

News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

Cumberland County CASA Program
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CASA Spotlight: Peggy Shelden

Peggy Shelden first read about the CASA program while living in California in the early 1990s and thought she would like to be a CASA volunteer in the future. She moved to PA in 1993 while working as an attorney for the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency. After she retired in 2001 she and her husband traveled for more than a year on their sailboat before she became a CASA volunteer in May 2003.

Peggy has advocated for six children of differing ages. Of the five children who have found permanency, 2 were returned to their parents, 2 were adopted, and one aged out of the system with a Permanent Legal Custodian arrangement. She is actively advocating for her sixth child.

Always the epitome of professionalism, Peggy has garnered affirmation from parents' attorneys, Children and Youth caseworkers, and judges, and has been a spokesperson for CASA to The Patriot News. While she acknowledges that being a CASA volunteer can be mentally and emotionally draining at times, she finds fulfillment in knowing she is helping children who are going through difficult times and making a difference in what happens to them. She enjoys working as part of a team with the various agencies and service providers involved in her various cases. Along with her regular advocacy duties, Peggy has also served as a mentor to a new volunteer and as an Educational Decision Maker for one of her children.



A Well-deserved Retirement

After serving as the primary *Guardian ad litem* in Cumberland County for almost 20 years, **Jackie Verney** retired from Dependency Court at the end of May. During those 20 years, she was unflinching in her dedication to advocating for what was best for the children she represented. It is impossible to calculate the positive impact that she had on countless children's lives. She also willingly worked side-by-side with CASA volunteers, who are sad to see her step down.

Educational Advocacy Training

With education being such an important part of a child's life, it is crucial that CASA volunteers understand the role they can play in ensuring that their assigned children are afforded every opportunity they need to achieve their potential in school. With that in mind, Cinnamon Evans, director of CASA of Venango County, invited our own **CASA Volunteer and Educational Consultant Sarah Pearce**, along with CASA Program Director Anita Brewster, to present a full day of training to more than 30 interested volunteers and staff from around the state. CASA Volunteer Sandy Evans, who first saw the need for educational advocacy in the Cumberland County Program in 2007, recorded a video that was used during the training which outlined why such advocacy is necessary.



I am for the child™

Twenty-eighth Class, Spring 2014



New CASA volunteers: Marilyn Mills, Kathy Kelly, Kim Summers, Rob Flynn, and Trisha Whitmer.

Rob Flynn has been married for 11 years and he and his wife have three children. His son who is the oldest is 6 and they also have 2 girls, ages 4 and 5. Rob has lived in Central PA for nearly 15 years. Prior to that he lived in California for 2 years. He grew up in Maryland and then attended High Point University in NC. Rob is a sales representative and recently relocated to the Pittsburgh area.

Kathy Kelly is originally from Glenolden, PA (a suburb of Philadelphia), but currently lives in the Colonial Park/Linglestown area of Harrisburg. She serves as the Privacy Officer for Capital Blue Cross where she has worked for almost 25 years in a variety of positions. Kathy has been married to her husband, Kevin, for 33 years and is the mother of Ryan, a chemical engineer for Bristol Myers Squibb, and Erin, who recently graduated as a Speech Language Pathologist. Kathy enjoys writing, movies, theatre, and travel. She has enjoyed volunteer activities related to children, education, and the arts, and is looking forward to making a difference for children in her role as a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

Marilyn Mills resides in Carlisle with her husband, but is originally from New York City. She volunteers with Rape Crisis through the Carlisle YWCA and is also a domestic violence advocate. In May 2013, Marilyn completed her degree in Human Services through HACC. She enjoys attending Immanuel Church in Mechanicsburg on Sundays, which gives her the energy to face the week ahead of her. She also enjoys reading and playing games on the computer. Marilyn considers herself to be a very friendly person willing to help others if she can.

Kim Summers grew up in Levittown, PA, with her parents and brother. In May, 2013, she graduated from York College of Pennsylvania, with a Bachelor's degree in Behavioral Science. She moved to Newville with her boyfriend, one dog, and two cats. Currently Kim works part-time as a Therapeutic Staff Support through Family Behavioral Resources in Chambersburg. In her free time, Kim loves to bake and decorate cakes and cupcakes. She also enjoys trying out new dinner recipes. During the winter, she likes to spend time reading a variety of books. However, in warmer weather, she prefers to go hiking, fishing, or kayaking.

Trisha Whitmer has lived all her life in Newport, PA. She received an AA in Criminal Justice from HACC, earned a BS in Social Psychology from Park University, an MA from Argosy in Forensic Psychology, and a JD from Widener University School of Law. She is licensed to practice law in PA. She continues to work for the Youth Advocate Program as a Master's Level Clinician, and has begun a job with the Cumberland County Juvenile Probation Office. In the past she has volunteered at the YWCA Domestic Violence Legal Clinic and is preparing to become a Neighborhood Dispute Settlement mediator. She and her husband live on a small farm with an assortment of animals. They enjoy gardening and harvesting their crops. In their spare time they enjoy family get-togethers, going to rodeos, and country line dancing.

Thirteenth Annual Light of Hope Celebration

The CASA Program had much to celebrate at its thirteenth annual Light of Hope and Swearing-in Celebration on April 2. Not only were the newest trainees sworn-in, but the Program also recognized Devora Sherfy and Cindy Garfinkel for completing five years as CASA volunteers. Devora represented 2 children and Cindy represented 5 in that timeframe. Diane Bowers and EJ McKenna-Hieb completed 10 years with the CASA Program and represented 5 and 4 children, respectively. In addition, EJ, who now resides in Massachusetts, was instrumental in developing the Educational Consultant to the CASA Volunteer concept in Cumberland County and has overseen educational advocacy for many of the children assigned a CASA volunteer. Some trained volunteers can no longer be actively assigned to advocate on behalf of children, but 5-year veterans Clare Garfield, Joyce Karash, Laura Neal, Jennifer Schwalm, and Sharon Wilson were recognized as Supporters of the CASA Program. As part of the program, Commissioner Barbara Cross proclaimed April to be Child Abuse Awareness Month and Margot Cardamone gave brief remarks about her experience with the CASA Program since the fall of 2010, when she first began as an intern and Montgomery Service Leader from Dickinson College. Music for the evening was provided by the Crescendevils, a coed acapella group from Dickinson College, and a reception was held following the evening, sponsored by the Dickinson College Chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta with additional support from the South Central Pennsylvania Alumnae Association.



Judges Peck, Guido, and Masland preside over the Swearing-in and Light of Hope Celebration.

Western Cumberland County Targeted for New CASA Volunteers

Under the leadership of Margot Cardamone, CASA intern and Dickinson College Montgomery Service Leader (MSL), the CASA Program is more actively recruiting volunteers in the western portion of Cumberland County. While many of the children represented by CASA volunteers reside in western Cumberland and Franklin Counties, few of the active volunteers are from that area. The MSL grant Margot secured provided for the development and production of multiple new promotional materials. In conjunction with the excellent teamwork of Heather Ilgenfritz and Chris Sechrist, part of the Communications Team of Cumberland County, new posters and flyers were designed to describe the process of becoming a CASA volunteer, the voice for an abused or neglected child. Chris also designed jar openers and notepads to increase awareness of the CASA Program.

To reach out to citizens of western Cumberland County, six informational presentations were held in various venues in Shippensburg and West Pennsboro Township. Leaders from municipalities learned of the CASA Program at the March meeting of the Western Cumberland Council of Government. Later in the month, Shippensburg University students, Megan Buchy, Nicole Smith, and Tabatha Weigle, spearheaded a presentation at the Shippensburg University's Day of Caring with the help of CASA Volunteer Michael Pimental. The SU students also set up an informational table at the Community Day at the Cottages, a senior adult community. Margot made the



fourth presentation of the CASA concept in March to the Shippensburg Human Services Council. Two more Shippensburg events were held in April at Katie's Place and The Harbor.

These events and new promotional items netted immediate interest from seven individuals from the western portion of the County and opened up more possibilities for sharing the CASA concept in the future.

Above right: Margot Cardamone with the fruits of her labor.

Left: Volunteer Pat Carey looking at the new jar openers, which were her brainchild several years ago.

Interest in CASA Continues to Grow

The number of people asking how they can become involved in advocating for the best interests of children through the CASA Program has risen dramatically recently. Compared to an average of about 60 requests per year over the past 4 years, there were over 50 requests in just the first 6 months of 2014. In addition to the initiative to expand awareness of the CASA Program in the western part of the County, the CASA Office promoted the Program at 4 other events this spring. On April 6, CASA Volunteer Pat Carey was available to answer questions and talk to anyone interested in learning more about volunteering at the Bosler Library's "speed dating" event. The following week, Program Director Anita Brewster and CASA Volunteer Sarah Pearce appeared on Good Day PA, a daily lifestyle program on abc27 television. In May and June, Outreach Coordinator Linda Rosenberry set up information booths at a fair held at Family United Network, a foster care agency where CASA Volunteer Lisa Dynarski is employed, and at the Building Common Ground Summit at Penn State Dickinson School of Law, brought to our attention by CASA Supporter Wendy Tibbetts.

Twenty of the 50 inquiries were a result of these events. The other 30, which would be the average for the 6 month period, came primarily through referrals from National CASA, PA CASA, and VolunteerMatch, a search engine for people interested in finding local opportunities for volunteering. These statistics highlight the importance of actively engaging in community events to recruit potential volunteers. If you are aware of upcoming venues that would be appropriate for promoting the CASA Program, please contact Linda Rosenberry (casa@ccpa.net, 240-6159).



Be the Voice

of an abused or neglected child.

- 1: Explore**
how to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer
- 2: Apply,**
interview, get invited to CASA training
- 3: Undergo**
multiple background checks successfully
- 4: Complete**
36-40 hours of CASA training successfully
- 5: Take the oath**
of office before a judge
- 6: Get appointed**
to a "dependent" child or sibling group
- 7: Investigate,**
facilitate, & monitor the child's case
- 8: Advocate**
for the best interest of the child
- 9: Remain child's CASA**
volunteer until the judge declares the child has found a safe & permanent home & is no longer a "dependent" child



**Cumberland County
CASA Association**
1 Courthouse Square Suite 301, Carlisle, PA 17013
717-240-6159 · www.ccpa.net/casa

PA CASA Association (Summerdale, PA) 717-728-2313 · www.pacasa.org
National CASA Association (Seattle, WA) 800-628-3233 · www.nationalcasa.org





New volunteer Kim Summers used her talents to add to the festivities of the last evening of training by decorating cupcakes.

Program Stats March 2001-June 2104:

- 182 CASA volunteers have been trained (41 assigned to represent children; about 100 continue in a supportive role)
- 380 dependent children have been represented, 28 of whom received Court appointed educational advocacy since 2007
- 1,183 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 closed, 120 returned home, 146 were adopted, and 30 went to live with a permanent legal custodian or a fit and willing relative. Nineteen 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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Time Sensitive Material for Immediate Delivery

CASA Volunteer Training

Upcoming training dates:
September 6—October 18, 2014

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 late winter 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.