cohort: September 2013 – August 2015 Clean and analyze judicial survey data Write Deliverable 3: Preliminary Outcomes Analysis Report |
| | <p>Deliverable 3: Preliminary Outcomes Analysis Report Deliverable 3 will detail the methods and preliminary results of the second research aim to determine differences in outcomes between cases assigned and not assigned to CASA</p> |
| May – August 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with CASA leadership to discuss Deliverable 3 Analyze volunteer advocates survey data in conjunction with IMPACT outcomes data Write Deliverable 4: Preliminary Volunteer Effectiveness & External Impacts Report Meet with CASA leadership to discuss Deliverable 4 |
| | <p>Deliverable 4: Preliminary Volunteer Effectiveness & External Factors Report</p> |

| Time Period | Activities |
|------------------------------|---|
| | Deliverable 4 will detail the methods and preliminary results of the third and fourth research aims focused on the differences in activities, attitudes, and personal characteristics of CASA volunteer advocates |
| September 2016 – August 2017 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="467 384 1344 443">• Conduct final COVE evaluation study analyses and compile findings into final evaluation report <p data-bbox="418 449 906 480">Deliverable 5: Final COVE Evaluation Report</p> <p data-bbox="418 485 1393 539">Deliverable 5 will include a full length report detailing the methods and results of all COVE four research aims.</p> |

IRB and Protection of Privacy

CFRP is in the process of applying for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the evaluation because the information gleaned will be shared with the larger research community to increase knowledge about the impact and effectiveness of CASA. CFRP will examine redacted court reports and other documentation from individual CPS cases. According to the guidelines of the Human Subjects and Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin, the IRB review will likely be expedited because the majority of data will be redacted.

The privacy and confidentiality of all interviews and notes are carefully maintained. Names and specific opinions are not shared across programs or among the state and program level participants. Notes are kept only on secure servers accessible only by authorized user computers. The hard drives of the authorized user computers are encrypted using the WinMagic SecureDoc enterprise whole disk encryption product, which uses 256-bit AES for the encryption. The authorized user computer systems are running Windows 7, kept up to date on patches by UT Austin ITS Managed Desktop Support using the Microsoft SCCM server on a weekly basis, have software firewalls enabled through group policy, and run Microsoft Forefront Anti-Virus with signatures pushed within an hour after they are available.

Authorized servers include SharePoint servers, located at central ITS's department's data center. SharePoint is managed by the UT Austin central ITS department and meets the UT Austin Minimum Security Standards for Category-I Data. Connections to the file servers are encrypted using IPsec, secure FTP (SFTP), or 128-bit SSL, depending on the connection method used. When security patches are issued, they are applied as soon as possible in accordance with UT Austin change management procedures. Access to the database server is encrypted using at least 128-bit SSL encryption built in to the client. LBJ users must be pre-authorized to access CFRP SharePoint.

Any document containing identifiable information, when not in use by an authorized CFRP user, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the locked CFRP Data Office.

Potential Risks and Challenges

CFRP has identified several potential risks and challenges to its evaluation plan.

ANALYSIS TIMEPOINTS

CFRP has proposed to analyze data for all cases with an open and close date in IMPACT from September 2012 to August 2015, which, to date, is approximately X cases. The Texas Department for Family Protective Services (DFPS) has reported that they will submit the first year of data by September 2015. These data were requested in January of 2015. Additional data for the years of September 2013 to August 2015 have not yet been requested and therefore it is possible that these data will have a similar delay in availability. This could impede the progress of research aims 1 and 2 or could result in a more limited sample size for the research

aims. Additionally, the process by which data are pulled from the CASA programs other data systems has not yet been determined, which may influence the time frame for analyses of research aims 1, 2, and 3 as well.

SELECTION BIAS

It is possible that even after controlling for all confounders uncovered during the selection analysis such as child characteristics, family characteristics, and case characteristics, selection bias will still exist because the study is not a randomized control trial. Without randomization, it is difficult to control for every possible difference between groups since some factors that may affect outcomes may not be measureable. Analysis of prior research has shown that children without a CASA volunteer advocate are systematically different than children with a CASA volunteer advocate, though the differences have varied among studies. Although a quasi-experimental research design and using propensity score matching can alleviate selection bias, there is a chance that additional selection bias will not be accounted for and that the results of the outcomes analysis will not accurately reflect the isolated effect of the CASA volunteer advocate.

GENERALIZABILITY

All of the information CFRP collects about children in TMC and PMC will be from the Texas CASA programs and the Texas DFPS IMPACT data system. Although Texas is a large and diverse state that is representative in many ways of the nation as a whole, it is possible that the conclusions drawn from the present evaluation will not be representative of the national sample of children in the child welfare system.

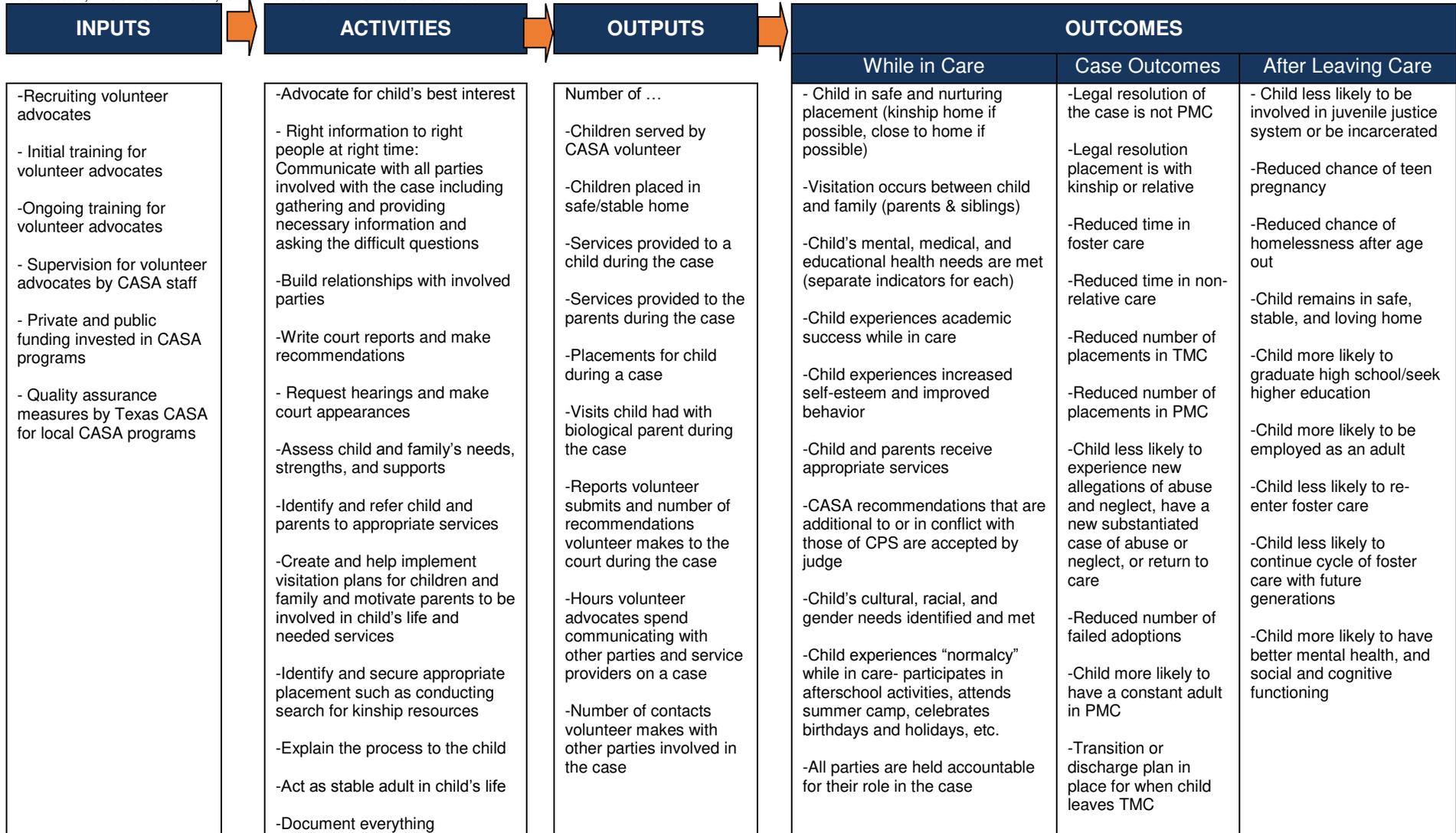
LACK OF FUNDING

Federal or state level actions may result in programs not being funded across the entire time period. In this situation, CFRP will present a final report on the time period covered by funding.

Appendix A. Texas CASA COVE Logic Model

SITUATION:

CASA programs provide volunteer to advocate and assist abused and neglected children in child welfare cases. The goal is to ensure that every child is in a safe and loving home. CASA volunteer advocates are assigned differently in different counties/programs. Some are assigned by the judge based on difficulty of case; in some counties, all children are assigned a CASA volunteer; in some counties, CASA chooses which cases to take.



External Factors

- Characteristics of the case- type of abuse/neglect, family history, extent of parent involvement
- Relationship CASA volunteer advocates and organization has with judges/other parties in the county
- Characteristics of child- extent of medical or educational needs
- Judicial system and court processes
- Budgets for local CASA programs for training/supervision
- Type of care child is under – difficult to support child in residential treatment center due to restrictions
- Where children are placed (may be far away from where volunteer lives)
- In some counties: which cases are assigned to CASA

Appendix B. Texas CASA COVE Short-Term Outcomes Measures

| Short-Term Outcomes – While in Care | Measure | Data Elements | Data Source |
|---|---|--|---|
| Child in safe and nurturing placement (kinship home if possible, close to home if possible) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dummy – placement in kinship home • Dummy – placement in non-kinship home • Dummy – placement in institution/RTC • Distance (miles) from placement to original residence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement type • Residence Address (this is placement address) • Can we get original home address? | IMPACT - Placement Information Form |
| Visitation occurs between child and family (parents & siblings) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • X% of planned number of visits received from parent • Number of visits with siblings (if applicable) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits – Frequency • Can we get a count of number of visits conducted in IMPACT? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parent & sibling? | IMPACT - Family Service Plan – Parent Child Contact and Financial Support (Visitation Plan) |
| Child's mental health needs are met | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dummy - receiving psychiatric evaluation if needed • Dummy - receiving counseling services if needed • Dummy - receiving medications if needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment date • Reason for appointment • Overall mental health | <p>Not sure if a list of services is available in IMPACT – didn't see in Case Connection but Waxman study (Houston) has data points from DFPS (child only)</p> <p>IMPACT - Medical/Mental Assessment Log</p> |
| Child's medical health needs are met | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dummy - visit to ER while in care • Dummy - received an annual medical checkup • Dummy - received a sixth month dental checkup | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an indicator for ER visit in IMPACT? • Last annual medical appointment • Last 6 month dental appointment | IMPACT – Medical/Dental Detail, Medical Mental Assessment Log, Medical/Developmental History |
| Child's educational needs are met | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dummy – correct grade for age • Dummy – received services for education needs (if applicable) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School grade • Educational needs (Common App & Education log) | IMPACT –Education Detail, Education Log |
| Child experiences academic success while in care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dummy – grades improved from case opening to case closure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report card at removal • Report card at case closure • Standardized test scores at removal • Standardized test scores at case closure | Requires access to education data from TEA |
| Child and parents receive appropriate services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of services received (child) • Number of services received (parent) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petition (for service) • Service Completed • ServiceType • Control for: Level of care (Placement Information | CASA Manager – 04_CM_Services OR Not sure if a list of services is available in IMPACT – didn't see in Case Connection but Waxman study |

| Short-Term Outcomes – While in Care | Measure | Data Elements | Data Source |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | section) | (Houston) has data points from DFPS (child only) |
| CASA recommendations that are additional to or in conflict with those of CPS are accepted by judge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of CASA recommendations in conflict/additional to CPS that are accepted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CASA affect crt Decision CASA#RecsMade CASA#Recs accepted | CASA Manager – 04_CM_Casework Fields CASA Manager – 04_CM_Hearings (NOT IN IMPACT) |
| Child's cultural, racial, and gender needs identified and met | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of children with match on race/ethnicity with placement caregiver Number of children with match on language with placement caregiver Number of children with match on religion with placement caregiver | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child race, ethnicity, language, religion Do we have foster caregiver demographics information in IMPACT? | IMPACT – Child characteristics Indian Child Welfare Act Form |
| Child experiences “normalcy” while in care- participates in afterschool activities, attends summer camp, celebrates birthdays and holidays, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count of children who had to change schools after removal Count of extracurricular activities Count of services related to normalcy (gifts received, summer camp) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original school location Current school address | IMPACT/ Case Connection – Case Summary - Education AND Where does extracurricular activity info get logged? Case Connection – External |
| All parties are held accountable for their role in the case | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count of visits between child and attorney/GAL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GAL attend? AttyAttend? | CASA Manager – 04_CM_Hearings (NOT IN IMPACT) |

Appendix C. Texas CASA COVE Intermediate Outcomes Measures

| Intermediate Outcomes – Final Case Outcomes | Measure | Data Elements | Data Source |
|--|--|---|--|
| Legal resolution of the case is positive (adoption, reunification, or guardian; not moved to PMC) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dummy - adoption • Dummy - reunification • Dummy - guardianship • Dummy - PMC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement type | IMPACT/Case Connection – Placement Information – Placement History Log |
| Reduced time in foster care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of stay in foster care (days) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date entered TMC • Date case closed and no longer in TMC/PMC (TMC Dismissal date- autofills) | IMPACT |
| Reduced time in non-relative care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of stay in non-relative care (days) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date placed • Date removed • Placement type | IMPACT/Case Connection – Placement Information – Placement History Log |
| Reduced number of placements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of placements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date placed • Date removed | IMPACT/Case Connection – Placement Information – Placement History Log |
| Child less likely to experience new allegations of abuse and neglect, have a new substantiated case of abuse or neglect, or return to care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of new allegations while in care • Number of substantiations while in care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal reason • Removal reason subtype | IMPACT/Case Connection - Placement Information – Placement History Log |
| Child more likely to have a constant adult in PMC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dummy - consistent adult | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative coding from CASA court reports | CASA Court reports (not available for non-CASA cases) |
| Transition or discharge plan in place for when child leaves TMC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dummy variable – has transition or discharge plan in place at time of case closure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition plan indicator • Discharge plan indicator | IMPACT – is there a discharge/transition plan indicator in IMPACT? |

Appendix D. Texas CASA COVE Long-Term Outcomes Measures

| Long-Term Outcomes – After Exiting Care | Measure | Data Elements | Data Source |
|---|--|---|---|
| Child less likely to return to care (recidivism rate) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children who return to TMC during time period examined | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes/No been placed away from home before • Legal action & action subtype <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Outcome date | IMPACT/Case Connection – Common Application. 4. Placement History IMPACT/Case Connection – Case Summary – Legal Status/CPS Legal Log |

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