

News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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Former Chief Clerk Marion Celebrates Annual CASA Swearing-in and Light of Hope

The annual Swearing-in and Light of Hope Celebration, held April 2, continues to be the highlight of the CASA year in Cumberland County. This year was no exception (see newly trained volunteers, page 2). Dennis Marion, who recently left his position as Chief Clerk of the County to accept the position of Deputy Secretary for the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, was the featured guest. Marion dedicated 31 years promoting human services in Cumberland County through multiple agencies and programs, including the CASA Program. He was introduced by Advisory Council member, Dr. Laura Patterson, professor at Shippensburg University and former Grants Administrator for Cumberland County who was vital in procuring the start-up grant for the Cumberland County CASA Program in 2000. In his brief remarks, Marion commented that Cumberland County is viewed across the state as a model county, with the CASA Program being one of its innovative initiatives.

Peggy Shedden and Barb Wilson were recognized for completing ten years as CASA volunteers. In her years of service, Peggy has advocated for six children, while Barb has represented three children. In addition, five advocates were recognized for their five years of service. Betty Manning has been the voice for three children; Dan Doyle for four boys; June Fisher for four children; Arnie Jenkins for five children; and Lynda Sadler for six children. All together these five- and ten-year veterans have donated hundreds of hours and thousands of miles of travel to the County on behalf of their thirty-one appointed children. As a token of appreciation the CASA Program presented each of these veteran volunteers with a ten or five-year keychain and the Harrisburg Area Kappa Alpha Theta Alumnae group gave each a potted pansy. The three dependency judges, Judge Edward Guido, Judge Albert Masland, and Judge Christylee Peck, then swore in the new volunteers who recently completed approximately forty hours of training. The new volunteers also received a plant from the Kappa Alpha Theta Alumnae women as well as a CASA pin.

Commissioner Barbara Cross declared April to be Child Abuse Awareness Month and Children and Youth Administrator, Wendy Hoverter, explained how Cumberland County observes the month by flying a memorial flag to recognize those children who have lost their lives through abuse. The celebration closed with a moment of silence during which the judges passed a symbolic Light of Hope for children to all those in attendance. The Syrens, an all-female a capella singing group from Dickinson College, complemented the evening of celebration with spirited music. Kappa Alpha Theta women of Dickinson College provided a lovely reception following the program to conclude the evening.



Deputy Secretary Dennis Marion and Commissioner Barbara Cross.



Judge Masland, Judge Guido, and Judge Peck. Jason Malmont/The Sentinel, reprinted with permission.



Left: Thetas and CASA Staff
Above: Laura Patterson and Anita Brewster



Veteran CASA volunteers Peggy Shedden, Dan Doyle, Betty Manning, Tiffany Lohman, and Jennifer Horning.

CASA Volunteers Ready to Be Appointed

Twenty-sixth Class, Spring 2013



Tori Romberger

Tori Romberger resides in Carlisle with her husband and two boys. She works part-time at Claremont Nursing and Rehabilitation Center as a Certified Nursing Assistant. She currently is majoring in Legal Studies with an emphasis in psychology at Kaplan University. In her spare time, Tori enjoys being outdoors, spending time with her family, and when time allows for it, reading a good book.

Karima Smith grew up in the Bronx and now lives in Harrisburg, PA. She currently works fulltime for the Commonwealth of PA, and is a paralegal by training. In addition to spending time with her six-year-old niece, she loves to read. She enjoys books of all genres, especially suspense and crime.



Karima Smith

Cynthia Spencer is a single mother of 2 adult sons. She was born and raised in the Harrisburg, PA area. She graduated from Susquehanna Township High School and went on to American University in Washington DC. After pursuing her love of professional basketball overseas, Cynthia completed her education at Penn State University and in 2011 earned her MBA with University of Phoenix at the Harrisburg Campus. Shortly after returning from Spain, she relocated to Nashville, TN to begin a career in corrections as a prison counselor for the Tennessee Department of Corrections. In Nashville she became familiar with CASA in the late 1980's. After returning to the Harrisburg area in 1990, Cynthia worked with Verizon Communications, Inc. and subsequently retired in 2010 to become a teacher. Cynthia currently teaches elementary education in Harrisburg School District. Cynthia has been searching for the CASA organization for some time but never found one in the Dauphin County area so decided that committing to the Cumberland County CASA would be a great service and is looking forward to serving the children of Cumberland County as well as the CASA organization.



Cynthia Spencer

Also Participating in Training

Chad Briggs, now a Children and Youth Services supervisor, and Megan Varner, CASA intern (see p. 3), also recently completed CASA Training. Megan participated in training to partially fulfill her internship requirements with Harrisburg Area Community College. Chad wanted to gain a better sense of what guidance CASA volunteers receive prior to being assigned to represent a child (or sibling group) who has been adjudicated as a dependent child. Here are some of his thoughts about his experience.



Chad Briggs

Growing up I was enthralled with the idea of regular people doing amazing things. I was raised with the idea that if you wanted to do something phenomenal all you needed was the will and courage to do so. Of course, as a child these people were always called "super heroes" and they could do things no other person could, they could save the world. As I grew older I had to grapple with the reality that the super heroes from the comic books were only ever going to exist on brightly colored pages. I became jaded. As I aged and went to college and experienced new things I started to think, "Maybe saving the world was too big a job for one person, maybe it's easier to start smaller."

I started working in child services right after college as I was in love with the idea of being a force for positive change in the lives of those who were at risk. My own way of saving the world, if you will. I spent the next 5 years working in an environment where only the professionals looked into and assessed these children and families. There had been talk about how other outside help may help us to assess the problems more accurately, provide a fresh set of eyes and help us look at the other side of the issue. Since I had spent my adult life studying and working to do just that I thought, "Yeah, that's just what I need—some opinioned know nothing who's going to tell me what's best."

Then I started working in Cumberland County. Shortly after my arrival I was introduced to the idea of CASA. My initial thought repeated itself as I looked back on my hours of training and field practice. Shortly thereafter I started having cases with CASAs assigned to them. Initially I was skeptical. After all, you don't bring in a patient to tell a doctor what he should do.

As time went on I saw the value in the CASA program. These were ordinary people who wanted to help and hadn't had the same chances that I had or who had done something else with their lives and still wanted to be a force for good with children and families. These were the real super heroes, though very few of them wore capes, despite my urging.

I was fortunate to be allowed to participate in the CASA trainings. I found it to be insightful as to what the expectations are on the volunteers and that a lot of the work is introspection and focusing on the child's best interests. I was also surprised at the level of commitment of some of the volunteers and their passion for working with children. I suppose that my own bias had put blinders on me. Because I had done this work for so long how could I not know what was in a child's best interest? However, when you only have a hammer you view every problem as a nail.

After going through the training I can say that I have a new found respect for what the CASA Program stands for and what their goal is in working alongside Children and Youth Services. I cannot help but admire that these people have taken time out of their daily lives to try to make a change in the world around them. Though we may not always agree, we're all after the same thing, and most importantly we're all super heroes.

New Location for CASA

After almost twelve years cozily situated in one room in the Human Services Building, the CASA Program moved in June to spacious quarters on the third floor of the New Courthouse. The move took place with much help from the County's Maintenance and IMTO Departments, as well as the CASA interns who helped pack and unpack many boxes. The offices are an extension of the Court Administrator's suite of offices, which is a natural fit, as the CASA Program operates under the authority of the Court Administrator. Now instead of three staff, one or two interns, and an occasional volunteer or two rubbing elbows in one room, Anita, Pam, and Linda each have their own offices which facilitate a better work flow. A BIG thanks goes to Court Administrator staff, Melissa Calvanelli, and Jamie Mitchell for being willing to think outside the box to create this great opportunity for the CASA Program to continue to flourish in Cumberland County.

CASA Interns' "Other Duties as Assigned"

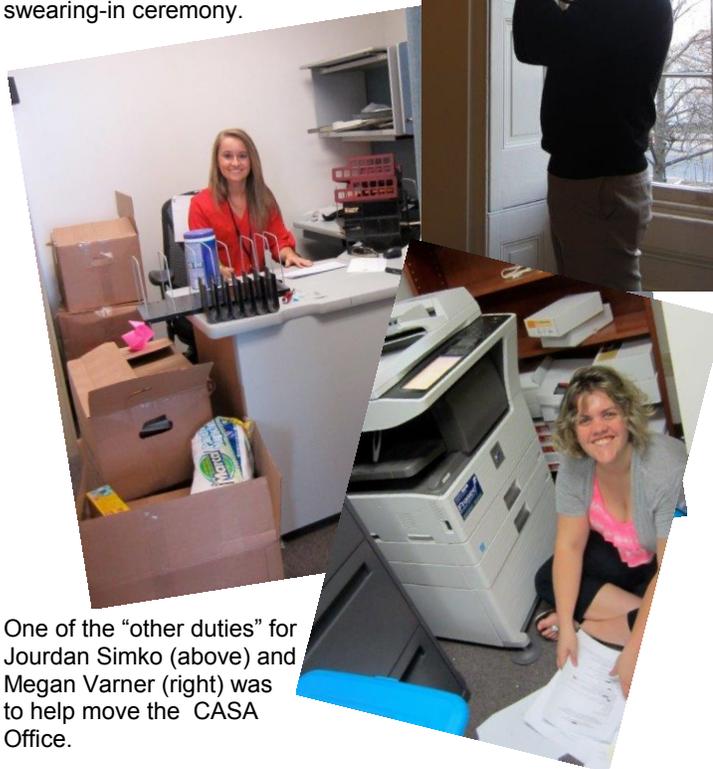
The CASA Program has been enriched by the efforts of three interns over the past months. In addition to doing the tasks of filing, copying, and redacting, they have been able to observe hearings, assist with training, participate in meetings, and meet many of the principal players in Dependency Court.

Greg Horne is a sophomore at Dickinson College who plans to remain with the CASA Program throughout his college career as a Montgomery Service Leader.

Megan Varner recently completed her Associate Degree at Harrisburg Area Community College, with plans to continue in the fall at Shippensburg University as a social work major.

Jourdan Simko, a junior at the University of Pittsburgh, decided to help out in the CASA Office over the summer as a way of getting more experience in the legal field.

Greg Horne's "other duties as assigned" included photographing the swearing-in ceremony.



One of the "other duties" for Jourdan Simko (above) and Megan Varner (right) was to help move the CASA Office.

Thetas Continue Support of CASA

In April, the women of Kappa Alpha Theta at Dickinson College presented Cuisine for CASA, a food tasting fundraiser for PA CASA. The event was supported by local restaurants and individuals who donated food dishes for sampling as well as gift certificates and baskets for a silent auction. In total, the event raised close to \$1200 for the ongoing work of PA CASA.



Sisters of Kappa Alpha Theta

The Road to Becoming a CASA Volunteer

It takes a lot more to become a CASA volunteer than just wanting to help a child. In addition to needing to make difficult recommendations to the judge in terms of what is believed to be in the best interest of a child, there is also an extensive background check and ongoing screening process that occurs long before a prospective child advocate is appointed to a child or sibling group. Cumberland County CASA is a member of the National CASA Association (NCASAA), which oversees nearly 1000 CASA programs around the country. As a member program, Cumberland County CASA complies with the Standards set by the parent organization. In addition to being at least 21 and being willing to make an 18-24 month time commitment (or ideally, to continue to advocate for the child for as long as the child remains a dependent child), applicants must be persons who respect a child's inherent right to be safe, to establish permanency, and to have the opportunity to thrive. CASA volunteers are ordinary citizens who advocate for the child's best interests to the Court at every stage of a case.

The first step to becoming a CASA volunteer is to complete an eight-page application and meet with CASA staff for an in-depth interview. If accepted for training, the next step is to participate in 36-40 hours of training facilitated by CASA staff, but also presented by key players involved in dependency matters.

In accordance with recently revamped NCASAA's Standards, each applicant must now provide 4 letters of reference and pass 6 different screenings. Record checks on each volunteer applicant include Social Security number verification, criminal records from the jurisdiction of residence and employment, LiveScan (a national fingerprint registry database comparable to the FBI database), PA State Police criminal records, PA ChildLine (a child abuse registry), and the National Sex Offender Registry.

Only after successfully completing the training and screenings and being sworn-in by a judge, is the CASA volunteer eligible to be appointed by a judge as an advocate for a child or sibling group in Dependency Court.

(See back page for upcoming CASA training dates.)

Program Statistics as of June 30, 2013:

- 168 CASA volunteers have been trained (39 assigned to represent children; about 90 continue in a supportive role)
- 346 dependent children have been represented, 22 of whom received Court appointed educational advocacy since 2007
- 1,049 CASA Reports have been written since 2001, providing additional information to help the Court make decisions

Of the children represented by CASA volunteers whose cases have closed since the CASA Program began, 108 returned home, 139 were adopted, and 26 went to live with a permanent legal custodian or a fit and willing relative. Fourteen children aged out of the system, 1 child died of natural causes and 5 had their cases transferred to other jurisdictions.

CASA Volunteer Training

**Upcoming Fall training dates:
September 14-October 26, 2013**

To explore becoming an advocate for child victims of abuse and/or neglect in Cumberland County, **contact the CASA Office, 240-6159 or casa@ccpa.net**. More information can also be found at **www.ccpa.net/casa**.

Volunteer advocates must—

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

Training is held over 5 weeks in Carlisle on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 pm in the spring and on Saturdays from 9 am to 3:30 pm in the fall.

Find us on Facebook 

**Cumberland County
CASA Program**

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 develop and present their recommendations to the court to aid in establishing a safe, permanent and nurturing home in an expeditious manner.



News and Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program is published semiannually. Back issues are available upon request or at www.ccpa.net/casa. To be added to or removed from the mailing list, contact the CASA Office at (717) 240-6159 or casa@ccpa.net.

For more information on becoming a Sponsor or registering for the day, check the Pennsylvania CASA Facebook page.



**5th Annual Ameriprise Financial
PA CASA Golf Classic**

Colonial Golf and Tennis Club
Friday, August 23, 2013
7:30 am—3:30 pm

Cumberland County COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE Program
Cumberland County CASA Program
One Courthouse Square, Suite 301
Carlisle, PA 17013
CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED
Time Sensitive Material for Immediate Delivery