

News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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Cumberland County CASA Program Set to Celebrate Its Fifth Anniversary

When Judge Edward Guido organized a group of concerned citizens in the late 1990s to explore the possibility of creating a CASA Program in Cumberland County, he had limited hopes of recruiting more than a few volunteers willing to give the time and energy needed to make a difference in the lives of the neglected and abused children under his jurisdiction. It is five years since his vision became a reality, and the Cumberland County CASA Program is planning a special evening on March 30 to acknowledge the 54 volunteers who have been trained. Special recognition will be given to those instrumental in the inception of the Program and to the volunteers from the first two classes. During the evening, Judge Guido will swear in the newly trained volunteers from the twelfth class of advocates.

Following the swearing-in ceremony, CASA's Annual Light of Hope candlelight vigil will be held on the steps of the Old Courthouse. Gary Shuey, administrator of Children and Youth Services will kick-off April's Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month.

The CASA Program hopes the event will bring together concerned citizens from across the County to stand in unity against the crippling effects of child abuse and neglect in our communities. The evening is scheduled to begin at 6 pm in the courtroom of the Old Courthouse on the square in Carlisle, and will conclude with a reception.

Spring Training Dates Set

To become an advocate for children with the CASA Program, please contact the CASA Office at 240-6159, casa@ccpa.net or www.ccpa.net/casa.

Volunteers must—

- be 21 years of age or older,
- be able to pass criminal checks,
- complete 36-40 hours of training, and
- be willing to make at least a 2-year commitment.

The next training is February 16 through March 28, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 pm.

A Grandma's Story

My story is probably a little different than other stories. You see, at four years old, my grandson was not being abused or neglected. He was thriving in my home where he lived with his Pappy, his father, and me. But when abuse allegations were made to Children and Youth Services, he was removed from our home and placed with the accuser. While in her home, he deteriorated - he was admitted to several mental health institutions, and he was put in a special school for children with emotional problems. He was being medicated for a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress.

It was difficult to prove that the alleged incidents never happened. It was even harder to watch my grandson deteriorate. We felt hopeless.

Eventually, a CASA volunteer was assigned to our case. Equipped with a court order, she was able to dig deeper into our situation. Through observation, interviews, and reading through the records, it soon became evident to her that the allegations had been fabricated. The CASA presented thorough reports to the judge providing him with the information she had uncovered.

Thankfully, the caseworker, counselors, and the judge all agreed that it was in our grandson's best interest to be returned to our home where he would be safe and cared for.

The good news is that our grandson is again thriving academically and socially. I hate to think of what his life would be like, had he not been returned to us. He is just one of the many children whose lives are different because a CASA came into his life.

Now how do I define CASA?

I would have to say that Court Appointed Special Advocates are a gift of hope to a troubling situation, a necessity for every child who has been placed in the system.



(Since this was written, her grandson, who is no longer dependent, needs no special services, as there have been major improvements in his behaviors and performance.)

Sorority Supports the CASA Program

Kappa Alpha Theta continues to be a firm supporter of the Cumberland County CASA Program. This Fall, the Dickinson College chapter sponsored a Hair-Cut-A-Thon at the EsScents Salon in Carlisle benefiting the CASA Program. In early November, both the Dickinson College chapter as well as the Harrisburg Area Alumnae chapter participated in the BonTon Care-to-Share fundraiser. Combined with two earlier fund-raising events this year, the two chapters contributed almost \$1000. These and other donations go directly to support training and events targeted to enhance CASA volunteer performance and satisfaction.



New CASA volunteers (seated) Mary Nooraga, Patricia Carey, Kathy Drye, Donna Wise, and Susan Cashman are surrounded by KAT Alumnae members, Carl Connellan and Judge Guido, and CASA staff.

In addition to the financial support of the Program, KAT also hosts an annual volunteer appreciation event for the CASA advocates. This year, an Appreciation Brunch was held the Saturday before Thanksgiving, with the chapters contributing both food and personnel to help with set-up. The relaxing morning was a great time for interaction between KAT members, Judge Edward Guido, CASA volunteers, and the Program staff.

Prior to the Brunch, held on the campus of Dickinson College, Judge Guido swore in the five newest volunteers. This brings the number to 54 of volunteers trained since the inception of the Program in 2000.

Meet the Eleventh Corps of CASA Volunteers

Patricia Carey grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and York, Pennsylvania and now lives in Carlisle. She is a retired school teacher who wants to continue to be involved with children. She is also involved with volunteering at the Bosler Free Library where she organizes adult programming. Pat feels that libraries are places where opportunities are equal for everyone. Volunteering for CASA will give her the opportunity to concentrate on children. As a concerned, involved citizen, she hopes to make a difference in someone's life when it's important.

Susan Cashman was born and raised in Hanover, Pennsylvania. When she married her best friend, Brad Cashman, they moved to Williamsburg, Virginia. She currently lives in Carlisle. At an early age, Susan learned many homemaking skills and also came to realize that a family is more than just the people who live inside the walls of your home. As she and her husband developed their marriage and family, they were always able to include others that were not as fortunate to have a good family structure. Susan has always had a love for children and even though her four sons and her foster son are grown and starting to have children of their own, she can share that nurturing with her grandchildren and now with the children she will be privileged to meet through the CASA Program.

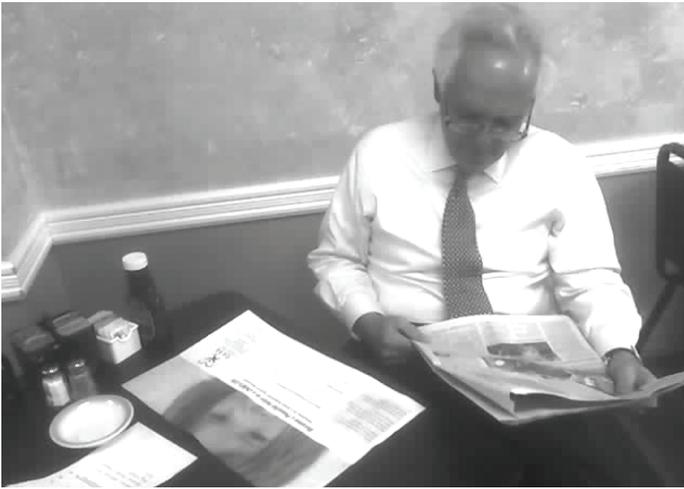
Kathy Drye was born in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania and currently lives outside of Newville. She has worked full-time for Cumberland County Community Services for 9 years. As a social service case manager with the homeless assistance program she has been an advocate for the homeless. She has just started a new job with Cumberland/Perry Mental Health/Mental Retardation. Kathy considers herself a family person, and is blessed with a wonderful husband, Mike, and a loving family. She loves animals and has 4 cats. She also enjoys gardening. Kathy believes that it is important to help others, and to volunteer to try to make a difference. Kathy loves her church, the Brethren in Christ Church located in Carlisle, and loves being part of that family.

Mary Nooraga currently lives in Enola. She is the mother of three almost-grown children, and has worked full time for Scientific Games Incorporated since 1998. Her husband, Sayed, has worked in the beverage bottling industry for twenty-five years. Due to his work she has been transferred all around the country. Their constant relocation pattern has made her aware of how much stress a family can be put under, many times from outside sources. These stresses have also made her aware of the importance of normalcy or stability for a child, especially when things outside their control keep changing.

Donna Wise was born in Pennsylvania, and spent some of her childhood in Montana. She now lives in Carlisle. Donna is the owner of two small businesses. Emily's ToyBox, LLC is an entertainment company and Wise Promo Services specializes in graphic and web design. Donna loves spending time with her family and pets. She is an avid reader who also enjoys the study of science, philosophy and various world religions. She also enjoys volunteering for her favorite pet rescue, Furry Friends Network (www.FurryFriendsNetwork.com).

Raising Awareness with Special Placemats in Area Restaurants

“Become a Powerful Voice in a Child’s Life.” This slogan is greeting diners in more than a dozen restaurants around Cumberland County. Recently the BJ’s Charitable Foundation and The Bon-Ton Stores Foundation awarded grants to PA CASA Association to produce placemats for use in area restaurants to help raise awareness about the CASA program and how ordinary citizens can volunteer to help neglected or abused children. The Cumberland County CASA program is one of the programs directly benefiting from this project. CASA is grateful not only for these two foundations, but also for the restaurants where the placemats are being used.



President Judge Edgar Bayley sits at the Carlisle Downtown Café, where CASA placemats are being used.

Cumberland County CASA Statistics (Dec 2005):

- 54 volunteers trained (39 remain active)
- 116 dependent children have been represented
- 202 reports provided additional information to help the Judge make decisions

OUR MISSION . . .

The mission of the Cumberland County Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program is to assist the court in determining what is in the best interest of abused and/or neglected children whose cases are in the court system. Through objective investigation and observation with the focus on the child assigned, trained CASA volunteers will develop and present their recommendations to the court to aid in establishing a safe, permanent and nurturing home in an expeditious manner.

Prison Training

Karen Rhinehart, Earned Time Case Manager at Cumberland County Prison, recently conducted training for a group of CASA volunteers regarding the prison. The training included a tour of the facility, overview of the policy it has in place for visitation, and a general introduction on what an inmate’s routine is while housed at the prison. Since parents of dependent children are sometimes incarcerated, this training was helpful in making volunteers aware of procedures. Hopefully it will make them more comfortable if it is necessary to visit there.

Judges Find CASA Volunteers Useful and Effective—But in Limited Supply

In June 2005, the National CASA Association engaged Organizational Research Services to conduct a national survey of family court judges. Over 550 judges and commissioners completed the survey, with 90% of respondents using CASA and GAL volunteers in their courts. There was representation from all regions of the country except Washington, DC and Hawaii. The objective of this survey was to evaluate: the process used for assigning CASA volunteers to cases, the role CASA volunteers play in supporting judicial decision-making and court processes, and judicial satisfaction with local CASA programs and volunteers. Overall, judges agree that the work of CASA/GAL volunteers is high quality, beneficial to judicial decision-making and beneficial to the children and families served. Primary results of the survey are:

- Nearly half (48%) of responding judges’ dependency cases are assigned to a CASA/GAL volunteer.
- Judges are most likely to assign CASA volunteers their most difficult and complex cases. When assigning a case to a volunteer, they particularly consider the instability of the child’s current placement, conflicting case information, concerns about implementation of services and extreme neglect, physical abuse or sexual abuse.
- Judges clearly value input from CASA/GAL volunteers in their court decisions. Volunteer input is most highly valued on issues related to placement stability and the permanence and safety of the children while in placement.
- Judges report that CASA volunteers’ activities have been “very useful” in their decisions about case outcomes.
- Judges find CASA volunteers to be very effective in a wide range of activities that support court processes. They find volunteers most effective in considering the best interests of the child and in monitoring the case.
- There is general concern about the availability of CASA/GAL volunteers for court caseloads. Only 6% of judges “strongly agree” that there are sufficient volunteers to meet the need.

See the Broadway hit



and support PA Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association

Join PA CASA on Friday, February 10, 8 p.m., at the Hershey Theatre for the performance of Annie and a "Meet the Annie Cast" sponsored by PSECU, immediately following the show. Ticket price includes a 4" x 6" photo with available cast members.

Tickets are \$65 for the performance and the reception. To order please call 233.3118 or email Dennis Hockensmith at dennishockensmith@pacasa.org.

All proceeds from this event benefit PA CASA.



25TH ANNUAL NATIONAL CASA CONFERENCE

April 1-4, 2006

Town and Country Resort
San Diego, CA

For more information and registration forms see
<http://www.casanet.org/conference/index.htm>