

News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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Linda Wiser: A CASA for Children



We thank Betty Washburn (sworn in as a CASA volunteer in the spring of 2006) for directing Linda Wiser to the CASA Program. Linda successfully completed CASA training in the fall of 2006 and has been a staunch advocate for children in this capacity ever since. Linda grew up in Plymouth, Wisconsin, and now lives in Shippensburg. She is a resourceful, assertive and colorful individual who thrives on thinking outside of the box. Friends and family are very important to Linda, who shares that, although her own childhood had its challenges, she grew up always knowing that she was loved. This feeling of being in a safe, nurturing environment is what helped Linda make her life choices. Involved in early education centers, from being a director, to teaching, to working every other position there is, she is a natural educator, both professionally and outside of the work environment, striving to be a good role model for those around her. She is also the owner/operator of the Wash Tub Laundromat, and she owns and manages numerous rental properties. Through her businesses, she has been able to practice the art of being fair and giving people a chance. She has a soft spot in her heart for those in need and uses her resources and life

knowledge to reach out and help where she can, although she also acknowledges how important it is to have healthy boundaries. In her laundromat, for example, she set up a play area for kids, using the opportunity to help parents parent their children when she sees a need, but she also has no qualms about asking them to leave the premises when necessary. Linda has a creative and playful side that she expressed in "Sing and Sway Linda's Way," a music and movement curriculum that she created for children. She brings her exuberance and love of life to the CASA work that she has done on behalf of children for almost 10 years. Since being sworn in, she has advocated for 16 children in 7 different families. Linda describes herself this way: "I am a teacher, business owner, landlord and a federal contractor; however, most important to me is I am a CASA for children. I advocate to find safe permanent homes for neglected and abused children." She says her CASA work makes her feel balanced in the world. She recently told us that her "I M YZER" license plate had been stolen, but she plans to replace it with "OLDR AND YZER." Linda's sense of humor also keeps her balanced, and she makes the world a better place wherever she goes.

CASA Couple Celebrates over 50 years of Marriage and Advocacy

Vi Nissly first heard about CASA through television ads, and true to form, her husband, Curt, was right behind her when we first met the couple 7 years ago. Originally from California, they had met in high school and were married 6 years later after Curt had completed 3 years of college and had returned from a two year life-altering mission trip to Africa. Curt completed his Master's degree program, they started a family and moved back to Africa where they taught, and where Curt and Vi eventually were employed by USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development). Between moves to the United States and other countries around the world, the Nisslys raised 5 children, 4 of whom they had adopted, and Curt earned a Ph.D. in Agronomy.

The Nisslys have spent their lives working side by side bettering the world around them. To name a few examples, they have volunteered in orphanages in different parts of the world, have watched children for couples without family members nearby to give them a break, and have sought out single parents who needed extra hands and encouragement. Since Curt's "retirement" in 2004, he joined Vi in the operation of their small business and together have been busy with their own grandchildren and countless other volunteer and church activities. They have been instrumental in bringing clean water to thousands of people in Africa. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, they led 15 work/construction trips to New Orleans, in addition to assisting at a homeless shelter in Harrisburg and volunteering with organizations that help the disadvantaged. With their history of helping those around them and their love for children, it is not surprising they would have also found their way to CASA. In 2010, after successfully completing all the requirements to become Court Appointed Special Advocates, they were assigned to three siblings. The complexities surrounding each of the children's needs have given the Nisslys ample opportunity to continue to nourish their relationship by traveling hundreds of miles throughout south central PA, attending dozens of meetings and hearings on behalf of the siblings, and spending quality time together contemplating, discussing, and caring about the children through their ongoing dedication and commitment. The Nisslys, like many whose life missions are to give to the world, embody the spirit of CASA.



Thirty-first Class of CASA Volunteers

Peter Adams obtained a B.A. from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and a Master's degree in Public Administration from UCLA. Peter found work with children who had been warehoused by New York State after being determined to be developmentally delayed and/or having behavioral health problems. He observed the effects of institutionalization on these children. This motivated him to enroll in a graduate program in Preventive Medicine and Administrative Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. During his time there, Peter had the opportunity to work on several grants and contracts for one of his professors. One contract resulted in



Michaella Mowers (former CASA intern),¹ Peter Adams, Steve Murphy, Angela West, and Nataliya Carrio.

re-procuring the Medicaid fiscal intermediary contracts for Wisconsin and him becoming acting Chief of Operations for Wisconsin Medicaid. After receiving another Master's degree in Industrial Engineering he found a job with Mayo Clinic as a health system engineer. During the next 35 years, Peter also worked as a senior manager for health systems and health insurers, and as a political appointee/senior government official in Pennsylvania under Governors Casey, Rendell and Corbett. As a retiree, he provides substantial childcare to his 7 grandchildren who currently live in Pittsburgh and England. He also has the luxury of doing volunteer work that interests him and which is socially useful, which includes being a CASA volunteer.

Nataliya Carrio was born in Moscow, Russia and immigrated to the United States in 1999 when she was fifteen years of age. Her beginning years in America were exciting and challenging as she learned a new language and began to pursue her dreams of becoming a doctor. Nataliya graduated from Millersville University in 2007 and continued her medical education through St. Matthew's University School of Medicine in the Caribbean. Her heart's passion was always to help people and give out the love that God has placed in her heart. She has traveled to different countries as an independent missionary and served people in poverty and those who suffered from abuse. One of the greatest and most memorable experiences was when Nataliya served in Zambia, Africa in 2009. She spent her time providing medical care in villages and as a sub-physician at the General Hospital of Zambia. She served in the community with outreach programs such as feeding the hungry, spreading the Gospel, teaching English, providing medical care, and helping to build projects (such as a school for children). At the present moment, Nataliya has taken time off from her medical career to focus on her family and the outreach ministry, as she is serving children from the streets who suffer abuse and neglect. She loves pouring out her heart and making a difference, whether it is volunteering her time at the hospital or spreading love to the little souls she cares about. Currently, Nataliya lives with her husband and four children in Chambersburg, PA.

Steve Murphy grew up in Dillsburg, PA. He moved to Maryland at age 20, but returned to Dillsburg after 11 years. He has lived there ever since. Steve is married and with his wife Deb raised a son and daughter. Currently Steve works for Adams County Children and Youth Services as a human services professional. In his leisure time, Steve is a big fan of amateur wrestling. He is looking forward to his journey as a Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer.

Angela West was raised in South Philadelphia as the youngest of two sets of children. Her mother and father never completed middle school; in fact, she was the first among her siblings to graduate and attend college. Angela now lives in East Pennsboro Township and has worked for East Pennsboro School District for the last eight years as both a learning support para-professional and a substitute teacher within the high school. Angela sees herself as a community advocate. After being diagnosed with cancer she began to live life differently and made a decision to start contributing to bettering the lives of our youth, schools and community. Angela has an 18-year-old son named Chris who attends a private military college and plays football. She is very proud of his accomplishments. Some of Angela's community service activities include: East Pennsboro Board of Health (chairperson), Cumberland & Perry Drug and Alcohol (commission member), Rape Crisis & Sexual Assault Counselor, East Pennsboro Fire/ Police, former State House candidate for the 87th District of Cumberland County, vice president of the Tri-County PA Federation of Democratic Women, and now CASA. In the very near future Angie plans to obtain a M.A. degree in Social Work & Pre-Law.

¹ **Michaella Mowers**, a former CASA Program intern and soon-to-be graduate of Shippensburg University, participated in training simply for the experience and to gain more knowledge in the field.

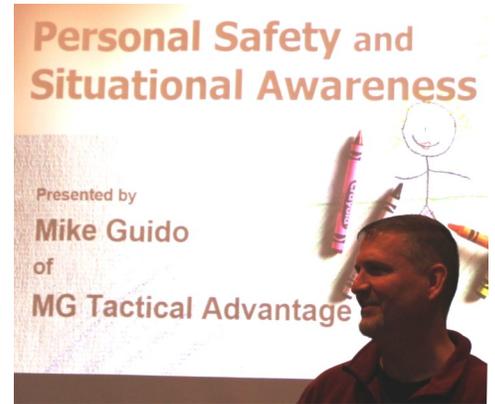


Cupcakes for CASA

On Friday, October 16th 2015, Dickinson College's chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta organized "Cupcakes for CASA." This event is sponsored through Kappa Alpha Theta to raise awareness and understanding of CASA, Kappa Alpha Theta's national philanthropy. From baking and decorating the cupcakes, advertising the event, and then selling the cupcakes, each Kappa Alpha Theta member played an active role in promoting awareness of childhood advocacy.

Volunteer Swearing-in Ceremony and Appreciation Brunch

On November 14, 2015, the CASA Program held an Appreciation Brunch at the Stern Great Room, Dickinson College, to recognize CASA friends and volunteers and to swear-in four new advocates (see p.2). The event also included personal safety training presented by Mike Guido of MG Tactical Advantage. This training provided the volunteers an opportunity to learn more about situational awareness safety in their roles as CASA volunteers. The Kappa Alpha Theta sorority of Dickinson College hosted the event and decorated world-shaped cookies to match the theme, "You Make a World of Difference." The Harrisburg Area Theta Alumnae also helped with the event, which was attended by 40 CASA volunteers, supporters, judges, staff, and Thetas.



Love Waits . . . for CASA



Michelle Kuhlmann and her fiancé.

Tuesday, December 15, was just another day in my life as a CASA volunteer. You know those types of days—where your morning starts with a call from a key person in your case upset with severe concerns regarding a family member and a situation with the child. While at work, the day is filled with numerous phone calls to various people (CYS caseworkers and supervisors, probation officers, family members, etc.). As you leave work, people are returning your calls and you ignore your significant other's phone call on call-waiting as you are passionately discussing case issues with people. Getting home, you cook a quick dinner, acknowledge your loved ones and find out how their days were. You hurriedly clean up so you can continue working on your CASA case. Your evening is filled with prepping for a team meeting the next day, including multiple calls and emails (with your iPhone, iPad, and computer surrounding you). One is an unexpectedly long and intense call from another family member. As I'm typing an email to the CASA office, my significant other looks over and asks, "What are you doing, NOW?" My response was simply, "Letting the CASA office know what just happened." As I finish up, he asks, "Well, can I get 5 minutes of your time?" Of course I reply with "Sure." He comments, "No, seriously, can I get 5 minutes of your UNDIVIDED attention?" Looking around, checking the phone, iPad, and computer to make sure there's nothing flashing to divert my attention, I go, "Yea, what's up?" He pulls a little black box out of his pocket, opens it, and says "I wanted to make this official before we visit our parents for the holidays. Will you marry me?" I was so completely stunned, he had to nudge me and ask, "Will you say yes?" Later he told me he had almost given up trying to propose that night.

Okay, so maybe December 15 wasn't just another day in MY life as a CASA volunteer!

CASA Advisory Council Expands

Since the beginning of the CASA Program in Cumberland County, a small, but dedicated, group of people have served on the CASA Advisory Council. The members of this group offer their time and guidance in their various areas of expertise. Recently, Tammy Shearer, Recorder of Deeds in Cumberland County and co-owner of Camera Box in Camp Hill, agreed to serve on the Council. She joins other local business owners, County employees, attorneys, service providers, and community leaders in supporting the CASA Program.

The current Advisory Council members are: Lindsay Baird, Esq., Jennifer Bray, Anita Brewster, Dr. Joyce Bylander, Melissa Calvanelli, Carl Connellan, Lisa Erickson-McCarren, Marlene Fuller, Joseph Gaskin, Lisa M. Grayson, Esq., Lucy Johnston-Walsh, Esq., Robert Kline, Esq., Kathy Kohlhaas, Kate Cramer Lawrence, Esq., Laura Neal, Esq., Wanda Noll, Darlene Orr, Dr. Laura Patterson, Gretchen Petri, Tammy Shearer, Karen Shirey, Erin Smeigh, Cindy Sniscak, Kim Sweger, Monica Swidler, Lisa Verdekal, Jacqueline Verney, Esq., and Cindy Villanella, Esq.

CASA Program Stats

Mar 2001—Dec 2015:

- ◆ 200 CASA volunteers have been trained ((34 assigned to represent children; over 100 continue in a supportive role)
- ◆ 426 dependent children have been represented, 28 of whom received Court appointed educational advocacy
- ◆ 1,369 CASA Reports have been written since 2001, providing additional information to help the Court make decisions

Out of the 426 children represented by CASA volunteers, those whose cases have closed resulted in 137 returning home, 161 being adopted, and 39 living with a permanent legal custodian or a fit and willing relative. 25 children aged out of the system, 1 child died of natural causes and 5 had their cases transferred to other jurisdictions.



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CASA Volunteer Training

**Upcoming training dates:
Mondays and Thursdays, 6 to 9 pm
February 8—March 21, 2016**

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. For more information see 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 in Carlisle—in the spring, 2 evenings each week from 6 to 9 pm; and in the fall, on Saturdays from 9 am to 3:30 pm.

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.