

# News & Updates from the Cumberland County CASA Program

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Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

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## MEANINGFUL CASA PARTNERSHIPS

The CASA Program took the opportunity on March 29 to recognize many of those people and organizations who have contributed to the success of the Program over the past 10 years. We wish to specifically recognize a few of them on these pages, realizing that there are many, many more folks than we can include here that have had a significant impact on the Program.

### Ten Years and Still Going

I met my first CASA volunteer in the early 1990's in New York City, where I was a foster care caseworker. That was very helpful in the impersonal child welfare system in NYC. Later I became an adoption caseworker in Cumberland County. In this role, I often had to write Child Profiles. It made my job much easier if there were CASA reports in the file. (At the time it was only with York County kids.) Shortly after I retired in 1999 I heard about the first CASA class to be offered in Cumberland County and I signed up! It is so important for children to have a person on their side whose agenda is simply their best interests. Through the years I have been associated with CASA, I have been impressed with the thorough, amazing and irreplaceable work done by the volunteers.

- Wendy Tibbetts, Class #1, March 2001



I chose this volunteer cause because I wanted to give back for the support I had as a child and when I needed help finding family members. Helping people is natural for me, which is why I chose the nursing profession and my reason for joining the CASA family. I have had 5 cases with 9 children and have learned new lessons with each. One thing that doesn't change is the need for supportive people who truly care about the children's well being. I choose to work with younger children who can't speak up for themselves, but can tell me volumes when I sit down to play dolls or a game with them or read them

a story. This helps them feel comfortable to talk and voice their fears and concerns in their own words. Then it is up to me to help the best I can with the situation, whether it takes 6 months or years. Children may have changing service providers during their dependency, but I remain the constant adult in their lives. The most rewarding part for me is being there from beginning to end. Some have been returned home or to other family members and some have been adopted. That makes all my time spent worthwhile. Plus the support of my loving husband makes it easier to continue this work.

- Carol Sprecher, Class #3, November 2001

### Judge Guido and Carl Connellan Continue to Light the Way for CASA

Judge Guido has been a champion of the CASA Program since first learning about it. As early as 1995, the idea of establishing a Program in Cumberland County was considered by the Children's Rights Committee of the Cumberland County Bar Association. After being elected in 1997, Guido along with his clerk Carl Connellan and a dedicated group of interested citizens began the arduous task of researching the means and methods of implementing such a program in the County. With financial support from the County and a grant from the National CASA Association, Anita Brewster was hired in September 2000 to direct the program, and by March 2001 the first volunteers were sworn-in.

Each year since then, the CASA Program has celebrated the training of new volunteers with a Light of Hope Celebration. In March, Judges Ed Guido and Al Masland swore in the most recent class of 7 volunteers at the Carlisle Theater. The Jones Family Singers of Harrisburg provided special music and Senator Pat Vance, Commissioner Barbara Cross, Children and Youth Administrator Wendy Hoverter, Dickinson College Assistant to the President Joyce Bylander, and others shared the importance of CASA and offered congratulations on achieving 10 years. CASA volunteers presented Anita Brewster with flowers and a CASA necklace and bracelet for her committed leadership.

Judges Guido and Masland then lit the first candles in the darkened theater as symbols of hope that the CASA concept embodies. As the light spread from person to person, Dennis Hockensmith, the executive director of PA CASA, reminded the audience of the importance of doing their part in helping children achieve a safe, permanent home. A reception provided by Kappa Alpha Theta concluded the evening.



Judge Guido also serves on the PA CASA Board and is instrumental in explaining CASA to other judges exploring the possibility of establishing programs in their counties.

## Meet the Twenty-second Corps of CASA Volunteers

**Keri Feldman** is 38 years old, the mother of 2 kids and has been married for 15 years. She has lived in Central PA for 6 years and previously lived at the beach on Hilton Head Island for 10 years. Keri is a real beach lover!! She also loves reading, knitting, scrapbooking, cooking and exercise. She considers herself rather outgoing, loves time with her girlfriends, but also takes her role as a wife and mother seriously. She is a stay-at-home mom and loves being a homemaker. Keri has been involved in volunteer work involving kids for all of her adult life and is really excited to be a part of the CASA program!

**John Gilbert** grew up in Mechanicsburg, Enola and New Cumberland. Living in foster homes from 1972 through adulthood, John entered the US Air Force after graduating Red Land High School in 1981. During 4 years in the Air Force, he trained and worked in the Security Police. After being stationed in Italy, Greece, and California, he was honorably discharged in 1985. 1986 brought John to the PA State Police Academy. Trooper Gilbert worked in Lancaster, Chambersburg, and Harrisburg before retiring. Since retirement, he is self-employed part time in flooring and tile installation. Community service is important to him. John enjoys his friends, the outdoors, computers, music, good coffee, and the guitar. He volunteers at the Oyster Mill Playhouse, building sets. He is a former member of Fairview Twp. Fire Department and a past advisor and treasurer of Boy Scouts of America, Harrisburg State Police Explorer Troop.

**Barbara Harris** grew up in Birmingham, AL, and now resides in Mechanicsburg, where she recently relocated due to her husband's job. She is a homemaker, a licensed professional counselor, and a certified geriatric care manager. Barbara has two daughters, ages 19 and 20, and has felt called to the CASA Program for at least 10 years, but timing wasn't right prior to now. She enjoys the outdoors, nature and wildlife, Bible study, and movies. She has been very blessed in her life, and had very good parents. She feels the need to give back to her community.

**Michelle Kuhlmann** and her husband were foster parents for over 4 years and have adopted two children. Her son Terry was adopted at the age of 11 and is now 14 and her daughter Raquel was also adopted at age 11 and is now 13. Michelle also has adopted/rescued several pets, currently having 4 dogs and 2 cats. She has been volunteering with an animal rescue group that saves dogs from puppy mills. She enjoys going to the gym (having recently lost 130 pounds), the movies, shopping, and out to dinner with friends and/or family, as well as watching her kids' sporting events. She and her husband recently moved to the Linglestown area from the Jersey Shore where she was born and raised. Michelle works fulltime at the DLA Distribution Center in New Cumberland, where she is the chief of the policy division in the contracting/acquisition organization.

**Heather Mayberry** works part time at Holy Spirit Hospital and recently graduated in May from Shippensburg University with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Criminal Justice and a minor in Psychology. Heather grew up in Enola and still lives there with her adorable 18-month-old daughter. She enjoys reading and being outside when it is warm. She likes scrapbooking, taking pictures, and spending time with friends and family. She loves day trips and is excited to find new places to visit.

**Kimberly Nissly** grew up around the world. She was born in Washington D.C., was adopted at 6 weeks old and spent the past 24 years of her life living in Kenya, Pakistan, Niger, Virginia and central Pennsylvania. She currently resides outside Harrisburg PA. After graduating college in 2009, she got a job as a fulltime clerk for the Dauphin County Register of Wills/Clerk of Orphans Court. In addition she works part-time for her family's cleaning business. She hopes to someday become an attorney and practice family and public interest law. When she is not working, she is a daughter to two, a sister to four, an aunt to two nieces and two nephews and a friend to many. When she reflects on her 24 years of life, she realizes that she has been quite blessed. She owes it all to her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to her two wonderful parents. Her parents are also CASA volunteers. She enjoys hanging out with family and friends, laughing, her dog Heidi, the beach and traveling. In the fall you can often Kimberly on the hockey field coaching third- and fourth-graders or on the sidelines cheering for her favorite local high school teams.

**Alison Ross** grew up in a suburb of Philadelphia and spent a number years living in center city Philadelphia. She made a huge life change recently with her husband, Jim, when they moved to an older farm in western Cumberland County. She is a historic preservationist by profession and works fulltime as an architectural historian for a local engineering firm. Her husband and she are both evangelical Christians—disciples of Jesus Christ. She has a 20-year-old stepdaughter and is a "mom" to three spoiled cats. After living out in the country now for several years, she has developed a love of gardening. She also spends a lot of time with her husband renovating their almost 200-year-old home. She dabbles in other activities when time allows, including playing the violin, painting, needlework, and photography. She also started learning horseback riding and horsemanship, with the hopes of one day owning a horse or two.



Michelle Kuhlmann, John Gilbert, Heather Mayberry, Kimberly Nissly, Barbara Harris, Keri Feldman, and Alison Ross.

### Program Statistics as of June 30, 2011:

- 143 CASA volunteers have been trained (58 active; 55 CASA Supporters)
- 304 dependent children have been represented
- 776 CASA Reports have been written, providing additional information to help the Court make decisions

Of the children represented by CASA volunteers whose cases have closed since the CASA Program began, 96 returned home, 110 were adopted, and 23 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.

### 3RD ANNUAL PA CASA GOLF CLASSIC

September 16, 2011

#### Colonial Golf and Tennis Club

4901 Linglestown Road  
Harrisburg, PA 17112

For more information go to [www.pacasa.org](http://www.pacasa.org).



## An Interview with Wanda Noll



Anita Brewster and Wanda Noll celebrated Cumberland County CASA's 5th anniversary in 2006.

*Cumberland County is privileged to have the past director of the York County CASA Program, Wanda Noll, as a mentor and role model for the establishment and ongoing operations of its own CASA Program. Whenever a question arises about how to approach anything, Judge Guido always asks, "How does York County do it?" Wanda shows the value of providing a non-adversarial, collaborative program, always centered on the best interest of the child, which values and respects everyone involved with a case. Here are excerpts of a recent interview Linda Rosenberry had with Wanda.*

### **Q: How did you first get connected with the CASA Program?**

**A:** Back in 1986 an article in the newspaper, "Court Advocates Needed for Abused Children" caught my eye. I didn't have time at that moment, but I clipped it and put it on my refrigerator, knowing that sometime it would be right. A year later, I saw another article and knew it was time. I went through the application and interview process, and after completing training in 1988, I received my first case in January 1989. Shortly after that, I was hired as a CASA Volunteer Coordinator.

### **Q: What educational or career background did you have before you got involved with CASA?**

**A:** I was in the financial world when I started as a volunteer. I took courses in criminal justice at York College, and of course, I had my life experience. I came into the work not knowing anything about child welfare or abuse, as I grew up in a loving, caring family with a lot of family support.

### **Q: How many years were you involved with CASA and in what capacity?**

**A:** I was on the staff of the CASA Program from February 1990 through April 2011, serving as a Volunteer Coordinator (1990-1994), Program Director (1994-2011) and a PA CASA founding Board member (mid-90s-2009 and 2011- ). On the PA CASA Board I served as President, and was instrumental in hiring Dennis Hockensmith as the PA CASA Association Executive Director.

### **Q: What are some of your most significant moments related to CASA that you can share?**

**A:** On the state level, I was privileged to be invited to the signing of CASA legislation by Governor Tom Ridge in 1999. At the county level, it was gratifying to have the Program validated by Commissioners and Judges when our new building was approved, blueprints drawn up, and they asked, "Wanda, what do you want?" My response was to have a safe, contained playroom for children, that was welcoming for them. How marvelous to see that dream become a reality. Last year, one of the new trainees received permission to paint a mural in the playroom. As a volunteer advocate, one of my best memories was being part of a Mennonite family gathering in their backyard in Lancaster County, where each member of the family sat in a circle and affirmed the newly adopted child that I had advocated for. One of the greatest pleasures is to have a parent come in after the case closed to ask for guidance and direction. They knew that we cared enough about them to come back. I have had adult children return also to let me know how they are doing. Valuing people, relationship building, knowing that a little bit of kindness can really make a difference—that is what is most significant.

### **Q: What are you currently doing?**

**A:** I am the Division Manager of Direct Services at the York County Office of Children, Youth and Families, where I am responsible for the oversight of all managers, supervisors, and caseworkers who provide services for the children in our agency. In that capacity I support and promote best practices initiatives that lead children to permanency.

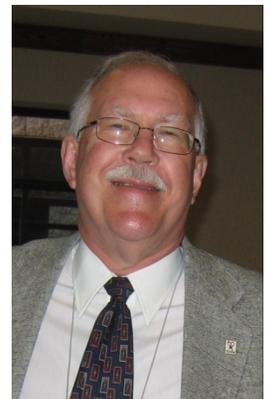
## What I Wish I Had Said

At the PA CASA conference in June, Dennis Hockensmith, Executive Director of the PA CASA Association, caught me off-guard when I was recognized for fulfilling the last of 3 terms with the PA CASA Board of Directors. I made some trite comment about the 9 years and how old we're getting, and then I heard these words come out of my mouth: "It's been fun." Fun? What a way to minimize and understate the work that goes on behind the scenes in the PA CASA office!

PA CASA's mission is "to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so they can thrive in safe, permanent homes." That simple statement translates into myriad challenges, managed and overseen by the PA CASA Association— whose staff is Dennis. Thus, Dennis often relies on a Board, which meets 4 times a year, to support him in the opportunities and challenges he and CASA face across the Commonwealth. While Dennis benefits from the support of National CASA, he expends enormous amounts of energy developing relationships to promote the CASA mission and to support or build programs. For example, the first CASA Program in PA was established in the mid-1980s. When CASA was founded in Cumberland County in 2000 by Judge Edward E. Guido, it was the 10<sup>th</sup> program in the state. In the 10 years Dennis has served as the Executive Director of the PA CASA Association, the number of programs has more than doubled, with many more programs in the developing stages.

The Board has seen Dennis jump in to mitigate crises across Pennsylvania, and has seen him strengthen programs by providing training opportunities, regional meetings, phone conferencing, and by keeping the programs connected. He also appears at as many functions, in many different counties, as is humanly possible. In Dennis' 10 years as Executive Director, he has kept PA CASA on course with visionary prowess, with a little help from Board members and many other supporters whom he is quick to lavish praise upon.

What I wish I had said would have been along the lines of: "The main reason I served 9 years on the Board is because of Dennis' leadership, and his faith in the human spirit". In my 9 years as a Board member, I've lost track of members who have come and gone, of events and opportunities we've had, and of achievements that trace back to Dennis' visions. Sometimes, being on the Board has been fun! But more often, it has been hard work, with a constant and unwavering leader called Dennis.



## CASA Volunteer Training

**FALL 2011:**

**SEPTEMBER 17 - OCTOBER 29**

(generally Saturdays from 9:00 to 4:00, in Carlisle)

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](mailto:casa@ccpa.net)**. More information can also be found at [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.

Training is held over 5 weeks in Carlisle on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 pm in the spring and on 5 Saturdays from 9 am to 4 pm in the fall.

Find us on Facebook 

**Cumberland County  
CASA Program**

## 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](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).