

News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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Celebrating 10 Years in Cumberland County

March 29, 2011 the Cumberland County CASA Program will mark 10 years of helping child victims of abuse and/or neglect with a celebration held at the **Carlisle Theatre**, 40 West High Street, Carlisle, at 6 pm. The twenty-second class of Court Appointed Special Advocates will be sworn-in, followed by the Annual Light of Hope. The public is welcome to join volunteers, public officials, court personnel, Children and Youth Services, and CASA staff in this special celebration of making a difference in the lives of children.

Vernatta Jones and the **Jones Family Singers** of Harrisburg will provide special music. Ms. Jones serves as Administrative Support for the Dependency Court Hearing Officer. A reception following the Ceremony is sponsored by **Kappa Alpha Theta** of Dickinson College and the Central Pennsylvania Alumnae Chapter.

Thoughts of a Ten-Year CASA Volunteer



Sandy Evans wrote this reflection on her 10 years as a CASA volunteer for children.

I often think about my first foster child, Tony. I soon discovered he came with not only the black plastic bag stuffed with worn, ill-fitting clothes, but also with seven years of inconsistency and upheaval from being moved multiple times each year as a dependent child. And no wonder! Those making recommendations—caseworkers, doctors, and therapists, kept changing. I realized there was not one person in his life with enough information to determine what would best benefit Tony.

When I first read about CASA, I knew it was what children in the foster care system needed. With some trepidation I stepped out of my comfort zone, completed training in 2001 and began advocating in order to give children a voice in the system. Now, ten years later, I can tell you that having a CASA volunteer assigned to a child can make a BIG difference because the CASA stays involved, checks up on every area of the child's life and reports to the Court all findings. The results can be seen not only in permanent outcomes, but in the foster children's journeys as they navigate their way through the system. I have represented 15 children and each case has brought unique challenges, characters, and issues. In the end, the reality is that there is a face of a child waiting for (and deserving) a permanent home. It is rewarding to see how my involvement has helped the Court move children to adoption, or has returned children to families who are back on track, or has reunited siblings.

I also serve as a board member for the PA CASA Association, and am trained as a CASA training facilitator because of my conviction to do all I can to support this worthwhile program. I am certain that the modest personal investment of my time advocating for a child's safe passage to permanency is far less than the cost would be to society and future generations without CASA involvement.

HIGHLIGHTS OF TEN YEARS OF CASA

- 2000:** Judge Guido organizes group of concerned citizens interested in CASA
- 2-year start-up grant from National CASA
 - Program Coordinator Anita Brewster hired
- 2001:** First CASA volunteers sworn-in
- Administrative Assistant Linda Rosenberry hired
 - **17 volunteers assigned to 28 children**
- 2002:** First Light of Hope Ceremony held, with reception hosted by Kappa Alpha Theta
- First of many college interns recruited
- 2003:** Expansion grant from National CASA
- Volunteer Coordinator Linda Rosenberry and Administrative Assistant Pam Wysocki hired
 - Saturday training offered in addition to Tuesday and Thursday evening format
- 2004:** CASA website revamped by Dickinson College students
- 2005:** Cumberland County assumes full operating costs of Program
- 2006:** Judge Ebert shares responsibilities of dependency court
- Successful placemat campaign for recruitment and public awareness
- 2007:** First Educational CASA assigned
- 2008:** YouTube video, CASA Volunteer Training, produced by Dickinson College students
- 2009:** Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted by intern
- Facebook page begun by intern
- 2010:** Judge Masland shares responsibilities of dependency court
- First PA CASA Conference for volunteer and staff training
 - **64 volunteers assigned to 115 children**

Meet the Twenty-first Corps of CASA Volunteers



Alison Browdie, Lisa Crone, and Jim Wiehe

Alison Browdie has lived in Carlisle for nine years and is an at-home mother to school-age children. She grew up in Vermont, and North Dakota, attended Williams College, where she met her husband, Michael and then attended the State University of New York at Buffalo School of Law. She has worked as a medical manuscript editor and as an attorney focusing on commercial transactions. In her spare time, Alison enjoys reading, running, volunteering at her children's school, and baking.

Lisa Crone is currently employed as a Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS) for the Youth Advocate Program in York, PA. She obtained her Bachelor's degree from the University of Phoenix in Human Service and Management in 2009. She is currently a student at the University of Massachusetts Online, working toward a Master's in Criminal Justice degree with a focus on Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment. Her goal is to conduct forensic interviews of children who are suspected of being abused. Lisa is a mother of two grown daughters and a grandmother of a beautiful grandson.

Jim Wiehe recently retired after 34 years of teaching in the Social Studies Department at Susquehanna High School where he was division leader. Jim coached baseball and softball at the varsity level. He has 2 grown children and 2 grandkids and lives with his wife in Shermansdale.

Annual Appreciation Brunch

Judge Albert H. Masland swore in the Fall 2010 class of CASA volunteers on November 6, 2010. About 40 CASA volunteers, staff, guest speakers from training, and court personnel joined the Kappa Alpha Theta women of Dickinson College and the South Central Pennsylvania Alumnae Chapter for an informal brunch, held at The Depot at Dickinson College and provided by the Theta women.

Following the brunch and swearing-in ceremony, veteran CASA volunteers shared adventures they have experienced in their role as CASA volunteers. Some were funny, some touching, but all conveyed the sense of people who are committed to making a difference in the lives of the children they have represented.

Theta Women Create Luggage Tags

As part of its annual rush week, Kappa Alpha Theta women made luggage tags for CASA children. These are meant to accompany the duffle bags they created last year. Children who move frequently are often separated from their possessions and hopefully the bags and tags will help children keep their things with them. The tags were presented to the CASA volunteers as part of the Appreciation Brunch.



CASA Program Benefits from Project Linus



Heather Bennett, former CASA volunteer, coordinated with the Shippensburg University Social Work Department to provide 35 blankets for the children served by the CASA Program. This effort was part of the Project Linus program. Project Linus is comprised of hundreds of local chapters and thousands of volunteers across the United States. Each volunteer and local chapter work together to help provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children who are seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need through the gifts of new, handmade blankets and afghans, lovingly created by volunteer "blanketeers." Project Linus has distributed over three million blankets to children in need since their inception in 1995.

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PA CASA Annual Golf Tournament

Save **September 16** and plan now to play golf for a good cause. Be watching for more details in the Summer Newsletter.



Dickinson College Bonner Student Helps CASA

The CASA Office welcomes Margot Cardamone as its new Bonner student from Dickinson College. Margot is a freshman from Mill Valley, CA who will be majoring in history and Italian. She is a member of Dickinson College's Mock Trial team at the college and is competing on the regional level in February as an attorney.

The Bonner Program provides opportunity for college students to engage in community service. It is a highly competitive program, and once selected, the student is given the choice of which organization to work with. Margot, the second Bonner student to work with CASA, says that when she spoke with the CASA representative she knew this was where she wanted to be. She feels it is an honor to be working with such a dedicated group of people and looks forward to the next four years.

My Savings Book & Journal



by J. McCrary

Books Donated by Author

For 30 years, J. McCrary's responsibilities have ranged across the spectrum of publishing. Recently, she became aware of the CASA Program through CASA volunteer Maggie Smith and donated copies of her book, *My Savings Book & Journal*, for distribution to the children served by the CASA Program. This award-winning book is one of two books published by Community Services Press to teach young people the critical and timely subjects of saving and managing money and credit.

KAT + CASA Intern = Jenn Hammer DeBalko, Lehigh County CASA Director



Jenn Hammer DeBalko sits at her desk in the Lehigh County CASA Program office. She also serves on the PA CASA Board.

In 2003 Jenn Hammer was a sophomore at Dickinson College, a member of Kappa Alpha Theta women's fraternity, and a CASA Office intern. She submitted the following:

During the summer of 2003, I attended a Kappa Alpha Theta leadership summit and developed a plan to strengthen the knowledge of and relationship with the local CASA program. I was frustrated that we knew only the bare minimum about CASA which is designated as the national philanthropy of Kappa Alpha Theta. I decided the first step was learning more myself, so I became an intern with the Cumberland County CASA Program. I had no idea that this would lead to 2 years of helping out in the CASA office and an eventual career path. The opportunities I had as a CASA intern were incredible. I was able to meet CASA volunteers, sit in on trainings and assist with day-to-day operations in the office. But by far the most powerful part of my experience was the ability to observe court hearings that are otherwise closed to the public. It wasn't long before I was taking notes on court hearings by myself. My heart would pound and I would get extremely nervous hoping I was writing down the correct things so that the Court could make the difficult decision of which child gets a CASA and which has to wait because volunteer and staff resources are limited. Not to mention that it is really hard to take notes when you forget to jot information down because you are so busy listening or you are trying to frantically scribble notes through tears! One child and CASA volunteer during that two years touched my heart in a way no other ever has. The child's beautiful brown eyes were so confused during the entire proceeding, darting back and forth between all the adults in the room throughout the hearing, looking for understanding of what was going on. In the end the Dependency Court Hearing Officer asked if she had any questions and she asked, "Can I go to the

dollar store with my mommy after this?" He told her why she was not allowed—her mom had not done drug screening and her foster parents had somewhere they needed to be. She left looking confused and frustrated. It was the CASA volunteer who got down on her level after the hearing and helped her understand what had just happened and listened to her explain why it was so unfair that she could not go to the store with her mother. I always identify this as my tipping point where an internship became a career.

In the months preceding that scary day to my own college graduation, the CASA staff suggested that since I had had such an interest in CASA, I should look into getting paid to spend so much time in a CASA office! I found a position in New Jersey where I was hired as a Case Supervisor within a matter of one month. I learned a new child welfare system, because everything changes across state lines. I met a new population of clients, as going from rural Cumberland County to Atlantic City was quite a switch. I was introduced to fundraising because the program I worked for was a non-profit. I LOVED my job and soon was promoted to Program Manager. In 2008 the position for Director of Lehigh County CASA opened and the time was right for me to return to my home town of Bethlehem, PA. Once again I was thrown into a whole new system. I realized how little I had known as an intern and once again saw how much court systems change in every jurisdiction. I switched back to working for a county-funded program—only now I was in charge! I was nervous until I got a welcome email from my previous CASA director and realized I had many great resources for all the questions in the world. Cumberland County CASA will never get rid of me as their "intern"! Everyday is a learning process but we are lucky to have a great community of support from the PA CASA Association, the National CASA Association headquartered in Seattle, Washington, and the entire network of CASA Programs. Each time I introduce myself to a new class of CASA volunteers, I tell them about my journey with the CASA program, and especially about that little girl and her CASA volunteer who changed my career path.

Pooches Continue to Bring Awareness to CASA



Steve Russell rests with dogs, Sandy and Lizzi, on the Appalachian Trail.

Steve Russell, the Florida attorney highlighted in the Summer 2010 CASA Newsletter for hiking the Appalachian Trail, completed his trip on September 23, two months ahead of schedule.

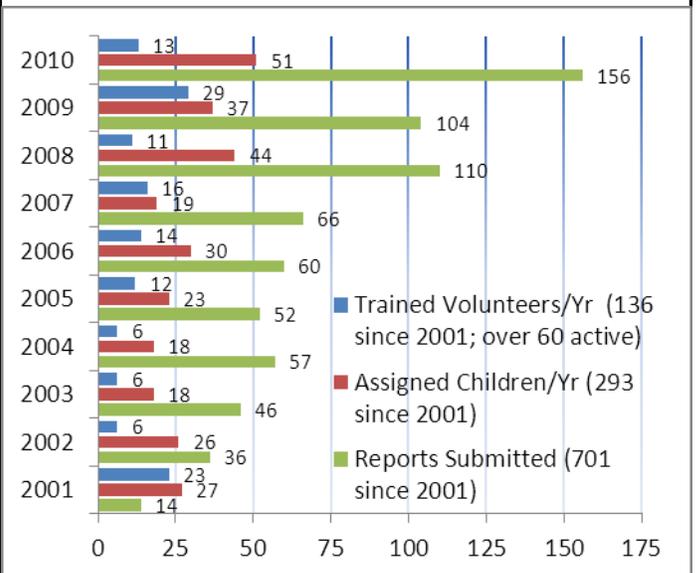
The impact of hiking on behalf of child victims of abuse and neglect was further enlarged through the efforts of Dr. Risé VanFleet, a child/family psychologist and positive therapy dog trainer in Boiling Springs.

Her article about Steve's hike and the CASA Program was featured in the September/October 2010 issue of the APDT (Association of Pet Dog Trainers) Chronicle of the Dog. Dr. VanFleet is the author of many books in the play therapy field and her book, *Play Therapy with Kids & Canines* won the Planet Dog Foundation's Sit. Speak. Act. Award for best book on service and therapy dogs in 2008.

A special **THANK YOU** to an unknown friend who returned a lost flash drive to the CASA Office following last year's PA CASA Golf Tournament. Your thoughtfulness is much appreciated.

Local Program Statistics from 2001 to 2010:

Of the children represented by CASA volunteers whose cases have closed since the CASA Program began, 91 returned home, 101 were adopted, and 18 went to live with a permanent legal custodian or a fit and willing relative. Nine children aged out of the system, 1 child died of natural causes and 2 had their cases transferred to other jurisdictions.



CASA Volunteer Basic Training

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 spring and on 5 consecutive Saturdays from 9 am to 4 pm in the fall.

Find us on Facebook 

**Cumberland County
CASA on Facebook**

To find us, search for the government page named Cumberland County CASA Program. If you “like” the page, you will then receive updates from us periodically as new items are posted.

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.