

THE POWERFUL VOICE!

News for champions of CASA children

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2 — FALL 2005

By the Numbers—2004

CASA Network Services

Following are service levels provided by the 954 CASA and volunteer guardian ad litem (GAL) program offices throughout the country in 2004:

- Volunteers recruited, trained, supervised and supported by CASA programs.....50,801
- Abused and neglected children served188,620

Note: Thanks to a substantial increase in CASA and GAL program participation in the National CASA annual local program survey, we have much more complete and accurate data this year. The numbers are lower than previous projections, but our network grew between 2003 and 2004. National CASA's growing ability to report key national statistics accurately should be credited to our network and its commitment to providing us thorough local program information.

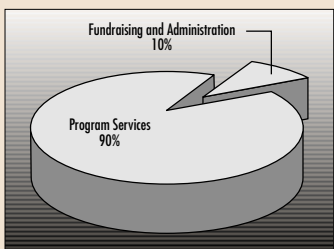
National CASA Services

The following numbers help to quantify the services provided by National CASA to our member programs nationwide in 2004:

- Local programs' requests for technical assistance completed by phone/email36,886
- Technical assistance publications/documents distributed.....39,831
- In-person technical assistance visits (in addition to trainings)104
- Number of grants awarded to local and state CASA programs351
- Dollar amount of grants awarded to local and state CASA programs \$9,189,332
- Training sessions sponsored or presented.....146
- Persons trained3,702
- Number of visitor sessions on casanet.org and nationalcasa.org1,092,604

Use of Funding

We are proud of the fact that of every dollar we receive, 90 cents goes directly to our program work. Your support makes it possible to pursue our goal of providing a CASA volunteer for every abused child who needs one. We sincerely appreciate



your continued dedication to the National CASA Association and to making a lifelong difference for children.



“The CASA program is so important to the welfare of these children. It provides safety, security and oversight to their cases—but most of all, it provides stability and a person who is with that child and for that child every step of the way. It is both an honor and a privilege to be a part of the CASA program.”

—Elaine Flaherty, Volunteer Advocate, Pima County Juvenile Court CASA Program, Tucson, AZ

My CASA Journey— Seeing First-Hand the Power of Volunteer Advocacy



—Bill Corwin, National CASA Chief Development Officer

Our supporters have various degrees of familiarity with CASA programs, but they are united by a belief in the need for CASA and in the effectiveness of our volunteers in bettering the lives of abused and neglected children. My experiences as a CASA volunteer and as an attorney for children have shown me first-hand that those beliefs are very well grounded.

My first experience with CASA was as a volunteer. I was an advocate for two girls, ages 4 and 6, and was amazed to see how little the other people in the child welfare system knew about these children and their needs. I was also a bit surprised by the initial reaction of the older girl upon first meeting me: she rolled her eyes and said wearily, “Oh God, not another one!” I was just another strange adult coming into her life; given her past experience, she was justifiably skeptical that I would be there if and when she needed me. I visited the girls weekly during the three years I was their advocate and worked with their social worker and attorney (who never met his two clients) to ensure that the children's best interests were served by the system.

Later, as a children's attorney in that same system, I relied heavily on the information and insights of the CASA volunteers assigned to my clients. The volunteers

regularly provided otherwise unknown information and valuable recommendations that were crucial to creating good outcomes for these children in court. Out of court, we were allies in our attempts to get the educational, medical and other services needed to give the children a true chance to succeed and thrive. Often the consistency and dedication of the volunteers provided the only piece of constancy and stability in lives that faced frequent and unpredictable changes in placements, schools and daycare. The volunteers' commitment to these children was inspiring.

From there, I went on to stints at two CASA programs in California as program director. This led to service on the National CASA board of directors and ultimately to my current role on the staff.

CASA has the broad support of judges, children's attorneys and many others involved in child welfare for a very simple reason: it works. And it works in a system where there is a tremendous need for help. I am fortunate to have seen first-hand how the work of a CASA volunteer can dramatically change a child's life from one marked by chaos and despair to one marked by stability and hope.

The support of individuals, companies, foundations and government plays a truly critical role in our ability to lead and support the entire CASA network. Your help enables us to pursue our long-term goal of providing a CASA volunteer to every child who needs one. On behalf of the children we serve, thank you for your investment in our work. ■



—Superior Court Judge Leonard Edwards of San Jose, California

Judge Speaks From the Heart About the Value of CASA Programs

When “Rita” came into my courtroom, she was angry at the social worker and angry at the world. She didn't trust anyone. Her parents were out of her life, and at 16 she had nowhere to turn. I appointed a CASA volunteer to speak on her behalf and changes started happening. The advocate became the only consistent person in Rita's life as the social worker was reassigned. She helped Rita find a foster home and then persuaded me, in spite of Rita's anger and record of failing in placements, that this home would work. Based on the volunteer's recommendation, I placed Rita in this new foster home.

Now several years later, Rita is completing college, has a job and is a self-assured young woman. She is still a close friend with the CASA volunteer, who continues to provide support and serve as a role model. I am certain that without the appointment of the CASA volunteer Rita would be homeless, in an unhealthy relationship or in jail. The work of the volunteers in our court system has resulted in many similar happy endings for children. They truly help the judge, the court process and most of all the children they speak for.

The volunteers in CASA's national network are recruited, trained and supervised by excellent staff members in local programs. And in turn, CASA programs and staff receive valuable support, guidance and training from the National CASA Association. I am very impressed with the leadership of National CASA and the tools that National CASA provides the network to expand much-needed advocacy for abused and neglected children.

National CASA provides valuable help to judges as well. *The Judges' Page* on the nationalcasa.org website keeps judges informed about such vital issues as parental substance abuse, family violence and educational advocacy, and National CASA's *Judges' Guide to CASA/GAL Program Development* provides a wealth of information to judges about how to start a new program or support an existing one. It is gratifying to see the difference CASA volunteers make for so many children. National CASA plays a tremendous role in making that possible. ■

Editor's Note: Judge Edwards received the 2004 William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence, the first family court judge to be so honored. He is also past President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and a former board member of the National CASA Association. He now serves on National CASA's Advisory Board. Part of this article was originally printed in *Juvenile and Family Justice TODAY*, a publication of the NCJFCJ.

The National CASA Association
Phone: (800) 628-3233
staff@nationalcasa.org
nationalcasa.org

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Electronic Learning and Educational Advocacy

Did you know that foster youth face the following challenges?

- They are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school.
- They are significantly underrepresented in post-secondary programs.
- 35-40% of foster youth are in special education programs.

One million American children are confirmed victims of abuse and neglect each year, and over half a million are in foster care. The child welfare system is often too overburdened and overwhelmed to make sure that the needs and interests of these children are addressed. Making certain that CASA volunteers are equipped to advocate for these children is of utmost importance.

To that end, National CASA is creating its first web-based training on the topic of educational issues and advocacy. Electronic learning (e-learning) affords CASA volunteers the benefit of training opportunities offered via the internet.

The purpose of educational advocacy is to better meet the specific educational needs of foster youth. Educational advocacy is for parents, advocates

and others concerned about a child's education. It entails identifying children with potential needs and accessing services to meet those needs.

For most children, parents serve as the squeaky wheel to which school personnel respond. But who plays that role for a child in the foster care system? CASA volunteers can influence the school system by interviewing school personnel to get their perspective on the child. With over 50,000 CASA volunteers serving nearly 200,000 children, it makes sense for these caring adults to help a child find a successful route through the educational system and beyond. While the role of the official education advocate for a foster child is often dictated by statute or local policy, the CASA volunteer can, at the very least, "speak up" to ensure that someone is assigned to this role and then work with that person as appropriate.

CASA volunteers will benefit from the e-learning series by having on-demand, low-cost access to the training they need to advocate for their assigned children's educational needs. The ultimate benefit will be improved academic performance, fewer grades repeated and higher graduation rates among foster youth. ■

Leadership Matching Gift Campaign Funds Recruitment of Diverse Volunteers

With your help and generosity, we were able to match the gifts made by National CASA board members and staff last holiday season, turning \$40,000 into more than \$80,000 to benefit abused children. The funds will be used to recruit a more diverse corps of volunteers serving in our network of local CASA programs.

Why is diversity important? We need people from *all* walks of life involved in CASA—whether as volunteers, staff members, board members, donors or members—in order to provide vital volunteer advocacy for *all* of the children who need us. People of color are underrepresented as volunteers in particular. For example, 27% of the children we serve are African-Americans, compared with only 12% of our volunteers. For Hispanic children and volunteers, the percentages are 11% and 4%, respectively. We have made progress in recent years recruiting more volunteers from these populations, but a concentrated effort is needed to further increase the number of Hispanic volunteers and African-American men in particular.

Activities made possible by last holiday season's campaign are going into high gear this fall. For example, a Hispanic recruitment video will begin production soon. The video and other new tools will be distributed to the entire CASA network early next year. ■

Before I met my CASA, Kim, I was failing all my classes and was not expected to graduate on time. Kim immediately started to help me with my education. She would make sure I was doing my homework and studying. ...In my second semester, I passed my English class with an A. I wish you could have seen Kim's expression when I gave her the good news.



My CASA volunteer not only helped with my education, she would always call me to see how I was doing. Because of her, I got to see my sisters more often than I had before. That showed me that Kim was really there for me and cared about my happiness.

—Karla Sanchez, excerpted from *Someone There for Me: Everyday Heroes Through the Eyes of Teens in Foster Care*, © 2004 by the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association; published by CWLA Press.

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Legacy Circle Benefits Children Far Into Future

Our Legacy Circle includes friends and supporters who have expressed their intention to include National CASA in their estate plans. By remembering the National CASA Association in your will or trust, you leave a lasting legacy for future generations of children in need. If you have not already done so, we hope you will consider becoming a member of this special group.

For more information about joining National CASA's Legacy Circle, please contact Heather Nist at (800) 628-3233 ext. 267 or heather@nationalcasa.org. ■

The National CASA Association, together with its state and local members, supports and promotes court appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so that they can thrive in safe, permanent homes.

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