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**NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION LAUNCHES NEW FOSTER YOUTH PROGRAM WITH THE SUPPORT
OF THE WAL-MART FOUNDATION**

*Fostering Futures, a New Program Developed by National CASA, Helps Older Foster Youth
Transition From Foster Care to Successful, Independent Adults*

SEATTLE (June 30, 2009) – To help address the unique challenges faced by older foster youth, the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association has developed a new program for its national network of nearly 70,000 volunteer child advocates, titled *Fostering Futures*. The Wal-Mart Foundation has recognized the value of *Fostering Futures* with a \$1.6 million grant to develop and launch the program in 2009. Funding from the Wal-Mart Foundation allows National CASA to support local CASA and GAL program efforts to recruit, train and retain volunteers to work with older youth.

Each year, an estimated 25,000 young people between the ages of 16 to 21 are legally required to emancipate – or age out – from the foster care system. Aging out of foster care without a life plan or preparation puts these vulnerable youths at great risk. These risks include homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, criminal involvement and Mental health issues.

Youth older than age 13 are far less likely to be adopted and more likely to age out of the foster care system with little or no adult support. *Fostering Futures* will engage CASA and Guardian ad Litem (GAL) volunteers as advocates for and advisors to foster youth ages 13 – 21, with the goal of helping them develop specific transition plans, identify supportive adult connections, and achieve positive outcomes once they transition out of foster care.

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“In all of our giving efforts, we strive to meet the unmet needs of underserved populations, and we simply could not overlook the needs of vulnerable foster youth,” says Margaret A. McKenna, President, Wal-Mart Foundation. “We are happy to support National CASA’s *Fostering Futures* program and to help these young people transition successfully into becoming productive adults.”

“We are grateful to the Wal-Mart Foundation for helping us launch our *Fostering Futures* program this year,” says Michael Piraino, CEO of the National CASA Association. “These older youth need the advocacy and support of CASA volunteers to prepare them for an effective transition and positive outcomes in early adulthood. *Fostering Futures* positions us to help achieve this promise of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.” National CASA worked hard to help secure this important federal legislation which includes the option for states to receive federal support if they elect to extend foster care to age 21. By extending the length of possible stays in care, the Act gives these young people more time to plan for their futures and to access specific resources to help them achieve their goals.

“I am pleased that the Wal-Mart Foundation has chosen to generously support *Fostering Futures*”, says Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA), Chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support and sponsor of the Fostering Connections to Success Act. “This collaboration between National CASA and the Wal-Mart Foundation will provide some real help to youths in foster care who face being pushed out of the system on their 18th birthday.”

For more information about National CASA’s *Fostering Futures* program, contact Jim Clune at jclune@nationalcasa.org. To learn more about National CASA, and how you can help create a hopeful future for a youth in foster care, please visit www.CASAfor Children.org.

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About National CASA

In 1977 a Seattle judge, concerned over making decisions about abused and neglected children's lives without sufficient information, conceived the idea of using trained community volunteers to speak for their safety and wellbeing, and to help them find safe and permanent homes where they can thrive. So successful was this program, that judges across the country began utilizing citizen advocates. Today, almost 1,000 CASA/GAL offices operate in 49 states, with more than 70,000 men and women serving as CASA/GAL volunteers.

About the Wal-Mart Foundation