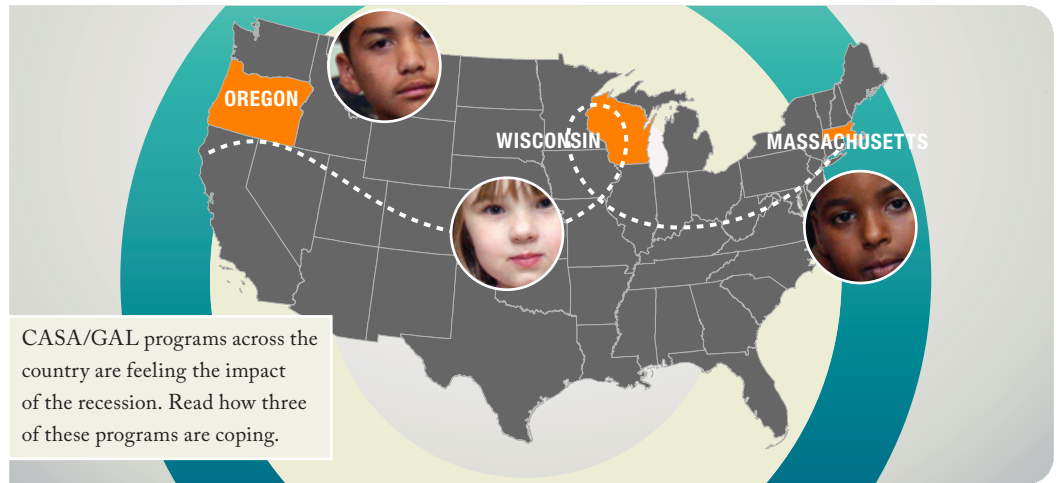


Mission Statement

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.



CASA/GAL programs across the country are feeling the impact of the recession. Read how three of these programs are coping.

Help in Troubled Times: National CASA bridge grants support programs hurt by the recession

A year ago, CASA/GAL programs around the country started trimming budgets as the long economic slide began. The easy stuff went first: no more staff meeting snacks or pizza lunch meetings. No more office coffee or filtered water.

One by one, many of the 1,018 local programs in the National CASA network started to face a painful new reality. Revenue streams they had worked so hard to cultivate and grow—public funding, foundation money, corporate sponsorship and private donations—were slowing to a trickle or completely drying up. At the same time, programs began to brace for a spike in the number of children who would need CASA volunteers as the economy squeezed families out of homes and parents beyond their ability to cope.

Deeper, more painful cuts were necessary by winter. Vacant jobs went unfilled. Newsletters went electronic to save on postage. Only the most necessary office supplies were restocked. Programs reconfigured themselves to become leaner.

Even in the face of devastating shortfalls, however, the one thing no program is willing to compromise is support to volunteers who serve kids. In every region, CASA/GAL staff members have made

tremendous personal sacrifices in order to keep doing what CASA programs do: giving kids in foster care a voice so they can find safe, permanent homes.

This spring, National CASA offered bridge grants to help the most vulnerable programs survive the recession. Thirty-two programs received a total of just over \$1 million in assistance, with individual grants ranging from \$8,500 to \$40,000.

Following is a snapshot of how three programs in different regions are coping with the recession and using the much-needed support from National CASA.

Eugene, OR: Finding the Silver Lining



CASA of Lane County staff members

“We’re all here because we’re committed to the mission,” says Megan Shultz, executive director of CASA of Lane County, OR. “People are willing to make sacrifices for as long as they personally can in order to keep serving kids.”

Continued on page 2

Standing Up for Foster Kids from Sea to Shining Sea: The *Forgotten Children Campaign*

One morning not long ago, 385 life-sized figures of kids—each one holding a message from a foster child—appeared in front of the courthouse in Twin Falls, ID. They were standing in for the 385 very real kids represented by the Fifth Judicial District CASA Program—kids whose voices are being heard and whose lives are being changed by CASA volunteers.

Some 530 miles away in Denver, 750 of the figures turned up in Civic Center Park on the first morning of the National CASA Annual Conference. The figures provided a backdrop for a high-profile media event and then stood silent vigil for 72 hours, giving passers-by an unforgettable visual reminder of the 7,500 Colorado children living in foster care on any given day.

More than 100 local CASA/GAL programs in 34 states are staging

Continued on page 5

And they have made sacrifices. In January, every staff member took a 20% cut in work hours and salary. Another reorganization in March further reduced hours and salaries for some staff members.

As she struggles with the economic challenges, Shultz says, she is trying to “embrace change”—even painful change—because it brings opportunity. “Some of the things we’re doing to save money now will make us stronger in the future,” she says.

In April, CASA of Lane County received a piece of good news: The program received a bridge grant of \$40,000 from National CASA. The money will help Shultz bring staffing levels closer to normal, which will allow the program to recruit and train volunteers next year and continue to take on new cases. That goes a long way toward fulfilling the program’s goal of making fiscally responsible decisions while holding the kids out of harm’s way, says Shultz. Still, the uncertainty is stressful. “I feel like we’re standing on shifting sands,” she says. “I just hope we’re all still standing when [the recession] is over.”

Janesville, WI: Focus on Volunteers

If Shultz is standing on shifting sands in Oregon, Wanda Diderich, program director of CASA of Rock County, WI, is at the center of an avalanche.

A General Motors assembly plant in Janesville closed in December, taking down many small businesses that it supported.

Unemployment in some parts of the county soared to 17%.

The ripple effects hit CASA of Rock County hard. With so many people out of work, allocations from workplace giving programs dropped off. Business support disappeared. Worst of all, Diderich began to lose volunteers just when the faltering economy seemed to be driving more kids into the local child welfare system. “People need to feed their families,” says Diderich, “and right now many can’t make the intense commitment we ask them to make.”

In response, Diderich and her only staff member, a half-time volunteer coordinator, focused resources on taking care of loyal volunteers and recruiting new ones.

By spring, CASA of Rock County had just one option left to cut its budget: to cut personnel. Diderich feared that to do so might cripple the program’s ability to serve kids. To prevent that, National CASA awarded the program a \$40,000 bridge grant, giving Diderich hope for the first time in a long while.

The grant money will “take some of the pressure off so we can perform our role of recruiting, training and supporting volunteers,” says Diderich. “If we’re taking good care of volunteers, then they’re providing good advocacy for the kids we serve.”

Lawrence, MA: Cutting to the Bone

The Massachusetts state budget, which, as of this writing, is winding its way through the legislature, is missing an important line item: Northern Essex County CASA (NEC-CASA). Unless supporters can convince legislators to add it back in, NEC-CASA faces a budget shortfall of 45%, says Lori Howe, development director for Family

Service, Inc., the program’s umbrella organization.

While NEC-CASA’s private fundraising has steadily increased for the past few years,



Northern Essex County CASA program staff from left to right: Joanne Lewis, senior coordinator of volunteers; Ana Rivera, coordinator of volunteers; and Connie Ricketts, program coordinator

Howe notes, “we can’t compensate for a massive loss in public funding with private funding in one year.” Especially this year.

As a consequence, NEC-CASA staff members will get a little extra time off this summer—unpaid. “Morale is okay right now because everybody understands what’s going on in the economy,” says Howe. Any deeper cuts, however, would likely damage the core of the program. “In a worst-case scenario, we would have to reduce staff to the point where we wouldn’t be able to recruit or train volunteers or take on new cases,” she says, which would inflict long-term damage on the program.

A \$40,000 bridge grant from National CASA is a welcome relief, enabling NEC-CASA to keep its staff intact. That means that while kitchen provisions and office supplies may be scarce, support to volunteers will not.

Giving Corner: Why give a little bit to National CASA every month?



Ken & Susan (Skip) Pollock, volunteers and donors, Maricopa County CASA, Phoenix, AZ

“As CASA volunteers, we see youngsters struggling through the foster care system, and we witness firsthand what it means for them to be given a voice in court. The National CASA Association provides valuable support and advocacy for CASA programs throughout the country. Our small, monthly contribution is a virtually painless way to provide consistent, effective and, in the long run, significant support to this valuable organization. In other words, we can do good for National CASA without needing Post-it notes as constant reminders—priceless!”

To become a monthly donor contact Alexa Heaverlo at 800-628-3233 ext. 263 or alexa@nationalcasa.org.

National CASA Conference: Taking advocacy to a higher level

CASA/GAL volunteers and program staff who attended the 28th annual National CASA Conference in Denver April 25–28 took part in an exciting 72-hour, 360-degree learning experience. The nearly 1,500 participants from the nationwide CASA/GAL network embodied the conference theme, “Taking Advocacy to a Higher Level.” Over the course of three days, they gained skills and soaked up information—and inspiration—from child welfare professionals, foster youth, judges, National CASA staff members and, most importantly, each other.

Dr. Phil and Robin McGraw, spokespeople for National CASA’s *Forgotten Children* campaign, addressed conference participants at the opening luncheon, pledging their personal support for the CASA network, reiterating their commitment to continue to recruit new volunteers and setting the tone for the days to follow. In another keynote address, author Gloria Burgess, PhD, praised attendees for “working on behalf of our young people, being their voice and their storytellers” and, in so doing, transforming our world.

Mark your calendar and join us in Atlanta April 16–19, 2010, for the 29th annual National CASA Conference. It’s never too early to start planning!

THANK YOU!

National CASA thanks the sponsors of the 28th annual National CASA Conference:



The View from the Floor: Volunteers reflect on the National CASA Conference



*Patrick Horner,
CASA of Scotts Bluff
County,
Bayard, NE*

The dynamics of being a CASA volunteer are so complex.

Listening to conference speakers and talking to other attendees clarified my understanding of how to reach out and help the foster youth. I discovered many new avenues to explore in my role as an advocate. It was also interesting to learn about the diversity of state laws that affect foster youth, some of which I think should apply nationwide. Overall, the 2009 National CASA Conference was the most intense, in-depth, informational conference I have ever attended.



*Jeff Marzyck,
Benton/Franklin
Counties CASA/GAL
Program,
Richland, WA*

I came away from the national conference with a feeling of renewal.

Coming together with people from all across the US and sharing experiences and ideas was a wonderful way to see

and feel the strength of the 60,000-plus CASA volunteers across this country who endeavor to provide a better start in life for our most vulnerable children. I am proud to be a CASA volunteer, and I will continue to labor for every small victory necessary to help the children I serve.



*Nancy Misita,
Sussex County
CASA Program,
Greenwood, DE*

The light that Dr. Phil and Robin brought to our conference was inspiring and uplifting. They filled me with pride for the job I am doing while pledging their continued support and intense involvement in our cause. I know that I do make a difference in the life of my CASA child. I pledge to continue my personal investment in this child’s life, as well as the lives of children who are assigned to me in the future. I feel blessed to have found CASA.



*Deborah Davis,
Florida 2nd Judicial
Circuit GAL
Program,
Apalachicola, FL*

It was inspiring to hear teenagers

who are close to “aging out” of foster care. I will try to do what I can to help these older kids especially; we just cannot give up on them. I was also taken by Robin McGraw’s description of what it is like for a child to go to court without a hand to hold, someone there to give a hug and to be supportive. It reinforced my desire to be there for the kids, even when a case is not going well. Being there for these kids is what CASA is all about.



*Alexandra Vanegas,
Boston CASA
Program,
Arlington, MA*

I already knew that minorities were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, but at a workshop called “It’s Not All Black and White,” I learned that a child’s skin color directly correlates with the amount of time they will spend in the welfare system. If you are a minority in care, then you will spend more time in the system and will have a more negative outcome. As professionals, we need to come together and erase this disparity.

On the Front Lines: American Legion recruits CASA volunteers from its ranks

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation aims to improve the lives of children across the nation by giving nonprofit organizations funds to educate the public about the needs of the children they serve. As a longtime supporter of National CASA, the foundation has consistently provided grants for volunteer recruitment and training initiatives that benefit the entire CASA network. Most recently, the foundation funded a turnkey toolkit for local programs staging *Forgotten Children* events across the country in 2009.

The partnership between National CASA and the American Legion is undergoing an exciting expansion this year as the organizations work together to mobilize legionnaires nationwide to serve as CASA volunteers. At the American Legion's commission meeting in Indianapolis in May, the organization's leadership unanimously passed a resolution in support of CASA volunteer advocacy. Here are two faces—and stories—of legionnaires who are changing kids' lives as CASA volunteers.



Volunteer Spotlight: American Legion Auxiliary member Annie Robinson: A passion to serve



In 1992, Annie Robinson was in the middle of a successful career at a large Indianapolis company when she realized she could no longer

ignore her inner voice. “Do something different,” it kept whispering, “something that will make a difference.” Leaving her day job was not an option, so she found a way to supplement it with work that felt more meaningful: She became a CASA volunteer.

Robinson soon knew she was on the right path, and she was hungry to do more, to know more, to help the kids she represented. She added college courses to her busy schedule, and by 2000 she had earned two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree. That year she retired from her job and started a new phase of life, working as a juvenile probation officer, a substitute teacher and a counselor.

Through it all, Robinson continued working as a CASA volunteer. “I have a passion to do this,” she says, “and a passion to keep learning so I can do what I do better.”

Robinson's experience, energy and ever-expanding knowledge make her a go-to volunteer, says Brian Robinson (no relation to Annie), her supervisor at Child Advocates, Inc., the CASA program in Indianapolis. “Annie has a great grasp of what a child might need as she works a case, and she really understands her role as an advocate.”

After 17 years, Robinson still finds her work as a CASA volunteer challenging, fulfilling and, often, exciting. “Some days I feel like a private eye,” she says. At 61, Robinson believes she has finally “switched over” to the work she was meant to do.

Volunteer Spotlight: Semper fi: Marine Don Barker is always faithful to the kids he serves



She is a tiny, fragile one-year-old who was born with two life-threatening strikes against her: The first was a devastating birth defect, and

the second, an unsafe home from which she was removed as an infant. Without an organ transplant, she will likely die before her second birthday. But before her name can be placed on the organ transplant waiting list, a court must decide whether to return her to her parents or free her for adoption.

Her life is full of concerned adults—foster parents who want to adopt her, biological parents who are working to get her back, social workers, medical teams, lawyers, a

judge. But only one person in this crowd is appointed by the court to look out for her best interest and speak for her alone: Don Barker, her CASA volunteer.

If anyone is prepared to shoulder this heavy responsibility, it is Barker, 64, an American Legion member who served his country as a Marine and his community as a sheriff's deputy. Volunteering for CASA of Davidson County in his retirement, he says, is just another chapter in his life of service.

The Marine Corps, says Barker, “taught me to be prepared and to arrive on time.” That lesson formed the cornerstone of his successful career, and it is crucial to his success as a CASA volunteer. “I arrive prepared for the mission, which means I do as much homework as I can before every meeting,” he says. “I don't want to be surprised.”

Barker is not shy about telling a judge what he thinks or pushing hard for a speedy resolution. Courts are reluctant to sever parental rights—and most of the time that's prudent, says Barker. But in this case, the stakes are too high, given the infant's tenuous health. Until she gets the help she needs, he will always be there for the medically fragile child.

Jane Andrews, executive director of CASA of Davidson County, says if she could build a mold for an ideal CASA volunteer, she would start with Don Barker. “Don represents the perfect match between the desire to make a difference and the skills needed to do so,” she says.

“I get a handshake and a hug,” Barker says, “and that's what keeps me going.”



Making Kids Our Top Priority: A message from National CASA CEO Michael Piraino

Imagine a world where everyone's top priority is children: making them safe, finding

them homes, really listening to kids and hearing what they have to say. That's the world I got to live in for a few days in April at the 28th annual National CASA Conference.

The conference drew nearly 1,500 people from across the CASA/GAL network to teach, learn and share. I met program administrators, staff and board members; a handful of very impressive foster youth; and many, many wonderful volunteers. As always, I was moved beyond words by the passion and the power of the people involved in our network.

I heard harrowing tales from the field about programs nearly crippled by the recession and staff members who are making incredible sacrifices to ensure that kids continue to be served and heard. (We share some of these stories in this issue of *Powerful Voice*; I hope you have a few minutes to read through them.) I am very pleased that National CASA has been able to assist struggling programs with bridge grants, and I am confident that when this economic storm is over, our network will emerge stronger than ever.

Why such confidence? Because even as the economy pounds communities across the country, people continue to step forward to become CASA volunteers. A year ago,

the National CASA network had 59,000 volunteers. Today, we are nearly 69,000 strong and serve nearly a quarter of a million foster kids, making us the largest—and I would say the best—volunteer-based child advocacy movement in the world.

If struggling CASA programs could account for volunteer assets in their budgets, their balance sheets would look very different. If we say an hour of volunteer time is worth \$50, the equivalent paid to professionals who perform similar duties, then last year our volunteers were worth \$290 million to CASA programs. This number will continue to go up no matter what the economic indicators do, and it is the secret to the success of the CASA network.

With the call to national service coming from the highest office in the land and recession-battered citizens answering it with a resounding “yes,” the National CASA network is positioned to catch the biggest new wave of volunteers that any of us can remember. This is an exciting time to be at the helm of an organization that is powered by volunteers.

Being a volunteer child advocate is demanding work, and it's not for everybody. It may not be for you. But you can still be part of this wave! Your community has many wonderful organizations that serve kids, and they need you to get involved. Go out there and find your opportunity to help make ours a world where everybody's top priority is children.

— *Standing Up for Foster Kids continued*



Forgotten Children events like these in 2009. Designed to increase awareness of the plight of kids in foster care and the role of CASA volunteers in their lives, the events also serve as an important fundraiser for local programs. National CASA provides the life-sized cut-outs to programs in its network through a competitive grant process and offers customized websites to support local fundraising for each event. The programs do the rest—creating homegrown events tailored to touch people in their communities and inspire people to stand up for foster kids.

The *Forgotten Children* campaign is sponsored nationally by Jewelers for Children, the Dr. Phil Foundation and the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Dr. Phil and Robin McGraw are the campaign's national spokespeople.

Partner Spotlight: Visit ShopCASA.org for direct links to these and other partner products



New! CASA Charm Bracelet

This custom-designed, limited-edition sterling silver bracelet with a CASA charm is an ideal way to show someone you care—about them, and about foster kids. For every charm bracelet purchased, \$5 will be donated to National CASA.



Stand up for foster kids by adding this charm to your bracelet! Purchase this sterling silver CASA charm designed for National CASA's *Forgotten Children* campaign, and \$2 will be donated to National CASA. Text on the back of the charm reads “Not Forgotten.”

Fred Meyer JEWELERS

“For All Those Special Times”



Skins for a Cause

Give your mobile device, cell phone or laptop a new look. Order any Skinit personalization sleeve or “skin” using the special link found on ShopCASA.org, and 20% of your purchase will go to support National CASA's work on behalf of children.

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An Important Message from Matt

To all CASA volunteers: Keep doing what you're doing!

"Joe helped me understand what was going on in court, and he made the court understand what was happening with me and my family. It was so nice to have someone listen to me, someone who didn't judge me. If I could say one thing to Joe, I would say, 'Keep doing what you are doing. You helped make my life a whole lot better.'" —Matt, age 17

Learn more about Matt and Joe, and meet other kids and their CASA volunteers, in the *National CASA 2008 Annual Report*. Find it at casaforchildren.org or call 800-628-3233 to request a hard copy.

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