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Forgotten Children Campaign Stands Up for Foster Children

This spring, National CASA staged a week long event in Washington, DC, that vividly illustrated just how many children in this country need someone to speak in their interest.

It started on Monday, May 19, when DC residents, visitors, legislators, and representatives of the national press woke to find that 850 life-size cutouts of kids had suddenly appeared on the lawn in front of the Washington Monument. In following days more were added, until by Friday there were 4,250, representing the number of children who would enter foster care over the course of the event; every year, some 300,000 children enter the system.

Six versions of the cutouts indicated the diversity of children in foster care. Each of the children depicted held a placard bearing a message obtained from a national focus group study of current foster youth—messages like “Yo confio en la gente que me escucha” (“I trust the people who listen to me”); “8 foster homes”; and “CASA is there for our children” in Dena’ina, an Alaskan native language.

Set against one of the great iconic representations of our national unity and sense of purpose, this kickoff to the

National CASA Association’s *Forgotten Children* campaign made for a compelling effect—and garnered exactly the sort of attention that needs to be paid. The event was covered nearly 200 times on television and radio and in print, reaching an audience of nearly 5 million. Volunteer inquiries via nationalcasa.org rose by 58% during those five days, and many local offices reported a similar effect.

We were helped immensely in drawing media interest by the participation of some very effective spokespersons. As the chief presiding judge of one of the largest juvenile court systems in the country, television star and author Glenda Hatchett was able to explain with authority the unique value of our CASA/GAL volunteers, both to the courts and to the children we serve. Danny Pino of CBS’s *Cold Case* opened the event with a satellite media tour, conducted at the site, which resulted in 120 airings nationwide. And Dr. Phil and Robin McGraw, bestselling authors and hosts of the daytime talk show *Dr. Phil*, signed on as official spokespersons of our upcoming national campaign (see sidebar).

Also speaking out for kids were Rep. Jim McDermott of Washington, Rep. Dennis Cardoza of California, and the Freddie



National CASA is pleased to welcome Dr. Phil and Robin McGraw as official spokespersons for our national *Forgotten Children* campaign. As part of their efforts, they plan to air a number of shows and segments over the next year highlighting the needs of foster children and the work of CASA programs.

Each *Dr. Phil* airing reaches upwards of 4 million viewers and drphil.com receives more than 40 million hits a week, so this is a remarkable opportunity to raise awareness in millions of households. “With Dr. Phil and Robin’s support,” says National CASA CEO Michael Piraino, “we hope the *Forgotten Children* campaign will make National CASA the most well-known child advocacy organization in the country.”

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—*Forgotten Children Campaign continued*

Mac Foundation’s chairman and CEO, Ralph Boyd Jr., who said it all: “Year after year, the National CASA Association has inspired individuals to volunteer as advocates for children who need help getting into permanent, loving homes.”

Of course, a large-scale event requires significant material support and hard work. Volunteers from the Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia CASA programs set up, guarded, and took down the display—and offered powerful testimony to the many people who stopped to inquire. Event sponsors included the Dr. Phil Foundation, the Freddie Mac Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Hewitt Associates, and FosterClub.

But that’s not the end of it. The *Forgotten Children* campaign will continue throughout the next year, helping to raise awareness of CASA programs across the nation. Several local offices have already expressed interest in bringing this truly “moving” display to their communities.



Rep. Jim McDermott of Washington embraces the issue.

—*Dr. Phil continued*

The couple has a longstanding interest in improving the lives of foster children. Dr. Phil worked with foster children in the Texas court system, and he and Robin have addressed these children’s particular needs through show segments and through the work of the Dr. Phil Foundation.

There are currently only enough CASA volunteers to help half the children and youth in our nation’s family court system. “When Phillip and I heard that,” Robin says, “we knew we had to lend our support to raise awareness and attract more volunteers.”

Forgotten Children Exhibit Sponsors

The National CASA Association gratefully acknowledges the Dr. Phil Foundation and the Freddie Mac Foundation, Title Sponsors of the *Forgotten Children* exhibit in Washington, DC. We also thank Casey Family Programs, Hewitt Associates and individual donors for their generous support of *Forgotten Children*.



Partner Spotlight: Jewelers for Children Awards \$1 Million to National CASA

Amidst the over-the-top opulence of the Venetian, the famous Las Vegas casino renowned for its gondolas and gilt, the last thing you’d expect to find is someone looking to *give* money away. But there they were on June 30: 1,800 people representing the jewelry industry—retailers, manufacturers, watch companies, and trade associations—gathered together to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Jewelers for Children (JFC) and the millions of dollars it has distributed to incredibly deserving nonprofits over the years. Thanks to the hard work and generosity of its underwriters and other members of the industry, Jewelers for Children has distributed over \$28 million to charities since 1999.

National CASA is grateful to count itself among JFC’s beneficiaries—and this year we are very excited to have been awarded,

once again, a \$1 million grant. Since 2003, through its Champions for Abused Children Initiative, JFC has contributed \$5.3 million to increase the number of children served nationally by CASA programs through training and support of CASA volunteers. This past year, more than 70 local CASA programs are receiving funds from a \$1 million grant.

At this year’s awards event, called Facets of Hope, former foster youth Kiaya Combs (pictured here with her CASA volunteer, Jane Hegstrom, who accompanied her to Las Vegas) eloquently expressed her personal thanks to JFC: “Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak for kids all over the country whose lives are better because of your support.”



JEWELERS FOR CHILDREN
A GIFT OF LOVE FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

Gas Prices: Going the Extra Mile for Foster Kids

As drivers reel from sticker shock at the pump, nonprofits are feeling the pinch too. From youth sports leagues to meals-on-wheels programs, tens of thousands of organizations rely on vans and buses to provide services. But while their transportation budgets are stretched, they do have budgets—and a highly visible need on which to base special appeals to their supporters.

Not so for many local CASA programs, whose volunteers pay for travel out of their own pockets. In order to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children, they have to be the eyes and ears of the court—and they can rack up a lot of miles doing it.

Volunteer advocates visit government and social service agencies, schools, caregiver homes and homes of origin, among other destinations. Particularly in suburban and rural locales, many volunteers drive

hundreds of miles each month in pursuit of the best outcome for foster children.

This summer National CASA put together a publicity and fundraising package called the “Extra-Mile Club,” which local program offices can use to alert their communities to the problem. It includes direct-response pieces targeting corporate partners and major donors, a press release and a news article, all of which can be customized.

We have already received positive feedback from many local programs on the “Extra-Mile Club” toolkit. One program officer wrote, “Our volunteers are absolutely wonderful, but none of them are rich. And you are right, they would never ask for help. We plan to begin this brilliant initiative as soon as we possibly can.”

To find out how you can help CASA volunteers go the extra mile, call Kris Gonzales at 800-628-3233, ext. 265.

Giving Corner



Many friends have made improving the lives of children part of their long-range plans by including National CASA in their wills or trusts. Such bequests help us ensure that all children in need have a CASA volunteer on their side. For more information, please contact Michelle Finet, director of donor relations, at 800-628-3233, ext. 267 or michelle@nationalcasa.org.

Forgotten Children Exhibit: More images from the National CASA event in Washington, D.C.



Right: Former foster youth invited passersby to show their support.



Right: An enthusiastic group of LexisNexis employees were among the volunteers who helped bring messages from America's forgotten children to the Mall.



Above: On day 2, Judge Glenda Hatchett visited the event and later helped spread the word about America's forgotten children during interviews with radio, television and newspaper reporters.

Pictured at right: Rep. Jim McDermott (WA) addressed the crowd at the event. He is accompanied at the podium by National CASA CEO Michael Piraino, Rep. Dennis Cardoza (CA) and Ralph Boyd Jr., CEO of the Freddie Mac Foundation, an event sponsor.



Foundation News: The Hearst Foundations Support Technology and Volunteer Recruitment

A new grant from The Hearst Foundations will support strategic initiatives to enable National CASA to reach our goal of serving 300,000 children by 2009. The grant focuses on two areas: First, the CASA Connects technology project will provide resources and promote best practices among volunteers across the country. Second, the development of a new training

curriculum will support local programs' ability to recruit, train and manage more volunteers. The Hearst Foundations have previously supported National CASA through our Urban Initiative, which significantly increased the capacity of CASA programs to serve more children in the nation's largest metropolitan areas.



Donor Profile: A Triple Blessing for CASA Supporters

Like thousands of other foster parents, Bill and Christine Stransky can tell you the exact day they first heard of CASA. For the Wharton, Texas, couple, it was May 29, 2001—when Renee Lukefahr, the Matagorda County office’s volunteer supervisor, showed up on their doorstep, part of a mini-caravan bringing the first two of young triplets they would foster parent and later adopt. Of course, in all the commotion, the affiliation hardly registered.

“We got a call at noon,” Christine remembers, “and Sarah and Elizabeth arrived that evening at 5:30.” The intervening hours had been filled with nonstop activity. The Stranskys were new to foster parenting and had no experience raising younger children, so they’d requested that any children placed with them be aged four to nine, and set up their house accordingly. But two nineteen-month-old girls were in immediate need.

After quickly conferring with Bill by phone, Christine called back the girls’ caseworker and took the first step toward creating a new family: “We’ll figure something out.” She and a friend spent the afternoon frantically preparing for the toddlers—who, as soon as they arrived “with one change of clothes and a stuffed animal for each,” began running circuits around the house. Christine recalls Renee crying, and explaining, “This is the first time I’ve heard those kids laughing like that.”

The girls—and their brother Nicholas, who rejoined them on October 1, ten days before their second birthday—had been through a lot. Showing signs of neglect,

The Stransky Family

From right to left: Elizabeth, Christine, Nicholas, Bill, Sarah; in front, Thumper (golden retriever) and Sassy. Not pictured: Tiger Lily, cat, Starr, dog, and two foster dogs, Leila and Brady.



they were less than two months old when first removed from their original home, and by the time they met the Stranskys they’d each spent half their lives in foster care. In coming years they would show physical and mental effects of their experience; all of them would end up requiring some kind of therapy.

Bill and Christine fell in love with them immediately and were soon eager to adopt. It was a long process, though, and there were complications. Luckily, both Renee and Matagorda County CASA volunteer Sherry Smith were on hand. Christine is no slouch when it comes to investigating and navigating the system—she’s an assiduous keeper of notebooks—but the children’s CASA volunteers were “tremendously helpful” in explaining the laws and process and helping to resolve the issues. Finally, in September 2002, there was an open adoption.

The children are now thriving. They’ve all been on the honor roll since they started school and are each making plans for the

future at the ripe age of eight. Elizabeth, who loves animals as much as she loves dancing, is going to be a veterinarian. Sarah, who also studies dance as well as drawing and writing stories, wants to be a teacher. Nicholas is going to be a professional football player—but he does have a backup plan: coach. They’re a big help in Bill and Christine’s animal-rescue work (when we talked, the family was boarding five dogs and a cat: “It’s a three-ring circus!”) when they’re not practicing with their swim team or putting on shows.

Christine has no illusions, though, about the future. “In a few years they’re going to hit puberty, and angst, and there’ll be questions” about how they ended up with the Stranskys, and what went on before. “But kids are smart, and they’re going to see that it was a good thing.” Christine knows it’s all part of God’s plan. At National CASA, we’re glad to have been part of it—and proud to count Bill and Christine Stransky as supporters, since 2001.

All-State Legal Holiday Cards Help Foster Children



All-State Legal (ASL), a trusted stationery and legal specialties provider, is supporting our nation’s foster children by donating 50% of its proceeds from eight selected holiday card designs to National CASA. Visit nationalcasa.org and click “Partners” to order your cards. Purchase cards by November 7 for early shopper reward pricing.





A Modest Investment: A Message from CEO Michael Piraino

“Even if the children we served last year end up spending an average of one month less in foster care than they would have otherwise, that would mean a savings of \$582 million—and I’m comfortable saying that we’re talking about a lot more than one month.”

Every CASA volunteer and everyone who supports CASA’s work knows we’re in this because it’s right to be. We believe that each abused or neglected child deserves to have someone who is trained to get to know them, speak up for them, and push for the best possible outcome. The work, and the support, come from the heart.

But these are remarkably uncertain times. People are worried by everything from the cost of gas to economic indicators that once seemed abstract. Businesses are nervous, and the decisions of charitable foundations on where to put their dollars have become harder than ever. I think it’s the right time to make a hard headed economic argument for the value of CASA’s mission.

There are roughly 800,000 children in foster care annually, at an estimated cost to taxpayers of \$2,396 per month per child; last year, we served 243,000. Now, as you read on, keep in mind two things: (1) CASA volunteers are generally called in on the most serious cases of maltreatment, meaning they speak for the sort of kids who are much more frequently placed in foster care, remain there longer, and, if they leave the system, are most likely

to reenter it. (2) It costs only \$80 per month to provide a CASA volunteer.

That’s a very modest investment compared to the cost of keeping a child in foster care for another month. So let’s look at the return on that investment.

We’re in an area where the messy details of individual lives dissolve into mass statistics, and I’m not sure it’s possible with current data to calculate exactly how much money is saved through CASA’s efforts. Still, studies suggest that the savings are significant.

Consider these findings from a December 2006 U.S. Department of Justice audit of CASA: 13.3% of all foster children remain in care more than three years, as opposed to 5.5% of children with a CASA volunteer; of the general foster care population, 16% end up reentering the system, while the figure for kids served by CASA is below 10%. Even if the children we served last year end up spending an average of one month less in foster care than they would have otherwise, that would mean a savings of \$582 million—and I’m comfortable saying that we’re talking about a lot more than one month.

What’s more, the long-run savings are potentially enormous. A September 2007 study by Prevent Child Abuse America estimates the annual cost of child abuse and neglect is a staggering \$103.8 billion—with about one-third in direct costs (hospitalization, mental health care, child welfare services, law enforcement) and the remainder in indirect costs incurred over the course of shattered lives: special education, juvenile delinquency, mental health and health care, the adult criminal justice system, and lost productivity. I think the figure is conservative, but it would take the rest of this newsletter to go over these and other calculations.

Over the coming year and beyond there’s going to be a lot of debate in this country and soul-searching in every household over where to place our resources. Even setting aside—for the moment—all the reasons of the heart, there’s a compelling case to be made that investing in these children (and supporting CASA) is the sort of sound economic policy that we should all be able to agree on.

Conference Sponsors

National CASA thanks our generous 2008 conference sponsors. We appreciate your commitment to improving the lives of abused and neglected children.



Mission Statement

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.

Diversity Statement

The National CASA Association believes that embracing diversity and inclusiveness strengthens the status of children and their families and that it is vital to achieving the organization’s vision, mission and development initiatives.

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

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What Do Children Who Have Been Removed from Their Families Want?

They want to go home. In National CASA's 2007 annual report, you'll meet a family whose desire to be together was greater than the challenges that separated them. Melissa Vigil made some bad choices starting at an early age, all of which led to her losing custody of her four kids. How did she manage to turn her life around and successfully reunite her family? We can't tell the whole story here, but we will



say that it includes two determined and compassionate CASA volunteers.

To read Melissa's story and to learn more about National CASA's 2007 accomplishments, view our annual report online at nationalcasa.org. To receive a copy by mail call 800-628-3233 or email michelle@nationalcasa.org.

How your contributions are spent

As a donor to the National CASA Association, you can take pride in being part of one of the leading volunteer organizations serving abused and neglected children. You can also be assured that your gift is used efficiently, with more than 90% going directly to program services such as funding, training and technical assistance to CASA and GAL programs.

