

News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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Celebrating CASA's Relationship with Kappa Alpha Theta

Since the inception of the Cumberland County CASA Program, we have enjoyed a wonderful relationship with Kappa Alpha Theta—both with Dickinson College women and Harrisburg Area alumnae. Below are some of the highlights of this long-term partnership.

Kappa Alpha Theta's Grand Convention

Submitted by Molly Banks Talley, Advisory Board Chair, Dickinson College Chapter, Epsilon Lambda Chapter, President, South Central Pa Alumnae Chapter.

Kappa Alpha Theta's Grand Convention in June 2016 put on a luncheon and program to celebrate Theta's relationship with the CASA Program and honor the work of CASA volunteers across the country.

The Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the fraternity, collects and distributes donations from members and chapters to benefit CASA and the Foundation's scholarship and leadership programs.

At the June Convention luncheon, Foundation leaders announced a new \$1 million dollar commitment to National CASA over the next three years for their performance measurement initiative. This support will lay the groundwork for CASA to embark on a national study to validate CASA as an evidenced-based intervention with measurable, positive outcomes for the children who benefit from CASA's services. Foundation leaders presented a super-sized check for \$200,000 to the Executive Director of National CASA at the luncheon as an initial gift to kick off this new initiative.

"With Kappa Alpha Theta's support, we know a performance measurement system will bring our advocacy to new levels of effectiveness and help National CASA move the field of child welfare forward for the benefit of children who have experienced unspeakable trauma and tragedy," explains National CASA Association Chief Executive Officer Tara Perry.



Thetas at the 2016 National Convention: Abbie Stasior, TJ Condon (Dickinson Alum & Theta Foundation Trustee), Molly Talley, Elizabeth Smith, and Caroline Pappalardo.

Thetas were so moved by the event and the announcement that in just 4 hours they raised more than \$15,000 via online donations following the luncheon. Thetas are excited to witness the progress and success of this new initiative and to further the work of CASAs in Cumberland County and all across the nation. More information is available at the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation website.

PA CASA Director's Theta Connection

Cumberland County CASA is especially proud to announce that Jennifer DeBalko was named as the new Executive Director of PA CASA, effective January 9, 2017. Jenn began her relationship with the CASA Program as an intern with Cumberland County while she was a student at Dickinson College. As a member of Kappa Alpha Theta, Jenn merged the worlds of CASA with Kappa Alpha Theta which had chosen CASA as its national philanthropy in 1991. She went on to serve as a Volunteer Supervisor and Program Manager at CASA of Atlantic and Cape May Counties in New Jersey. Most recently, Jenn served as the Executive Director of the Lehigh County CASA Program.



16 Years of Giving and Going Strong

Almost each semester for the past 16 years, Theta women have hosted events to honor Cumberland County CASA volunteers. The first such event was in 2003, hosted by Theta alumna Barb Pitts. Every year since then, the Theta women from Dickinson College have donated their meal points to provide an Appreciation Brunch each fall for volunteers and host the Light of Hope reception each spring. The Harrisburg Area alumnae also donate their time and resources in various ways to make the events a success.

CASA Café

Thetas held their most recent event benefiting the Cumberland County Program, PA CASA Association, and National CASA on October 26, 2016. The CASA Café offered delicious food and featured performances by groups and individuals from Dickinson College. The women designed and sold T-shirts that highlighted the relationship between CASA and Kappa Alpha Theta. Over the years they have also held fashion shows, concerts, buffets, hair cut-a-thons, and bake-offs for CASA.



Thirty-third Class of CASA Volunteers

Stephanie Felsburg grew up in Massachusetts and now resides in Mechanicsburg with her husband, son and daughter. After living in New Jersey, England, North Carolina and Virginia she was very happy to settle down in Pennsylvania. She homeschooled her son, who now is in college, and currently is homeschooling her daughter. She enjoys reading about history and researching family genealogy. She is excited to become a CASA volunteer and hopes to be an encouragement and instrumental in positive outcomes in the lives of the children she will serve.

Margo Stanton grew up in Germany and Spain and returned to the United States to go to SUNY Brockport. Her parents still live in Madrid and she and her kids are lucky enough to go back to visit every summer. After she graduated she moved to the Washington DC metro area and started volunteering at the Kensington Volunteer Fire Department. She met Pat, her husband, at the Fire Department and they've been married 20 years. They have three children, 2 of whom were adopted. She completed her Master's in Management while working as the Montgomery County, MD, Director of Traffic Safety before moving to Carlisle to be closer to her grandfather. She enjoys spending time with family and friends and taking pictures of birds of prey.

Doris Moss has just moved back to the Carlisle area from Jacksonville, Florida. Yes, she has just willingly left the hot for four beautiful seasons that include the brutally cold. She was born in Michigan but grew up in Ohio, Texas, Connecticut, New Jersey, and finally Missouri. In St. Louis, she got married and continued her travels to Germany where she stayed for 26 years. She has two grown children: a son who lives in Indonesia and a daughter in the Carlisle area, who has her only granddaughter with another one soon to be born. Doris was married for 37 years but is now a widow. It was her husband who got her interested in the CASA program. After she retired from 30+ years of teaching, she read an article about the Guardian ad Litem program in Florida, which is comparable to the CASA Program. She was a GAL for about two years before moving to PA. When not volunteering, she likes to antique, do crafts, eat out, read, and meet with friends/family. She loves being a grandmother.

Hangying Ni grew up in Hangzhou, an international city on the Eastern coast of China. She worked as a language teacher and researcher there for over ten years and continued this career for about two years in New York before moving to Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania with her husband and son. She then decided to challenge herself with a new field. Currently, she is a graduate student at Central Penn College, learning Organizational Leadership. She is an open-minded and warm-hearted woman who likes to learn and to help people. She plays table tennis and is planning a club at school. She is also a Christian who attends church regularly.

George Odongo was born and raised in Kenya, East Africa. After high school he attended Elim Bible institute in Lima, New York (a three-year college), after which he returned to Kenya and served in Christian ministry from 1984 to 1998. During this time he was involved in church ministry in Kenya and youth work in both Kenya and Uganda. With the help of a few pastors and church groups he was able to found a seek-and-rescue ministry to youth under difficult circumstances (Mission Hope – A Christian Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Education and Rehabilitation Program), which is focused on restoration, renewal, and reconciliation. He was the founder and director for 14 years, training and commissioning volunteers. He returned to America in 1998 to further his education, and prepare for the next phase of commitment in his life. In 2002 he completed his first level in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). He has served as a Hospital and Hospice Chaplain and is currently pursuing a M.Div. degree. His calling is to serve children and youth at risk, and he believes CASA is going to equip him to better his services.

Caridad Suarez was born and raised in New York City and moved to Pennsylvania in 2005. She is the mother of one son and has two beautiful grandsons. She is currently raising one of her grandsons who has Asperger's syndrome and ADHD. Cari had been previously trained as a CASA volunteer in Washington County, Maryland.

George Vaites comes to CASA with a background in education. A former elementary teacher, he currently works for the Teacher Education Department at Shippensburg University. His adjunct duties include instructing courses and supervising student teachers throughout Central Pennsylvania. George lives in Carlisle. When he's not teaching, he enjoys hiking, photography, and rooting for his beloved Philadelphia teams.



New CASA volunteers Stephanie Felsburg, Hangying Ni, George Odongo, Intern Jenny Morris, Cari Suarez, Doris Moss, Margo Stanton, and George Vaites.

CASA Program Statistics: March 2001—December 2016:

- ◆ 211 CASA volunteers have been sworn-in (34 currently representing children; over 100 continuing in a supportive role)
- ◆ 454 dependent children have been represented, 30 of whom also received Court Appointed Educational Advocacy
- ◆ 1,481 CASA Reports have been written since 2001, providing additional information to help the Court make decisions

Out of the 454 children represented by CASA volunteers, those whose cases have closed resulted in 144 returning home, 176 being adopted, and 41 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.

**Thoughts from Tracy Wolf
Theta - Intern - Volunteer**



Once I became a member of Kappa Alpha Theta at Dickinson, becoming more involved with the local Cumberland County CASA Program was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. Through volunteering at Swearing-in and Light of Hope ceremonies, raising money for CASA through on-campus events, and interning at the Cumberland County CASA office during my senior year, I learned so much about dependency court and how essential CASA volunteers are to ensuring that children's best interests are being met. Not a week goes by without me mentioning something to a friend or colleague about the CASA Program or something I learned through my involvement.

Since graduating from Dickinson, I moved to Washington D.C. and will soon begin training to be a CASA volunteer. This is something that I have wanted to do since joining Theta as a sophomore in college, and I cannot wait to get started. I know that it will be difficult at times, but knowing that I will get to play a small role in improving the life of a child in need of support is worth it. I cannot thank Theta enough for connecting me with such a wonderful organization, and the women at Cumberland County CASA for teaching and supporting me over the past few years.

Note: In 2003, PA CASA Executive Director Jenn DeBalko was the first of ten Theta women from Dickinson College to intern over the years with our CASA Program. Tracy was a CASA intern in 2015. The tradition continues with our current intern, Elizabeth Smith, who is also the CEO of the Epsilon Lambda Chapter. Molly Talley, Advisory Board Chair for the Epsilon Lambda Chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta at Dickinson College, says that it is now competitive to become a Theta intern for CASA.

Theta Service Projects



Each year as part of formal recruitment, Thetas create a service project that showcases their involvement with CASA. Tying fleece blankets for children, decorating keepsake boxes, creating pillowcases, for children and making favors for volunteers (like the candle

jars pictured above) are just a few of the projects Thetas have completed over the years.

Upcoming CASA Events:

- ◆ April 11, 6pm—Swearing-in and Light of Hope Ceremony, Old Courthouse, Carlisle.
- ◆ April 27, 12-1pm—Cupcake Wars, Britton Plaza, Dickinson College
- ◆ July 24—PA CASA Golf Tournament, Hershey Country Club

CASA Supporters Promote Our Program

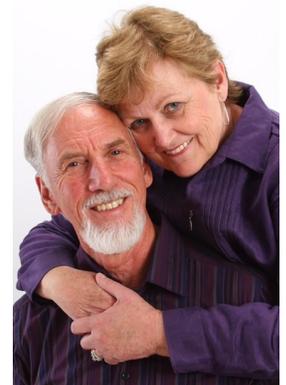
We are grateful for former CASA volunteers who continue to support the CASA Program in other ways. Patti Bethel, who had advocated for 3 children in 2 different cases while she was an active volunteer, stepped up to organize an informational booth at the Mercersburg Townfest on September 24. While there is no CASA Program in Franklin County, many of the children who are dependent in



Cumberland County are in placement there. Thus there is a need for more active volunteers from western Cumberland County and beyond. CASA Jim Wright of Fayetteville also helped Patti that day.

Curt Nissly's Legacy Lives On

On October 8, 2016, the CASA Program lost a valuable volunteer. In addition to advocating very effectively for 3 siblings, Curt Nissly and his wife Vi made the world a better place in Africa, Louisiana, Harrisburg, and everywhere they went. At his passing, Curt's family requested that donations in his memory be given to the Cumberland County CASA Program with the intent of purchasing gas cards to assist volunteers in carrying out their work. Curt is sorely missed, but it was a comfort to hear the oldest of the 3 CASA children speak at his memorial service about what a profound impact Curt and Vi have had on his life.



Donations for Kids

Women from the Carlisle First Church of God have used their talents to create afghans to share with the children represented by CASA volunteers. Janet Naugle, tipstaff for Judge Peck, delivered the beautifully crafted gifts.



In addition, members of Shippensburg University's Alpha Sigma Tau fraternity recently donated coloring books for older youth. All the gifts received are distributed through the volunteers as they visit with the children to whom they are assigned.



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CASA Volunteer Training

**Upcoming training dates:
Monday and Thursday, 6-9pm
February 23-March 30, 2017**

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.