

THE POWERFUL VOICE!

News for champions of CASA children

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Judges Highly Value CASA Volunteers But Need More of Them

In June 2005, National CASA engaged Organizational Research Services to conduct a national survey of juvenile and family court judges in jurisdictions with CASA programs. The objective of this survey was to evaluate:

- The process judges use for assigning CASA volunteers to cases
- The role CASA volunteers play in supporting judicial decision-making and court processes
- Judicial satisfaction with local CASA volunteers

A total of 564 judges and commissioners completed the survey, with representation across nearly every region of the country. The results show that **judges believe that the work of CASA volunteers is high quality, beneficial to their decision-making and beneficial to the children and families they serve.** However, the vast majority of judges reported that **there was an insufficient number of CASA volunteers to meet their caseloads.** Other key findings:

- Judges are most likely to assign CASA volunteers to the most difficult and complex cases.
- Judges find CASA volunteers to be most effective in considering the best interests of the child and in monitoring the case.

If you would like more information about the judicial survey evaluating the impact of CASA volunteers, visit casanet.org, email theresa@nationalcasa.org or call (800) 628-3233, ext. 253.



It was during this time that God acknowledged my sorrows and sent me an angel, in the form of a GAL volunteer named Carmen. At first, accepting her wasn't easy. I tried everything

to push her out of my life. But none of this deterred her. With Carmen, I learned that love comes in all shapes, colors and forms. And that I could trust people.

Though in the sense of the legal system she was no longer my GAL once I turned 18, she has always remained a very committed friend. They say that action speaks louder than words. Carmen's action of remaining a permanent fixture in my life continues to teach me each day that I'm worth someone's love.

—Kadia Edwards
Former foster child, graduate of Howard University
and current graduate student at Duke University

Join National CASA's Legacy Circle

Our Legacy Circle includes friends and supporters who have expressed their intention to include National CASA in their estate plan. If you have not already done so, we hope you will consider becoming a member of this very special group. For more information about leaving a lasting legacy, please contact Heather Nist at (800) 628-3233, ext. 267 or heather@nationalcasa.org.



From Lighthouse to Laser Beam: Refining Our 2006-2009 Strategic Plan

—Michael S. Piraino
National CASA CEO

Last year at this time, we told you about National CASA's new strategic plan that will take us through 2009. Over the past six months, we have worked diligently to flesh this out with measurable objectives. During the process, we came to realize that we cannot be all things to all people. This is true not only because we have finite resources—human and financial—but also because visionary growth requires sharp focus. We must transform ourselves from a lighthouse casting our beam all around us to a laser aimed where we can get the most results for children.

Toward that end, we have come up with five specific focus areas for the next 12 months to complement the overall strategies announced last year. The exciting overarching objective is to serve **100,000 more children** than we do now—and to achieve this before 2009. This is an interim step toward our vision of providing a CASA or GAL volunteer to every child who needs one.

While CASA volunteers now serve almost 200,000 children and youth, more than 800,000 children are in foster care during the course of a year. The great need for more advocates is verified by last year's judges' survey (see story on at left). To reach this ambitious

goal of 100,000 more children served, we are pursuing the following five specific projects:

- Evaluating our organizational structure and staffing to ensure that we are set up in the most efficient and effective way possible.
- Targeting promotional efforts in areas of the country where the need is greatest (for example, urban areas) and among groups of individuals most likely to volunteer (for example, retiring Baby Boomers).
- Focusing our efforts to recruit and retain volunteers of color in several large cities, with an emphasis in 2006 on African-American volunteers. This reflects our strong commitment to ensure that CASA volunteers reflect the cultures and communities that they work within.
- Unifying the power of the CASA network. We want to make our corps of 50,000+ advocates feel more connected with each other and with National CASA, which will help with retention, recruitment, awareness and development throughout the country.
- Implementing a fundraising plan that will enable us to initiate and continue the projects outlined above.

America's juvenile court judges agree that CASA volunteers provide great benefits to children and youth—and that we need many more such advocates. We thank you for your continued support at every level of the CASA network. Without it, we couldn't possibly recruit, train and supervise these caring individuals. ■

Speaking Up at Work: How I Influenced an International Corporation to Benefit Children



—Joyce Mandel
Manager, Hewitt Associates
Volunteer, CASA of Lake County, IL

Like many CASA volunteers, I also have a full-time job. I work as a manager for Hewitt Associates, a global human resources services firm. Unlike many CASAs, however, when I arrive at work, I often see an announcement on our homepage about CASA that will be seen by thousands of Hewitt employees!

Four years ago, I had completed my CASA training and had just been assigned a case. Based on my training and my early experiences as a volunteer, my enthusiasm for the CASA program grew quickly. I knew that this program was making a big difference in the lives of the children in our community.

My enthusiasm was contagious. I spoke openly about CASA to many of my peers at work and even posted an online "want ad" asking people to contact me if they wanted more information. My message spread quickly. I ended up getting requests for information from people I didn't even know. I was excited but a bit overwhelmed! I had to hold two meetings, one over lunch and another during off-hours, to share more information with a group rather than answering one individual at a time.

I spoke up—not just at court but also at work. Now my employer has a strong, growing relationship with CASA programs in several states as well as with National CASA. Among our employees, we have many CASA volunteers and several board members. Hewitt regularly holds meetings to share information about CASA. The company has hosted eight evening CASA trainings, welcoming employees and others. Thousands more people now know about the work CASA and Hewitt are doing together. Many, like me, are proud to be a part of both organizations.

As a CASA volunteer, I advocate for two children. When I met him, "Patrick" was 14 years old with the equivalent of three years of education. His family had been in and out of the system for most of his life. He and his younger sister, "Karen," had witnessed domestic violence and been neglected. I spoke up for these children and got people involved in the case working together to help them. I was persistent, and the results are clear. With a CASA advocate, things work out better for the kids. "Patrick" will soon graduate from high school and is looking forward to his future. "Karen" is in a pre-adoptive home filled with love and acceptance.

I spoke up for the children and made a difference. I also spoke up at work, and look what has happened! Who have you told about CASA lately? You may be amazed at the response you get. ■

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

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National CASA's Response to Hurricane Katrina

In Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama—the states hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina—there are 36 CASA/GAL programs. In 2004, these programs reported serving 5,001 abused or neglected children via 1,672 trained volunteer advocates.

In the days after the disaster, National CASA gathered information about the needs of foster children and CASA programs in areas affected. We also determined ways to help, including setting up a Hurricane Relief Fund and matching people in need with resources.

Thanks to CASA donors, volunteers and staff, our Hurricane Relief Fund raised **\$8,953 in individual donations**. An additional \$120,902 was given by **Jewelers for Children**. The **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention** provided \$30,150. The total amount of \$160,005 was distributed without delay.

Seventeen programs were invited to apply for the first round of emergency grants, resulting in awards of \$30,150 to be used for a variety of needs, including:

- Locating displaced children
- Setting up new office locations for programs that had nowhere to operate
- Replacing lost computer equipment, office furniture, library materials, etc.

The second round of grants provided \$14,430 each to the state CASA associations in Mississippi

and Louisiana to support local CASA programs, staff, volunteers and children affected by Katrina.

Finally, ten affected programs received grants of approximately \$10,000 each for their operations.

Thank you to all our donors for helping us respond quickly to the needs of CASA programs in these devastated communities. Ultimately, many more children will receive the benefits of a CASA volunteer because you helped these programs keep their doors open at a critical time. ■

"Thanks for all that you have done for us. National CASA responded to our needs before any other agency, public or private. The response from all of the staff has been remarkable and I am truly honored to be a part of such a caring agency."

—Laurie Johnson, Executive Director,
CASA Mississippi



When I first met [the child], he would not respond to me or look me in the eyes. Now when I come over, he smiles and we play. I think it's important for him to have a positive male role model in his life.

—Eduardo Oliva, Volunteer Advocate
11th Judicial Circuit Guardian Ad Litem Program
Miami, FL

Generous Donation Inspires Year-End Givers

A \$50,000 matching gift set the tone for a successful 2005 holiday appeal. A very generous couple, who wish to remain anonymous, felt that this would be a great way to inspire year-end donors.

They were right! On November 1, 2005, we introduced our *Twice the Hope* matching opportunity. In just eight short weeks, \$50,000 was turned into \$100,000—proof positive of your commitment to making a difference in the lives of the children CASA serves.

The couple behind the matching gift are long-time supporters of National CASA. Their reasons for making this gift? "National CASA helps children in need, and we felt our gift would allow CASA to reach even more children and inspire others to give to this amazing program."

We are truly grateful for their vision and support, and for leading the way with their matching gift. Thank you to all who made the most of this opportunity and gave so generously. ■

Double the Impact of Your Gift

Many employers sponsor corporate matching gift programs and will match any charitable contributions that their employees make. Your gift may be doubled or even tripled, according to your employer's policy. Some companies also match gifts made by retirees and spouses of employees.

Companies have various methods for submitting matching gift requests: online forms, automated phone systems or a paper form that you send to National CASA. To find out about your employer's matching gift policy and how to have your donation multiplied, simply contact your company's human resources department. ■

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.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

National Court Appointed
Special Advocate Association
100 W Harrison, North Tower, #500
Seattle, WA 98119

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