

News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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Spotlight on CASA Volunteer Judy Beskid



CASA Volunteer
Judy Beskid

Judy Beskid grew up in Pittsburgh, PA, and lived in Virginia and Michigan before moving to Harrisburg in 1967. She has enjoyed working in the fields of education, real estate development, information technology/systems, and the restaurant/catering business. She retired as a Systems Engineer from Electronic Data Systems in 2005. After that she started and continues to work part-time for Inclinor of America, which manufactures custom in-home elevators. But more important than anything else in her life are her husband, Frank, her four children, and 5 grandchildren.

Judy was sworn in as a CASA Volunteer in November of 2009. Since then, she has advocated for a total of 7 children in 4 cases, one of whom she is actively advocating for currently. Judy feels that when a person signs up to become a CASA Volunteer, their hope is that they may be able to make a positive difference in a child's life. Judy relates that what the person may not understand is that they have signed on for a roller coaster ride that moves quickly and is full of ups and downs. The downs may include sitting in court

with children while witnesses may be testifying to all that is negative about the child or their family members, with little emphasis on the positive and good; watching children being placed in what are called "shelters," some of which really are more like detention centers; watching children being bounced from placement to placement and school to school, losing trusted teachers, counselors, caseworkers, and putting them behind their peers on the education ladder; and feeling frustrated with the whole foster care system because there are not enough families, homes, facilities, or workers to take adequate care of these most fragile members of our community.

The upside includes watching children being reunited with parents; watching children getting adopted by loving, caring, and supportive families; watching children who have had trouble with truancy walk across the stage to receive their high school diplomas; escorting a youth to tour a college campus and watching as they begin to understand what their future could hold; helping to be able to keep a child in a school district where they wanted to stay and were receiving great support; seeing a child's incredible resilience and fortitude; and watching a child take great pride in something they have accomplished. The upside also includes the many wonderful children and adults you meet along the way, who will always hold a special place in your heart.

While in training to become a volunteer in 2009, Judy met two other CASA Volunteers, Sarah Pearce and Joy Gross. Being a resident of Dauphin County herself, she and the others wanted to help get a CASA program started in Dauphin County. Over the years, they and many others have worked together to help make that dream come true as of July 2019. Judy continues to serve on the Steering Committee for Dauphin County CASA. See the article below for more details about the Dauphin County CASA program.

CASA Has Arrived in Dauphin County!

After 10 years of hard work by many, a CASA program has opened in Dauphin County as of July 2019! Several CASA volunteers from Cumberland County CASA played a large role in getting the Dauphin County program off the ground, and we so appreciate the tireless efforts of Judy Beskid, Sarah Pearce, and Joy Gross. But the driving force behind this endeavor has been Lori Serratelli. Lori was first introduced to the CASA concept while she was involved in Dauphin County's family law hearings as an attorney. When she realized Dauphin had no CASA program at that time, she trained to become a volunteer in Cumberland County and served as a CASA for 2 teens in two different cases from 2010-2012. In 2014, she became an active member of the PA CASA Board. When Lori was appointed by Governor Tom Wolf to fill a judgeship seat in 2016, Lori's vision started to take root. After getting the approval from the court and a commissioner in 2016 to proceed,



CASA Volunteer Joy Gross and Jefferson Award recipient Lori Serratelli

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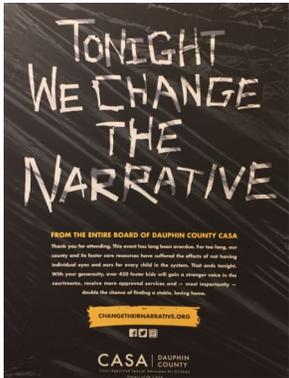
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she formulated a Steering Committee, then worked on getting funding and a Board in place, spearheaded the Search Committee for an Executive Director for the program, and now continues to be a fundamental partner to help launch the program while serving as the Chair of the Dauphin County CASA Board. In July 2019, the Search Committee hired Christine Pfau Laney as the Executive Director of the program, and Christine's first day was on July 24th. On 6/5/19, Lori was named as a recipient of the Jefferson Award, given by the television news station CBS21 and the Donegal Insurance Group, to honor those who have made meaningful contributions to the community that will have a lasting impact on others.



CASA Volunteer Joy Gross with her former CASA Youth, Emily, at the Millworks

Pavone, a marketing group in Harrisburg, donated their time to work on very creative fundraising and marketing work for Dauphin County CASA to help make the public more aware about CASA and the important and challenging work that goes on in Dependency Court. In March 2019, they had a fundraising event at the Millworks in Harrisburg. Their unforgettable invitation came literally printed on a black trash bag. It read: "We know what you're thinking: Why's this invitation printed on a foster kid's suitcase?"



Dauphin County's pledge to make a difference in the life of a child

During the event, they highlighted a statistic from the National CASA Association that states that on average, a child in the foster care system changes placements once every 4 months, and that it is not unusual to see children's belongings transported in a trash bag. Also, according to the National CASA Association, on average, children without a CASA Volunteer spend 9 extra months in the system, but steps can be taken to change the children's stories by having a CASA program in place. Highlighting the event was a personal narrative of a former foster child, Emily Kesler, who shared her story of what having a CASA meant to her—accompanied by her former Cumberland County CASA, Joy Gross. In April 2019, the Board held a press conference in Harrisburg, where black trash bags filled with children's items and marked with children's names lined the entrance for those in attendance. This visual certainly helped to send the point home- children in the dependency system deserve to have someone advocating for them so that their voices can be heard.

A huge thank you to all who have helped to get this program started! Your tireless efforts are going to help bring more support and advocacy to a very vulnerable population --children who are involved in the Dependency system due to alleged abuse and/or neglect. We hope that more CASA programs will continue to open across the state and country.

Spring 2019 Light of Hope and Swearing-In Ceremony

The 18th Annual Light of Hope and Swearing-in Ceremony for new CASA Volunteers was held on May 1, 2019 at the Old Courthouse in Cumberland County. CASA Volunteer Cindy Garfinkel was recognized for 10 years of service, and CASA Volunteers Kim Meals and Kathy Kelly were recognized for 5 years of service. CASA Volunteer Margo Stanton was recognized for her support in co-facilitating training for new volunteers. Judge Edward Guido, Judge Albert Masland, and Hearing Officer Kate Lawrence gave advice and reviewed expectations with the 7 volunteers who made up the 37th class of new CASA Volunteers. PA CASA Board members Tammy Shearer and Shamaine Daniels also attended and supported the event. The Cumberland Valley Bluegrass Boys from Dickinson College entertained the audience with their wonderful musical talents.



The sworn-in class with Judge Guido and Judge Masland



Judge Guido helping to light the audience's candles

The evening concluded with Steve Gill, Program Specialist for the Eastern Region for the PA CASA Association, leading the candle lighting portion of the ceremony. As the light of the candle was passed on, it symbolized hope and the positive difference we can all make in the lives of those around us. Our many thanks to the women of Kappa Alpha Theta (KAT) from Dickinson College who hosted a lovely reception afterwards, and to the Central PA Alumnae Chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta for the beautiful potted flowers provided to our CASA Volunteers. We also appreciate the continued support from the judges, Cumberland County, and our CASA supporters and friends as well. We would not be able to do what we do without all of you!



PA CASA Program Specialist Steve Gill

Thirty-Seventh Class of CASA Volunteers– Spring 2019

Maureen Beltrandi grew up in Brewster, NY and currently lives in Mechanicsburg. She is employed by Select Medical and Advantage Care Rehab as a Physical Therapist. She has worked as a Physical Therapist for over 34 years, mostly in outpatient orthopedic rehabilitation. She continues to enjoy working on an as-needed basis. She is married and has 2 children and 1 grandchild. They are a very close family and enjoy spending time together. Her interests include reading, mostly historical fiction, traveling, biking, yoga, and golf. One of her favorite things is enjoying good food and conversation with family and friends. She wishes to be a CASA volunteer to give back to the community and believes all children deserve every opportunity to succeed.

Debbie Bilous grew up in New Cumberland but currently lives in Camp Hill. She and her husband recently retired. She has been fortunate enough to travel all over the world and to see things most people only dream about. Germany and Italy are her favorite places to visit, and she can't wait to go on an African Safari again. Traveling is one of her favorite hobbies, along with reading, walking, spending time with her children and enjoying her two granddaughters. Her two sons are married and one lives in South Carolina and one lives in Lemoyne. Debbie graduated from HACC and attended Millersville State College. After college, she worked at Pennsylvania Blue Shield for many years, before she resigned to be a stay-at-home-mom. Later, Debbie began what became her 30 year career in Early Childhood Education, working as a preschool teacher and a preschool director. She enjoys working with children and seeing them grow and have an excitement for learning. She came into contact with a CASA Volunteer while she was working at a preschool, and she knew she wanted to become a volunteer once she retired. She realizes this will be challenging work, but she feels ready to advocate to ensure that the children she works will feel safe and loved.

Larry Boresow was born and raised in Overland Park, Kansas, and now lives in Carlisle with his wife. They have 5 children who have brightened their lives and who all have special talents in the arts and athletic world. His wife, Alecia, is a former professional dancer and is currently the school principal at the Central PA Youth Ballet. Larry is an entrepreneur and is self-employed as the owner of Boresow's Water Company and Superior Water Solutions- which provides water filtration services across many states. He and Alecia are enjoying a new and exciting adventure with their recent move to a once certified organic farm, and are now raising horses, sheep and chickens. Larry's favorite family vacation times are Disney getaways and their annual beach time in Cape May. Larry has a deep love for his family and faith, and he is active in several Bible studies at the Carlisle Evangelical Free church. He is a "people person" as summarized in his never ending book, Lessons on Life by Larry – "a stranger is only a friend you have yet to meet!"

Hope Comeau was born and raised in Concord, MA. New England was her home for 35 years until her husband's work brought them to Pennsylvania. It was a tough choice to leave New England, but they and their 3 children have thrived and made a wonderful life for themselves here. In 1998, her husband suffered a massive stroke that left him with the loss of half of his brain. At that time, two of their children were in college and one was about to graduate from high school. Up until that point, she had been a stay-at-home mom, and her whole life had suddenly changed overnight. She got a job at the YWCA of Carlisle, as a counselor with Sexual Assault/Rape Crisis Services of Cumberland County and worked there for almost 20 years. The YWCA of Carlisle opened some wonderful doors for her, for which she is forever grateful. She retired from the YWCA 3 years ago and wanted to spend some time enjoying retirement before venturing into too many things. When she recently saw an article in the paper about CASA Volunteers, she recalled when she learned about the CASA program starting up over 18 years ago, and realized she wanted to become a volunteer. She now lives with her husband and daughter on a horse farm outside of Carlisle. They now have 3 grandchildren.

Carlesha Green Halkias hails from Reading, Pennsylvania where she was raised by her maternal grandparents. She moved to Carlisle to attend Penn State Dickinson School of Law and remained in the area thereafter. She now resides in South Middleton Township with her son, daughter and husband – Vasilios, Shannon-Sophia and Michael. Michael serves as the Chief Public Defender for Cumberland County. Carlesha is a licensed attorney and secondary education teacher. She has served in various social justice positions during her legal career and currently teaches Disability Law and Race, Racism and American Law at her law school alma mater. Because of her personal, professional and volunteer experiences she is keenly aware of the value and need for children to be supported as they navigate the Dependency system. She considers the opportunity to serve as a CASA an honor.



Spring 2019 Training Class: Back row from the left– Darya Kharlamova, Larry Boresow, Debra Bilous, & Hope Comeau
Front row from the left– Joy Nixon, Carlesha Halkias, & Maureen Beltrandi

Continued- Thirty-Seventh Class of CASA Volunteers– Spring 2019:

Darya Kharlamova is a junior nursing student at Messiah College. She is originally from Ukraine and lived there until she was seven years old. At that time, she and her family moved to Enola and have been here ever since. She had to learn the English language and figure out how to assimilate the new culture into her everyday life. She is currently going to school and working as a CNA for Aveanna. She enjoys working with children and has participated as a camp leader for young girls and boys for several years. She enjoys the outdoors and considers herself to be a creative person. She has a close family and three younger brothers. Her family came to America with nothing, but with hard work, patience, and faith, her mother was able to become a Registered Nurse. She believes that a lot of the great skills that she has learned, such as diligence, compassion, hard work, and a positive outlook on life, have come from watching her parents build a better life for each other and their children. As a future registered nurse, her goal is to bring healing to the lives of those she encounters (especially children) to the best of her ability. Children will always be the future, and Darya believes that it is her calling to make sure they have a bright one.



The class being sworn in on May 1st

Joy Nixon grew up in Africa as the child of missionary parents to the Congo and Tanzania. Most of her childhood was spent in different cultures and worldviews. She is a graduate of Rift Valley Academy in Kenya and then attended nursing school in Sellersville, PA. She worked in intensive care until her 2 sons were born. To accommodate her children's schedules, she transitioned into the business side of nursing. Her work with Blue Cross/Blue Shield offered her many interesting challenges, including Fraud and Abuse investigations, code review, and system implementations of clinical programs. Joy has a Master's Degree in Psychology and is interested in childhood trauma and how children deal with early loss. She is actively involved in her church, and teaches a number of courses there throughout the year. She is now retired. She looks forward to assisting CASA in achieving their mission to help children of abuse and neglect find places where they can flourish.

Cupcake Wars for CASA

On April 4, 2019, Dickinson College's Kappa Alpha Theta sorority hosted its 5th annual Cupcake Wars for CASA event, which was a friendly baking competition among eleven student groups at Dickinson College to help raise funds for the PA CASA Association. The Thetas had each group run with a theme for their cupcakes this year, which definitely added to the fun. There was an Over-the-Rainbow theme, a spooky theme, a royal wedding theme, and a birthday party theme to name a few. PA CASA Board Member Tammy Shearer and CASA Volunteer Sandra Goodling, along with two Dickinson staff, were the judges for this year's competition. The groups did



CASA Staff and Volunteers and PA CASA Board Members having fun at the event



Cupcake Judges Tammy Shearer and Sandra Goodling hard at work!

a great job and the Thetas did outstanding with organizing this year's event. The event raised over \$1,300 for PA CASA! We have been connected to the Dickinson College Thetas for 19 years and look forward to many more years of working together!



The amazing Thetas of Dickinson College

OPTIMA- Another Tool for Volunteers

In May 2019, Cumberland County CASA launched a new data management program for our staff and CASA Volunteers to use called Optima. Optima is an interactive web-based system designed specifically for CASA, allowing volunteers to input and keep all of their case information in one place. It also helps our staff keep well-documented data to provide statistics to the National CASA Association; specifically, how many children are being served by our program, how many hours our volunteers donate on their cases, average length of stay in the Dependency system, average length of time a CASA Volunteer is appointed to their child(ren), etc. Since it is web-based, it can be accessed by our CASAs virtually anywhere. Optima is being used by nearly half of all other CASA programs in Pennsylvania and across the nation. We are excited that CASA Volunteers will be able to manage much of their own case information, thus helping the CASA staff ensure that accurate data is being tracked and also help streamline work for the CASA office.



Cumberland County CASA Program Statistics: March 2001- June 2019

- ◆ 245 CASA volunteers have been sworn-in (34 currently representing 43 children; over 100 continuing in a supportive role)
- ◆ 506 dependent children have been advocated for, and many have received CASA assisted Educational Advocacy
- ◆ 1,741 CASA Reports have been written since 2001, providing additional information to help the Court make decisions

Out of the 506 children represented by CASA volunteers, some of the outcomes have resulted in: 160 children returning home, 49 children living with a permanent legal custodian, 198 children being adopted, 29 children aging out of the system, 1 child dying of natural causes, and 5 children having their cases transferred to other jurisdictions.



Volunteerism comes in many forms! Thanks to generous donations the CASA Program has received over the years, we have been able to offset training costs for 4 CASA Volunteers this year, enriching their understanding of advocacy and permanency for children! The Cumberland County CASA Program staff is humbled by the generosity of so many who have given back to their communities in the best ways they have been able, in order to support the CASA Program which advocates for our most vulnerable, at-risk children—victims of alleged abuse and/or neglect.

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**Upcoming Training Dates:
September 3 through October 21, 2019**

Contact the CASA Office to explore becoming an advocate for child victims of abuse and/or neglect at 717-240-6159 or casa@ccpa.net. For more information, see www.ccpa.net/casa.

Training is held in Carlisle –in the spring and in the fall.

- Volunteer advocates must—
- be 21 years of age or older,
 - be able to successfully pass criminal checks,
 - complete 50 hours of training, and
 - be willing to make at least a 2-year commitment.

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.