

# News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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# CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

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## Swearing-In Ceremony and Eighth Annual Light of Hope Celebration

As a former elementary school teacher for 35 years, Sharon Wilson is keenly aware of the difficulties of children caught up in "the system." The Camp Hill woman is among eleven people sworn in March 31 as part of Cumberland County's eighteenth class of trained CASA volunteers. In addition, advocates trained in the fall, Linda Carr, Catherine Fought, MJ Gatten, and Gerry St. Jean, were publicly recognized. Diane Bowers, Terry Freeman, and EJ McKenna-Hieb were also acknowledged for their five years of service. These 3 seasoned volunteers have represented 14 children since they were sworn in as part of the seventh and eighth training classes. Prior to swearing in the new volunteers, the Honorable M.L. Ebert gave a brief talk to the volunteers and the audience. He expressed his expectations of the CASA volunteers as they pursue what they believe to be in a child's best interest.

Without the dedicated sharing of the expertise of many professionals in the community, training would not be as in-depth and valuable. Two of those who have been helping train new CASA volunteers for many years retired from their positions with Children and Youth Services in 2009, so it was only fitting that they, too, be recognized for their work on behalf of the CASA Program. Brenda Snider and Marlene Fuller have both coached the trainees in understanding how the agency operates and how best to coordinate with the caseworkers to be most effective as a child advocate.

Following the Swearing-in and Recognition ceremony, Commissioner Barbara Cross read the proclamation declaring April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. Wendy Hoverter, Administrator of Cumberland County Children and Youth Services, presented the Child Welfare League of America flag in memory of the children who die each year as a result of child abuse. In 2008, Pennsylvania had 50 such fatalities.



Theta alums Karla Billman, Marianna Wood, Gretchen Petri, and Mary Jane Robinson

As sobering as that statistic is, the evening ended on a positive note. Ms. Pennsylvania Galaxy 2009, Wendy Sledd, spoke of her own child abuse experience and bore testimony to the fact that a child can not only survive abuse, but can also flourish in adulthood. When Wendy first heard about the CASA Program a number of years before, she trained as a CASA volunteer to make a difference in a child's life. While her husband was stationed at Carlisle Army War College, she became the spokesperson for the PA CASA Association across Pennsylvania. Her story was not only touching, but also gave hope for the many children who are victims of abuse today.

Symbolic of spreading the Light of Hope, Judge Ebert and Dennis Hockensmith, Executive Director of PA CASA, lit the candles of volunteers who in turn lit the candles held by the rest of the audience. While the light was passed, CASA intern Melissa Moreland read a poem written by one of Cumberland County's "CASA children" who had recently aged out of the system.

Kappa Alpha Theta women from the Alumnae chapter of South Central Pennsylvania again made the evening special by presenting both new and 5-year veteran CASA volunteers with a potted pansy. The members of the active chapter at Dickinson College provided the refreshments for the reception which concluded the evening.

### Same Newsletter: New Method of Delivery!

The CASA Program is trying something new for the summer edition of the newsletter. Not only will the newsletter be distributed via hard copy and surface mail, but it will also be offered via email as a green alternative. The newsletter will feature the same great stories, but will be set up like a standard web page to surf at your convenience. If you are receiving this newsletter by regular mail and would like to be added to the email list, please send a note to casa@ccpa.net with your contact information. If you would like to receive a hard copy instead of an email, please let the office know that as well.

## **Meet the Eighteenth Corps of CASA Volunteers**

**Clare Garfield** moved to Carlisle from New York City in 2006. A professional fundraiser, Clare has worked for several non-profits including Columbia Law School, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, WITF, Inc., and now the Hospice of Central PA. She enjoys outdoor activities, particularly hiking and skiing, as well as theater and literature. Clare is a member of the PA CASA Board of Directors and looks forward to making a positive difference in the futures of many children.

**Cindy Garfinkel**, originally from Easton, PA, now lives in New Cumberland with her husband of 12 years, Brad, and their 5-year-old daughter, Julia. Cindy is currently a Child Grief Specialist for The Highmark Caring Place, a center for grieving children, adolescents and their families. Previously, Cindy worked for 11 years as a case manager and clinical supervisor of a treatment foster care program. She has a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Sociology from Shippensburg University and a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Fairleigh Dickinson University. Cindy is an avid Disney World fan and enjoys spending her free time traveling with her family.

**Carole Huberman-Talerico** currently works for the PA Treasury Department as Director of the Office of Internal Audits. She holds degrees from Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently awaiting approval for her Ph.D. in Political Science from the Union Institute and University in Cincinnati, OH. Carole is married to James Talerico, and has four children and three grandchildren.

**Joyce Karash**, retired and living in Lemoyne, is a mother of 5, grandmother of 18, and has just recently been blessed with 2 great-grandchildren. As a concerned citizen, she has always been child-oriented, having been raised by community-minded parents in Marion, Ohio. She has been involved on a management team for Special Olympics for over 15 years, and is very involved in her church on both the local and regional level.

**Laura Neal** is employed fulltime by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Now living in Cumberland County, she divides her time between her job and her family. She is hoping she will be able to make a difference in the lives of the children to whom she is assigned.

**Carla Noss** grew up in Hershey, PA. She works fulltime as co-owner, with her husband, of Sir D's Catering business, based in New Cumberland. Together she and her husband have 6 children and 2 grandchildren. Carla is an avid dog lover and owns a black lab named Bella. What she enjoys most is when all the family is together in the summer around the pool just having fun. She likes to keep busy and is always open to new adventures.

**JoAnn Paré** lives in Mechanicsburg with her husband, Robert, after growing up in Knoxville, a small town in northern Pennsylvania. She is retired and is a happy homemaker and wife. She is the mother of five "wonderful, successful" children who have "blessed her with fourteen equally wonderful grandchildren." JoAnn enjoys traveling with her husband, reading, gardening, and taking part in church activities. She volunteers as a way of giving back for her good fortune in life.

**Robert W. Paré** lives in Mechanicsburg with his wife, JoAnn, after growing up in Holyoke, Massachusetts. He is a retired member of the U.S. Air Force. Prior to retirement, he was the Commander of Air Force recruiting in south central Pennsylvania from 1973-1975. Robert is also a cancer survivor. He enjoys being of service to his community, which is why he has been in volunteerism for approximately thirty years.

**Jennifer Schwalm** grew up and still lives in Carlisle. She works part-time at Kohl's Department Store and at Mayapple Bar and Grill and is a Tastefully Simple consultant, all while continuing her education. She enjoys singing, reading, and watching movies. She also likes to go bowling and roller-skating in her free time. During the summer, her two sons race go-karts so she spends many of her weekends at the race tracks.

**Devora Sherfy** grew up in the beautiful mountains of southwest Virginia and now lives in Dillsburg. She is employed full-time as a Medical Management Consultant at Highmark Blue Shield. Previous volunteer experience includes South Central AIDS Foundation and The Highmark Caring Place. She describes herself as a fun-loving, giving person who enjoys hiking, nature, traveling, and spending time with her husband Fred, her cat Luna, and friends.

**Sharon Wilson** grew up in Brooklyn, New York and retired from teaching elementary school in upstate New York after 37 years. She is very interested in continuing to work with children in a meaningful way; thus, her interest in the CASA Program. She and her husband, Peter, moved to Pennsylvania from the Syracuse, New York area in 2007 to be closer to family members and their current, as well as future, grandchildren. The Wilsons enjoy planning trips together and other numerous family activities. Since relocating, they've had many wonderful experiences here in Central PA.



Seated: Devora Sherfy, Joyce Karash, Jennifer Schwalm, Cindy Garfinkel, Clare Garfield.  
Standing: Stephanie Johnston (intern), Melissa Morehead (intern), Laura Neal, Sharon Wilson, Carole Huberman-Talerico, JoAnn Paré, Bob Paré, Carla Noss

### **Program Statistics as of June 30, 2009:**

- 107 CASA volunteers have been trained (47 are active; 38 are CASA Supporters)
- 233 dependent children have been represented
- 490 CASA Reports have been written, providing additional information to help the Court make decisions

Of the children whose cases have closed since the CASA Program was begun in 2000, 57 returned home, 55 were adopted, and 17 went to live with a permanent legal custodian or a fit and willing relative. Seven children aged out of the system and 2 had their cases transferred to other jurisdictions.

## Statewide Conference Discussion

The PA Permanency Conference, *Transition Without Opposition*, included the *Making a Difference with CASA Volunteers* session presented by panelists with firsthand experience working with CASA volunteers. Seven panelists shared their unique perspectives of how an advocate's involvement benefited them. One father related what it felt like, after working hard for six months to reunify with his daughter, to hear his daughter's CASA volunteer tell the judge that he and his wife had exceeded all expectations. He explained, "My daughter's CASA did not just look out for our daughter's best interests; she helped to rebuild our family. . . thankfully, we will never be the same." CASA volunteer Barbara O'Brien aged out of foster care after becoming a dependent child at age seven. She identifies with her assigned children because she remembers what it was like not to trust anyone – until a CASA was assigned to her at age fourteen. Her CASA took the time to explain everything - from court procedures to her mother's disease of drug addiction. "If it weren't for my CASA, I wouldn't have made it." She was able to work through her anger towards her mother, who today is a close friend. The Honorable Edward E. Guido voiced appreciation for the "hard work" done by more than 100 CASA volunteers in Cumberland County and for the dedicated CASA staff. He cited several cases where advocates were able to turn cases around. He added, "Children in Cumberland County have a chance at life because of the CASA Program." Guardian ad litem (the attorney representing the best interest of a child) Jackie Verney called CASAs "invaluable." She recalled cases where having a CASA assigned made a big difference, especially in one case that ended in adoption where, "I couldn't have asked more from that CASA." The panelists generated many questions from the audience. It was a passionate, encouraging, insightful, and sometimes humorous exchange of viewpoints about the CASA's invaluable work. I felt the attendees left with a complete picture of the role of a CASA.

(submitted by CASA volunteer Sandy Evans)

## Interns Abound

The CASA office has been cozy with many interns working side-by-side with the staff and volunteers. Five talented young ladies from Dickinson College and Shippensburg University helped in the office this past spring. Thank you for all of your help Anne, Hallie, Melissa, Faith and Stephanie. During the summer months 2 more interns donated their time to the CASA cause. They help keep things in the office running smoothly. Keep up the great work Stephanie and Colin!



Three of the spring interns were also members of Kappa Alpha Theta at Dickinson and helped with the Light of Hope set-up and reception. Faith Evans is in the center, Anne Zmuda is on the front far right, and Hallie Yarger is on the left in the rear.

## First Annual PA CASA Golf Tournament



Friday, September 11, 2009  
Carlisle Barracks Golf Course  
Driving Range opens at 10:30 am  
Check-in begins at 11:00 am  
Lunch at noon  
Shotgun start at 1:00 pm



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## Community Development Grant

Through the sponsorship of Senator Pat Vance, the Cumberland County CASA Program has received a \$5,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. This money is designated to be used for volunteer retention and training and support of volunteers by the Program staff. The grant will pay for some much-needed equipment that will improve the Program's ability to boost the quality of the training new volunteers receive. This comes on the heels of National CASA's newly revised training manual which relies heavily on audio-visual technology.

## National CASA Quality Assurance

In the summer of 2008, the Cumberland County CASA Program was required to complete the National CASA Quality Assurance Self-Assessment. This assessment must be successfully completed every four years in order for a program to remain a member in good standing of the National CASA Association. This was the second time the local program participated in the assessment. Although much work is required to document compliance with 12 standards, Cumberland County has found it to be a valuable exercise to re-examine and update policies and procedures on a regular basis. Some of the new policies which have been implemented as a result of the Assessment include better tracking of volunteer contact with the office and with the assigned children; developing exemption forms for volunteers who have legitimate reasons for being unable to see their children on a monthly basis; and implementing and evaluating a diversity recruitment plan. Certification of full compliance was received in 2009, with the request to use some of the Cumberland County documentation as samples for other programs.

## Customer Satisfaction Survey

Stephanie Johnston, a graduate student from Shippensburg University, conducted a customer satisfaction survey for the Cumberland County CASA Program which has been helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses as perceived by those persons and agencies that work directly with the CASA staff and volunteers. Those surveyed included judges, attorneys, Children and Youth personnel, biological and foster parents, and various service providers. In general, the survey showed a positive reception of the CASA Program by those most closely involved. Anyone interested in reading the final Survey Report may obtain a copy by contacting the CASA Office.

## **CASA Training, Fall 2009**

To explore becoming an advocate for abused and/or neglected children in Cumberland County, contact the CASA Office at 240-6159, [casa@ccpa.net](mailto:casa@ccpa.net) or [www.ccpa.net/casa](http://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.

The next pre-service training is scheduled to be held in Carlisle on 5 consecutive Saturdays from 9 am to 3:30 pm, **September 19 through October 24** (excluding October 10) . Spring training will be held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, 6 to 9 pm, in February and March 2010 with exact dates to be determined.

**News and Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program** is published semiannually. Back issues are available upon request or at [www.ccpa.net/casa](http://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](mailto:casa@ccpa.net).

## **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



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16 West High Street, Suite 303  
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CASA  
Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN  
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