



News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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Light of Hope & Swearing-In Ceremony

The Cumberland County CASA Program held a candle-lighting ceremony on April 18 on the steps of the Old Courthouse. The "Light of Hope" concept was introduced in 1999 by the National CASA Association as a means of creating public awareness with regard to the fact that child abuse and/or neglect exist, even in our own neighborhoods.

This vigil followed the swearing-in of the most recent class of CASA trainees by the Honorable Edward Guido. Also participating in the event were the Judge's clerk, Carl Connellan, Children & Youth Services Administrator Gary Shuey and many of the C&YS staff, CASA Program Coordinator Anita Brewster, Pennsylvania CASA Director Dennis Hockensmith, and representatives from other child-focused organizations such as the Tressler Wilderness Program and the Exchange Club. Fifteen sorority sisters from the Dickinson College chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta assisted throughout the ceremony, as well as two members of KAT's Alumnae Club. Special music was provided by Elizabeth and Benjamin Pfister and Becky Terry. In addition, several of the "veteran" CASA volunteers returned as a show of support for their newest peers. Together, over sixty concerned citizens, CASA volunteers, and guests lit candles in recognition of the children of abuse and/or neglect in Cumberland County.

It is the hope of the Cumberland County CASA Program that this event can become an annual reminder to the local community of the presence of neglect and abuse among our most vulnerable members of society, our children.



Newly sworn-in CASA volunteer, Amber Larsen, passes the Light of Hope to her mother. Judge Guido continues to light the candles of other CASA volunteers in the background.

Meet the Fourth Corps of CASA Volunteers

Kathy Kohlhaas is a full-time mom of two boys, ages two and nine. She has been involved in a variety of volunteer experiences over the past nine years and is currently pursuing a master's degree in social work to better enable her to make a difference in the lives of families and children. She enjoys ballroom dancing and hiking in her leisure time.

Amber Larsen is a graduate of Hempfield High School in Greensburg, PA, and attended Kent State University in Ohio. She moved to the Carlisle area when she became engaged, and is planning her wedding for October 11, 2003. Amber decided to be involved with CASA because of her love of children and the opportunity it gives for her to fight for their rights.

Susan Kreidler is the director of finance for a non-profit environmental agency. She has been married to her husband, Ken, for twelve years and they have four children and three grandchildren. They are in the process of enlarging their family by adopting a 17-year old daughter. Susan's interests include reading and amusement parks. Her strongest interest, however, is working with teenagers.

Betsy Schorpp grew up in Norfolk, Virginia, but has lived in Carlisle with her family for the past 27 years. She has two grown children and a black Lab, who is her walking companion. A former English and reading teacher, Betsy enjoys volunteering in the community and hopes as a CASA to be another voice for a child.

Cumberland County CASA Progress Report

Accomplishments: Looking Back

Since the first eleven volunteers were sworn in over a year ago, the CASA office has seen the impact a committed volunteer can have in the life of a child. The initial goal of the CASA office was to train and deploy at least twelve volunteers. To date, 27 volunteers have received training and been sworn in, with 24 remaining active. These volunteers have worked with 27 families, representing 50 children. In advocating for these children in the dependency court system, over thirty court reports have been written, reflecting the many hours of research and analysis done by each of the CASAs. Four of the assigned family's cases have closed due to the termination of dependency, and three children have been adopted.

Goals: Looking Forward

There is still a need for additional CASA volunteers. At least 15 children have been identified who could benefit from the involvement of a CASA volunteer, but there are no "spare" CASAs to assign to them. The next training sessions for new volunteers will be held in the fall, scheduled to begin on October 1. Anyone interested in receiving more information about what it takes to become a CASA volunteer is encouraged to contact the CASA office either by phone or email (240-6159, casa@ccpa.net).

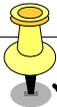
With the end of the two-year start-up grant from the National CASA Association, Cumberland County has agreed to assume the full cost of operating the CASA Program as it is currently configured. The office is exploring other possible funding streams to allow for expansion of the program.

Dickinson College Internships

Dickinson College has been developing a relationship with the CASA office since the beginning of the spring 2002 semester through its career center and internship program. So far, two interns have assisted with the daily operations of the CASA office. In the spring, Christi Bowles, a senior policy studies major, completed over 120 hours of work for CASA. Her main focus was on working with the local newspapers and radio and television stations to publicize the CASA concept. She also assisted Anita Brewster in the spring training classes. Currently Jessica Langley, a senior history major, is working in the office 8 hours a week. A third intern is scheduled to begin work in the fall semester.

Expanded Facility

The Cumberland County CASA Office has recently relocated into much larger quarters. Still on the third floor of the Human Services building in downtown Carlisle, Anita and Linda now share space more than twice the size of their original office. In closing out the two-year National CASA grant monies, they were able to purchase equipment and furniture to make the work even more efficient and effective. The CASA Program staff is also indebted to their neighboring offices which offered additional furnishings and support during this transitional period. Everyone is welcome to come visit the new office at any time.



Volunteers -

The time you spend as a CASA is invaluable, and the CASA office wants you to know how much we appreciate all you do. One of the ways we can show others just how valuable you are, is to be able to track the amount of volunteer time all of you give. If you have not yet submitted your hours for March through June, please do so ASAP. You may use either the electronic version via email, or send a hard copy. If you do not have either, contact Linda (240-6159).



Appreciation Dinner

The Greater Harrisburg Alumnae Chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta hosted an appreciation dinner for the volunteers of the Cumberland County CASA Program on April 11. Mary Jane Robinson and Gretchen Petri, shown above, assisted Barbara Pitt in presenting a festive Italian dinner, complete with checkered tablecloths and rustic flower arrangements on each table. The banquet celebrated the first anniversary since CASA volunteers began representing children in Cumberland County. The event also marked the completion of the fourth volunteer training session.

PA CASA Reorganization

The state CASA headquarters, PA CASA, has gone through a major reorganization over the past 9 months, which included moving the offices and hiring new personnel. The state offices are now located at 114 Walnut Street, 2nd floor, Harrisburg, PA. Dennis Hockensmith, the new Executive Director, brings 25 years of experience in the field of children and family services to his position. He has already demonstrated his desire to lead PA CASA in becoming an effective force by seeking ways in which the state office can assist local CASA offices in their work with neglected and abused children.

In addition, Ron Eckman, the newly hired Training and Education Coordinator, has begun to organize the state into regions to better address local needs and to promote the development of more county offices. Currently the state, which has only 11 fully operational programs, is divided into 3 regions: east, west, and central. Not surprisingly, Cumberland County CASA is in the central region with York County, Cambria County, and newly-forming Lycoming County.

The new logo found on the masthead of this newsletter is the official state CASA logo. It was designed to emphasize Court Appointed Special Advocates being a presence throughout the state.



FALL TRAINING SCHEDULE

Anyone interested in exploring the possibility of becoming an advocate for neglected and/or abused children in Cumberland County should contact the CASA Office. The next training session is scheduled to begin on October 1 and will be held every Tuesday and Thursday evening from 6 to 9 pm through November 7.

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.

OUR MISSION . . .

Cumberland County COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE Program

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