

Cecil County CASA: SWOT Analysis



Contributions

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I. Introduction

A. Introduction to Team Members

Our team consists of four University of Delaware juniors: Claudia Kacmarcik, Emily Eckert, Isabella Rizzo, and Gabrielle Pancio. Throughout the past two years at the University of Delaware, we completed Tier 1 and Tier 2 of the Blue Hen Leadership Program, developing our individual and group leadership skills. Additionally, all of us have had the opportunity to apply the leadership practices we were learning as employees of the Blue Hen Leadership Program through positions of Service Leaders and Peer Mentors. This year, we seek to learn about leadership in the scope of the community as Tier 3 Community Fellows. Together, we are serving the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) organization of Cecil County. Each member brings a unique leadership style and set of strengths to the team, which we hope to utilize together throughout the year to enact positive change within Cecil County CASA and the community. We have divided up group roles in order to collaboratively tackle the analysis of CASA and complete a project that moves CASA towards its mission. Claudia is the project manager, Emily is the researcher, Izzy is the scheduler, and Gabby is the communicator.

Claudia Kacmarcik: Project Manager

According to the Clifton Strengths Quest, Claudia's top five strengths are restorative, learner, focus, individualization, and achiever. Therefore, the basis of Claudia's strengths are around her skills in organization, focus, and dedication towards achievement. Claudia's strengths enable her to remain motivated in the pursuit of a goal and identify where others might be struggling. Therefore, her role for the year is the project manager. Claudia has taken the lead as the main leader of the group's organization. She ensures that group meeting times and locations are established and is the primary point of communication between our group and the CASA liaison. Claudia communicates interview times and scheduled visits with CASA individuals and

then relays this information to the group. Claudia's green and gold nature helps the group stay organized and on task, and guarantees the project follows a strict timeline in order to complete our goals.

Emily Eckert: Researcher

Emily's strengths demonstrate her passion for learning and her desire to pursue information. Her top five strengths include empathy, deliberative, relative, learner, and input. Emily's true leadership color is green, meaning she is skilled in the analytical and logical side of leadership. Therefore, Emily is in charge of the research part of our project. Emily's responsibilities include researching other CASA organizations in different counties and other organizations with similar missions to CASA. Through this research, we can hope to analyze what programs and initiatives in other similar organizations have been successful, and compare this to how CASA of Cecil County is functioning. Additionally, Emily has the job of delegating different aspects of research to members of the group, including information surrounding the board, financial status, and community engagement, which is completed through research, communication with the liason, and interviews.

Izzy Rizzo: Scheduler

Izzy's true leadership color is gold, highlighting her ability to stay organized and focused on the task at hand. Overall, her greatest strengths lie in her skills of consistency, responsibility, and organization. According to her strengths analysis, Izzy's strengths are achiever, learner, restorative, responsibility and consistency. Therefore, Izzy's role is scheduling and maintaining the timeline of our project. Specifically, Izzy keeps the hours of our meetings, keeps a document of all the communication with different CASA representatives, and records the goals and outcomes for each meeting. This ensures that each meeting is productive and reminds our group of what needs to be done. As we gain a more concrete idea of our project moving forward, Izzy will be responsible for managing the group timeline, making sure each meeting works towards the overall project goal, and ensuring that necessary steps are being taken to complete the project. Forming and maintaining a timeline will be essential for a successful outcome.

Gabby Pancio: Communicator

Lastly, Gabby is the leader of communication within the group. Her true leadership color is orange, and her strengths are based on building relationships, communication, and people-based skills. These strengths include WOO (winning others over), achiever, learner, communication, and restorative. Her skills in communication and resolving issues through open dialogue help her establish trust and lead effective conversations within the group. Her responsibilities include communicating the goals and objectives of each meeting and being the main conductor of interviews with CASA representatives. Additionally, Gabby is responsible for maintaining good team relationships and facilitating communication about disagreements. To do this, she is tasked with bringing group issues to the table to prevent falling into the five dysfunctions of a team. She starts each meeting with group check-ins to make sure everyone is on the same page, feels good about the project momentum, and is ready to complete the next step.

As a unit, we have a wide variety of strengths and leadership styles. If we can collaborate on our shared strengths and each bring our own strengths to the table, we can enable each other to be successful. We all have the learner strength, which we can use to drive our desire to promote CASA by learning about CASA of Cecil County and educating ourselves on the social issues CASA combats. Izzy, Claudia, and Gabby also have the joint strengths of achiever and restorative, which tie into our desire to produce a complete and successful result in an effort to better our community. It is important as Community Fellows that we are passionate about seeking creative and innovative solutions to resolve issues within the community. Emily's strengths of empathy and relator, bring an important Blue leadership style aspect to a team of orange, green, and gold. Her more emotional side can help bring the heart out of all of us when working on this project. We have discussed our strengths and used each of our unique qualities to establish different team roles for the year. By choosing our roles based on our strengths, we can ensure each individual is in a position to exceed and we enable each other to act in an effective manner.

B. Introduction to Cecil County CASA

History

This year, as members of Tier 3 in the Blue Hen Leadership Program, we are working with the 501(c)(3) nonprofit CASA, Court Approved Special Advocates for Children, of Cecil County, Maryland. CASA is a national organization with different state and local member programs. All CASA organizations work under the same mission of supporting and promoting court-appointed volunteer advocacy, so every child who has experienced abuse or neglect can be safe, have a permanent home, and the opportunity to thrive. As a national organization, CASA seeks to address issues in child welfare and aid the 440,000 children in foster care in America. Volunteer advocates from the community undergo training, are paired with a child, and form a one-on-one relationship with them. Judges rely on advocates for information to help them make well-informed decisions for each child. CASA also seeks to address the physical and emotional impact of abuse and neglect, advocate for appropriate education, and enable well being for children within the foster care system. The idea for Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children began in 1976 in Seattle, with the hope of providing children who had experienced abuse or neglect with trained volunteers who could speak up in the courtroom for their best interests. Since then, it has grown to include 950 programs across 49 states. The Maryland CASA Association officially began in 1998 and has helped to start seven new CASA programs throughout the state. CASA of Cecil County began in 2015, carrying on the mission to provide advocates and resources to aid children in the foster care system in the Cecil County community.

Our main point of communication with CASA of Cecil County is Kristen Connors, the office manager. Kristen has a variety of responsibilities through her role as Office Manager. Her main goal is to ensure staff members and volunteer advocates have the necessary items to complete their regular tasks. In addition, she ensures that the organization has the proper documentation and training for all of the staff and advocates annually. The staff and advocates have continuous training and education throughout their involvement with CASA. Following the initial 30-hour training (which Kristen facilitates), staff and volunteers are required to have 12

additional hours of training annually. Kristen tracks this information and ensures the advocates are properly educated and equipped with the proper tools from training to meet the needs of their child. Furthermore, Kristen’s job consists of community education and assisting with fundraising. Lastly, outside her official role as office manager, Kristen acts as a volunteer advocate herself. Kristen has a variety of responsibilities with CASA of Cecil County and is, therefore, a valuable point of contact through her high commitment to the CASA mission and a multitude of connections within the organization.

CASA Organization Chart

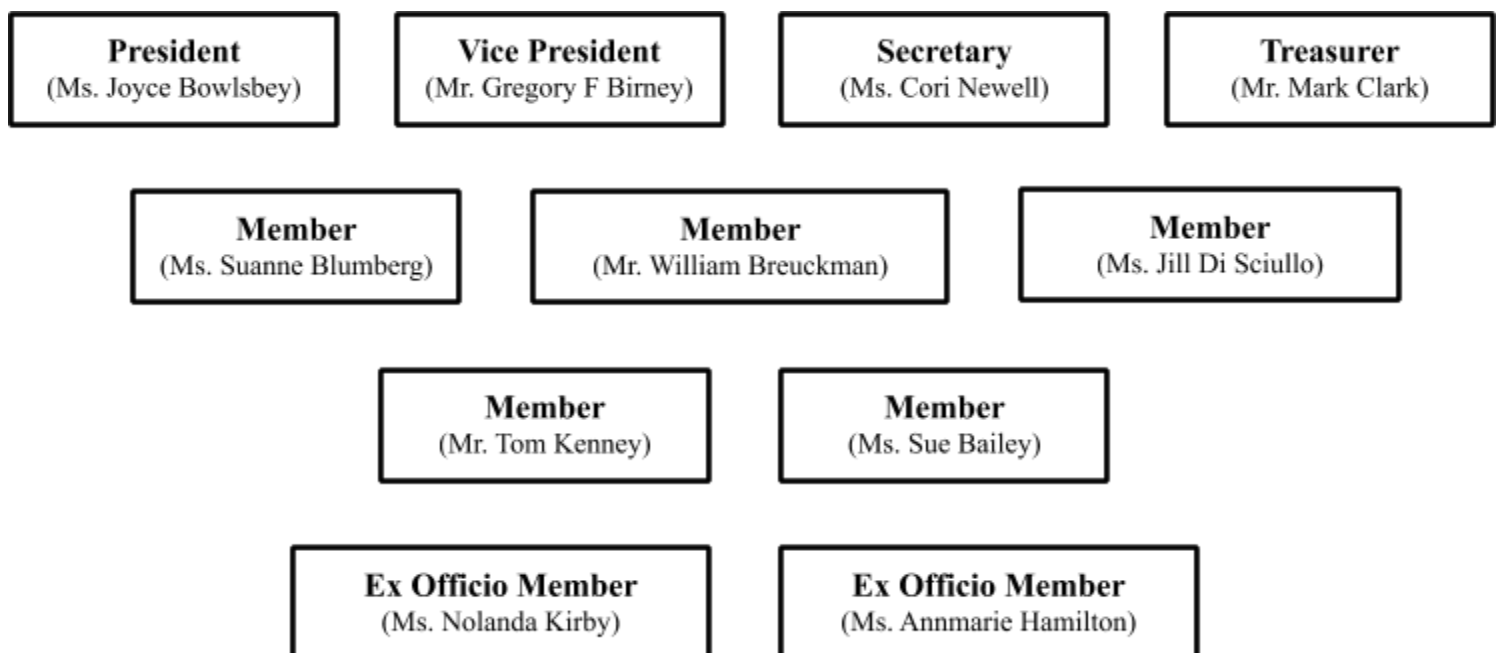


Figure 1: Board structure of Cecil County CASA. The board consists of 9 members, with a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and 5 general members. Additionally, there are 2 Ex Officio members who participate in board meetings but do not have voting rights.



Figure 2: Staff structure of Cecil County CASA. The Executive Director oversees all Staff, and oversight of volunteers' work is divided between the two case managers.

Mission Statement

As a national organization, CASA is based around the values of adaptability, collaboration, integrity, respect, quality, service, and stewardship. It is clear across all CASA organizations that the main focus is centered around the needs of the child. Through its mission, CASA seeks to provide well trained, committed, passionate, and empathetic advocates that can form strong relationships with the child, as well as provide a valuable voice in the courtroom. The mission statement of CASA Cecil County, as stated on their website, is as follows:

"CASA of Cecil County's mission is to advocate for and support abused and neglected children in the court system, while ensuring their right to safe, stable, permanent homes. CASA of Cecil County achieves this mission through the work of specially trained volunteers from the community who advocate for the best interest of children, recognizing and respecting each child's individual needs. By providing a voice to children in the foster care system, it is our goal to help children and promote the timely placement of those we serve in safe, permanent homes."

Financials Overview

The majority of financial information has been acquired through the 2017 IRS Form 990 and from information gained through staff and board interviews. Cecil County CASA is a branch of the national CASA organization. It receives most of its funding from the government and therefore abides by certain regulations and guidelines outlined by the government. These guidelines ensure Cecil County CASA is effectively working towards its mission while staying within the restrictions of child privacy and boundaries established by the Department of Social Services. Cecil County CASA brings in a revenue of \$142,172, with an expenditure around \$138,000. CASA holds a variety of fundraising events to spread awareness, gain volunteers, and raise money for the organization. These fundraisers include a Casino Night, Festival of Trees, and Mini Golf. Alongside the organized fundraising efforts, Cecil County CASA gains revenue from its board members and through other donations. The board members contribute funds towards fundraising efforts and in the form of donations when necessary.

C. Interview Insights

It is clear from all the interviews that the driving force of Cecil County CASA is the heart. All the staff, board members, and volunteers are driven by their love and passion for kids and their goal to help each kid find a safe and stable home. Those involved with this organization are committed to the values of collaboration, integrity, stewardship, service, and adaptability. The group of 70 volunteers are drawn to CASA for its mission, coming from different backgrounds of working with children, parenting, and social services.

Although all the members of the organization are passionate and committed to the mission, there were general trends of concerns and weaknesses. One problem that was brought up across several interviews was the issue of developing strong relationships between the children and their advocates. A major issue CASA is facing is that there are not enough trained CASA volunteers for the amount of children in need. However, even when children have a CASA, the formation of an effective relationship can be difficult. Some advocates have strong relationships with their children, while some children don't want an advocate or don't utilize their advocate as a resource. It can be difficult for some advocates to establish a beneficial

relationship with their child. Additionally, with volunteers and advocates driven through their heart, it can be hard to maintain boundaries and to ensure advocates are focused on the big picture. While the goal for a CASA advocate is to establish a consistent, dependable, and supportive relationship with their child, it can be difficult for a strong relationship to form and to keep decision making driven by logic and guided by the guidelines of the law surrounding child services. CASA advocates have the opportunity to be hands-on, but it is important to find and maintain a balance between head and heart.

Another concern is making sure advocates and the staff are providing the proper resources and a strong, consistent relationship to the children in the program. There are concerns about advocates having training in child psychology and providing children with the proper tools and resources to be successful once they leave the foster care system. Although CASA advocates are trained, there are areas for improvement that could help advocates meet all the needs of their child. In the future, CASA would like to better equip children with the skills to live successfully and safely as adults.

Overall, Cecil County CASA is a relatively new non-profit organization and is moving towards spreading community awareness and gaining volunteers. CASA holds a variety of fundraisers throughout the year and is attempting to broaden their impact in the community. Their current major project includes finding housing for CASA children leaving the foster care system and helping transition them into their adult lives. Currently, this is Cecil County CASA's greatest focus, as they hope to ease this transition for children and set them up to live a successful life outside of the foster care system.

II. Information for SWOT Analysis

A. Mission Statement Application and Analysis

Each branch of CASA shares the same mission, values, and vision. The mission of CASA is to “advocate and support abused and neglected children in the court system.” The overarching vision of CASA is to ensure all children in the system have a safe, stable, and permanent home, as well as an advocate to support them through the court process. The values they aim to exemplify are education, advocacy, and stability. This is accomplished through engaging with the community and the children they serve. Locally, this branch has worked to uphold their mission statement but has lacked in the area of advocacy within the community. Advocacy based on their mission statement is ensuring that each child has a CASA; however, this branch has roughly 140 children under court protection and only about 70 CASA advocates. Therefore, as an organization, CASA could seek to improve community engagement in order to adequately fulfill their mission statement. Despite this, there are areas in which CASA succeeds in upholding their mission statement, specifically in their work of “recognizing and respecting each child’s individual needs”. One of the ways this is accomplished is through the matching process for advocates and children. A Case Manager, Anna, asks advocates what they are looking for in a relationship with their child, the age range, if they are comfortable with advocating for siblings, etc. This process allows the advocates to respect and recognize what the children need, so they can provide adequate service and guidance. This also guarantees that each advocate-child pairing is a good match with the potential for a strong relationship to form. Additionally, each CASA is required to meet with their child once a month, attend court when necessary, and go to monthly meetings with the other advocates. This fulfills their mission to recognize the needs of the child by ensuring that advocates are consistently present in the child’s life.

B. Short Term and Long Term Goals

At the heart of CASA is the overarching goal to place all abused or neglected children into safe, permanent homes, and connect each with a CASA in order to get them there. As a

result of this mission, Cecil County CASA dedicates their time and resources to projects which help to place children into permanent homes. During our interviews with staff, volunteers, and a board member, there was one main short term goal and one main long term goal mentioned each time. The short term goal of the organization is to increase the volunteer base. The volunteers are the advocates for the children in the system, and Cecil County currently has 140 children in need of CASA's, but only 70 available advocates to represent them in court. Increasing the volunteer base would help to further meet the needs of the children, which would help this branch fully fulfill its mission statement. However, while this is a short term goal, it is also long term in the sense that they need to continuously have enough advocates.

The long term goal of the organization is to be able to raise enough money to build or buy a transitional home for those who have aged out of the foster care system. Once children are 18, if they do not have permanent housing there is nothing more the system can do for them. When interviewing both the Executive Director, Giulia, as well as the Case Manager, Anna, the long term desire to be able to provide transitional housing for children was expressed. While this requires more funds than the organization currently has, it would help to fulfill their mission of providing safe and stable housing for all children in the court system. For this reason, it could be a realistic venture to look into. While these are the main goals, other objectives have been met by this branch. Earlier this year, the organization was able to acquire their own office space, which allows the staff to have separate offices to conduct interviews. This additional space is also helpful for planning programming and storing fundraising equipment throughout the year. In an interview, the Outreach Coordinator expressed Cecil County's goal to form a better relationship with the Department of Social Services (DSS). The social workers within DSS often perceive CASAs as inconvenient or annoying because the advocates do not have to follow the same guidelines. This issue is prevalent in Cecil County because this branch is only 4 years old, and the court system is not yet accustomed to their presence. The overarching goal to form a better relationship has not been successful because they are not sure what to do to strengthen this relationship, so there is an opportunity for growth in this area.

C. Finances

Government Funding

Cecil County CASA is mostly government funded. When interviewing Giulia, the Executive Director of Cecil County CASA, she mentioned that in order to receive this funding from the government, CASA has to reach certain standards. Therefore, they must report various metrics to the government each year in order to continue receiving grants. While interviewing board member, Sue Bailey, it was confirmed that most of the funding that CASA receives comes from the government.

Fundraising

CASA holds major fundraisers a few different times throughout the year. One of the major fundraisers that CASA hosts each year is the Festival of Trees, which takes place during the Holiday season. Community members and local businesses can sponsor and auction off a tree, and the funds raised are used throughout the year to support CASA's programs. Recently, Cecil County CASA had a Casino Night to raise funds especially for the new transitional housing program that they are trying to implement. When planning fundraisers, CASA gets most of its resources from the board members. This can include the money required to host the events, as well as other resources such as food. Since CASA's board members do not regularly contribute financial resources to CASA, they give funds and other resources when it is needed. Sue Bailey, a board member for CASA of Cecil County, explained this when she stated that board members often volunteer to provide food or resources when it is required for meetings or events. She also discussed that when CASA puts on major fundraisers, the board members will provide whatever financial resources are needed to successfully run the event.

IRS Form 990

Cecil County CASA's IRS form 990 shows that in the year 2017, overhead made up 3.39% of their overall revenue. In that year, CASA had a small number of fundraising expenses (\$4,478). Most of CASA's funding comes from the government and board members. There was a small amount of management and general expenses (\$215). When adding up fundraising and management expenses (\$4,693) and dividing by the total expenses of \$138,478, overhead for CASA was found to be 3.39%. This low percentage of overhead gives CASA an advantage when

applying for grants because the lower the overhead, the more likely an organization is to receive grant funds.

D. Branding and Marketing

In terms of branding and marketing, Cecil County CASA is somewhat regulated by CASA national. The Cecil County branch of CASA pays a yearly fee to the national organization. As a result, CASA national provides branding such as logos and tag-lines. Their web presence on social media is somewhat casual, advertising upcoming events and fundraisers that they host. According to Executive Director, Giulia Hodge, their target audience “encompasses anyone that is passionate about helping children in foster care, but specifically retired educators.” Giulia also shared that retired teachers have been proven to be the best advocates for children. This shows that Giulia is concerned with getting the right people on the right seats of the bus, as discussed in Collins’ “Good to Great.” More generally, in order to volunteer as an advocate, one must be at least 21 years of age, and be able to dedicate at least one year as a volunteer. Their target audience has somewhat been reached through word of mouth and a highway billboard.

E. Board of Directors

The board of directors seems to be committed to the organization as a whole. In an interview with Sue Bailey, a board member, we learned that the monthly board meetings have good attendance, and members can call into the meetings if they cannot physically attend. When a decision needs to be made during a board meeting, they tend to get an email in advance that details what needs to be discussed. The board members do not have a mandatory obligation to donate to the organization, but most if not all board members volunteer their time or donate goods and supplies for fundraisers.

Based on our interview with Sue Bailey, it is evident that the board is in some ways fulfilling their role. This is observed through the open communication she described the board to have, as well as Giulia’s accessibility to the board for suggestions and comments. This relationship allows the board to maintain its oversight over the Executive Director. The board

does not completely fulfill their role of ensuring that employees are working towards fulfilling the mission of CASA. This was demonstrated by the apparent influence Giulia has over the boards' decisions. The Executive Director is heavily involved in the recruitment of board members and seems to be exerting more control over the board than appropriate. This is a problem because the Executive Director should not be the one recruiting board members, due to potential conflicts of interest. As a result, we observed that this board does not appear to fulfill all of the roles that it should.

Board members have required training that includes online courses, general information about the board, responsibilities, and confidentiality. Board members must also have DPS (Department of Public Safety) clearance and be fingerprinted. Despite this training, we do not think that everyone on the board is aware of all of the specifics of the organization, especially financials.

Due to timing and confidentiality issues, we are not able to attend a board meeting to see the group dynamic of the board and get more diverse input into the Board's role and function within the organization.

F. Volunteers

CASA Volunteers must complete 30 to 40 hours of training before being paired with a child, as well as 12 additional hours of training with each consecutive year. This training includes both online and in-person components, as well as a day-long court observation. Training is important because it ensures that each volunteer has the necessary tools and knowledge of resources to provide the best support for the children they advocate for. The main responsibility of volunteers is to gather information to be presented in court. This information comes from communicating and interacting with the child, as well as their family, foster parents, teachers, and counselors. CASAs use the information gathered to inform the judge. The goal of this is to provide the best possible representation of the child and his or her situation in court, in order to find that child a safe, permanent home.

CASA volunteers rely on intrinsic motivation to perform their duties. These volunteers surely have quite a bit of this and are motivated by the unfortunate situations that have lead the

children to foster care. There isn't much of a reward system set in place; however, the prospect of foster children finding a safe, permanent home could potentially be considered extrinsic motivation.

G. Location and Logistics

Location

CASA of Cecil County is located at 131 E. Main Street, Elkton Maryland, 21921. They are open Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm. CASA just moved to a new building this year. This is the first time since Cecil County CASA has been open that they have their own space. Previously, CASA was located on an upper floor in the building next door to their new location. Their previous location also housed the Department of Social Services in Cecil County. Since moving into their own space, the staff has begun to visualize opportunities for growth in the future. The new space has been beneficial at times where private conversations are necessary or difficult situations arise. Since they are now physically separated from the Department of Social Services, CASA is able to work behind closed doors. This is definitely a newfound advantage that CASA is using to the best of their ability.

Logistics

CASAs are court-appointed special advocates that help fight for the needs and wants of children in the foster care system. It is a national nonprofit that has state and local branches all over the country. The staff of Cecil County CASA includes 5 staff members, nine board members, and volunteers. Volunteers are called CASAs, and their main purpose is to provide foster children with stability and support. Relationships are built which enable CASAs to understand and communicate the childrens' needs. Volunteers go through about 30 hours of training before they become CASAs and are assigned to a case. The goal of all CASAs is to have their child be adopted by their foster families or reunited with their parents. CASA stay with their child's case they are assigned until the child is put into permanent housing or age out of the foster care system. There are currently 70 volunteers for 140 children who are in the foster care system of Cecil County.

Other Programs

The Transitional Housing Program is a program that Cecil County CASA is trying to start soon. It is a program that will help provide housing for children who have aged out of the foster care system between the ages of 18-21 years. CASA wants to use this program to guide and transition these individuals into adulthood. Children are less likely to be adopted as they get older, and in the foster care system, they are not always taught the life skills that are necessary for independent living. Many children end up going back to CASA, looking for support, once they age out of the system. These children lack the skills they need to get by in the world and are looking for help to get them on their way. This program would help these children find themselves a place to live, as well as teach them necessary skills, such as money management.

H. Social Entrepreneurial Ventures

Cecil County CASA is currently not pursuing any social entrepreneurial ventures. Most of the money that CASA receives comes from fundraisers that they put on, as well as government funding. If they were to take part in social entrepreneurial activities, they could generate funds to be used to help solve the social issues they face. There is definitely some room for growth in this area for CASA. Right now, their biggest goal is to get the transitional housing program up and running; a social entrepreneurship venture would really help here. CASA would be able to raise both awareness for children in the foster care system and money for the housing program. This venture also might allow CASA to gain more exposure in their local community, which could help increase their volunteer base. It also provides potential to educate the community about the amount of foster children in their area, and all the benefits that could come from them being housed within their county.

I. Comparable Agencies

As a branch of a national organization, Cecil County CASA performs better than average when compared to other branches of CASA. Nationally, branches of CASA comprise most of the nonprofits dedicated to the mission of supporting and promoting court-appointed volunteer advocacy. There are over 950 CASA branches nationally with 93,000 total advocates, making

CASA the organization that provides largest number of advocates for children within the court system. Compared to other CASAs in the state of Maryland, Cecil County CASA fulfills the national mission of providing advocates for children better than other organizations. Of the 15 CASA affiliates in Maryland, Cecil County CASA serves a higher relative percentage of children in their county. For example, Baltimore County CASA has 600 children in foster care, but are only able to serve 33% of the children. Additionally, Frederick County CASA has 77 children in the foster care system and only 14 of the children have advocates, meaning they serve 18% of the children. As Cecil County CASA meets 50% of the need for children in the system, they perform better than average when compared to branches close to them. Thus, this branch is meeting its purpose; however, they are not as innovative in their approach to fundraising or providing permanent homes to children. Transitional housing is a move many branches are moving towards, and this innovative housing placement would be beneficial to older children who are less likely to be adopted into a permanent home. One of the issues foster children face is that if they do not have a permanent home by age 12, they are more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, and poverty than children who do. To combat this, Los Angeles CASA now has transitional housing available to children who grew up in the court system, after they age out of it. This is an innovative way to combat an issue. Instead of relying on others, the individuals in transitional housing are able to meet their needs themselves. Los Angeles CASA has been able to accommodate over 20% of the children over 18 who are in need of this housing.

In regards to organizations in Maryland (other than CASA) that advocate for foster care youth, there is only one with a comparable mission: MARFY. Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) strives to empower communities to advocate for a system of care in Maryland that meets the needs of children and families. Their overarching goal is to meet the needs of foster care children as they age out of the system by providing resources to promote long term success. Unlike CASA, this organization does not advocate for children in court, but they do work to provide safe and stable homes for the foster care system. Based on our research, it is clear that CASA is the best nonprofit that currently operates to advocate for children in the court system.

J. Good to Great

First Who

First Who is a concept that is simply explained by the metaphor of a bus. It includes getting the right people on your bus, in the right seats, before you start moving. CASA does not necessarily use this practice. Since CASA is in need of more people to be CASA volunteers, they tend to take anyone who makes themselves available, assuming they pass the necessary background checks. Cecil County CASA needs about 70 more volunteers in order to for each of the children in foster care to have their own advocate. We saw some areas of concern in relation to First Who when interviewing a board member. Sue Bailey, a general member of the board, joined back in January 2019, but had some difficulty providing useful and detailed answers to our questions. She seems to not know much information about the board or CASA as an organization. When interviewing CASA's Executive Director Guila Hodge, she said that there are a few people who do not become CASAs for the right reasons. She said that some people want to be a CASA because it looks good for them; they actually have no interest in advocating for the child's welfare. However, through interviews it is clear that CASA does have staff and volunteers who fully believe in and embody its mission. Almost all of their volunteers truly want to make a difference, and they are doing it to help the children. When interviewing the CASA volunteers, it was easy to see that they have a real passion for protecting and advocating for children in the foster care system. If they did not have this drive, it would be hard to build and maintain a relationship to ensure that the children they advocate for are well looked after.

The Hedgehog Concept

The hedgehog concept revolves around three different overlapping circles. One circle contains what best drives your economic income engine, another circle contains what you are best at in the world, and the third is what you are deeply passionate about. The main idea of this concept is based on the intention to be the best, planning to be the best, and strategizing to be the best. This concept applies to CASA well. CASA wants to do its best and make sure that children in the foster care system are being well looked after. This definitely fills the circle of what they are deeply passionate about. The fundraisers, government funding, and grants that CASA has

earned fill the circle of their economic resources. This allows them to have the funds to be able to fuel the work that they do with the children. It also includes several different programs that they are starting to run, most notably the new transitional housing program that they are trying to implement. The last circle, what you are best at, is represented by their work of advocating for foster children. The middle is a combination of these three circles overlapping, enabling the organization to make good decisions that lead to success. CASA does this very well. They use all of the resources that they have in the most efficient way possible.

The FlyWheel

The FlyWheel is based on the idea that success or failure of an organization is not based on one thing alone. Everything that happens in an organization should be a push forward and cause gains in forward momentum, as if pushing flywheel. The flywheel will eventually gain momentum until the organization has a breakthrough success. This concept is hard to apply to CASA because it is run differently than other organizations. Since CASAs are court-appointed, they have a lot of momentum coming from the government. CASA has approval and backing from the court system to advocate for children. CASA also has a lot of support from its volunteers who willingly work with these children to make sure that they are living in a healthy environment. The more volunteers that CASA has the more momentum it acquires. This allows them to advocate for more children. However, this does not necessarily mean that CASA is more successful. CASA measures their success by the number of children who are reunited with their families and/or adopted into loving homes. Just because CASA gains momentum by increasing their volunteer base, it does not necessarily mean that they are successful in getting more children into permanent homes.

Level 5 Leadership

Level 5 Leadership revolves around the idea that organizations are successful because executives focus on the team and not their own personal success. It is all about how each member of the organization's skills are used to help the organization reach its goals. The levels of leadership, starting at the bottom of the pyramid are as follows: highly capable individuals,

contributing team members, component managers, effective leaders, and great leaders. It is evident that Cecil County CASA is not fully running its organization with Level 5 Leadership. From the interviews conducted, it seemed as though CASA has a lot of staff members and volunteers who really do their job well. The staff members and volunteers are highly capable individuals and contributing team members. They work together to provide the best care and advocacy possible by constantly working as a collective unit towards the organization's goals. This became evident especially when discussing transitional housing, all lower level members of the organization talked about how hard everyone had worked to get the program up and running. The lower levels of Level 5 Leadership all seem to be fully covered in CASA. In addition, the Executive Director, Giulia Hodge, is fully invested in CASA's mission. Giulia is a great executive leader. She works with all different members of the organization to make sure CASA is successful. However, the board member that was interviewed seemed to know very little information about CASA. Now, this could be due to many different reasons, including that she spends a lot of time taking care of her special needs grandchildren. This could mean that she has less time to commit to CASA, or is distracted when working for CASA. It is possible that there are more knowledgeable board members that we did not have the chance to interview. Some of the upper levels of Level 5 Leadership, mainly at the component managers level, seem to struggle a little bit in being a part of the organization's success.

K. Head, Heart, Hustle

The main theme of the book "Work on Purpose" by Laura Galansky was "head, heart, hustle." This saying illustrates the idea that when the things individuals know how to do align with the things that individuals are passionate about, there is increased potential for achievement and success. From the interviews we conducted, we have observed head, heart, hustle across the organization. Everyone involved in this organization definitely has the heart aspect and is passionate about the work that CASA does. Through mandatory training, volunteers learn the necessary skills to become successful advocates. This allows volunteers to combine their passion and knowledge, resulting in the hustle mentioned in "Work on Purpose". Both Anna and Giulia, a Case Manager and the Executive Director, respectively, identified that volunteers can get

distracted by the emotional nature of their job and act more based on their heart than their head. Both, again, mentioned that they are aware of this issue, are able to recognize when it occurs, and realign the volunteers with the main goal of getting the child into a safe, permanent home.

III. SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recognizing and correcting when advocates are leading with heart, not head -Having the right people on the right seats of the bus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Members that are dedicated to and passionate about the mission, with backgrounds relating to their roles - Executive Director Giulia is a leader with a strong vision for the organization - Dedication of workers; knowledgeable and committed to upholding the mission statement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Training to ensure advocates and employees are equipped with proper skills - The mission of the national and local branches are in alignment - Match advocates and children based on compatibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Help to ensure strong relationships between advocates and the children they represent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocates leading with heart, not head <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Difficult to maintain the strict boundaries outlined by the Department of Social Services - Board of directors is not in the loop about all affairs related to the organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → If not all board members have a complete understanding of the financials and struggles of the organization, they cannot make informed decisions - Inconsistency of leadership practices - Foster children don't always develop necessary life skills for life after foster care - No accountability for advocates to form strong relationships, other than mandatory monthly communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → No way of evaluating or reviewing the strength of child/advocate relationships → Rely mostly on intrinsic motivation - Do not have enough advocates to meet the need of the community
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No reward system for successful cases such as adoption - No formal review process for advocates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → No way to ensure the advocate is meeting the specific needs of the child they represent → A review/ evaluation process could be used to ensure CASA advocates are being utilized as a valuable resource - Social entrepreneurship - Create partnership with the Department of Social Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relationship with the Department of Social Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → CASA is under strict control and regulations of the government and the organization relies on government funding - Amount of foster families willing to accept foster children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Economic difficulties in the greater community may impact the number of families able to host foster children - Substance abuse

Strengths:

Cecil County CASA has many strengths that work in favor of reaching the organization's goals. One of the biggest strengths observed is that CASA has many members of their organization who are motivated by their heart, and their heads. We see this in advocates who really want to do what is best for the children. Their personal goal is to make sure that the children they advocate are in a safe, healthy living environment. They are dedicated and take the time to go through rigorous training. They want to be equipped with the proper skills to handle any situation that could come into their child's life. Another strength that CASA has is the right people on the right seats of the bus. This is evident in how passionate staff members and the executive director are about CASA's mission. Even though these members of CASA might not be directly working with children in foster care, they are constantly working to fulfill their roles as best as possible to make CASA successful. An example of this is that CASA matches its advocates to their children. During the extensive training period, the staff members are able to get to know each volunteer and accurately pair them with the child that they are able to help the most. This ensures that there is a strong relationship between CASAs and their children.

Weaknesses:

There are a few internal weaknesses that could lead to Cecil County CASA being unsuccessful. One of the things that CASA seems to be struggling with occurs when advocates lead too much with their heart, and not enough with their head. Due to this, many CASAs have a hard time with the strict boundaries that are outlined for them by the Department of Social Services. Advocates often get very involved in the lives of their children and become attached. It has been observed that instead of advocating for the child's wellbeing, they become focused on something that the child asks of them and they lose sight of advocating for their actual needs. Another weakness is a lack of Board Member knowledge. When interviewing a Board member, it was clear that not everyone was in the loop and did not seem to have a full understanding of the organization. Due to this finding, an additional weakness of Cecil County CASA is inconsistent leadership practices throughout the organization. CASA currently lacks an organized assessment system. They do not have anything official in place to review how

advocates are doing in terms of their relationship with their child and advocating for them. Therefore, advocates have no structured accountability, other than their one mandatory communication a month.

Opportunities:

There are many opportunities for Cecil County CASA to succeed as an organization, especially as they are a newer branch and have only been operating for four years. First, as they do have successful cases (such as those that end in adoption) within their organization, they have the ability to develop a reward system for such cases, so advocates feel appreciated for their work. Additionally, for the advocates there is not currently a review process, leaving a gap for such a process to be established to combat the external problem of having ill-performing advocates continue to volunteer for the organization. A review or evaluation process could thus be used to ensure that CASA advocates are being utilized as a valuable resource. Along with this, there is no way to currently ensure the advocate is meeting the specific needs of the child they represent, so creating a system to check this would be a beneficial opportunity. One of the greatest opportunities Cecil County CASA has is to create a partnership with the Department of Social Services. The current relationship between the two organizations is not beneficial to the outcomes of children in the court system, and coming together would be mutually beneficial for both organizations. Furthermore, social entrepreneurship is another opportunity Cecil County CASA has to raise its funds and spread education and awareness about their cause. One such venture is to acquire and establish a transitional housing program, which creates the opportunity for both awareness of children in the foster care system and funding for the housing program.

Threats:

There are many alarming threats to Cecil County CASA that, if not combatted, will impact the sustainability of this branch. First, is their relationship with the Department of Social Services. DSS plays a critical role in the placement of children in permanent homes, and without a strengthened relationship, CASA will not have a place in the community because their role is less critical than the role of social workers. The next major threat is the regulations of the

government over CASA. This branch relies heavily on government grants to fund and operate their organization. Due to strict control and regulations on such funding, if Cecil County CASA were to ever not qualify for or receive such grants, they would be in jeopardy of shutting down. Additionally, one of the other threats is the lack of foster homes in Cecil County. The mission of this organization is to place children in permanent, stable homes, but because of the significant lack of foster families they cannot be sustainable in the community as children are being placed throughout the state, which is not beneficial for anyone involved. Furthermore, economic difficulties in the greater community impact the number of families that are able to host foster children. This is leading to the lowered number of available foster housing placements. Lastly, the other major threat to Cecil County CASA is substance abuse. This is the largest contributor to children entering the system. Because of the previously mentioned threats, the influx of children from homes with substance abuse is increasing the number of children they are unable to serve. If any number of these threats are not resolved Cecil County CASA will not be sustainable within the community.

IV. Conclusion- Project Proposal

Needs:

Cecil County CASA is a great non-profit organization that helps protect children in the foster care system, as it works towards getting them placement in permanent homes. CASA has several strengths; however, we do see them having some room for growth and improvement in the future. One of the biggest needs that we see right now is that Cecil County CASA currently has no system in place for CASAs to get feedback on how they are doing with the children they are advocating for. CASA also has no assessment system to check how the volunteers are doing in handling their cases. There is no way for the organization to track if the CASA is doing what the child wants. If CASA's mission is to advocate for the best interest of the children, it is important to establish what the child's needs are so the advocates can be the most effective. Also, we have noticed a common concern that CASAs lose track of advocating for what the child needs. They focus on other things in the child's life, such as activities that they want to take part in, instead of focusing on getting the child into a healthy living situation. Another big need that we saw Cecil County CASA has is that they currently do not have a program for children who age out of the foster care system. Foster children do not have a place to go and do not always have the necessary skills to live a successful life in the real world. Many children, once leaving the foster care system and growing out of the CASA program, face difficulties with housing, finding a job, and sustaining themselves. Currently, Cecil County CASA is trying to put in place a transitional housing program for this problem, however, they have not been able to start it yet.

Project #1:

- Develop a feedback or evaluation system for advocates
 - This can address relationships between foster children and their advocates. Across the interviews, different concerns were mentioned about advocate-child relationships. The concerns ranged from advocates that were not involved consistently with their child and struggled to form a strong relationship, to

advocates who became too emotionally invested with their child. An evaluation or review system could be put in place for the advocates to ensure that advocates are properly fulfilling their roles and being the best resource possible to the individualized needs of each child.

- As noted in the interviews, some children feel as though their CASA advocate is “just another person to report to.” Advocates struggle to reach these children that are disinterested or disengaged with the CASA program.
 - This review process could ensure a more individualized approach to each CASA relationship to meet the needs of each child.
 - Additionally, CASA advocates could gain a greater understanding of the needs of their child, and as an organization, CASA could find points of weakness in their training to improve upon. If feedback shows certain areas where advocates are lacking, or advocates feel they are lacking knowledge, training could be modified.

Project #2: Real-life prep/interim housing

- Help find and gather resources for interim housing and education programs for foster youth that age out of the system.
 - We could potentially try to develop a partnership with a local store or business to donate goods and supplies.
- This housing could help children adapt from life in the foster care system to life in the real world. We could potentially take steps to help fundraise for this housing, and look into local housing options and see the options CASA could take advantage of.
- Lessons could include getting and maintaining a job, handling an income and taxes, budgeting, self-care, and healthy lifestyle choices. If children are equipped with the right skills or are aided in finding a job and housing, they may be set up to live a more successful and stable lifestyle, which is a major goal of CASA.
- The housing could be offered as a group home, helping to form relationships between children coming out of the foster care system

- This could provide an important support system during this difficult transitional period. Having a group of children living together could help them model the way for each other, and provide a community of people with similar experiences.

V. References

<https://www.marylandnonprofits.org/what-we-offer/marfy/>

<https://cecilcasa.org/>

<https://casaforchildren.org/>

“Good to Great” by Jim Collins

“Work on Purpose” Laura Galinsky

Giulia Hodge, Executive Director, Cecil County CASA

Anna Willis, Case Manager, Cecil County CASA

Donna Zeisberg, Outreach Coordinator, Cecil County CASA

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Sue Bailey, Board Member, Cecil County CASA

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