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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Perceptions of Court Appointed Special Advocates on Volunteer Turnover

by

Salwa El Habib

MSc, University of Khartoum

BA, University of Khartoum

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

There is a high turnover rate among court-appointed special advocates (CASA) in the United States. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore perception on the retention of CASA volunteers. Maslach's burnout theory and Greene's theory of resilience provided the framework for the study. A sample of9 active and 5 inactive CASA volunteers, one CASA volunteer recruiter, 3 program supervisors, and one administrator were interviewed. The data was organized and coded manually to facilitate auto-coding using a qualitative data software. All responses to each question were compiled in one place allowing for thematic analysis based on the frequency of terms and concepts occurring during the interviews. According to study findings, lengthy and complicated processes, restrictive laws and regulations, limited outcomes impact for the children, and unrealistic expectations of the CASA volunteers were the main reasons for the high turnover rate. Support and preparedness were crucial in the CASA volunteers' decision to serve longer. The study findings would be available for decision makers to review and revise policies in order to improve the experience and adjust expectations imposed on CASA volunteers via recruitment and training messaging. Increasing CASA volunteers' retention rate would change the trajectory of more children in foster care by improving their chances for achieving positive outcomes.

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Dedication

To my mother Faiza for her dedication, enduring patience, and unwavering support. To my son and hero, Omar Shah for his lasting encouragement and inspiration. To National CASA Organization and Network under the leadership of CEO Tara Perry for the great work, vision and dedication to vulnerable children. To all CASA/GAL volunteers for your tireless work changing the future for vulnerable children, one child at a time.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Study

Volunteering describes activities and services conducted primarily for no monetary compensation, intended to help others or promote a cause or belief. Researchers have used demographic and gender factors to create a profile of individuals more likely to volunteer, what motivates them, and in what type of activities. According to Fischer and Schafer (1993), individuals with higher education, earnings, and socioeconomic class are more likely to volunteer than those less educated, less fortunate, and from a lower socioeconomic class. Individuals within a higher education and income bracket could afford to spare time and resources in philanthropic activities more than individuals and communities with fewer resources. However, as more scholars examined these assumptions, numerous inconsistencies in the findings became evident, and demographic distinctions fell in prominence to a secondary level. Fischer and Schaffer found no significant demographic factors predicating that one social group is more likely to volunteer than another. The motivation for individuals to become involved in volunteerism varied by different factors ranging from egoistic and self-serving to totally outwardly altruistic, and different people fell at different points on the spectrum of motivation to volunteer (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). Researchers should explore the difference between those who volunteer and those who do not within each social group, with the possibility that there are altruistic qualities that predispose some people to help others.

There are many different types of volunteer opportunities. The intensity, time commitment, and involvement of each activity determines the type of volunteer available for it. In general, volunteers are citizens who have beliefs in certain causes or ideals and feel compelled to provide services to further their cause or help others without material compensation. In this study, I explored volunteer experiences within the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association context to learn about retention patterns among CASA volunteers, including a better understanding of the underlying causes for a volunteer to stay or leave.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the National CASA Association and its network of affiliate programs around the country, with the goal of providing best interest advocacy for children in court proceedings due to abuse or neglect It describes the reasons for creating the CASA model and its value to the children and youth who the CASA advocates serve. I present the problem statement and the theoretical framework through which I analyzed the data and drew conclusions that addressed the research question. I also provide perspective on why I chose to undertake the study and its significance to social change.

CASA Volunteers

Every year, about 500,000 children and youth experience the foster care system in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). In 2015, more than 77,000 community citizens advocated for the best interest of more than 250,000 children and youths in judicial proceedings due to abuse or neglect in over 900 communities across the United States (National CASA, 2016a). In 2015 alone, state and

local CASA/GAL (guardians ad litem) programs across the country recruited and trained over 22,000 new volunteer advocates to serve additional children and youth in care (National CASA, 2016b). During the same year, state and local CASA/GAL programs lost 17,000 volunteers either voluntarily or involuntarily (National CASA, 2016b). According to National CASA, (2016b) there was a net gain of one volunteer for every three lost. The purpose of the study was to identify the reasons for the high attrition rate among CASA volunteers, with the goal of recommending policies that could improve the volunteer advocate experience and motivate them to serve longer.

The National CASA Association is a nonprofit organization, with a network of over 940 state and local programs nationwide (National CASA, 2016a). The overarching mission of these programs is to provide high-quality representation for children and youth in judicial proceedings, as established in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017; Poertner & Press, 1990). The CASA initiative started in Washington State in 1977, as a recommendation by Judge David Soukup, a dependency court judge in Seattle. The initiative would appoint citizen volunteers to speak on behalf of the children in court proceedings due to abuse or neglect. The first CASA intervention started with one citizen volunteer working with a social worker and a judge. Since then, it has grown into a movement of more than 900 programs in 49 states (National CASA, 2015).

Scholars who have examined the CASA/GAL initiative have addressed the effectiveness of the initiative in providing best interest advocacy for the child. Poertner and Press (1990) defined best interest measures as the total number of services ordered,

the average number of services per hearing, the number of court-ordered changes in case plans, the time between hearings, the time between court reviews, and maintenance of the initial goal of reunification. Duquette and Ramsey (1986) used a set of processes and outcome measures to compare the efficacy of three groups that advocated for children in judicial proceedings: lay volunteers supervised by an attorney, law students from the University of Michigan Child Advocacy Law Clinic, and private attorneys trained as Guardian ad Litems. Duquette and Ramsey showed no difference in court processing time or any of the other procedural orders, such as permanency plans or the number of placements.

Condelli, Fairweather, and Licwinko (1988) compared five models in nine sites: law school clinics, staff attorneys, paid private attorneys, a paid attorney paired with lay volunteers, and unassisted lay volunteers. Condelli et al. showed that the paid attorney and one or both CASA models outperformed the other models on a variety of best interest outcome measures. The CASA advocate was significantly better than the other models on the length of time the child spent in an out-of-home placement and the average number of changes made in case plans (Condelli et al., 1988). There was no proof that lay volunteers were less effective than staff attorneys, and CASA was at least as effective as staff attorneys on a variety of measures.

CASA volunteers go through a screening process. They undergo a 30-hour training on best interest advocacy for children in court proceedings due to abuse and neglect (National CASA, 2007). Once sworn in by the Judge, the CASA program or the sitting judge assigns a case of one child or multiple siblings to the CASA volunteer. As

the child's guardian ad litem, the CASA volunteer makes recommendations to the judge, based on independent fact-finding activities, that are in the best interest of the child. Through their service, CASA volunteers are supervised by a paid staff member and receive legal advice in cases of termination of parental rights. They are also required to complete 12-hour continuing education sessions on relevant topics identified and recommended by the CASA programs (National CASA, 2007).

Scholars have used the quantitative approach to measure the effects of CASA volunteers in outcomes for children. Using a qualitative approach, I investigated the conditions the CASA volunteers found favorable for providing advocacy services, and those they found unfavorable, from their own perspective. The 2016 National CASA Program Survey findings was the motivator for gaining a deeper understanding of the CASA volunteer experience and exploring the retention patterns among CASA volunteers.

Problem Statement

There is a high turnover rate among CASA volunteers. Over 60% of the number of CASA volunteers recruited annually quit the programs (National CASA, 2016b). This is a substantial loss on investment that the organization made in recruitment, training, and coaching of volunteers. Each case handled by a volunteer helped build the accumulated individual and institutional knowledge key to success in future cases. The constant turnover drain in asset knowledge prevents this process of accumulating experience and building capacity within the volunteer body, perpetuating the constant need for recruitment and training.

Unlike donors and event volunteers, a CASA volunteer is expected to commit for a longer period of continued service to the children - 18 months on average (National CASA, 2007). According to the National CASA (2016a), if a volunteer advocate fulfills the basic requirement of serving a 2-year period, he or she is more likely to serve longer and on more cases. According to Alfes, Antunes, and Shantz (2017), many nonprofit organizations do not have the structure for rewarding volunteers, so they depend on the rewarding experience of volunteering, which for CASA volunteers is advocating for the children in care. There are different CASA service models dictated by the statutes of each state; some CASA programs function as independent nonprofit organizations and others are publicly administered and function within the county or court system (National CASA, 2013). They are all unified under the objective of advocating for the best interest of the children in judicial proceedings due to abuse and neglect.

Some volunteers continue to advocate for children for over 10 years and occasionally up to 30 years (National CASA, 2016b). These volunteers acquire extensive experience in the child welfare system and the dependency courts. They keep up with the required annual hours of training and need minimal supervision and coaching, thus freeing the time of volunteer coordinators and supervisors to recruit, screen, train, and coach new volunteer advocates. However, in some instances, volunteer coordinators and program directors identify drawbacks in volunteer longevity pertaining to set perceptions of the outcomes for the children and youths for whom they advocate. This drawback cannot be generalized as most of the long-term volunteers keep abreast with new thinking

and trends and readily adapt to policy changes through on-going education, training, and direction (Kizer, Kreisher, & Whitacre, 2015).

Research on child welfare has expanded to include the effects on, and outcomes of, children placed in the child welfare system in the areas of safety, wellbeing, education, and contact with the justice system. Studies have also been conducted on service providers such as case workers, social workers, child welfare workers, and probation officers that show how much stress these professionals undergo because of working with children and families who had experienced trauma first hand (Berrick & Durst, 2014; Lawson & Berrick, 2013). In the child welfare literature, multiple scholars have captured the emotionally and physically demanding nature of the occupations dealing with trauma and its relationship to stress, burn-out, and individual resilience (Blome & Steib, 2014; Stevens & Higgens, 2002). There are a few studies on the impact of judges on the wellbeing of children in court proceedings. There are also several studies about volunteer advocates regarding demographics, availability, gender, professional affiliations, aptitude, and retention (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016; Bright, Shovali, & Cooper, 2015; Harp, Scherer, & Allen, 2017; Obenoskey, 2016). The gap in the literature constitutes the need for a study on the CASA volunteers' experience from the perspective of the volunteers, recruiters, and administrators.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the reasons for the high turnover rate among CASA volunteer advocates from the perspectives of volunteers, recruiters, and administrators. This knowledge might guide in formulating policies and

procedures that improve the CASA volunteer experience and increase retention rate. Based on a 5-year data period (2011-2015), the average number of CASA volunteers recruited annually was approximately 22,000, compared to an annual drop-out number of about 17,000, indicating an over 60% attrition rate (National CASA, 2016b). In addition, 50% of the CASA volunteers serve 2.5 years on average (National CASA, 2016b). One quarter serve up to 1.75 years, and one quarter serve a minimum of 3.4 years, reaching up to 30 years in some cases (National CASA, 2016b). Understanding the CASA volunteers' retention and longevity patterns and underlying reasons could provide the knowledge and tools necessary for proposing policy changes to improve the retention rate.

Research Question

The research question addressed by the study was the following: What are the perceptions that CASA volunteers, volunteer recruiters, and administrators have regarding factors that impact volunteer retention?

Theoretical Framework

Maslach's multidimensional theory of burnout (1998) and resilience theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Greene, 2002) were chosen for the theoretical framework of this study. According to Maslach and Jackson (1986), individuals suffering burnout exhibit high levels of exhaustion, cynicism, and low efficiency, symptoms similar to those of secondary traumatic stress. Stevens and Higgins (2002) observed that working with maltreated children could cause burnout resulting in high rates of turnover among the workers.

Resilience theory (Greene, 2002) offers a framework of analysis for volunteers remaining for extended periods versus those who stayed for short periods. The concept of resilience encompasses the way individuals interpret and respond to risk. Some people have a high threshold of tolerance and stamina when faced with trauma, and others have a low threshold and are often victims of traumatic stress manifestations (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999). Within the range of manifestation of resilience, there are multiple levels of tolerance to risk and trauma. Response to trauma was not uniform and has varied even for the same individual under different circumstances, usually influenced by external and internal factors that change from one event to the other (Rutter, 1987).

Over 50% of social workers had similar symptoms to those of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Bride, Robinson, Yegidis, & Figley, 2003). According to Bride (2007), social workers and volunteers serving in the social services sector manifest burnout symptoms similar to those of secondary traumatic stress caused by interacting with individuals who have experienced trauma, without necessarily having experienced trauma first hand. Framing the research problem with these two theories provided insight on possible reasons for the turnover among CASA volunteer advocates, without excluding any factors that could have contributed to the situation in question. I used a broad-brush approach over the data for a preliminary coding and analysis, followed by a deeper analysis for an interpretation of the data. By linking the interview questions to the primary and secondary codes, I found trends and patterns, and likely exceptions and outliers emerged.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight on the high turnover rate among CASA volunteers. The document reviews provided a representation of the situation on the ground, tracking trends of tenure. I used the interviews to elicit answers to the what and why questions and provided knowledge of the reasons CASA volunteers joined in the first place. The participants also provided insight on the factors that kept the CASA volunteers going versus the factors that would compel them to discontinue their volunteer involvement.

Qualitative researchers find the case study approach to be effective in facilitating the understanding of complex situations and examining real life situations and circumstances (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). As such, I used the case study approach to get a better understanding of the CASA volunteer advocates' experience and the factors that influenced their decision to stay and serve longer or to leave. At the onset of this study, I reviewed relevant documentation and records at the national and local levels to get a perspective on the issues related to the research problem. I conducted interviews with CASA volunteer advocates of a local CASA program, as well as volunteer recruiters and supervisors and program administrators to get a better sense of the program's volunteer recruitment and retention policies and strategies.

The CASA program sent out a request on my behalf to all active and inactive CASA volunteer advocates who had been serving within the last 5 years. The interviews were conducted individually with 22 respondents who met the criteria for the study. Each interviewee signed the appropriate consent form and dated it before the interview started;

all interviews were audio taped. To maintain anonymity of the interviewees, I saved the interviews using an anonymous naming convention that included the date of the interview, order of their interview, and a two-letter designation code that described the relationship of each interviewee to the program. I transcribed the interviews using a professional online transcription software company and, with the use of NVivo, the Qualitative Analysis Software of choice, I outlined the plan and created nodes and subnodes and placeholders as much as seemed reasonable. The study included a discussion of the theoretical framework and a critical analysis of how it connects to public policy.

Commonly Used Terms and Legal Definitions

Abuse: Any physical injury, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse inflected on a child, other than by accidental means by those responsible for his/her care, custody, and control (National CASA, 2007).

Advocacy: Interventive strategy in which a helping person assumes an active role in assisting or supporting a specific child and/or family or a cause, on behalf of children and /or families. This could involve finding and facilitating services for specific cases or developing new services or promoting program coordination (National CASA, 2007).

Advocate: An adult person that uses his/her power, knowledge, or influence to promote a cause or right in support of a child or family (National CASA, 2007).

Best interests of the child: Child standards for deciding among alternative plans for abused or neglected children. Usually it is assumed that it is in the child's best interest and least detriment if the child remains in the home, provided that the parent(s) can

respond to treatment. However, the parent's potential for treatment may be difficult to assess, and it may not be known whether the necessary resources are available. A few authorities believe that except where the child's life is in danger, it is always in the child's best interest to remain in the home. This view reflects the position that, in evaluating the least detrimental alternative and the child's best interest, the child's psychological as well as physical wellbeing must be considered. Once justification for state intervention has been established, the child's wellbeing must be the determinative (Goldstein, Freud, & Albert, 1979).

Child abuse and neglect: All-inclusive term, as defined in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, for the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare (National CASA, 2007).

Court appointed special advocate (CASA): Adult lay citizen volunteer appointed by the court to represent the child in a judicial proceeding, as a friend of the court. Used interchangeably with guardian ad litem (National CASA, 2007).

Court order: Directive issued by the court having authority of the court and enforceable as law. Written command or directive given by the judge (National CASA, 2007).

Foster care: A form of temporary substitute care, usually in a home licensed by a public agency, for children whose welfare requires that they be removed from their own homes (National CASA, 2007).

Foster child: A child who has been removed from his/her own home to ensure his/her wellbeing and/or safety (National CASA, 2007).

Guardian ad litem (GAL): Adult appointed by the court to represent the child in judicial proceedings. Under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (1974), a state cannot qualify for federal assistance unless it provides by statute that in every case involving an abused or neglected child which results in judicial proceeding, guardian ad litem shall be appointed to represent the child in such proceedings. Such guardians are usually appointed to safeguard the rights of persons otherwise incapable of handling their own interests (National CASA, 2007).

Neglect: Failure by a person responsible for a child's care to supply a child with the necessary provisions: food, clothing, shelter, or medical care, when reasonable to do so, or failure to protect a child from conditions or actions that imminently and seriously endanger the child's physical or mental health (National CASA, 2007).

Placement: After the removal of a child from his/her natural home and placing him/her in a different custodial setting for more than a short period of time. Placement maybe in a foster home, group home, relative's home, or institution (National CASA, 2007).

Assumptions

In conducting this study, there were key assumptions that provided the foundation for the research. Simon (2011) described assumptions as existing situations or perceptions without which a study would become pointless. Truthfulness of the respondents was provided by Simon as an example of assumptions. Following Simon's

definition, this study was based on several assumptions, highlighting child abuse and neglect that the child welfare system had been dealing as a long-term problem. As long as there were parents and guardians who might subject their children to abuse and neglect, putting them in harm's way, the foster care system would continue to exist and provide an alternative safety net for those children.

Another assumption was that the representation of children in court proceedings was mandated as a public policy in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). In compliance with CAPTA, states had mandated that each child in care be represented by a GAL attorney. According to Duquette (2008), child representation by GAL attorneys had limitations, including high cost and large caseloads. In this study, I also assumed that funding for child representation in judicial proceedings was limited, especially when factoring in the increasing numbers of children admitted to the foster care system each year.

With these assumptions, the CASA model has been providing a low-cost alternative that would continue to rely exclusively on citizen volunteers advocating for the best interest of children in judicial proceedings due to abuse or neglect. Unless unlimited sources of funding were designated for the purpose, or attorneys' costs for representation of children became substantially reduced, the CASA model would continue to be the most viable response to representing the best interest of children in the child welfare system due to abuse or neglect. Weisz and Thai (2003) determined that CASA volunteers provide better quality information about the child they advocate for to the judge. The quality of the information upon which the judge's decision is based

improves the chances for better outcomes for the child they are representing. This makes recruitment, training, and retention of volunteer advocates critical for the wellbeing of those children.

The study participants were made up of a group of caring and concerned individuals who value the CASA volunteer experience and mission. They showed interest in sharing their experiences advocating for children and lessons learned to avoid pitfalls and shortcomings. They presented a range of experiences, some positive and some less so; all participants demonstrated interest and concern for the wellbeing of the children in care due to abuse and neglect by signing up to participate in this study.

Scope and Delimitations

Simon (2011) defined delimitation as the factors that the researcher would choose to define the scope of the study. They include the theoretical and practical parameters for the study that the researcher selects and controls, such as the objectives of the study, the research questions, and the potential participants of the study. In this section, I describe the scope of the study in terms of the population, the program selected for the study, the participants, and the purpose of the study.

Over 500,000 children and youth pass through the foster care system annually, due to abuse or neglect (National CASA. 2016a). In 2015, about 77,000 CASA volunteers advocated for the best interest of over 250,000 children (National CASA, 2016a). Therefore, in spite of the large number of children served by CASA advocates, over 250,000 children in care remained without a volunteer advocate to represent them in court. As the number of children entering care each day grew exponentially in the last

several years with the increase in the use of opioids, the number of volunteer advocates remained the same (National CASA, 2016a). Approximately 300,000 children and youth in care did not get a CASA volunteer to advocate in their best interest in court proceedings (National CASA, 2016b). This issue was exacerbated by the significantly high rate of turnover among CASA advocates, coupled with the limited supply of volunteers. With the goal to serve all children in care, retention of volunteers would increase access and availability of CASA advocacy.

The study was designed to reach out to active as well as inactive volunteers who provided advocacy services within the last 5 years. The intent of the study was to understand what makes some volunteers serve for a prolonged period, while others stay for a short time. I interviewed only those inactive volunteers who left voluntarily.

The question of CASA volunteer advocates' retention is not unique to one program or one state. It extends across the country to almost all CASA/GAL programs but varies depending on the size and local dynamics of the area. State and local CASA programs invest in campaigns for recruiting volunteer advocates to serve the children in their respective jurisdictions. The potential of sharing study results with all CASA jurisdictions is highly likely. It is worthwhile, especially related to reducing the highest costs of recruiting and training new volunteers, while increasing retention of those already experienced.

Limitations

In this section, I present possible limitations to the study and the treatments that I used to maintain the integrity of the research. According to Simon (2011), limitations are

situations that are outside the sphere of control of the researcher, with the potential of affecting the outcome of the study. Simon provided examples of the circumstances or situations that constitute limitation, such as limitation in time or using a sample of convenience. Although these were not problematic in themselves, they might increase the risk of producing problematic or deficient results that could fail generalization or validation. Based on the definition and examples above, I avoided potential limitations and outlined the course of action I took in dealing with them.

Programs could become protective towards their work (National CASA, 2013). Some might prefer to maintain the status quo, rather than risking exposure of or acknowledging possible weaknesses with the possibility of losing funding. This protectiveness could produce data that would highlight positive experiences only and omit experiences perceived as negative. Being aware of this limitation, I used probes and triangulations that allowed verifying and validating the data and digging deeper into the responses by asking clarifying questions, while remaining cognizant of the sensitivities that that would create. Being aware of the potential limitation, I needed to ensure the CASA program that I selected as the unit of analysis was the sole focus of the study.

I perceived a potential bias risk at two levels. The first level was my bias as an instrument of the study, and due to my close affiliation with CASA as an employee and as a volunteer advocate. The possibility existed that I would come into the study with already formed opinions and, consciously or not, try to influence the findings to support my preconceived ideas. The second level bias was at the state and program levels, where for the same reasons of my bias, interviews could have been skewed to either conceal

facts or overemphasize them based on suspicion or preconceptions of the intent of the study and potential influence on the future of the program.

Being aware of these bias risks prepared me as the researcher to maintain objectivity by constantly checking my thoughts for bias and preconceptions. I needed to be transparent, clear, and approachable to build good rapport based on trust and confidence. As for the validity of the data, I compared it with other similar programs in the network using triangulation of data gathered via different methods.

Significance of the Study

The National CASA Association provides policy guidance and technical assistance to the network through different venues, including capacity building and financial support. The training curriculum developed for the volunteer advocates' training is one of the highest valued services provided to the network, with built-in competencies expected as outcomes. These services are provided as part of a membership package that the whole CASA network signs on for. In return, the member programs provide a set of core services defined within the best interest advocacy for children and youth in judicial proceedings due to abuse and neglect.

The results of my study would inform the National CASA Association of the reasons for high turnover among volunteers. Policy adjustments might entail adding to the volunteer training curriculum competencies, practices, and measures to enhance volunteer retention. The impact that this policy adjustment might have on the number of children served could be significant, affecting a positive social change for children and youth in the foster care system. Having a CASA volunteer advocate assigned to each

child and youth in the foster care system would offer potential to change their trajectory and improve their outcomes.

The CASA volunteer advocates in 2015 served 250,000 children in the foster care system (National CASA, 2016a). Although this number seems high, it is less than half of the number of children who go through the system annually. A change in the practice of volunteer advocates' recruitment and retention has the potential of increasing the number of children served by a CASA volunteer advocate and improving the outcomes for more children in care.

Significance to Theory

The study increased the understanding of the barriers to volunteer retention and revealed the patterns that shed light on the reasons for the high turnover among volunteer advocates. Adjusting the way CASA programs perceive their volunteers would make a difference in understanding how to handle volunteer recruitment and retention in an evolving environment. It could also shed light on practices that worked well in the past but are no longer viable or applicable at the present.

Significance to Social Change

CASA exists to improve the lives and outcomes of children and youth in foster care for the reasons of abuse and neglect. The records for foster children are not favorable. Besides the trauma of maltreatment and or abandonment, these children are removed from their families and placed with total strangers (National CASA, 2013). Some of them experience multiple placements resulting in changing schools several times. For those who reach the age of maturity while in foster care, the statistics are even

more discouraging: high rates of incarceration, homelessness, joblessness, and other dire outcomes (National CASA, 2017).

In addition to serving as an advocate in legal representations, a CASA volunteer advocate is often the sole stable figure in the life of a child or youth; one whose sole motivation is to speak for the best interest of that child or youth. This stability instills confidence and trust; consequently, the outcomes for the children and youth are more favorable and more in line with their peers growing up in their families. Therefore, the more CASA volunteer advocates are trained and available to serve children and youth in foster care, the greater is the potential for positive social change for those involved and for society.

Summary and Transition

This chapter provided an overview about the concept of volunteerism, the characteristics of people who volunteer, and the likely motivations that compel individuals to volunteer. Research varies on the motives for volunteering and on the profile of individuals who are more likely to volunteer. Some researchers found that certain socioeconomic characteristics are more prevalent among volunteers, such as higher education and income levels. Others disagreed with the findings based on demographic and gender traits as being inconsistent and attributed the volunteer motivation to a wide range of reasons. Six motives for volunteering were identified in the volunteer functions inventory by Clary et al. (1998), ranging from value motives that are altruistic and outwardly, to egoistic motives that are more personal and benefit only the individual whether in tangible or intangible ways. Volunteering activities also vary in

time commitment, intensity, and physical or emotional demand. Volunteers tend to choose activities they are more comfortable performing or feel strongly about. This study focuses on the CASA model.

Over 500,000 children go through the foster care system due to neglect or abuse every year; and every year over 77,000 citizen volunteers (CASA) advocate for and represent about half of these children in court proceedings (National CASA, 2016b). The CASA vision is to provide a CASA or GAL advocate to each child in foster care due to abuse or neglect to speak on his or her behalf and represent his or her best interest in court. One of the problems in achieving this goal is the high turnover rate among the volunteer advocates. Each year, about sixty percent of the number of volunteers who sign up to become CASA leave the programs (author, year). The reasons behind the high turnover rate among CASA volunteers had not been studied. The purpose of this study was to increase an understanding of the reasons for the high turnover rate among CASAs. CASA advocacy, unlike other types of volunteerism, is more demanding and requires the volunteers to be invested physically, psychologically, and emotionally. In this study, I assumed that CASA volunteers leave at a high rate as a result of burnout due to secondary traumatic stress. I also assumed that those volunteers who remain to serve longer are more resilient either due to innate or acquired resilience. Consequently, the study was framed by the burnout theory and theory of resilience.

The information obtained from this study could be used by leaders and decision makers to institute changes that would improve the CASA volunteer experience and increase the volunteer retention rate. Experienced volunteers could provide stability in the

lives of more children in care, which would improve their chances of success in life. In addition, there would be benefit in terms of savings and return on investment in volunteer training.

In Chapter 2, I review literature on volunteers and volunteer experience and documents literature on the CASA and GAL model in relation to volunteers and children served.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A volunteer provides help or assistance to benefit recipients ranging from large organizations to neighbors and family members. Volunteers are increasingly becoming the backbone of civil society (Kizer et al., 2015). Donating is a monetary form of volunteering, more commonly known as philanthropy. Giving emotional support is another form of volunteering usually referred to as helping (Alfes et al., 2017). Volunteer services include board membership and providing technical assistance or business services, community or church projects, and mentoring and advocacy. The services volunteers provide, however complex or intense, are performed without material compensation (Brown, 2005). Volunteers are often motivated by the opportunity of meeting and socializing with people who share similar interests and values (Pearce, 1983). According to Ellis (2015), volunteers, advocates, and activists are ordinary citizens who achieve social change through their own efforts to organize in support of a cause they believe in, or against policies that they perceive negatively. They may take risks when taking a position or expressing an opinion (Rehnborg, 2015). They are not motivated by financial compensation, which they do not receive, but by the reward of trying to make a difference.

Organizations have become more dependent on volunteers in carrying their mission and vision, as is the case with the National CASA Association and its network of over 900 affiliate state and local programs countrywide (National CASA, 2016a). In this study, I reviewed volunteer services in the National CASA Association context, which

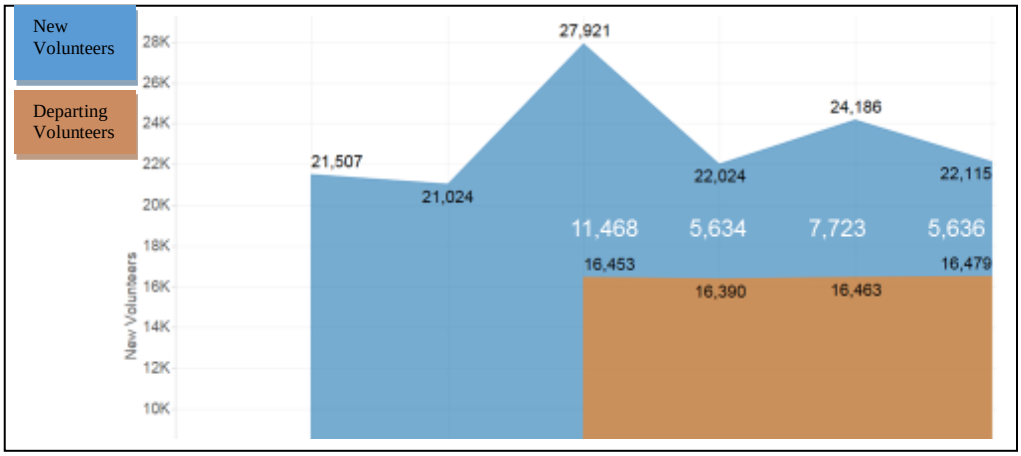
falls into the category of providing best interest advocacy for children in judicial proceedings due to abuse or neglect.

Historical Perspective

The concept of volunteering as unpaid work sprung from limited localized community initiatives to global volunteer movements in different specializations. For example, cyber volunteers created the largest open-source encyclopedia in the world, Wikipedia, that continues to grow by volunteer input, albeit with perceptions of lack of accuracy. Johnson (2015) attributed the success of social enterprises or community projects to committed community volunteers and supporters. The first CASA program was created in Seattle, Washington in 1977 with one citizen volunteer working with a social worker and a judge. CASA now has over 77,000 volunteers delivering best-interest advocacy for more than 250,000 children and youth in the foster care system nationwide (National CASA, 2015).

I focused on the CASA community advocate volunteers and their turnover. During 2015, the state and local programs recruited approximately 22,000 new volunteers (author, year). About 17,000 CASA volunteers left in the same year; about three out of every four volunteers left during the same period (Figure 1). This level of volunteer turnover posed a financial and staffing burden on programs already strained for resources.

Figure 1: Volunteer-level data: New & departing volunteers.



Source: Leading with Data: National CASA Association, 2016

According to the Local Program Annual Survey (2015) report, the volunteer data results reflected four distinct quartiles: 25% of the volunteers served as CASA for up to 1.75 years, 25% served between 1.75 - 2.6 years, 25% served up to 3.4 years, and 25% of the volunteers stayed as CASA 3.4 years to 10 years and more. Volunteers come from all walks of life with different interests, aptitude, and temperaments; there is a difference in longevity between the first and last quartile in the volunteer data. A few studies by graduate students and child welfare research institutions addressed the problem of the CASA volunteer revolving-door phenomenon but did not examine the issue from the volunteer perspective. There was no knowledge of the reasons some volunteers stayed a long time while others stayed for a short time (Lipp, 2015), which left a gap in the literature about the reasons for the high turnover. The purpose of this study was to

understand the reasons for turnover and point out the issues that would help improve the volunteers' experience and increase the overall retention rate.

The major sections in this chapter include the literature search strategy and the theoretical framework for the study. The theoretical framework is described in the context of the study and provides the basis for the assumptions, while in the literature review, I establish the relevance of the theories in relation to the main elements and assumptions of the study.

Literature Search Strategy

I started a broad literature search strategy, initially through Google Scholar, to get a scope of the literature available using terms such as *volunteer, volunteering, CASA, GAL, advocate, advocacy*, and *retention*. I also used many databases through the Walden University Library, including EBSCO, SAGE, ProQuest, and other databases targeting social work, child welfare, social policy, and juvenile justice. I compiled articles and books of relevance to the subject and continued to narrow down my search by using target terms and key phrases, such as *volunteer advocate, volunteer retention, CASA volunteers, CASA advocates, guardian ad litem, and GAL*. I also compiled articles from the Child Welfare Information Gateway on volunteer recruitment and retention. In the process of reviewing the literature, I came across terms that describe the state of the children and adults in the child welfare system, such as *trauma, secondary trauma, stress, burnout, secondary traumatic stress, resilience, and vicarious trauma*. These terms provided the basis for the theories that framed the study. Appendix E outlines the relationship between literature elements.

Theoretical Foundation

Understanding the reasons why some CASA volunteers stay for a long time and others do not requires a deeper understanding of key variables and circumstances that characterize the field of child welfare and social work. These variables include gender, age, racial, and ethnic make-up among other demographic characteristics, as well as the professional and structural environment. I have chosen the multidimensional theory of burnout (Maslach, 1998) and resilience theory (Greene, 2002) for framing this study.

Theory of Burnout

Children in protective proceedings experience multiple trauma during their time in out-of-home care. They are removed from their families, they change schools, they are separated from everything that is familiar to them and placed with total strangers who may not even look like them and may be moved to different placements thereafter. In dealing with these children, the CASA volunteers experience secondary traumatic stress, the same as do therapists and social workers (Hesse, 2002). Secondary traumatic stress (STS) and burnout are synonymous; STS affects individuals who have experienced trauma through persons who suffered trauma first-hand (Bride, 2007). Bride et al. (2003) assessed the effects of STS on social workers found that over 50% had similar symptoms to those of PTSD.

Burnout has been recognized as an occupational hazard for people working in jobs related to human services, such as education, health care, social work, and child welfare (Maslach, 1998). Human services work requires a high level of commitment to clients for extended periods of time, often causing chronic stress, exhaustion, cynicism,

and sometimes a diminishing sense of worth. Although the nature of this work and the relationships they afford can be enriching and rewarding, they can also become a drain on the physical and emotional reserve of these workers. Being exposed to multiple traumatic events, as is the case with workers and volunteers in the social service sector, increases the risk of burnout and secondary trauma. Because CASA volunteers have taken the role of child advocates, which falls under the category of human services, they run the same risk of burnout hazards as social workers.

Most of these occupations have been subject to political and economic pressures, funding cutbacks, and burdensome regulatory restrictions. According to Blome and Steib (2014), the number of child abuse and neglect reports hiked when the CAPTA of 1974, passed. The passing of CAPTA prompted jurisdictions to take steps in tightening the regulations, increasing the level of supervision, and loosening the educational requirements for child welfare social workers. In addition to increasing the number of reports on child abuse and neglect, these adaptations resulted in changing the role of the social workers to case managers. Instead of directly providing the services to clients, they refer their clients to external service providers (Blome & Steib, 2014).

Although social and child welfare institutions have existed for a long time, they are still struggling with the standards and continue to add new layers of regulations. The organizational climate of the child welfare agencies can be described as highly stressful. The staff and administrators navigate between inquiry from the outside, rigidity from the inside, and heavy caseloads that they need to oversee on daily basis. The nature of the

problems they deal with range from child abuse and neglect, to substance abuse, to incarceration, and domestic violence (Blome & Steib, 2014).

The CASA volunteer works within already established structures as parties to the case: law enforcement, the legal (and court) system, the child welfare system, as well as the CASA program under which they serve. Their role is to gather information and facts through venues, including observation and interviews, and compile a court report with recommendations to the judge on the best interest of the child or youth (National CASA, 2007) they are advocating for. To prepare CASA volunteers for their role, they undergo a 30 to 40-hour training, covering a range of topics that include establishing a common understanding of what constitutes abuse and neglect, to a description of the process of removing a child or youth from their family due to abuse and neglect. CASA volunteers receive training through different media, including lectures, handouts, role playing, and case studies that depict real life situations of children who are in foster care due to abuse and neglect. The training also includes a general description of the roles of the different parties involved in this process and their relationship to the case.

The removal of the child from his or her family due to abuse and neglect marks the beginning of dependency, and it sets off a series of processes and timelines that all parties involved are bound by. Each party to the case answers to an agency that has its own set of mandates and priorities. After being assigned by a judge to advocate for a child in protection proceedings, the CASA volunteer is expected to learn all of the facts about and surrounding the child(ren), and the reasons for his or her removal from the family. The CASA investigates the child's situation and prepares a court report that

includes recommendations to the judge on the best interest of the child (National CASA, 2007).

The CASA volunteer is bound by standards of all agencies involved including the CASA model standards themselves. These restrictions, whether implicit or explicit, can limit the capacity of the volunteer advocate to gather information and advocate for the child. In many cases, the recommendations for the best interest of the child or group of siblings includes additional interventions that require going beyond the allotted timeline. Often rules and regulations take precedence, and decisions are made to comply with those regulations and timelines. The CASA volunteer's role is to make recommendations to the judge who has the discretion to adopt them or not, which underscores the advisory role of the CASA volunteer. The CASA volunteer becomes a quasi-social worker. As the social worker remains the primary custodian of the case, two risks lie in the path of the CASA volunteers: they could either find themselves closely aligned with the social workers or in conflict with them. In both cases the CASA can lose his or her independence as an investigator and advocate for the child and can become disillusioned with the system.

There may also be other instances where the CASA volunteer could be restricted by the regulations and other structural rigidities that limit the extent of their service, rendering them feeling ineffective, especially if the volunteer identified services other than those recommended by the social worker that he or she thinks relevant to the child's best interest. These could include services that need a longer period than the anticipated average to resolve a dependency case, such as getting the parent to enroll in a drug treatment program. Due to the high volume of children in protective custody, the process

becomes impersonal and automatic, closer to a conveyor belt pushing the children through the system, rather than seeking the best interest of the children in care.

This experience is related to job stress and burnout among workers of child welfare agencies (Travis, Lizano, & Mor Barak, 2015). Child welfare workers exposed to long-term job stress and burnout exhibit behaviors that leaders and policy makers find increasingly concerning, according to Travis et al. These include disengagement, depersonalization, work withdrawal, and exit-seeking behaviors that CASA volunteer advocates may find themselves at the receiving end of.

Being exposed to multiple traumatic events, as is the case with workers and volunteers in the social service sector, increases their risk of burnout and secondary trauma. Trauma informed self-care, including being self-aware of emotional and mental experiences, protects the workers against consequences of dealing with traumatic events and individuals (Salloum, Kondrat, Johnco, & Olson, 2015).

Lee, Esaki, Kim, Greene, Kirkland, & Mitchell-Herzfeld (2013) recognized that, while significant research went into analyzing and understanding the burnout effects on social service sector workers, there is a lack of research on strategies for burnout prevention and treatment. In conducting statewide surveys of home visitors in a voluntary child maltreatment program, Lee et al. (2013) focused on predicting strategies that benefited workers in coping with and mitigating work-related burnout.

Resilience Theory

Not all those dealing with individuals or children exposed to or having experienced trauma themselves are at risk of secondary trauma and burnout. The range

varies from high risk of compassion fatigue, another term for secondary trauma, to being significantly affected by these events. There are risk factors that increase the chances for secondary stress related to exposure to the traumatic experience of others. These include being empathic, where the individual experiences the trauma deeply; lack of experience handling secondary trauma; possibly unrelated emotional instability; and lack of external support systems (Bonanno, 2004).

According to Bonanno (2004), factors that counter the risk for secondary trauma and burnout include a belief system, social and community support, professional maturity that allows for emotional separation and ability to manage empathy. Some groups of people persevere through all challenges and are able to pursue their work and mission in life passionately. According to Bennis (1997), those are the workers and volunteers that stay the longest. However, researchers recognized this concept of resilience as complex with external and internal factors that could vary based on social and cultural, faith, age, temperament, and general attitude towards life (Greene, 2002). Greene, Galambos, and Lee (2004) examined the theoretical assumptions of resilience with the objective of getting a better understanding of how practitioners can insulate themselves from the effects of life stressors.

While some researchers attribute resilience to individual innate characteristics like temperament and attitude, others have advocated for the ability to develop and acquire coping strategies that would mitigate the effects of a traumatic encounter (David, 2012). Lee et al. (2013) also recommended trauma informed self-help strategies that would

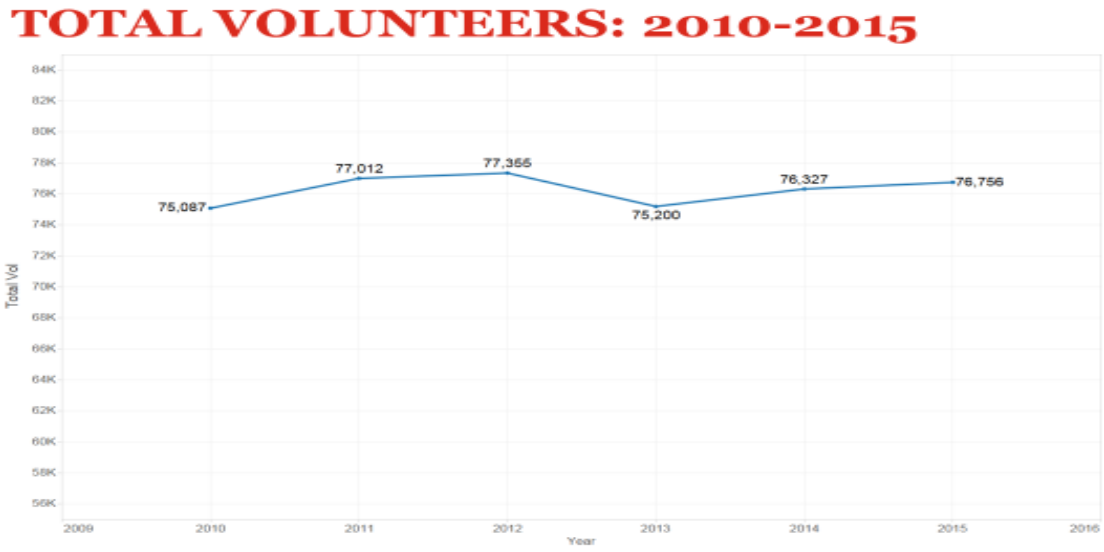
protect practitioners from burnout. David (2012) and Lee et al. (2013) share the concept of building resilience based on self-awareness and trauma-informed knowledge.

Kapoulitsas and Corcoran (2015) conducted a qualitative study that involved active social workers to understand how they coped with compassion fatigue, another term for burnout. The study led the research into four thematic areas that affect the resilience of workers and their response to traumatic stress: supportive supervision, understanding resilience as a complex and changing process, promoting one's own personal well-being, and the ability to debrief (Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015). Practitioners who participated in the study identified individual coping mechanisms that the researchers were able to summarize, and while there is a misconception that resilience is synonymous to being tough, it is more accurate to describe it in the context of putting on your oxygen mask in a flight emergency before you try to help others. In the case of CASA, this would mean to identify support structures and to be able and willing to share and debrief.

CASA Volunteer Advocates

While recruitment efforts continued to attract new volunteers to join the CASA movement, there was a 60% turnover rate of newly recruited volunteers each year, meaning that two out three volunteers left voluntarily or were asked to leave. As the turnover continues, CASA state and local programs gear up their volunteer recruitment efforts to sustain the level of services provided to children and youth in care. The reasons for the high turnover are not clear, and as programs continue to focus on recruitment rather than retention, the volunteer revolving-door phenomenon continues.

Figure 2: Total Volunteers: 2010-2015



Source: National CASA Association: Leading with Data – June

This study considers the type of people who are more inclined to become CASA volunteers, and what they are seeking to achieve as volunteer advocates for children. Understanding the characteristics of these volunteers will shed light on the reasons some stay for a long time while others stay for a very short period. The goal is to provide decision makers and leaders with information that will allow them to create the conditions that would support volunteer advocates to serve longer terms, increase the retention rate, and improve the return on investment. The relatively low volunteer retention rate is clearly a general problem that the nonprofit sector faces. This study will attempt to obtain answers from volunteers' perspectives, regarding factors that influence their decision to want to continue volunteering and the factors that compel them to quit.

In recent studies, volunteer involvement across different types of nonprofit organizations showed a drop in annual volunteer hours, but there was a significant rise in community participation and self-help groups (Johnson, 2015). The reasons are not known, but there is speculation that volunteers are not motivated to take the work offered by nonprofit organizations. Hyde, et al. (2016) attributed the reasons to a rise in episodic volunteering (EV), which occurs in crisis situations where large numbers of volunteers are needed for a short period of time. In order to increase nonprofit long-term volunteering, programs need to offer considerable flexibility to accommodate and support volunteer needs focusing on community involvement. This must happen while nonprofits continue to attract new volunteers (Johnson, 2015). Kizer et al. (2015) also emphasized volunteer retention as crucial to the success of programs, adding that volunteer longevity should be celebrated by taking care of those already engaged.

Historically there were gender connotations associated with volunteering. For example, women volunteers did charitable work with vulnerable and needy persons, such as children and those unwell. Men's charitable work often involved physical activity, such as rescuers, firefighters, construction workers, and coaches, or professional pro bono and trustee types of work (Ellis, 2015). As the role of women evolved in society and achieved considerable social, economic and political recognition, gender roles remained unchanged; over 80% of CASA volunteers are women.

Many organizations have created a structure to manage volunteers, adding positions in volunteer management, volunteer engagement, or volunteer involvement. This professionalization of volunteerism (Ellis, 2015) depersonalized volunteerism. It is

important that volunteers buy into the value of organizational change such as adding a layer of volunteer management, or they may actively or passively resist it, jeopardizing the potential to achieve the organization's goals. To get their support, volunteers' perception of change needs to match their ideals of what makes sense and what would work better. Inexperienced volunteer program managers hired specifically to recruit volunteers, may focus on maintaining the volunteers "in line and happy" (Ellis, 2015, p. 29) thus missing the opportunity of utilizing the volunteers' passion and talent appropriately and efficiently.

While volunteers may feel frustrated with staffing structures, staff have issues as well. When it comes to engaging volunteers, some issues inhibit volunteer engagement from achieving a positive outcome. These include confidentiality, competency, accuracy; in general issues of trust by the staff entrusted with volunteer management (Rehnborg, 2015). There are also issues of sustainability, where after training and coaching the volunteers, there is no guarantee they will stay on long enough to see projects to fruition. More staff perceptions of the value of volunteers come from the zero-market-value compensation for volunteers and the idea of having to invest in them. According to Rehnborg (2015), because volunteers are free, they do not seem to be worth much, and it becomes increasingly difficult to convince a board to invest in them.

By analyzing 3,000 charities, Hagar and Brudney (2004) concluded that the more an organization invests in strengthening its capacity for managing volunteers, the more the volunteers feel valued and serve longer. As a result, organizations spend less resources in recruiting and training of volunteers, thus increasing the return on their

investment (Rehnborg, 2015). These include training, communication, supervision, and providing insurance liability protection. Investments like these are necessary to be able to harness the power of volunteers in the most efficient manner and help provide volunteer stability that supports the planning framework of the organization.

All organizations, whether charitable or for profit, have a mission. Volunteers choose to belong to organizations that speak to their interests and beliefs, with the intent of making a positive contribution and hopefully having an impact. Volunteers may also be seeking to fulfill their needs in terms of job experience or networking opportunity. As organizations grow, they may benefit from volunteers' new thinking and innovations.

The value of volunteering lies not only in providing an unpaid service to advance a mission. Volunteers often provide education and increased public awareness of social issues and the struggles that people experience in life. Volunteers can increase public consciousness of the public of societal ills and malfunctions, and they show how to become part of the solution (Hochberg & Cobb, 2015).

Hochberg and Cobb (2015) suggested that staying focused on the mission goals and engaging volunteers in achieving those goals is most effective in leveraging the full potential and human capital of the volunteers. People want to know that what they do matters. So, it would improve the volunteers' experience and commitment if they can see their immediate and long-term impact. If volunteers also see potential benefits from the experience regarding developing new skills, personal and professional, and new networks, it should also add to their commitment. Long-term volunteer engagement to the causes the organization cares about rather than to the organization itself provides

connectedness to a much larger network, thus strengthening commitment to the team (Hochberg & Cobb, 2015).

In volunteer recruitment and engagement there is no one-size-fits-all approach. For example, different generations have completely different interests and outlook on life. Engaging millennial (born between early 1980's to early 2000's) volunteers could prove more challenging, but not for lack of interest. To the contrary, according to Finger (2015), 88% of millennials made charitable cash donations in 2013. The challenge is to get them engaged in a cause that interests them, where their contribution of time or money would be meaningful to them.

Baby boomers (born between the years 1946-1964) lie at the other end of the spectrum. They have already been making substantial contributions in time and money to charity (Steinhorn, 2015). According to Grimm, Spring, and Dietz (2007) baby boomers constitute a substantial resource in the nonprofit world, not only due to their large numbers, but because they have considerably higher education and skills level, as well as financial resources. As many retire, they have been seeking opportunities for work whether paid or unpaid, keen to remain productive and relevant. They want to volunteer in fields where they can share their long-acquired experiences and make contributions that are meaningful to them. Baby boomers are more likely to turn down a volunteering opportunity if it is not a good fit. As organizations are facing shortages in volunteers, it seems important to make sure the volunteer role is defined in order to be of interest baby boomers (Steinhorn, 2015) as well as millennials.

The Three *Rs* of volunteering: Recruitment, Recognition, Retention

While the notion that use of volunteers costs nothing is widespread, this is inaccurate. There are expenses associated with recruitment, training, fielding, and coaching. These costs become more difficult to justify with high volunteer turnover (Lipp, 2015). Translating staff hours invested in working with volunteers into actual costs speaks to the bottom-line of organizations. Volunteers also make investments in time, resources and emotional involvement, which cannot be quantified, and are invaluable. In this respect, volunteer retention is not only a metric value; it is a shared human value (Lipp, 2015) that requires organizations to have well-designed volunteer programs that support full engagement of the volunteers, ensuring proper placement, training, recognition and support.

Lipp (2015) suggested that the retention rate for all volunteers is not uniform and that the retention rate depends on the volunteer role. He argued that a volunteer at a specialized position has a higher optimal rate of retention than one involved in fundraising, for example. To determine the optimal volunteer retention rate, Lipp (2015) introduced a formula with four elements: volunteer role, the minimum term of service, the number of volunteers currently in that position, and the number of volunteers who left the previous year before completing their full term (see Table 1 below).

Table 1.

Volunteer Retention Rate Worksheet

1.	Volunteer role	
2.	Minimum term of service	
3.	Number of volunteers currently in this role	
4.	Number of volunteers who left in the past year before completing their full term	
5.	Subtract Line 4 from Line 3 and enter total here	
6.	Divide Line 5 by Line 3 and multiply by 100 to determine a baseline retention percentage	

*(Adopted fr*om Lipp, 2015)

Lipp (2015) also suggested that volunteer retention is a shared responsibility in an organization that relies on volunteers, adding that staff at all levels should know details about volunteer service, including the retention rate. According to Kizer et al. (2015), organizations should show more vigilance in retaining their volunteers to save the time and energy required to recruit new volunteers. They explain that recruitment is costlier as well as disruptive for continuity of the service and for the staff who recruit, train, and coach them. While it is evident that volunteer interests, temperaments, and circumstances vary widely, as a rule, people are more available and tend to stay in positions longer as they get older (Lipp, 2015), confirming the earlier statement that the baby boomer generation is invaluable for the future of volunteerism. Lipp (2015) also confirms that for the volunteering experience to be a win-win, it must be a good fit for the volunteer as well as for the organization. Studying the organization prior to engaging with it would allow a better feel and understanding if it is the right match for both.

The findings of the UPS Foundation study (1998) revealed that people choose well-managed organizations to ensure an optimum use of their time. Potential volunteers can have access to information and research about any organization through the internet. This applies to both recruitment and retention; volunteers often quit if the organizations they volunteer for are not well-managed. The UPS Foundation study (1998) advocated for motivating volunteers by offering them appropriate opportunities for training and skills development, recognizing their efforts and rewarding them, and most importantly, placing them in a role where they fit best.

Lipp (2015) argued that although volunteer retention is important for reasons mentioned above, it comes with some risks, including possible loss of innovation and fresh ideas from new volunteers. He suggested that involving existing volunteers in the recruitment process adds to the value of volunteers while maintaining an inflow of fresh energy and ideas with new volunteers. To avoid volunteer fatigue, organizations may offer flexibility for rotating within the organization with the opportunity of varying their experience and allowing cross-learning from peers.

As a master trainer, Kanter (2015) strongly advocates for measuring the performance of volunteer programs. She argues that performance measurement helps in understanding the dynamics of the organization and helps organizations make decisions that support their goals. Moreover, assessing volunteer contributions consequently improves volunteer relations and allows organizations to become intentional about exceeding their goals and expectations by integrating volunteers carefully in the workforce. Bennett (2015) referenced an online study conducted by VolunteerMatch in

2010, where 90% of the respondents stated that they would volunteer for a cause that they cared for; 82% percent stated that they would take a volunteer opportunity that would make an impact; 30% indicated they would not take a volunteer opportunity that does not make an impact. Forty-five percent would not consider an opportunity that is not interesting, challenging or engaging.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Human Development*, volunteers benefit from their actions in ways other than financial. There are clear psychological and physiological benefits for people who help others. While many volunteers feel emotional benefits and are more fulfilled when helping others, these good feelings often translate into feeling better physically as well (Brown, 2005). And to achieve this level of satisfaction and fulfilment, it is necessary for nonprofit organizations to adopt a clear working philosophy around volunteers that gives meaning to their contribution.

Summary and Conclusions

Civil society is becoming increasingly dependent on the efforts of volunteers in various domains, from localized community activities to global initiatives. In this chapter, there is an overview of the progression of volunteerism and the route it took towards becoming institutionalized. The National CASA volunteer model was created and implemented 40 years ago by Judge Davis Soukup, a family court judge in Washington State, who invited citizen volunteers to speak in court on behalf of children in legal proceedings due to abuse or neglect (National CASA, 2015). The first group of 50 volunteers started in 1977 and volunteer numbers have grown to over 77,000 volunteers nationally in 2015. Data from six years (2010-2015) show that volunteer numbers

plateaued because of the high turnover rate among volunteers, while the number of children and youth entering care and needing advocacy continued to rise.

In this chapter, I described the literature search strategy and presented the literature consulted to date in a mind-map (Appendix E). The literature review provided context for the burnout theory and theory of resilience which constitute the theoretical framework for the study. The theoretical framework was based on the assumption that the high turnover rate exhibited by CASA volunteers is attributable to Burnout, also known as secondary traumatic stress, that characterizes workers in the human services sectors dealing directly with trauma victims. The secondary traumatic stress in case of the CASA volunteers results from closely interacting with children and youth who are victims of abuse, neglect, and resulting removal from family.

Theory of resilience (Greene, 2002) included elements of strength the volunteer advocates were able to draw from to continue to serve, either in terms of external support or internal and innate resilience. The literature review draws on ways to build resilience and provide support to the volunteers to influence their decision to stay on.

In the next chapter, I will review the methodology for the study, including the qualitative data collection approaches used to obtain the data that answer the research question. I also provide a description of the participants and how I chose them for the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Problem Description

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons for high turnover among CASA volunteer advocates. The standard length of time that a juvenile dependency case takes in court is 18 months (National CASA, 2015). Subject to delays in court hearings and other circumstances involving parental rights termination, adoption, or guardianship, it is not unusual for dependency cases to take 30 months or more. In reviewing the data on volunteer tenure, 25% of CASA volunteers serve up to 1.75 years, 25% serve between 1.75 and 2.6 years, 25% stay up to 3.4 years, and 25% continue to serve more than 3.4 years (National CASA, 2016b). The CASA volunteers' tenure appears to match the length of a dependency case in court. Most of the volunteers stay only long enough to advocate through a single dependency case while a quarter of the volunteers stay much longer, many over 10 years (National CASA, 2016b).

The factors that create this pattern are unclear; research on the CASA intervention has not focused on volunteer retention from the volunteers' own perspective. There is no knowledge of the reasons some volunteers stay long while others stay for a short time (Lipp, 2015). It is critical to understand the causes of the high turnover among volunteers to be able to recommend policy measures that would improve the conditions for CASA volunteer advocates and to help to motivate them to serve longer.

Research Design and Rationale

In this qualitative study, I sought answers about CASA volunteer advocate retention. The key research question that this study addressed was the following: What

are the perceptions that CASA volunteers, volunteer recruiters, and administrators have regarding the factors that impact volunteer retention?

Approach

I used a case-study approach for data collection in this study. Using the same set of open-ended questions, the interview method was used to obtain data from respondents with potentially varying points of view in relation to the CASA volunteer experience. By building rapport and trust with the CASA program and state administrators, I was given access to program records that document criteria for volunteer recruitment and supervision, as well as volunteers' feedback on their experience. I was able to obtain program documentation on the implementation of the program, numbers of volunteers trained and recruited within a certain period, and the number of children and youth served during that period. I also obtained a copy of the training curriculum and sets of rules and standards that the CASA volunteers are expected to follow.

I conducted 22 interviews with volunteer advocates, volunteer supervisors, administrators, and recruiters who met the study criteria about their perspective on volunteer recruitment and retention. The case-study approach allowed for in-depth study and analysis. This approach also enabled the comparison of data from different sources, namely field notes, documents and records review, and interviews for the purpose of data verification and triangulation.

I performed an extensive document review prior to conducting the interviews to objectively conceptualize the CASA model. This was necessary to compare the setup and mode of delivery of the CASA program selected as the unit of analysis with the original

CASA model. In addition, the National CASA Association administers several surveys to its network, through which local CASA programs and state organizations provide data about their programs, including the number of children served, the number of active volunteers, new volunteers recruited, trained and assigned a case, the number of cases closed, and the number of volunteers who left the program (National CASA, 2015). Because the focus of my research was on volunteer retention, it was critical to find out the number of states and programs that track data of departing volunteers. Based on my request, additional questions were added to the National CASA 2016 Annual Local Program Survey that would gather data on tracking volunteer advocates who became inactive of their own accord. These data helped determine those states that collected data on departing and inactive volunteers as potential sites for my case-study.

Each CASA program follows standards in recruitment and training of CASA volunteer advocates; each has variations depending on state and local statutes in child welfare laws and structures. States and local programs also vary in their local policies regarding volunteer advocates' relationship to the court. There are also state-to-state variations in the volunteer advocate roles and expectations in terms of what the volunteer can and cannot do or expect. Therefore, it was vital to get access to local records and documents to understand the structure of each program, the status of the volunteer advocates and their relationship to the court, and volunteers' roles and what was expected of them.

A CASA volunteer's role is to act as an advocate for the best interest of the child or youth he or she is assigned to by court through CASA management. As part of their

role, they are required to investigate each case. This involves meeting all parties to the case, including parent(s), social worker, attorneys, teachers, and school administrators if applicable, reviewing medical records and meeting health providers, and observing the child or youth through regular visitation and communication. The CASA volunteer advocate makes recommendations on the best interest of the child to the judge presiding on the case (National CASA, 2007). Getting access to the local records that reflect the CASA volunteer experiences, such as court reports, exit interviews, and opinion surveys, would be crucial for understanding their interactions and perspectives of those interactions.

Interviews

I used one set of interview protocol for all participants, briefly describing the emphasis of the questions for each category of interviewees: volunteer administrators, recruiters, and active and inactive volunteer advocates (Appendix B). I interviewed 22 participants: active volunteers (11), inactive volunteers (five), volunteer coordinators (four), one supervisor, and one administrator. All participants had worked with the program within the last 5 years.

The 2017 National CASA Conference held on March 2017 in Seattle provided an opportunity for meeting with CASA volunteer advocates from across the country. I attended the conference in a professional capacity and took advantage of the opportunity to gauge interest in my study. The response I received from volunteer advocates expressing interest in participating in the retention study was overwhelming, revealing no

risk of shortage in potential respondents. I decided to design a study plan and focus on implementing it.

Role of the Researcher

My role in the study as observer-participant allowed me to observe the participants closely while conducting the interviews, as Bernard (2005) described. I had an additional advantage as observer-participant because of my knowledge of the CASA/GAL model as well as my experience as a CASA/GAL volunteer.

Because of my relationship with National CASA as an employee, there was a risk that participants might either be biased or see me as biased toward the organization and not be open to sharing their perspectives. It was not possible to minimize the bias by purposely limiting the participant selection to individuals with whom I had no acquaintance or relationship because the program size was relatively small, and I did not have a wide range of staff to select from. Therefore, I maintained an open and transparent approach in sharing the purpose and the goal of the study with program administrators, volunteer managers, recruiters, and volunteers, making sure that the study was focused on CASA volunteers' retention. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the study and that their identities would be fully protected.

I also maintained emphatic neutrality, as suggested by Patton (2015), by showing understanding while remaining objective with each participant. My deep experience with and understanding of the CASA model was important in maintaining self-awareness of my bias, potential influence, and judgment. I was deliberate in practicing epoche, also

known as bracketing, by setting aside my personal experience to allow a fresh look to each participant's experience, as suggested by Patton (2015).

Methodology

I used the case-study approach for this study of CASA volunteers' retention, which depends primarily on purposive sampling as a design strategy. I selected a mid-size CASA program as the primary unit of analysis and collected data from leaders and volunteers affiliated with that program. My selection of the CASA program for my case study depended on the state and program's leadership being receptive to participating. Some states were more receptive than others to conducting a qualitative inquiry about volunteer advocate retention.

Another determining factor was accessibility. The study required multiple visits to the program site area, so I needed to make sure that could happen within a reasonable budget and time frame. Accordingly, my primary choice was my home state, whose leaders were not receptive to the study. Consequently, I selected the closest and second most accessible state, whose leaders agreed to the study.

Selecting a CASA program to be the primary unit for analysis depended on program size and length of operation. It had to be a large enough organization to be able to get a representative sample of staff and volunteers, and it had to have been operating long enough to have developed a pattern able to be studied, which I set as 10 years or longer. Once the program that I would work with was determined, I initiated and completed the acceptance formalities with the program management. The formalities included discussing the logistics and legalities of getting access to records of active

volunteers as well as inactive volunteers who had voluntarily discontinued their service with the program.

For data collection, I used the Moustakas (1995) model identified for using three processes for developing a relationship in qualitative research: being-for, being-in, and being-with. The being-for process promotes a supportive role of the researcher with the subject of the study; the being-in describes the position of the researcher as being immersed with the subject's dealings and feelings; and the being-with describes being neutral to the subject (Patton, 2015). For this study, I used the being-with process for developing relationships based on mutual trust, transparency, and independence.

I approached the study with empathic neutrality and mindfulness as a data collection and field work strategy. This strategy allows the researcher to become fully present and mindful while performing observation; responsive, sensitive, respectful, open, and empathic while interviewing; and always demonstrating neutrality, openness, and being present (Patton, 2015). I led open-ended conversation-like interviews with six staff and management of the selected program, and held interviews with 16 volunteer advocates, active and inactive.

Participant Selection Logic

Using participant selection logic resulted in a purposeful sample based on longevity of service as a volunteer. The goal was to obtain data that might help detect patterns and trends among volunteers based on their experiences, as well as the perspectives of volunteer recruiters, supervisors, and administrators. To answer the study question about volunteer retention, it was important to get the perspective of inactive

volunteers who had left voluntarily and to then compare those views with active volunteers' experience. This would ensure the validity of the data and support the program plans for improving the volunteer experience to increase the retention rate.

I had a formal introduction by the program director to the staff to describe the research project and objectives, the type of data I was seeking, and the profile of the potential participants from a pool of active and inactive volunteers. Following the introductions, I drafted an e-mail describing the study and requested that the program send the e-mail out to all active and inactive volunteers who had been involved with the program within the last 5 years, in addition to all program staff. In the e-mail, I provided my e-mail address and requested that potential participants respond directly to me.

Instrumentation

In this qualitative study, I relied primarily on two sources of data: document review and interviews. I reviewed documents that provided information on type and content of data the program collected about volunteers. The review also included state-level documentation related to volunteer recruitment and assignment, as well as longevity and retention rates of the volunteer advocates. Most of the data were available publicly. I was unable to access data that were not public because of privacy and confidentiality considerations. Document review included data that National CASA had collected from the network of 940 state and local programs through the annual local program survey, as well as other national data collection instruments that were available publicly. Internal documents were made available from the relevant department at National CASA.

I used an interview protocol (Appendix: A), guided by the research question and the theoretical framework, to obtain responses from program management, staff, and volunteers. I took notes in conjunction with the interviews and used an audio recorder to get accurate accounts of the interviews. Each participant reviewed, signed, and dated a written consent before starting the interview, attesting that they understood and agreed to participate in the interview and that the interview would be audiotaped. I informed the participants of their right to exit the study at any point with no repercussions and without giving any reason, only a notification to me.

In this study, I observed the highest degree of confidentiality to ensure anonymity of participants. To ensure content validity, I used data triangulation, performed thorough document reviews, held informal discussions with colleagues, and maintained longer contact with the participants. The sufficiency of the data was arrived at past the point of saturation, when themes started to repeat. With due consideration to the design of the study, I interviewed participants up to the designated number of 20 respondents.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The documents I relied on in this study included written material and organizational reports, studies, records, and reports that provided the contextual background on program policies and practices for volunteer recruitment and retention. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, follow-up questions, and probes to get an in-depth response from people about their experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge, as suggested by Patton (2015). I scheduled 1-hour interviews with four to five participants per day. I scheduled interviews during the day as much as possible to

free time in the evenings for preliminary revision of the data and initial transcription. I was able to complete interviewing and data collection in 5 days and was able to collect additional documents and conclude the trip on schedule.

Within the scope of the research, there were opportunities for informal conversations with participants and observers to gather additional data for reliability and verification purposes. For additional information or clarification, I used both phone and e-mail communication, and in one case I had to repeat the interview with one of the participants because it was deleted by mistake.

Data Analysis Plan

The participants included CASA volunteers with varying length of time in service, as well as volunteer supervisors, recruiters, and administrators. The interviews were audio recorded after the written consent was secured from each participant. I had planned to run the coding and data analysis parallel to the interviews, but that proved to be very difficult to achieve as I needed to remain attentive through the interviews. Below is a preliminary outline of a coding framework (Table 2).

Table 2.

Preliminary Coding Framework

Parent code (aspects/ characteristics of the Theory)	**Child codes**	**Interview question/s**
Volunteer Recruitment	Awareness, Motivation	Interview Question 1
Volunteer Retention	Support, training, coaching,	Interview questions 2 & 3
Resilience	Support, Training, Knowledge	Interview questions 2 & 4
Burnout	Challenges, Barriers, Stress	Interview question 3
Policy	Statutes, roles, procedures	Interview questions 3 & 4

During the transcription and data cleaning process, there was an opportunity to look through the interview and listen to the audio. This allowed me to take stock of the major themes, identify popular perspectives and those that were uncommon. The second step was rearranging the data in question-and-answer format, which allowed auto-coding the data. Through the auto-coding of the data, all the answers to each question were compiled in one place, including answers to the clarification questions. I used manual coding and NVivo qualitative data management software to investigate the research question within the selected theoretical framework. As new or unexpected themes emerged during the analysis, I treated them as viewpoints, that might merit further investigation related to volunteer retention.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To establish a standard of credibility, I had several research colleagues review the interview protocol to assess its relevance to the topic of the study. I also interviewed individuals with varying experience in CASA advocacy to get a range of perspectives and to be able to triangulate their responses for verification. With full access to reports and data, I have been able to verify the credibility of the data and data sources.

The National CASA Association has over 940-member state and local programs countrywide. The case study that I have undertaken focused on the experience in one program. To ensure the transferability of the findings, I had to be intentional in selecting a representative sample of participants. From among the pool of participants, I selected

12 active volunteers who served for periods varying from two years to eleven years. The group of inactive volunteers was made up of five participants who served from one year to 15 years.

I have interviewed 22 participants in total; six interviewees chose to meet at the CASA Program premises, seven participants chose to meet at the Public Library, six preferred the University Library, three chose to meet at their employment offices, and one interviewee I had to meet at home due to a recent accident that limited their mobility. The CASA program provided the exclusive use of a meeting room in the premises, where interviewees felt comfortable participating in the interviews. All meeting locations were private, safe and ensured total confidentiality and anonymity to the participants.

Ethical Procedures

This case study did not pose any risk to the participants. For the protection of the participants' identity, the CASA program sent out the invitation letter that I prepared, in an e-mail to all volunteers, active and inactive, and program staff directing them to communicate directly with me using the e-mail address provided in the invitation letter. There were no foreseen risks to any of the participants with regards to their physical or emotional safety. All were adults over 21 years of age and chose to participate in the study of their own free will. To minimize risk in this respect, I have omitted, as much as possible, all identifying information that could define the profile of the participants.

I have been the sole guardian of the data in all its format, text or audio. All records were kept electronically on a hard drive, with appropriate back-up. There was a very limited risk for the exposure of data, accidental or otherwise. For the transcription, I

chose an online transcription service recommended by peers and made sure they only kept the data for a limited time, after which the data was automatically destroyed. I performed the data clean-up of the transcripts myself and designated private storage with password access for the data, where they will remain for 5 years, until I delete them.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the data collection method used in conducting this qualitative study. I relied on interviews as the main approach for data collection. The sample selection was done purposefully to ensure that the participants meet the criteria of having an affiliation with the CASA program selected as the study unit of analysis. I outlined the method for selecting the participants to make sure a representative sample of each group depending on longevity, which ensured having representative viewpoints from respondents in each category. I provided an overview of the type and source of documents used for background information and included the preliminary data coding framework and information on how the data was coded and analyzed.

Chapter 4 also included treatment of issues of trustworthiness in building credibility of the data and data sources, establishing means for verification, relevance and transferability of the study findings. It offers the interpretation of the data using the interview questions as the initial framework for the data analysis, in addition to the coding framework presented in this chapter to create nodes and sub-nodes.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to get a better understanding of the reasons for the high turnover rate among CASA volunteer advocates from the perspectives of volunteers, recruiters, and administrators. The intent was to be able to recommend action policy that would improve the volunteer advocate experience and increase the retention rate. The research question that this study addressed was the following: What are the perceptions that CASA volunteers, volunteer recruiters, and administrators have regarding factors that impact volunteer retention and tenure?

In this chapter, I outline the process by which data were generated, collected, and recorded, as well as the systems used for keeping track of emerging themes, findings, discrepant cases and outlying data. This chapter has been reserved for the analysis and evaluation of the data by using manual coding as well as with the aid of a qualitative data analysis software.

Research Setting

For this case study, I selected one CASA program as the primary unit of analysis and interviewed 22 individuals who had an affiliation with the CASA program either as active and inactive volunteers or as program staff. Leaders of the state CASA organization supported my request for conducting the study and encouraged my selection of the CASA program for the unit of analysis. An introductory visit to the program proved beneficial for meeting the program staff, checking the program site, introducing the study, and answering staff questions to establish a level of familiarity and trust. This visit presented an opportunity for obtaining historical documentation and reports about

the program, in addition to current information on the size, structure, and model of implementation.

Demographics

The gender make-up of the participants consisted of 17 females and five males. The range of service of the active volunteers varied from 2 to 11 years; four volunteers had been serving for less than 4 years, two had been serving for 4 years, two had been serving for 6 years, two had been serving for 8 years, and one CASA volunteer was on the 11th year. The service of the inactive volunteers ranged from 1 year to 15 years; one volunteer served 1 year only, one served less than 3 years, one served 9 years, one served 11 ½ and the fifth served for 15 years and continued to maintain a cordial productive relationship with the CASA program management and volunteer in different areas.

The program staff participants constituted of one administrator, one volunteer recruitment and retention coordinator, and four volunteer supervisors. Table 3 below summarizes the demographic and characteristic composition of the participants.

Table 3

Demographic Profile of the Study Participants

	Attributes	Participants	By gender	
			Female	Male
Gender:	Female	15		
	Male	5		
Relationship with CASA:	Active Volunteer	9	7	2
	Inactive Volunteer	5	2	3
	Program Staff	6	6	0
Time with CASA:	1-2 Years	3	2	1
	3-4 Years	5	5	0
	5-6 Years	4	3	1
	7-8 Years	2	1	1
	9-10 Years	1	0	1
	10-11 Years	2	2	0
	>11 Years	3	2	1

Data Collection

After receiving the Walden University institutional review board approval under number 05-30-18-0483315, with the expiry date May 29, 2019, I prepared the invitation letter and shared it with the program for dissemination to all program staff and active and inactive volunteers who have been affiliated with the program within the last 5 years. The invitation letter provided a description of the purpose of the study and the approach for data collection. It also included my e-mail address with instruction to those interested in participating in the study to directly respond to.

Within 3 days from the date the letter was circulated, 49 potential participants responded to the invitation e-mail expressing interest in participating in the study. They were all from among the categories identified as potential respondents for the study. The selection of the participants was based on meeting the criteria for participation and the completeness of the information they provided. A follow-up e-mail was sent out to each of the respondents providing them with the timeframe for data collection (5-week days) and asking them to provide a phone number, their preferred meeting place from among three public places identified, and their preference for a meeting time. Based on the responses and feedback received, I created a schedule within the time designated for the interviews and inserted respondents based on their preference of place and time, trying to cluster respondents by their preferred meeting location as much as possible.

Some of the potential participants did not respond to the follow-up e-mail and were automatically excluded from the pool. Other respondents were not available or able to take part in the study during the specified week, and they were reserved aside in case I

needed more participants. There were a few, specifically from among the staff, who did not meet the criteria for the selection and were also excluded from the study.

I conducted 22 interviews within the designated timeframe during the week of June 25-29, 2018, with 11 active volunteers, five inactive volunteers, one recruiter, one administrator, and four volunteer supervisors. The extra two participants provided a precautionary measure in case of emergency or unforeseen circumstances that might prevent some of the potential participants from showing up to the interviews. All interviewees signed and dated the consent letter before starting the interviews. Twenty interviews were completed with the audio recordings, as originally planned for the study.

Data Analysis

Data Organization and Preparation

The audio recordings were uploaded to a transcription website to transcribe the interviews. To ensure the quality of the transcription and its adherence to the text, I went through each interview comparing the audio with the text and corrected the text of the transcription wherever it needed to be corrected. The corrections were necessary for the fidelity of the interviews. As part of the data clean-up, I performed broad-brush manual coding on the data and organized the interviews into questions and answers, using different text formats. To distinguish among the interviews, I created a naming convention that included the of the interview, the sequence in which each interview was conducted, numbers from 1 to 20, and a two-letter designation code that described the interviewees' relationships to the program.

I used a qualitative analysis software for data analysis, into which I fed the data folders. Due to the formatting of the interview text, the responses to each question easily compiled in one place. The research question was treated as an initial node, and additional nodes were added as emerged or guided by the coding framework that I created earlier. At the same time, each interviewee was identified by a set of case attributes, including gender, relationship to program, employment status, and race. These case attributes served as demographic descriptors for the interviewees and as placeholders for mapping the data to find out if something was missing or out of place.

The interview questions provided the framework for analysis. Some of the questions were split to allow the streamlining of the analysis. The answers for each question stood separately as a data section. By running the data for word frequency analysis, main themes and patterns emerged from each section, allowing the creation of new nodes and subnodes for coding the data. By repeating the process for each section, I added more nodes and subnodes, at the same time similar nodes, creating new ones and deleting those that did not have meaningful content for analysis.

Understanding the Data

In addition to analyzing the responses to the individual interview questions separately, a thematic analysis across all responses to the interview questions provided a clearer understanding of the data. This cross analysis provided insight into the relationship between emerging themes and the theoretical framework of burnout theory (Maslach, 1998) and theory of resilience (Greene, 2002).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is recognized as a scientific method of observation that focuses on collecting data about meanings, concepts, perceptions, and feelings, all of which are nonquantifiable (Miles et al., 2013). As the researcher in qualitative research is a principle instrument of the research, in many cases the researcher or group of researchers are the only ones with access and knowledge about the research. Qualitative research does not provide numerical evidence of trustworthiness and credibility of the results. Therefore, to gain the trust of the reader, the qualitative researcher must document and provide evidence that the research processes were credible, and the analyses were trustworthy. Below are the elements identified as the four pillars that ensure the "goodness of the study": credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Miles et al., 2013, p. 14).

Credibility

One way to ensure credibility is to consult with a limited number of colleagues on the ethical procedures adopted for the study. This process would ensure that the procedures meet the required standards (Miles et al., 2013). To establish a standard of credibility, four of my colleagues and 10 active CASA volunteers from different states reviewed the interview protocol and research plan to assess its relevance to the topic of the study as well as the ethical procedures adopted for the study. The composition of the interviewees was diverse consisting of individuals with a range of varying experiences, relationships to the program, and tenure. This diversity made it possible to get a range of perspectives allowing for the triangulation and verification of their responses. The full

access to the CASA program reports and data made verifying the credibility of the data and the data sources possible.

Transferability

National CASA Association has over 940-member state and local CASA programs nationwide. These programs vary in size from a one-person program to over a hundred employees-size programs. The model of implementation also varies in terms of the programs' relationship to the state, county, and judicial system. In some states CASA programs stand alone as independent entities; in other states they function under a state, county, or court jurisdiction. Despite all the legal and structural variations, the CASA programs exist under, they all abide by the same set of standards, towards achieving the same goal of providing quality advocacy for children and youth in judicial proceedings due to abuse and neglect.

The CASA program selected as the unit of analysis for this study falls within the range of a midsize to large program. It is representative of 50% of the CASA programs in the network in terms of size, longevity, and coverage area, with around 12 staff members and over 300 active volunteers. It was established over 10 years ago and went through several cycles of change and growth.

To ensure the transferability of the findings, I selected a representative sample of nine active volunteers who served for 2 to 11 years. The group of five inactive volunteers served from 1 year to 15 years. The program staff included different functions and varying lengths of time working for the program. The findings of this study would easily be transferable to any of the 940-member CASA programs.

Dependability

One of the factors of dependability is the consistency of the study throughout the different stages. Miles et al. (2013) suggested the periodic review of the study process by peers and colleagues maintain the stability and consistency of the study over time. This aspect of dependability improves the quality and ensures the integrity of the study. As an example of establishing consistency, all interviews' locations were private, safe, and ensured confidentiality and anonymity to the participants.

The CASA program offered the exclusive use of a meeting room in their premises, where six participants chose to take their interviews, including one administrator, three volunteer supervisors, one volunteer recruitment and retention coordinator, and one inactive volunteer. Three participants, including one volunteer supervisor, one active, and one inactive volunteer chose to take the interview at their places of work; one active volunteer chose to meet at the community center, and one active volunteer took the interview at home due to limited mobility caused by a recent accident. From the remaining 11 active and inactive participants, five chose to meet at the public library, and six participants preferred to take the interviews at the university library.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research is equivalent to validity in quantitative research. Compared to an audit process, confirmability requires the researcher to ensure both the plausibility of the research process as well as the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It requires that the meanings emerging from the data must be free from any

researcher's bias whether explicit or implicit, and the conclusion be solely drawn from the data (Miles et al., 2013).

Although it may never be 100% bias free, providing a clear explanation of the purpose of the study and the process undertaken to complete it would improve the validity and plausibility of the study (Miles et al., 2013). All aspects of data collection and matters of confidentiality and anonymity were stated to the participant in advance to ensure truthfulness of the responses. Patton (2015) suggested creating an audit trail of the process strengthen the validity of the study and ensure confirmability.

Responses from potential participants started to arrive shortly after the invitation was e-mailed out; by the 3rd day, 49 potential participants responded. Acknowledgment of receipt of the e-mails included a thank you note and provided a tentative schedule of when the interviews would be conducted. Each participant provided a phone number, a day and time within the designated period that would work for conducting the interview, and a preferred location for the interview. Based on the potential participants' preferences for time and place, 1-hour interviews were scheduled with the respondents that met the criteria for the study. Twenty interviews were successfully completed after having secured a signed consent from each participant.

Study Results

Of the 20 respondents that provided interviews, 19 provided information about how they became aware of CASA and the factors that motivated them to serve. Seven became aware of CASA from a media ad, newspaper, TV, or radio; seven became acquainted with CASA through their employment or profession; two knew about CASA

through fundraisers' events; and three respondents became aware of CASA through family and friends. At the time of the interviews, six of the respondents were employed by the CASA program; 12 out of a total of 14 respondents were retirees when they became CASA volunteers; and only two volunteers were actively employed while serving as CASA volunteers as in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Employment Situation of Study Participants

Classification	CASA Volunteers		CASA Staff	Total
	Active	Inactive		
Employed	1	1	6	8
Retired	8	4	0	12
Total	9	5	6	20

Enabling Factors for Successful Advocacy

In response to the interview question about the enabling factors for a CASA volunteer, all respondents acknowledged that CASA volunteering is more involved than the average type of volunteering in terms of time commitment and emotional investment. The responses varied depending on the experiences of the respondents, their background, and their affiliation to the program. The top five frequently occurring codes were: support (*f*=66), personal characteristics (*f*=35), training (*f*=30), connectedness (*f*=16), and recognition (*f*=11). Some factors had overlapping inferences and it is possible that they were coded under two categories, such as in training and support.

Support (*f*=66)

Eighteen respondents emphasized the type and quality of support that CASA volunteers get as most crucial in enabling them to succeed in serving children in dependency courts. The range of support deduced from the data, included having supportive families to working for a supportive employer that would allow time away from family or work when the volunteers need to take time off to attend to CASA duties. The CASA supervisors and coordinators are most critical in influencing the decision of

CASA volunteers to serve longer. They have an important role in simplifying the process to make it easier for the CASA volunteers to achieve success. All respondents emphasized the need for the supervisors to be supportive, encouraging, and motivating CASA volunteers, in addition to being available and accessible to answer questions and allow advocates to share and debrief. Several respondents described the CASA office as supportive and "really good at providing positive feedback". One of the CASA volunteers "kind of hung in there with the support of [the] supervisor and … peer coordinator" after having a negative experience with members of the larger team in the case. Some of the respondents mentioned coaching and providing guidance as part of the training that overlaps with support.

Personal Characteristics (f=35)

Eleven respondents emphasized personal characteristics, including innate qualities, and acquired experiences as critical in enabling the CASA volunteer to effectively advocate for vulnerable children. One of the respondents emphasized that the individuals must have the motivation and "willingness to want to do this; to advocate for children". Due to the complexity of the cases CASA volunteers get assigned to, and the volume of documentation they must go through, described as excessive by many of the respondents, CASA volunteers must have the capacity to assimilate and process the information and present it in a comprehensible manner. Respondents also identified communication skills as crucial for effective interaction with all parties involved. CASA volunteers are required to communicate effectively with all parties to the case of the child they advocate for. As such, self-confidence is a significant quality to possess, especially

in court and when addressing persons at various levels of authority. Another quality is on their ability to build relationships and connections with the children and the families to be able to gain their trust. They also need to be receptive of different opinions and points of view, flexible and adaptive to changes, and resourceful.

CASA volunteers must maintain focus on their role in relation to advocating for children and demonstrate resilience in the face of rejection or disappointment, as one of the respondents put it: “water off a duck's back” because sometimes interactions could be rude and painful.

Training (f=30)

Training included pre-service training and continuing education for the CASA volunteers. The pre-service training pertains to the standard curriculum that National CASA developed to include all competencies necessary to enable a CASA volunteer to advocate for the best interest of a child in judicial proceedings due to abuse and neglect. This curriculum is universal across the network with minor variations dictated by the state and/or local statutes and law, as well as the legal structure of each organization. The continuing education includes training on other topics relevant to child welfare and the judicial system. They are offered by staff or external resources and are available for both volunteers and staff, providing the opportunity for the CASA volunteers to meet their annual 12-hour training requirement.

Eleven respondents highly commended the quality and content of the pre-service training emphasizing the solid base foundation that the volunteers start off with and then

build on with the regular continuing education sessions. Several respondents benefitted from the experts in the child welfare field or judicial system who were regularly invited during the training to present new laws and statutes. Most presenters delivered their materials through case studies with situations depicted from real life experiences. The quality of the training was described with terms such as excellent, fabulous, solid, and really good.

Connectedness (f=16)

Nine respondents mentioned that CASA volunteers need to feel connected and have a sense of community to enable them to effectively perform their roles advocating for vulnerable children. The local CASA program is promoting and encouraging the CASA volunteers to connect with, and form ties among themselves, as well as with coordinators and supervisors. These relationships help create communities and prevent the feeling of isolation and loneliness that CASAs often experience.

The other type of connectedness is with the children themselves. Some of the respondents believe and advocate for CASAs to focus on the child and try to relate to them at a personal level, without getting emotionally attached. Several respondents found this expectation to be a challenge that cannot be achieved, especially that the CASA program imposes restrictions against CASA volunteers spending time alone with the child or youth they are advocating for without another adult supervising.

Recognition (F=11)

Recognition was also included among the enabling factors for CASA volunteers to perform their roles effectively. According to Fisher and Cole (1993), recognition featured very high on the list priorities for keeping the service of the volunteer longer. Six respondents identified recognizing the CASA volunteers' efforts as crucial in boosting their morale and encouraging them to continue volunteering. They described giving volunteers credit for what they do in carrying out their duties, no matter how little. One of the respondents felt "very appreciated" when a supervisor offered "lots of compliments" for the work and efforts that the volunteer did. One of the respondents missed the events that the local CASA program used to give specifically to express appreciation to volunteers in different ways. Three respondents associated the recognition and appreciation factors with the condition of being sincere. They noted that when appreciation was not sincere, the volunteers got the vibe, which sometimes resulted in a turnoff for them. Recognition also included constant assurance that CASA volunteers were making a difference in the lives of the children they served even when they felt rejected by the children or the outcomes were less than optimum.

Another respondent argued that there are high expectations cast over what role of the CASA volunteer, stressing that the expectations should match what the volunteer can realistically do and take credit for. A respondent argued that training should be explicit and realistic about the impact that a person can have when there are so many factors that are out of the CASA volunteer's control, such as what the court does, what the funding sources do, what judges do and how families interact. CASA programs, when recruiting new volunteers, should relay a realistic picture of what a volunteer can take pleasure in

doing, to avoid disappointment and a feeling of inadequacy when they don't have control over outcomes of the children.

Another respondent suggested that the courts, as the main beneficiary of the volunteers' inputs and advocacy services, need to scale back on their expectations from the volunteers, so that the volunteers might be more comfortable in their role and more likely to achieve success in their work. The judges also need to be taught to appreciate the volunteers who were helping them help the children in court.

Elements that Influence the CASA Volunteer's Decisions

Most respondents made a direct or indirect reference to the individual's decision to volunteer based on several factors, some are circumstantial, and others are more personal choices to continue to serve or move on. I framed this study using two theories that are relevant to the experiences in social services. Theory of burnout (Maslach, 1998) depicts the outcome of working with individuals or children who had traumatic experiences. Also referred to as Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), burnout is often described with symptoms similar to those of PTSD's. Resilience theory (Greene, 2002) describes fortitude and strength in character that enable individuals to persevere through traumatic experiences, whether secondary or first hand. Resilience can be innate or acquired, but varies greatly from one individual to another, as well as for the same individual in different circumstances. To capture the relevance of these two theories for CASA volunteer retention, I created placeholders for each theory under this question. Further, these placeholders made more sense to be split into two nodes; one for volunteers' decision to stay, which included "resilience" as a subnode, and one for

volunteers' decision to leave, where "burnout" was included as a subnode. Creating two nodes, one for each theory, helped streamline the coding process and allow for coherent analysis for this question.

In analyzing the occurrence of each of the terms, *burnout* was used five times throughout the study, by two respondents. However, there were multiple instances where respondents described varying levels of burnout without specifically using the term. For example, *frustrating* occurred 39 times throughout the study and was repeated 27 times in the responses to the question addressing the elements that influence a volunteer's decision to leave. Among the terms that were used frequently was *difficult*, repeated 55 times throughout the study, and 26 times in responses to the same question. There were other terms that described negative sentiments or experiences such as *waste*, six times; *intimidating*, seven times; *challenges* and *abuse*, each 5 times. Several other expressions that described negative experiences occurred intermittently across the data, such as *adversarial*, *overwhelming*, *unpleasant*, *broken*, *burdensome*, *horrible*, *inappropriate*, *worrying*, and *lonely*.

As for the term *resilience*, it occurred twice throughout the study, both from the same source. However, several factors discussed by the respondents imply resilience. For example, personal abilities and innate strength describe the characteristics of being resilient. Resilience is also implied in the support that volunteers get from their families, employers, peers, and supervisors. It includes providing the space for volunteers to share and debrief and get advice on the best course of action. The sense of community that the

program fosters for the volunteers help them to feel less isolated in this work, strengthening their resolve and resilience.

Elements that Influence the Volunteer's Decision to Stay

CASA volunteers are believed to represent "more than your typical volunteer" as one respondent stated. They need to invest a substantial amount of energy and time in a case that they serve. The respondents cited various elements that could influence a CASA volunteer's decision to continue to volunteer. The responses largely focused on a sense of doing something positive and being productive. According to several respondents, a heightened philanthropic drive is essential to keep the CASA volunteers going. To make their task easier, they need to have the ability to develop positive relationships with other individuals and agencies that are party to the case they are serving in. The responses to the question regarding elements that influence the volunteer's decision to stay, were almost equally divided between being supported and feeling productive.

Being Supported

Support in this question almost echoed the support listed in the responses to the previous question on factors enabling the CASA volunteer to succeed. It included open communication and positive relationships with supervisors as well as other partners in the case, such as social worker, parents, and lawyers. The one difference pertained specifically to the needs of retirees. A number of respondents expressed concern that the retirees are at a stage in their lives where they want the flexibility to travel and have new experiences, at the same time feeling productive and making a difference in someone else's life. Most likely, they are financially independent and have empty nests.

So, while retirees are ideal for the role of a CASA volunteer, they need relatively flexible schedules that would enable them to take off for a couple of weeks and come back to resume their advocacy services. So, they need to be assured that during their absence, there is a structure in place that they could temporarily rely on during their travels. And although this flexibility creates additional work for the volunteer supervisors and coordinators, most of the respondents under these categories expressed willingness to provide this type of support as a way of retaining the retiree volunteers.

In addressing this issue, the Peer Coordinator Model emerged as a new theme that seemed to provide an additional layer of support that CASA volunteers needed especially during their absence. Per one of the respondents, the program ran a survey about the peer coordinator model and the results of the survey indicated that most CASA volunteers preferred to meet with a peer coordinator with questions or for debriefing because they assumed that the supervisor would be too busy to meet with them individually. While this statement holds true, there is another level of comfort that the CASA volunteers seek in communicating with a peer coordinator, asking questions, bouncing ideas, or sharing concerns, because they too are volunteers, and are perceived to be less judgmental of the CASAs.

One of the respondents explained that understanding the nature and temperament of each CASA volunteer helped package support that matched the personality of the volunteers and promoted their retention. A personal touch expressed in a handwritten *Thank You* note, for example, would go a long way in making the volunteer feel appreciated and connected, as suggested by one of the respondents. Some of the

supervisors go as far as sending thank you notes to the families and employers expressing appreciation for allowing the volunteer to take time away from their family and employment duties to advocate for vulnerable children.

Sense of Productivity

Seven respondents emphasized being or feeling productive as an important factor in volunteers' lives and sense of duty. One of the respondents emphasized the volunteers' preference to be productive and not just busy. This was one of a range of responses offered within the framework of being productive, which included: making a difference in someone else's life, being helpful, doing something bigger than oneself, giving back, getting involved, doing something that would use their brains and intellect, doing something meaningful, affecting change, and being effective. One of the interviewees described that some of the CASA volunteers' commitment was as steadfast as if it was their lives' mission. And yet other CASA volunteers try CASA volunteering for some time in the spirit of philanthropy and dedication to giving back, then they move on to try something else. This is an indication that personality, personal experiences, and aptitude all play an important role in the choice to become a CASA volunteer and stay as one.

Elements that influence CASA Volunteer's Decision to Leave

Thirteen of the twenty respondents mentioned life circumstances as the main reason that drive the CASA volunteers to leave. Among those life events most frequently mentioned are illness, death in the family, job changes, or moving away. Other life compelling circumstances include having the time and ability to perform the required duties that are required of a CASA volunteer. In addition to the 30-40 hours of rigorous

training that are required of a CASA volunteer, they also need to perform other duties, including: visiting the child or children they are assigned to advocate for at least once a month, visiting schools and other service providers to monitor the services ordered by the judge in favor of the child, meeting the other parties to the case – parents and guardians - and attorneys, writing court reports, attending court sessions, participating in the 12 hour annual on-going education sessions.

Twelve respondents used the term *challenge* to describe the role and circumstances that influence CASA volunteers' decision to leave. There are challenges such as lengthy litigations which delay the permanency process for children, but these do not rise to the level that influence the CASA volunteers' decision to leave. At least five respondents expressed frustration and disappointment with the system and at the outcomes for the children. The respondents described challenging interactions with the child welfare social worker and or the attorney as being serious enough to make them consider quitting. But they acknowledged that the social workers are overworked and stressed, which position the CASA volunteers at the receiving end of hostility and a defensive stance for being perceived as a nuisance or yet another layer they need to deal with. One interviewee described an incident with one of the parties involved in a case as being abusive and unprofessional. The interviewee argued that such abuse could be tolerated at the job, but not as a volunteer. Another interviewee felt bullied and abused by the way some of the attorneys interacted with them. In one case, the attorney was belittling the CASA volunteers and calling them amateurs who should not be involved in

legal proceedings. Several other respondents had unpleasant encounters with attorneys, especially those representing one of or both parents.

Respondents also described the children's placements as a significant challenge for being far below acceptable living standards, and for being remote, requiring a lot of driving. Three respondents mentioned the restrictions imposed on their interaction with the children as limiting to their role and are also a cause of frustration, especially that the same rule does not apply equally in all CASA programs. This restriction prohibits the CASA volunteers from being alone with the child or youth without adult supervision, which limit their interaction with the child or youth, within the legal boundaries. One respondent complained that while this restriction is in place to protect the program from potential liability, the background checks that the program performs on the volunteers are so rigorous that the risk for liability should be significantly diminished if not completely eliminated.

Three respondents acknowledged the limited role of a CASA volunteer in realistically being able to influence or control the outcomes for the children, attributed to the involvement of several players in a child welfare case. According to the respondents, this revelation was a source of frustration for the CASA volunteers. One respondent was very critical of the scheduling of the court hearings, describing it as fluid and a total disregard to the time of all individuals involved, including CASAs, Social Workers, attorneys, and parents. The respondent compared the court scheduling process to "cattle call" where multiple cases get scheduled at the same time for the whole morning and wait to be called randomly to their session. Another respondent also complained that the court

process dragged too long, even though they already knew, and were working towards, the outcome. Also, the court reports and paper work were described by at least four respondents as presenting significant barriers, and were referred to as daunting, anxiety producing, and a distraction to the real work of advocacy.

Two respondents described the quality of new volunteer supervisors as inadequate, lacking the knowledge and expertise to guide the CASA volunteers, which was frustrating to the volunteers as a lot of time was wasted before they were fully on board. Two respondents experienced lack of tolerance to different opinions expressed by CASA volunteers or staff and described the process of dealing with dissent or difference in opinion by “freezing people out” which means dropping them off of the e-mail chain, social calendar or any type of communication. Two respondents found the lack of responsiveness from parties they need to get information from with regards to the child or children, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, very frustrating. It was interpreted as disrespectful and devaluing to their role as CASA volunteers.

Only one respondent brought up the issue of gender imbalance in favor of women as a drawback, explaining that the ratio of women to men in the organization is seven or eight to one especially at the higher ranks and top management, there are hardly any men in the office. Not that there's anything wrong with it, but the respondent stated that balancing in men’s and women's perspective would be beneficial to the organization.

Three of the five inactive volunteers mentioned that they were not contacted by the CASA program while inactive, neither to maintain a relationship nor to find out

whether their circumstances changed, and they were available to become active. At least two of them were willing to return but felt that their services were not desired since no one contacted them. Two respondents stated that since they changed their status to inactive, nobody from the CASA program followed up with them to find out if their circumstances had changed. Nobody contacted them to find out if they were available to take a case.

There are two issues influencing the CASA volunteers' retention in this paragraph. One is regarding volunteers' resignation due to change in their circumstances, so they become inactive, and the other is when a CASA volunteer completes a case and brings it to closure and is waiting to be contacted to take a new case. In both cases, the CASA program misses the opportunity for retaining volunteers who are technically ready for having gone through a full round of training and believed in the mission. Not contacting inactive CASAs usually sends a negative message that the individual's services are no longer needed.

Knowledge of Systems and Processes

Seventeen participants responded to this question. Among the highest frequency words appearing in this section were training, peer, and ask. Thirteen respondents credited the quality of the training for providing valuable knowledge about the systems and processes, as a solid foundation for their role as CASA volunteers. Nine respondents mentioned the role of a peer volunteer or coordinator as crucial in coaching them through the process, and while they had a good foundation from the training, most of the knowledge they had, needed to be experienced and tested on the ground. Ten respondents

thought that the best way to gain practical knowledge was by asking questions of their supervisors or peers who had longer experience and deeper knowledge to share.

Four respondents repeated the term “preparedness” ten times. This was mentioned more specifically in a context of being caught off-guard in a situation that they could have been prepared for. One respondent mentioned that there would be instances when they needed to ask questions in court but did not feel equipped for the proper way to ask questions in court. Another respondent lived in a remote rural area and one of the assigned was placed very far away, which required driving for long distances. This was in addition to having to deal with the tight knit community in the rural area, where everyone was related to each other either by blood or marriage. The respondent found it very difficult to obtain information about the children to report, and at times it felt unsafe, which required a certain level of preparation, perhaps in cultural sensitivity, prior to the start of the advocacy work.

In a further analysis of the whole data, only three respondents used the word confident/confidence in the context of knowledge, and none used the word comfortable or knowledgeable. One respondent mentioned that they felt out of their depth in the proceedings and another expressed a sense of fear or awe having to address the judge and others in the court.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the research setting and the process by which the data was collected, saved, coded and analyzed. I also explained how patterns were registered and emerging themes captured, coded and included in the analysis. This study revealed

significant issues that are hard to detect without focused and rigorous research. The most obvious observation was the willingness of the individuals to participate in the study in overwhelming numbers. Requests for participation in the study continued to come past the data collection phase. This high interest in the study reveals that this was the first time a study invites the perspective of the CASA volunteers, and that the volunteers felt they needed to be heard and share what they perceive to be valuable experiences, knowledge, and information.

In this chapter, I described the demographic characteristics and composition of the participants and described the strategy used for making a sample selection for the study. I also provided evidence of trustworthiness in terms of establishing credibility, ensuring transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The study interview questions provided the framework for coding the data. Each question was treated as a node, which allowed themes under each question to emerge as sub-nodes. Organizing the data in such a way provided basis for comparison between the responses, establishing tangible sections for analysis. The theoretical framework provided the filter through which the themes were analyzed and was interwoven into the results to establish relevance to the study. Chapter 5 documents the integration, synthesis, and evaluation of interview data and related literature findings. The chapter also presents recommendations for action as well as areas for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to identify the reasons for the high CASA volunteer turnover rate. The objective of the study was to make available the information for policymakers and organizational leaders to consider policy changes that would improve the CASA volunteers' experience, and consequently, increase the volunteer retention rates. When I announced the study through an e-mail invitation from the CASA program, there was a high level of interest in participating in the study, demonstrated by the number of responses from potential participants. This interest revealed the openness and willingness of the CASA community to share and document their experiences.

The key findings of the study did not align with the assumptions made through the theoretical framework. The study assumptions were framed by the burnout theory (Maslach, 1998) and theory of resilience (Green, 2002). The theoretical framework was based on the premise that CASA volunteers are exposed to burnout from STS caused by their close interaction with children experiencing trauma first-hand. Burnout among the CASA volunteers was assumed to be a significant factor influencing the decision of volunteers to stay or leave. It was acknowledged by a few of the respondent that CASA volunteering can cause mental and emotional burnout, and it does. However, in the previous chapter, I built an argument against burnout as a main reason for CASA volunteers' turnover. I found that volunteer frustrations with the system featured highest among the main factors for the high turnover rate among CASA volunteers. Volunteers were invested in the mission and knew beforehand the type of challenges they would experience. I found that when volunteer respondents felt productive and effective in the

outcomes of the children, they experienced less frustration and felt better about volunteering. Volunteers attributed lack of successful outcomes for the children to the limits placed in their role in that child's case. Feeling ineffective created defeatism and frustration among the CASA volunteers. In addition, the study participants shared their frustration with state child welfare and the judicial systems, as well as the CASA program and other agencies and individuals who were party to the case.

Interpretation of the findings

The theoretical framework of the study constituted of two theories: burnout theory (Maslach, 1998) and theory of resilience (Greene, 2002), which framed the assumptions that the CASA volunteers share the same conditions as their counterparts in other human and social service sectors, resulting in high turnover rates among workers and volunteers alike. According to the theoretical framework assumptions, the high turnover rate was attributed to burnout caused by secondary stress and vicarious trauma as a result of interacting with children and youth who experienced trauma first hand. Complementary to burnout theory, it was assumed that the CASA volunteers continued to serve if they were resilient or had the opportunity and learned to build inner strength. Internal resilience was assumed to help CASA volunteers deal with secondary stress and trauma and to help insulate them from burnout. Fraser et al. (1999) recognized that individuals experience traumatic events differently depending on their threshold of tolerance. Some individuals with higher threshold exhibit resilience and strength, while others react differently to the same event and could show symptoms of stress and burnout. There is no

pattern of how individuals respond, and in some instances the same individual could have different responses to similar trauma in different circumstances.

Burnout is recognized as an occupational hazard for individuals who deal with trauma victims. Burnout manifests in chronic stress, exhaustion, cynicism, and a diminishing sense of worth. Although some participants described CASA volunteering as challenging, most of the responses described it as frustrating, which does not automatically indicate a relationship to burnout. When individuals sign up to volunteer as CASA advocates, they get many opportunities to understand what they will experience. CASA volunteering requires qualities and qualifications, in order to be able to represent a child or youth in judicial proceedings, often unlike those needed in other volunteer positions. Those who do not possess the required qualities and qualifications and are unwilling or unable to learn or acquire them are eliminated earlier in the process. Those individuals who sign up as CASA volunteers pass the primary test of ability and aptitude and are committed to the mission of advocating for the best interest of abused and neglected children.

Burnout did not feature prominently as a reason for CASA volunteers to leave. In addition to what most of the respondents referred to as “life happening” and other time commitment issues, there were several other challenges mentioned by the various interviewees as possible factors influencing the volunteers’ decision to leave. The processes involved were described as lengthy, complicated, and daunting. For example, one of the respondents described scheduling court hearings as a “cattle call” and a “colossal waste of time” for all parties involved. Several hearings are scheduled within a

2- hour timeframe, either in the morning or in the afternoon, and parties to the cases scheduled within that timeframe wait to be called randomly by the judge. The uncertainty of the schedules makes it almost impossible to block a time in the calendar and be able to schedule other activities around it. Each report comes with its own set of requirements and standards; many volunteers found the court report to be challenging and unnecessarily complicated. Respondents mentioned that they would have preferred spending time advocating for the child's wellbeing than on the required perfecting of completing the report.

The aspect of volunteer effectiveness was also questioned by the CASA volunteers, who saw they were investing time and effort, often without seeing any visible difference in the outcomes for the child. A couple of the respondents complained that they were micromanaged and that their supervisors were not attentive enough to their concerns; instead, they focused on what the volunteers perceived as unimportant issues, such as the language or style of the report. A couple of the CASA volunteers complained of having to deal with recently hired supervisors who had limited knowledge and experience in child advocacy. Some volunteers preferred to step aside rather than having to deal with uncomfortable or confrontational situations.

The CASA volunteers' duties require them to visit the child or youth they were assigned to advocate for once a month. Three respondents mentioned the restrictions imposed on their interaction with the children as limiting to their role and are also a cause of frustration, especially that the same rule does not apply equally in all CASA programs. This restriction prohibits the CASA volunteers from being alone with

the child or youth without adult supervision, which limit their interaction with the child or youth, within the legal boundaries. One respondent complained that while this restriction is in place to protect the program from potential liability, the background checks that the program performs on the volunteers are so rigorous that the risk for liability should be significantly diminished if not completely eliminated.

A few respondents identified child and youth placements as being challenging and problematic at times. Some children were placed in remote locales, far away from where the CASA volunteers lived. Sometimes volunteers perceived that the homes where the children were placed had challenges in terms of quality. Some CASA volunteers felt unsafe and threatened by adversarial parties to the case. All of these factors influenced a CASA volunteer's decision to stay or leave.

Most of the CASA volunteers were retirees from the middle and upper-middle class, and their perceptions of what was acceptable in terms of living conditions usually did not match with the real living conditions that the children in care experienced. As a result, their perception of the living conditions at the homes from which the children were removed or those they were placed into indicated a negative outcome for the child to those volunteers. This perception created a sense of frustration and failure because they were not able to achieve better outcomes.

In response to this, some of the interviewees recommended that volunteer training should reflect a more realistic picture of what the CASA volunteers could expect in terms of real-life situations for the children. CASA volunteers should be made aware of the socioeconomic variations that exist in society and that are accepted within a range of

being normal. Volunteers should be coached to understand that their perceptions of acceptable standards of living are not reasonable or possible for some families. The goal of the socioeconomic training would be to help volunteers adjust expectations of the impact they can have on the children's outcomes.

In most advocacy cases, there are multiple parties involved, all working towards achieving the wellbeing of the child. These parties represent different agencies and organizations. Each party has its own set of goals, which may not necessarily match those of other parties. According to one of the respondents, a CASA volunteer, being one among many parties to a case, should not expect to have a substantial impact on the child's outcomes and should be coached to refrain from over-expectation to avoid disappointment. Another respondent advised that the CASA volunteers should expect rejection, disappointment, frustration, being ignored and being devalued by other parties, so that if they have any of these experiences, they would at least recognize it as not personal, even when it feels differently.

According to two of the respondents, CASA volunteers should not be portrayed in training as potential saviors of the child. They should be able to see their role as assisting the court in making the best decision in the circumstances by gathering information about the child and the family and suggesting the services that could help the child make it through. They should also note clearly and often in training that the small things they do for the child matter individually and collectively. And while they may not see what they are doing in material terms, they are making a difference in a child's life.

Several respondents were in inactive status and stated that they were not contacted

by the program. When CASA volunteers become inactive or remain unassigned without been contacted, there is an overlooked opportunity for the CASA program. Reactivating inactive volunteers is much more easily accomplished and cost effective than recruiting and training new CASA/GAL volunteers. Bright et al. (2015) found that forty-four percent of the respondents of their study ended their service as CASA/GAL volunteers after they were inactive for periods of time extending between six months to a year. The study revealed that this was one of the main reasons the respondents gave for an answer about attrition. However, only ten percent of all the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the CASA program they were affiliated with. In order to mitigate unintended attrition of CASA/GAL volunteers, the study recommended the establishment of a rigorous tracking system that would establish and maintain contact with inactive volunteers with the intend of re-activating their records. Not contacting inactive CASA/GAL volunteers sends the wrong message -that the individual's services are no longer needed. Therefore, it is less likely for an inactive CASA/GAL volunteer to contact the program to get a new case and is always worth the programs' efforts to follow up with the volunteer and maintain contact.

Limitations of the Study

I was able to foresee two study limitations; one limitation due to my relationship with National CASA as an employee and a volunteer. The other limitation constituted the natural tendency of the staff to be protective of their program and tend to defend the way they conducted business. In order to minimize the impact of these limitations, I had to become cognizant of my own bias and be deliberate in maintaining and reflecting a

neutral stance. As for the other limitation, I was intentional in allowing space for each interviewee to feel comfortable and answer the questions as they would in different circumstances. However, there was no indication that the staff took a protective stance towards the program during the interviews.

I also had to be aware that there were respondents who signed up to participate in the study for an opportunity to express grievances or complaints. While I remained mindful to the possibility, I maintained a neutral stance, while also allowing space for the interviewees to be comfortable answering the questions. Some of their responses were revealing about underlying issues and problems.

Recommendations

Although not directly addressed in this study, one significant theme emerged that directly relates to retention. The program studied has introduced the Peer Coordinator model, which provides special training for seasoned CASA volunteers to supervise other volunteers, providing an intermediary layer of supervision by peer volunteers. Two among the active volunteers were Peer Coordinators, as were two from among the inactive CASA volunteers. Although not all respondents had something positive to say about Peer Coordinators, considering them a barrier to direct contact with the supervisors, many had positive feedback in terms of accessibility and availability for support. Therefore, I would recommend that the Peer Coordinator model be further studied, and the experience evaluated to assess its viability before it is recommended for replication to more programs.

A couple of respondents expressed frustration with the Court Report in terms of length, complexity, and over-emphasis. This has been identified as one of the main barriers as expressed by the CASA volunteers, and some of the staff. I would suggest that the program works with both volunteers and staff to redesign the Court Report to streamline and simplify the questions without affecting the quality of the data. This may reduce the length of the report and the time needed to prepare it.

Another area that was clearly painful for the CASA volunteers was their fear of being prepared enough to fully manage an advocacy case effectively when a child's life outcome might be impacted positively or negatively by their actions. While the training provided a strong foundation, several respondents acknowledged that the practical aspect of knowing comes with experience. The new CASA volunteer should receive an additional period after initial training where they would shadow a more experienced CASA for a period of time to be determined. This would allow the new CASA volunteer to go through the process and gain experience safely, by asking questions as they arise, discussing options, and building a level of comfort in dealing with the different parties to the case.

Implications

CASA volunteering has been described by various respondents as being emotionally demanding, emotionally draining, emotionally too much. It is much more involved than typical volunteering and can take an emotional toll on the individual CASA volunteers and workers. It is true that some volunteers leave for emotional burnout reasons. According to the data, however, burnout has not emerged as a significant

element influencing the CASA volunteers' decision to leave. While burnout cannot be completely dismissed from the equation, CASA volunteers were already committed and invested in the mission of advocating for the best interest of vulnerable children when they signed up.

CASA volunteers play a rather complicated role as advocates for the children and youth who experience abuse and neglect. They deal with highly complex and demanding systems – child welfare and the judicial- as an equal party most of the time and are expected to perform at the same level of expertise. The CASA volunteer tasks are comprised of monitoring the child, investigating situations, communicating needs, searching and identifying services, and writing Court Reports summarizing their findings to the judge. This is a highly involved set of tasks that most CASA volunteers do in a serious and professional manner. In the process of performing their duties and tasks, the aspect of volunteering becomes secondary, and they are expected to perform their duties as semi-professionals, which takes away the joy of volunteering and turns it into a job that they did not intend to sign for.

As for the children who are the direct beneficiaries of advocacy of the CASA volunteers, they are among the most vulnerable children in society, being abused and neglected by the very people responsible for their safety. Lewis-Morrarty, et al. (2012) stated that young people exposed to traumatic experiences in their adolescence or younger ages tend to exhibit anger, rage, and uncontrollable behavior. Lewis-Morrarty et al. (2012) predict that such behavior, if not addressed, leads to problematic outcomes for the young person as they reach adulthood. Therefore, increasing CASA volunteers'

retention rate could translate into more experienced CASA volunteers advocating for the best interest of the most vulnerable children, helping them overcome the residue of traumatic experiences and changing their trajectory to one with positive outcomes.

This behavior is ignored and treated as acting out. These are the foster children and youth who undergo multiple trauma, from being neglected and abused, to being moved away from home and family to reside with strangers. They may end up moving several times, changing schools, losing friends and a sense of stability. Foster children experience more than their share of trauma first hand and often end up being resentful, aggressive, and combative and generally exhibit angry behavior.

Conclusion

There are innumerable volunteering opportunities from which people can choose. CASA volunteering is special; it allows volunteers, especially retirees, to "use their brains" as one respondent put it, while helping children and families. But once it becomes more of a "job" as another interviewee described, it becomes a turn-off.

In response to the question of systems and processes, most of the respondents mentioned the good training foundation, but emphasized the need for more on-the-ground experience with both the legal and the child welfare systems. As one of the respondents put it, the training did not cover important aspects of what to expect in court, and many times they felt out of their depth, using the word "embarrassed" to describe their situation. After the training of 30 or 40 hours is complete, the CASA volunteer is sworn in by the judge in a ceremonial event, and they are assigned a case shortly after. A couple of the interviewees compared this process to being thrown into the middle of the pool and

expected to swim. Most of the volunteers manage to handle a case successfully, either by working on their own to learn more about the systems or by finding a coach or mentor to consult with along the way. Several respondents found that they were able to relate better and more closely to a Peer Coordinator. The Peer Coordinator, who is also a CASA volunteer with more experience in the field, is nominated and vetted by the CASA supervisor to coach and supervise other CASA volunteers.

The difficulties child welfare workers and CASA volunteers face to succeed in their roles as child advocates are complicated; no single issue can be pointed to as the cause for volunteer turnover. There is a set of structural challenges within each individual system that plays a part in child welfare. Some of the problems lie in the red tape of regulations that exist in some of the most fluid and uncertain child abuse and neglect situations, creating conflict and confusion. For example, the CASA volunteer is required to monitor and investigate the situation of the child sufficiently to be able to write a complete report to the judge recommending the best interest of the child. But there is a set of (written) rules stating that a CASA volunteer cannot visit the child they are advocating for more than once a month. Another example is the promotion of family reunification as the primary goal in achieving permanency for a child; within eighteen months the family is expected to qualify to get their child back or face Parental Rights Termination. In most cases, the problems of the families are so complicated and require such concerted efforts from different agencies to work together to get the family back on track, this goal is difficult to achieve. The sheer number of children coming into the

system and the limited resources designated make family reunification virtually impossible to address successfully in every situation.

According to research, CASA Volunteers walk into situations that restrict what they can offer in terms of support and positive advocacy for the children. Volunteers can visit the child only once a month, except in very rare circumstances. CASA volunteers cannot provide transportation to any party to the case, especially the child or youth, and the parents. The CASA volunteer cannot be alone with the child without the supervision of another adult. And the CASA volunteer is prohibited from offering gifts of any value to the child or family. Therefore, volunteers' movement, their interaction with the children they are advocating for , and any expression of generosity are all restricted. They are left with a very limited set of tools; yet many CASA volunteers are able to create positive change for the children even with just those limited tools.

The study reveals it is not burnout that pushes CASA volunteers to leave; it is frustration with the system and the restrictions imposed by laws and regulations, by the CASA program, and by judicial and child welfare agencies. Leaders, decision makers, and policy makers at the national, state, and local levels need to be made aware of and acknowledge the faults in the child welfare system as a whole, and then show willingness to address them collectively, as suggested by one respondent.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Salwa El Habib

Date: Time:

Interviewee Name:

Location:

I am: ☐ Active Volunteer ☐ Inactive Volunteer ☐ Program Staff

(please specify)

Program Director

Volunteer recruiter/trainer

Volunteer supervisor

Other: _____

How long have you been affiliated with CASA program?

1. When did you first become aware of CASA and what was your motivation to serve with CASA program?

2. From your experience, what are some of the enabling factors that would make it easier for a volunteer to meet their goals or accomplish best interest advocacy for a child or a group of siblings?

3. From your perspective, what are the elements that would influence a volunteer's decision to stay on or leave their volunteer position?

4. How do you assess your knowledge of the processes and systems involved in carrying out your role?

Appendix B: Codebook

Coding & Data Analysis

Name	Description	Sources	Frequency
1. How did you become aware of CASA and what motivated you	Provides a historical perspective and background about interviewee	19	42
2. Designation and how many years affiliated with CASA	Relationship with the program	20	43
3. Enabling factors for CASA to succeed	The interviewees' perception of what the positive factors that kept them going	20	119
Personal Qualities and Abilities		11	35
Challenges		10	33
Connectedness		9	16
Recognition		6	11
Support		18	66
Training		12	30
4. Elements that influence CASA decision to stay	Internal or external factors that would make a CASA stay	19	83
Being Productive		4	6
Recruitment and Retention		8	18
Follow-up		1	1
Messaging		1	5

Name	Description	Sources	Frequency
Resilience		3	4
5. Elements that influence CASA decision to leave	What are the internal or external factors that would make a CASA leave	19	120
Burnout		5	10
Challenges		12	43
Conflict		9	21
Distance		4	7
Processes		13	52
Scheduling		1	5
Life Circumstances		13	20
Negative Experience		11	48
Outcomes		3	5
underlying reasons		7	19
6. Assess your knowledge	Provides the interviewees' perception of their preparedness and knowledge to do the job	17	79
Experience		7	15
Preparedness		4	10
Cultural sensitivity		1	2
Knowledge		6	9
Processes		17	114
Support		5	10

Name	Description	Sources	Frequency
Peer Coordinator	The also emerged very strongly as a theme for future research	10	43
Quotations	Unusual expressions that the interviewees used during the interviews	3	4

Appendix C: Literature Review Mind-Map

Designed by DOCEAR