

News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASAProgram

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CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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CASA Sparks a Light of Hope in the Eyes of a Child



The son of Representative Will Gabig carefully shields the flame of his candle.

On April 6, approximately 100 people, including family and friends of the seven newly-trained CASA volunteers, gathered in the Old Courthouse in Carlisle to witness Judge Guido officially swear-in the tenth class of CASA trainees as advocates for dependent children in Cumberland County. Prior to the swearing-in, County Commissioner Bruce Barclay presented a proclamation to Gary Shuey, administrator of Children and Youth Services, declaring April to be Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month in Cumberland County.

After the formal ceremony, everyone moved from the courtroom to the front steps of the Old Courthouse. A memorial flag from the Child Welfare League of America was raised in Veteran's Square, representing the 44 children in Pennsylvania who died as the result of abuse or neglect in 2004. Pledging to strive for whatever is in the best interest of children, government officials then lit candles at the front of the assembly. Participating were "Buck" Swisher for U.S. Representative Todd Platts, R-19; State Representatives Will Gabig, R-199 and Glen Grell, R-87; Secretary of Planning and Policy Donna Cooper for Governor Ed Rendell; and State Senator Patricia Vance, R-31. Commissioner Barclay lit the central candle in the large wooden CASA candle stand, symbolic of the County's continuing support of the CASA Program. Judge Guido then lit his individual candle from the large wooden CASA candle stand and used it to light each of the CASA volunteers' candles. The flame was then passed throughout the

audience, representing their commitment to spread awareness about child abuse and neglect and what the CASA Program can do to help. Debbie Booz of the Carlisle School District provided background flute music.

Dennis Hockensmith, executive director of the Pennsylvania CASA Association, closed the ceremony by praising the "selfless dedication" of both CASA volunteers and Children and Youth caseworkers, who often work side-by-side. Together, he said, they can bring a "promise of a better future" to the 20,000 children living in unstable, temporary homes in Pennsylvania. Following the candlelighting ceremony, the Dickinson College Chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta hosted a reception in the main hall of the Old Courthouse.

Cumberland County CASA Statistics as of June 2005

Since the first class of volunteers were trained in 2001: 49 volunteers have been sworn-in (38 remain active)
108 dependent children have been represented
(currently 44 children have advocates)

Advocates have written 180 reports to provide additional information to help the Judge make decisions.

Meet the Tenth Corps of CASA Volunteers

Steve Bailey was born in Richmond, Virginia and moved frequently during his childhood. After serving 5 years in the Air Force (including duty in Viet Nam), Steve got his BSBA degree and has worked in banking, retail and manufacturing management, taught as an adjunct professor, and worked in data processing. He took early retirement in 2000, but returned to work full-time in 2004. Steve has 2 adult daughters who live in Richmond. He loves to travel and experience other cultures, and enjoys photography and computers.

Dotty Brlansky has lived in Cumberland County for the past 18 years. She is retired but teaches part-time at the Carlisle OIC. She teaches reading to adults with disabilities and tutors adults studying for their GED tests. She also volunteers on the hotlines for Rape Crisis and Hero Project and Domestic Violence Services.

Patricia Gasant's passion for helping foster children came from growing up herself in an unfit home for a child. Knowing how hard life can be for an innocent child, she was driven to start her first volunteership with CASA in 1998 in California during college. She moved to San Diego after college for a job and there she found Foster Youth Mentors and joined their volunteer program. Shortly after that, she developed epilepsy and had to give up volunteering due to losing her license. Eventually Patricia moved to Cumberland County and through the internet discovered that the CASA Program was here in her area. While awaiting her "clean bill of health" in June and thereby having her license reissued, Patricia has helped out the CASA Office in a variety of other ways, such as in marketing the Program.

Until her recent retirement, **Jacquie Gensel** had no understanding of the concept of free time. A native of Carlisle, Jacquie's career as a Custom Software Developer and Office Manager in her husband's Computer Service and Consulting firm along with her responsibilities as a wife, mother and grandmother filled every moment. Jacquie now enjoys reading, traveling and relaxing with her husband on the beaches of the Outer Banks. Her favorite pastimes are spending time with her family and spoiling her grandchildren. With her newly found free time, Jacquie has decided to pursue her dream of helping children in need. As a CASA volunteer Jacquie hopes to give a voice to children and help protect their right to have a safe and loving home.

Dana Gleason is a single father living with his son in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. Dana builds web sites for medical groups, and is active in various other organizations.

Georgia Lain is a native of South Jersey and has lived in Cumberland County for 5 years. Prior to moving to PA, she worked for YMCA Camp Ockanickon in New Jersey in administration and child care. She has a strong desire to help children with the larger picture of their lives and believes that the CASA program is a wonderful opportunity for her to contribute and be a voice for a child. Georgia is a wife to her best friend, Darol, mother to her ten-year-old son and her two stepdaughters, ages seven and ten. She values her relationship with her immediate and extended family. The values that her family shares with each other are honesty, mutual respect and love. She enjoys many things—a few of which are spending time with her family (including traveling to visit New Jersey and Wyoming relatives), reading, writing, photography, and watching her son play football and baseball and her stepdaughters play soccer.

Brandi Kay Thrush left Cumberland County long enough to explore the back woods of Ft. Leonardwood, Missouri, the Eastern Shores of South Carolina, and the Beach for Lovers in Virginia. Since she has returned to the Newville area, Brandi has a fulltime job with the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency as an administrative assistant, and two part-time jobs as a security supervisor with Capital Security Agency and as a clerk with Ross retail store. She volunteers as a classroom advisor for Junior Achievement at her alma mater, Carlisle High School. For enjoyment she spends time with her very special son, Mason Kyle Thrush, who starts Kindergarten this fall in the Big Spring School District. Brandi considers her life to be very full but is always looking for more opportunities.



From the left: Dana Gleason, Dotty Brlansky, Anita Brewster, Jacquie Gensel, Brandi Thrush, Steve Bailey, Patricia Gasant, Judge Guido, Georgia Lain, Carl Connellan, and Linda Rosenberry.

NCASA Convention

Anita Brewster and Linda Rosenberry attended the Annual National CASA Convention in Atlanta, Georgia in April. While there they received valuable training which will help to strengthen the Program. As an added bonus, they were able to reconnect with Judie Updike, a CASA volunteer from the first training class who now lives in Georgia.

Question & Answer Reception

On January 27, concerned citizens from around Cumberland County attended an informational evening promoting the CASA Program. After a brief introduction by Volunteer Coordinator Linda Rosenberry, Peggy Shedden, Maggie Fitzpatrick, and Betsy Schorpp shared their experiences as volunteers advocating for children in dependency court. Judge Guido also spoke to the effectiveness of the volunteers.

Fall Training Dates Set

Training for new volunteers will be held on five consecutive Saturdays this Fall from October 15 through November 12. Sessions will run from 9 am to 3:30 pm, with a half-hour break for lunch. In addition to covering the material from the comprehensive National CASA training manual, trainees will also benefit from presentations by professionals regarding a wide range of topics which prepare volunteers to advocate effectively for children in the Court system.

For more information on participating in the training, go to www.ccpa.net/casa or contact the CASA Office at 240-6159 or casa@ccpa.net.

Funding Solidified

Recently, Cumberland County Commissioners agreed to sustain the CASA Program at its current level of funding. Over the past two years, the Cumberland County CASA Program received an expansion grant of \$51,500 from National CASA. Among other things, this grant provided for the hiring of a Volunteer Coordinator whose main goals have been to recruit and retain quality volunteers and to make the CASA Program more widely recognized and supported among the citizens of Cumberland County. With the commitment from the Commissioners, the CASA Program is positioned to continue expanding the advocacy volunteers are able to give to the children in dependency in Cumberland County.

Building Strong Families Conference "Families in Transition"

Thursday, October 20, 2005
8:30 am - 4:00 pm
Messiah College, Grantham, PA
Cost: \$40



For seminar and registration information see:
<http://www.messiah.edu/departments/family/resources/BSF2005/>

Spreading the Word

In addition to advocating for children, many of the volunteers willingly give their time to help promote the CASA Program at various events and presentations. On June 8, Representative Glen Grell held a press conference in the rotunda of the Capitol to heighten awareness of the CASA Program across the state and to introduce the Fourth Annual Criterium and Family Festival, held July 9 on the streets of downtown Harrisburg to benefit PA CASA. CASA volunteers Kathy Kohlhaas and Sandy Evans, along with the grandparents from one of Sandy's cases, were present to lend their support and stories to the event. Volunteers Maggie Fitzpatrick, Jacquie Gensel, Dana Gleason, Brandi Thrush, and Wendy Tibbetts helped to spread the word about CASA at the American MusicFest during the July 4 weekend. The CASA Office makes about 2 presentations to individuals and/or groups each month. In the past six months, CASA volunteers who have joined their voices to those of the staff to help people understand the role of a child advocate include Carol Bell, Maggie Fitzpatrick, Peggy Shedden, Betsy Schorpp, EJ McKenna-Hieb, and Donna Wolfe.

Jefferson Award Recipient

Dotty Brlansky, one of the newest CASA volunteers, was recently recognized as a Jefferson Award recipient in the Harrisburg area for 2005 for her work at OIC, Domestic Violence, and Rape Crisis. The Jefferson Awards were established in 1972 to encourage and honor individuals for their achievements and contributions through public and community service. Dotty certainly exemplifies the heart and soul of a volunteer, dedicating many hours to help those in need in the community.

Monitor Donated

Through the generosity of Steve Kownacki, the owner of Final Focus Video in Mechanicsburg and a board member of PA CASA, the CASA Program received a 20" Mitsubishi Diamond Pro monitor. This will make page layout and design easier and more efficient for all the desktop publishing that the CASA Office does.

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.



Become a Powerful Voice in a Child's Life

Volunteer as a Court Appointed Special Advocate

Every 10 seconds a child in America is reported to be abused or neglected.

Nearly two out of every 1000 children living in Pennsylvania were found to be victims of child abuse last year.

In Cumberland County there were 63 substantiated cases of child abuse in 2004.

What is a Court Appointed Special Advocate?

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer is a trained citizen (21 or older) who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interests of a child in court. Children helped by CASA volunteers include those in foster care or at home for whom permanency is being addressed. Most of the children are victims of abuse and/or neglect.

How Can I Help?

Become a CASA Volunteer.

Learn more about CASA and help to spread the word.

Who Do I Contact?

Nationally:
(800) 628-3233
www.nationalcasa.org

State-wide:
(877) 517-2272
www.pacasa.org

Locally:
(717) 240-6159
www.ccpa.net/casa