



Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

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## News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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### **Educational Field Trip**

On October 22, thirty persons, including attorneys, CASA® volunteers and staff, Children and Youth personnel, and the Court participated in a tour of the Children's Resource Center in Harrisburg and The Beech Street Program in Carlisle. The trip was co-sponsored by the CASA Program and the Court Administrator's Office to increase awareness of those involved in dependency court. The Children's Resource Center is the child abuse evaluation center for the central Pennsylvania area. Founder Dr. Earl Greenwald and his staff used the visit to explain the role of the Center. In addition to conducting physical examinations, the Center also interviews children using an interdisciplinary, coordinated approach. Interviews are observed by representatives from all involved agencies, which reduces the trauma of abuse by reducing the number of interviews a child experiences.

The Beech Street Program is a play therapy agency, with Cindy Sniscak as the therapist. Ms. Sniscak is also a member of the CASA advisory council. She was able to explain to the group the nature of play-based assessment and therapy and their benefits to children of all ages and their families. While at the Beech Street Program, the group enjoyed a lunch provided by the CASA Program.



Part of the group outside of the Beech Street Program

### **New CASA Website Launched**

Jennifer Hammer and Dan Emery, seniors at Dickinson College, have given a new look to the website of the Cumberland County CASA Program. In the Fall of 2003, Jennifer had served as an intern for the CASA Office, so when her Policy Studies Senior Seminar professor, Dr. James Hoefler, required all students to develop a website for some worthy organization, she immediately thought of CASA.

The newly redesigned website can be viewed at [www.ccpa.net/CASA](http://www.ccpa.net/CASA). The site is designed to be user-friendly for the general public and anyone interested in becoming more familiar with the CASA Program and the opportunities it offers. CASA newsletters are posted and archived on the website. The site also offers a password-accessible page for volunteers as a way of keeping them connected and up-to-date with events in the Program.

### **CASA Family Picnic**

As a way of showing appreciation, not only to CASA volunteers, but also to their family members who generously give up family time, the CASA Office recently sponsored a Family CASA Picnic. Thanks to arrangements made by Barb Wilson, CASA volunteer and also South Middleton Township Manager, the picnic was held at the South Middleton Park. The facilities were excellent and volunteers and families enjoyed fun playground equipment for the younger crowd as well as good picnic food. Hopefully this picnic will develop into an annual event.

### **Harrisburg Criterium 2005**

The Faulkner Honda Harrisburg Criterium and Children's Festival will be held on July 9, 2005. The bike race circles the Capital Complex in downtown Harrisburg, with the start/finish line at Strawberry Square. The Pennsylvania State Employees Credit Union will be a primary sponsor of race day activities that help the CASA cause. The Children's Festival will include fun activities for the entire family, and is under the direction of the PA CASA Office and the Milton Hershey School.

## Meet the Ninth Corps of CASA Volunteers



**Bob Wicks** has been in the field of art education all of his career, having taught 19 years in public schools, one year at Penn State University and 25 years at the Harrisburg Area Community College. Bob has a BA in Sociology and he holds the rank of Professor Emeritus from HACC. He and his wife live in Mt. Holly Springs. They have two daughters and one son, all married. They also have 10 grandchildren. His cocker spaniel encourages him to walk every day. Bob's hobbies include alternate photography, Ham Radio W3HAH, and pottery. He has also been involved in the art of making Ceramic Ocarinas and has a book underway for professional craftsmen.

**Donna Wolfe** is the mother of three and resides in West Fairview, PA. She has a BA in sociology and has been in the field of social work for over 10 years. Donna is currently employed at the YWCA in Harrisburg as a Volunteer Coordinator and Prevention Education Specialist. She also speaks nationally on Sexual Violence, specifically regarding children's issues.

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### Appreciation Dinner

CASA volunteers and staff enjoyed an Appreciation Dinner hosted, once again, by the Dickinson College chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta. The Depot on the Dickinson College campus provided a comfortable setting for the November 18 evening. After a delicious Italian meal, volunteers shared conversations about their experiences as CASA volunteers. Fun prizes were also awarded to each volunteer, recognizing something unique about their roles as child advocates. For example, Sandy Evans was recognized for the heaviest file, Phil Nusbaum for the longest case, and Carol Sprecher for the shortest case. Pictured around the table below are volunteers Barb Wilson, Carol Bell, Elaine Stabler, Wanda Ansel, Pam Wysocki (staff), Wendy Tibbetts, and Judy Castrina.



### The Value of CASA Recognized

The CASA Office continues to receive affirmation from many different sources. In October, an attorney representing a parent in a dependency case involving one of the volunteers sent this letter:

*I am writing to express my appreciation for your diligence and thorough review and participation of the case involving my client's daughter, .... I am in receipt of your October 1, 2004 report, which is not merely lengthy, but comprehensive and surely to be a distinct tool for the court. I believe you have captured and iterated all matters accurately and unfortunately that is sometimes rare within the juvenile justice system.*

*Quite often, the juvenile justice system is the bastardly child of the justice system (no pun intended). To that end, dependency matters are considered, among some, to rank below delinquency matters in priority. I cannot disagree with those pessimists in any regard.*

*Thank you for your assistance in your efforts to see some light through the forest for these needy children and families. I truly believe in this cause and devote countless hours like yourself to children and families in need. I appreciate your time.*

It is heartening to know that many attorneys recognize the need for greater assistance to many children and families. Letters such as this help to balance the many times when CASA volunteers feel as if they are the lone voice crying in a wilderness of conflicting stories and agendas.

## National CASA Evaluations

The Cumberland County CASA Office has recently gone through two evaluation processes from National CASA. In June the Office completed a Self-Assessment of its compliance with National CASA Standards. In the resulting report card which the Office received, the Program was commended for its "excellent use of court personnel and local professionals in their volunteer and community training programs;" its "mutually beneficial relationship with the court system;" and its use of many other community service organizations to "spread the CASA message and recruit volunteers." One recommendation for further Program development was in the area of diversity, both in the staff and the volunteer pool, to make them more reflective of the community.

In late October, Susan Grant, the National CASA Regional Program Specialist made an onsite visit. Since Cumberland County is a recipient of an expansion grant from National CASA through July 2005, this visit was set up to monitor the Program's compliance with the grant requirements. During her visit to Cumberland County, Susan met with the Program staff, the Court Administrator, a volunteer, and a member of the advisory council. In addition, she reviewed a large body of documentation. She affirmed that the Program is in compliance with the requirements of the National CASA grant.

## CASA Training for New Volunteers

To become an advocate with the CASA Program, individuals are required to complete 30 hours training and receive state police and ChildLine clearances. This ensures that volunteers can safely and competently work with at-risk children. Training will be held over 5 weeks on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, 6 to 9:30 pm from February 24 through March 31. For more information on participating in the training, contact the CASA Office at 240-6159 or casa@ccpa.net.

### Fourth Annual Light of Hope®

Light of Hope is an event highlighting April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, and brings together government and civic leaders, social service organizations, and county citizens who share a concern for the children who are victims of abuse and/or neglect. The fourth annual Light of Hope is tentatively planned for April 5 in conjunction with the swearing-in ceremony of the tenth class of volunteer trainees. Activities will begin at 6 pm in the Old Courthouse on the square in Carlisle.

### CASA Statistics

- \* 42 volunteers have been trained since 2001  
31 remain active
- \* 93 children have been represented

## Full Year Internship

The CASA Office is fortunate this year to have a Temple University intern from September 2004 through May 2005. Courtney Dibeler is earning a Master of Social Work, with an emphasis in Social Administration. Along with her internship and class studies, she also works fulltime for Catholic Charities as an adoption case-worker. Until very recently she worked at the Vista School in Harrisburg, which is a private school for autistic children. Courtney also brings a sense of exuberance and creativity to everything she does.

## New Office Configuration

After months of playing musical chairs at two desks and a table for three staff persons plus an intern, the CASA Program now has a well-designed office, built by Rich Beaston and Brian Raudabaugh in the Maintenance Department of Cumberland County. Completed this summer, the new configuration added another desk and much needed storage which has streamlined the organization and workflow of the entire office. More than 30 persons attended an Open House held on August 30 to celebrate the professional, efficient "new" CASA office.

## Judge's Luncheons

The CASA Office and the Court Administrator's Office have been sponsoring luncheons for the Judge, the dependency Master, attorneys involved in dependency cases, Children and Youth supervisors, and the CASA staff. These luncheons have been very helpful in opening lines of communication, with the agenda usually centering around themes pertinent to dependency court and procedures. Among the topics of discussion in the past have been truancy, family group decision making, permanency options, concurrent planning, how children move through Children and Youth Services, the distribution and use of CASA Reports, the various kinds of hearings and a clarification of their purpose, and the procedure for filing and service for a hearing by a petitioner other than Children and Youth Services.

### 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.



## The Impact of Child Abuse and What You Can Do

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, the impact of abuse is far greater than its immediate, visible effects. Abuse and neglect are associated with short- and long-term consequences that may include brain damage, developmental delays, learning disorders, problems forming relationships, aggressive behavior, and depression. Survivors of child abuse and neglect may be at greater risk for problems later in life. Issues such as low academic achievement, drug use, teen pregnancy, and criminal behavior affect not just the child and family, but society as a whole.

Many people in Cumberland County are concerned about the issues of neglect and abuse of children, but don't know how they can make a difference. The CASA Program is eager to describe the opportunities it provides for ordinary citizens to become agents of change in the lives of children caught in abuse and/or neglect.

### There is a child who needs you!

On January 27 a reception to explain the CASA Program will be held in the New Courthouse on the square in Carlisle from 6:00 to 7:30 pm. Volunteers who have been trained by the Program and are actively advocating for children in Cumberland County will be on hand to share how they are making a difference in the lives of children and will answer questions regarding their role and responsibilities as CASA volunteers. Judge Edward Guido and the CASA staff will also be available to reinforce how effective CASA volunteers have been in looking out for the best interest of dependent children and to answer any additional questions about the Program.

CASA staff and volunteers are also available to explain the CASA Program to groups of any size. Presentations can be tailored to meet the interests and needs of the group. There is no speaker's fee. To schedule a speaking engagement, contact the CASA Office at 240-6159 or [casa@ccpa.net](mailto:casa@ccpa.net).

*News and Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program* is produced semiannually. Back issues are available upon request or online at [www.ccpa.net/CASA](http://www.ccpa.net/CASA). **To be added to or removed from the mailing list, please contact the CASA Office at (717) 240-6159 or email [casa@ccpa.net](mailto:casa@ccpa.net).**

Cumberland County COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE Program



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