

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.



Dallas, Nashville and Santa Barbara Stand Up for Foster Kids



On October 16, Dallas CASA presented the *Forgotten Children* campaign at the downtown John F. Kennedy Memorial. As passersby and invitees absorbed the disturbing significance of the 850 life-sized cutouts of foster kids set up on the lawn—that's the number of kids who enter the system each day nationally—it was a real-life former foster youth who made the most memorable impact of the day.

Donald Knight, 20 years old, witnessed the murder of his mother when he was only 6. At the age of 12, when relatives could no longer take care of him, he entered the state's child welfare system and began shuttling from one foster home to another. He also met Ron Craig, a Dallas Court Appointed Special Advocate, who became the one dependable, consistently interested adult in his life.

Soon Donald will be transferring from Navarro College in Texas to Brigham Young University, where he has received a football scholarship. He's smart, articulate, charming and a very nice guy who gives Ron a lot of credit. "He's my family," Donald said of Ron, who still attends all of Donald's football games and makes sure he keeps up on his homework. "I couldn't be prouder of him if he was my own son," Ron told us.

The *Forgotten Children* display vividly illustrated that foster kids need a lot more Rons in their lives. On any given day in Dallas County 2,000 children are in the foster care system; Dallas CASA serves about half of them. The remainder still need CASA volunteers.

The event drew a large crowd, lots of press coverage and a good number of volunteer inquiries. Two other programs—CASA of Santa Barbara and Tennessee CASA—met with similar success when they hosted similar events. Congratulations to all three programs, and our thanks: With their help, National CASA has been able to establish best practices for presenting *Forgotten Children* events in preparation for the campaign's nationwide launch in 2009.

See more photos on page 2



Tennessee CASA

Look carefully, and you'll see the Parthenon in the background, indicating that this must be . . . Nashville! Centennial Park, home to the world's only perfect replica of the famous Greek structure, was the site of Tennessee CASA's October 7 event, which was produced in partnership with other area child welfare programs. Timed to coincide with the second presidential debate, held at nearby Belmont University, the event elicited major television and radio coverage.



In Dallas, 850 life-sized cutouts of foster kids were placed on the lawn at the John F. Kennedy Memorial.



Donald Knight captures the attention of the audience as he shares his story at the event in Dallas, Texas.



Donald Knight and his CASA volunteer, Ron Craig.

CASA of Santa Barbara County



On October 29, an estimated 250 people carried cutouts of foster kids down State Street in downtown Santa Barbara to the Courthouse Sunken

Garden, where they joined an additional 450 cutouts already in the ground. At the courthouse, information booths brought attention not only to CASA of Santa Barbara County but to the many other community organizations in town that are working very hard to improve foster children's lives. In addition to the dramatic display, singer Kenny Loggins and his son Crosby performed, and awards were presented to those who have supported the CASA program's efforts for foster kids.



Giving Corner: It Isn't Too Late to Make Your Tax-Deductible Donation for 2008!



By making a gift to National CASA today, you can make a difference in the life of an abused or neglected youth.

This holiday season, inspire your friends and family to share the joy of supporting National CASA.

- Host a holiday party and ask your guests to bring a donation for National CASA.
- Organize a holiday party raffle at your workplace and designate National CASA as the recipient of the proceeds.
- In lieu of holiday gifts, ask your friends and family to make a donation to National CASA in your honor.
- Be creative—find your own way to share why you support National CASA!

Thank you to everyone who made a gift in 2008. To request a year-end donation receipt for your 2008 taxes, please contact Alexa Heaverlo at alexa@nationalcasa.org.

Introducing Champions for Children!

Become a Champion for Children with your annual, unrestricted gift of \$1,000 or more. Champions for Children are major donors who ensure the future of the National CASA mission to provide every child in need a CASA volunteer and a safe, permanent home with hope for a brighter future. As a member you'll receive exclusive benefits, including invitations to special events and acknowledgment in National CASA publications.

To find out more about Champions for Children, contact Michelle Finet, director of donor relations, at 800-628-3233 ext. 267 or michelle@nationalcasa.org.

Local Program Partnerships: Dallas CASA Builds a Relationship with Archon Group, LP

National CASA knows how important local corporate support is to the work of our programs across the country, and we periodically like to highlight particularly successful partnerships. We thought it appropriate to feature a Dallas CASA corporate partnership, as this program is a featured venue of our Forgotten Children campaign (see page 1).

On November 14 the Greater Dallas Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals recognized the Archon Group, LP, with its 2008 Outstanding Corporation Award. Based in Irving, TX, Archon is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Goldman Sachs. Since choosing Dallas CASA as its sole charity in 1997, Archon has sought creative ways to leverage its business connections to support the work of Dallas CASA.

An example of Archon's untiring commitment is its annual golf classic, which attracts players from around

the globe and has raised more than \$5 million in 11 years. Archon employees also organize and run an annual vacation package sweepstakes and have built stunning playhouses for Dallas CASA's annual Parade of Playhouses event. Additionally, Archon executives provide leadership through board of directors and committee participation and are instrumental in helping Dallas CASA plan for the future.

For Archon CEO Jim Lozier, encouraging employees to donate their time to a charity is a means of promoting a healthy balance of family, work and community. When asked about his devotion to the CASA program, Mr. Lozier says, "CASA volunteers represent one of the few true purposes in life, and that is to love others. Unconditional love changes a life as nothing else can." According to Dallas



Archon executives John Gibson, Jim Lozier and Woody McMinn present a check to Beverly Levy, executive director of Dallas CASA, at the annual Presidents Day Golf Classic on February 18, 2008.

CASA Executive Director Beverly Levy, "Archon's generosity has truly transformed Dallas CASA and has multiplied the number of children we are able to serve each year. I can't imagine a better model of corporate philanthropy."

Forgotten Children Exhibit: More Photos from Regional Events



Foundation News: American Legion Child Welfare Foundation Stands Up for Foster Kids



Director of the Americanism and Children & Youth Division William Pease visits with Maricopa CASA staff and volunteers at the Legion's 90th Annual Convention this past August in Phoenix, AZ.

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation has awarded National CASA a grant to produce a turnkey toolkit for local programs staging *Forgotten Children* events across the country in 2009. The toolkit will provide essential resources, tools and templates, including a website that will enable programs to leverage the event for volunteer recruitment and fundraising in their communities.

The foundation is a longtime supporter of National CASA, providing grant funding for volunteer recruitment and training initiatives that benefit the entire CASA network. Previously, the foundation funded a new volunteer curriculum toolkit, which was provided to the CASA network in 2007. The philanthropic priority of the foundation is to better the lives of children across the nation by providing nonprofit organizations with a means to educate the public about their needs.

Volunteer Profile: The Rewards of Working with Older Youth



As a CASA volunteer in Pima County, Arizona, Marji Stiffler specialized in working with older youth. By now she knows the score, but Marji will be the first to tell you there was a time when she was naïve.

One day, a teenager turned to her and said, “See those marks on my arms? I don’t cut myself anymore.” Marji didn’t really understand what the girl was saying: “I had some preparation because I raised three teenage girls. I was comfortable with young people. But I really had no idea about things like ‘cutting.’” Luckily, Marji found training through her CASA program office on this and other issues affecting the kids she worked with.

Of course, self-mutilation is only one of the hazards these youth face. Foster kids age 13 and up are far more likely than their peers to drop out of school, fall into substance abuse, run away and end up on the streets . . . and that’s just the beginning of the list.

This creates a significant challenge for the volunteers themselves. Now, add to that the fact that CASA volunteers serving older youth are almost inevitably working with very troubled kids. “Connection is more difficult,” says Marji. “They have anger issues. You really have to work on communication to gain their respect and their trust.”

Meanwhile, the “working the system” role of the volunteer is far more complex with this population—and, in one sense, far more weighty: Time is running out. Some kids look forward to “aging out” (at age 18 to 21, depending on the jurisdiction) as a kind of emancipation. As Marji observes, “They’ll say things like, ‘When I’m 18, I’m outta here! I don’t want to be in the system anymore.’ But as that date approaches, they change their tune.” Ready or not, they’re going to be on their own.

It’s a sudden and terrifying realization for the kid—but something the volunteer has kept in mind all along. That’s why CASA volunteers do a lot more than fulfill their mandates as investigators and advocates in court. As Marji puts it, “We need to be preparing these

young people, for the good of themselves and society, to function in society.”

To get this done, sometimes you have to work the system. Marji can remember speaking up for a foster youth: “If you change this kid’s placement now and change her school, she’s not going to graduate on time.” Sometimes you have to work with the youth: “If you don’t take the life skills class, you’re not going to be eligible for subsidized housing.”

In terms of the system, Marji has come to see herself as what she calls a “conduit”—someone connecting resources to youth and resources to each other so that a strong web of support is woven for each young person. In terms of the youth, she points out, “You’re planting seeds. Later on they say, ‘Someone did care about me.’”

Recently, Marji received a wedding invitation from a former foster youth she had worked with whose life is obviously going well. It’s a welcome, tangible reward for what had been incredibly hard work on Marji’s part.

“I’ve done a lot of different things in my life. CASA was the one thing that got under my skin in a good way, as part of who I am. Working with youth in the system is the most rewarding work you can do. When you look into the eyes of someone who’s—” Marji breaks off, overcome for a moment.

“It’s an amazing responsibility, and one I do not take lightly.”

Partner Spotlight: Back-to-School Backpacks Benefit 25,000 Foster Youth. Thank You!



Cindy Booth, executive director of Child Advocates in Indianapolis, with Carl Edwards, driver of the No. 99 Office Depot Ford Fusion in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series.

Since 2005, National CASA has been one of five national charity partners in the Office Depot Foundation National Backpack Program. Hewitt Associates has provided generous shipping support. In August, for the fourth year in a row, backpacks

with essential school supplies were once again distributed to elementary schoolchildren served by local CASA programs across the United States.





A Holiday Message from National CASA CEO Michael Piraino

“Most of us can’t begin to imagine what it must be like to yearn so greatly for everything the holidays represent . . . and to dread them so deeply.”

In this holiday season, children reign. For a month or so, it seems as though every spare bit of energy we have is dedicated to pleasing them. We make and buy them presents, of course, and we strive by word and example to teach them the true meaning of our celebrations—to serve them in that way.

It’s an awful lot of work and often too much expense, but it’s completely worth it. We know that for a child this season brings a joy like no other, and providing them that joy brings us a contentment like no other.

For those of us, though, who have taken foster children into our hearts—in our homes; or from afar, with our financial and material support; or as volunteers, whether that’s for an hour or for as long as it takes—for us, as our thoughts turn to these children, it’s a season tinged with sadness. We understand that in this season more than any other, no matter how bad things may have been at home, these kids long for home.

Thank goodness, most of us can’t begin to imagine what it must be like to yearn so greatly for *everything* the holidays represent

. . . and to dread them so deeply. Of course, every adult knows that the holidays bring sadness, too—but not like *this*.

Now, when we think of the children CASA programs serve, most of us have an image in mind. We imagine a child—usually, and especially during the holidays, a *true* child, never much older, say, than 10. This is common, and perfectly understandable. This year, however, I’ll ask you to think specifically about the older kids, the hundreds of thousands of abused and neglected children age 13 and up, and what they in particular are going through.

It would be the rare foster child who knows the actual rates—the depressingly precipitous (and accelerating) rates—at which her chances of being adopted are falling with every passing year. But she feels it happening. Nor does she know how discouraged even the most dedicated professionals or volunteers can become, though I imagine she can see it in their eyes. She might or might not remember what her parents or guardians did to bring on intervention by the state, but she certainly knows that everyone around her thinks her parents were just bad—and she may, too.

What does this experience do to a child, one who already has enough to deal with, what with adolescence itself? I don’t know. What I *would like* to know is, does she really believe in her own innocence? Can she go forward?

This issue’s cover article tells the truly heartening story of one young man in foster care—currently considering colleges—and his CASA volunteer. I wish you could meet them both. Elsewhere you’ll find featured a veteran volunteer who specializes in working with older youth. I wish we could give you more than this glimpse of what our volunteers are doing.

What I *do* know is this: If every man, woman and child in this country understood the full range and depth of what these children endure—and what CASA volunteers uniquely do to ease their burden and point them forward—every heart would melt. The call would go out, the money would pour in by the pennies and the dollars, and soon every foster child really *would* have a volunteer standing by his or her side.

That would be a season of joy.

This holiday season, give a gift that gives back and supports National CASA!

Visit ShopCASA.org to view this season’s featured partners and products that support our work on behalf of children.

The CASA Diamond Heart Pendant is available in stores and online! Show someone how much you care and support National CASA with the purchase of a CASA Diamond Heart Pendant.



New!



Show your support! Give your iPod, cell phone or laptop a new look, and support your favorite organization—National CASA. Visit Skinit.com and click on Skin for a Cause to make your purchase today!

Purchase a seasonal flower arrangement or gift basket from Organic Bouquet, and 10% of the purchase price will support our mission to provide volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children.



Fred Meyer JEWELERS
"For All Those Special Times"

skinit
.com

ORGANIC BOUQUET
beautiful flowers, naturally

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

100 West Harrison | North Tower, Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98119 | 800-628-3233 | nationalcasa.org

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Seattle, WA
Permit No. 1905

Help Stop Duplicate Mailing

Contact Alexa Heaverlo at alexa@nationalcasa.org if you receive more than one copy of this newsletter. Thank you for helping us save money!

WHAT'S INSIDE

Forgotten Children Events: *Page 1*

The Forgotten Children campaign is on the road in Dallas, Nashville and Santa Barbara.

Foundation News: *Page 3*

The American Legion child welfare foundation stands up for foster kids.

Message from the CEO: *Page 5*

A holiday message from National CASA CEO Michael Piraino.

Your Holiday Purchases Support National CASA: *Page 5*

Find out how you can support National CASA when you shop at Organic Bouquet, Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers, or Skinit.com.

Older Foster Youth Say “Don’t Label Me”



The 2007 National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption found that 45% of Americans erroneously believe that children enter foster care because of juvenile delinquency. So it is not surprising that many of these young people feel stigmatized or “labeled.” They say people think they must have done something wrong to end up in foster care. We heard this loud and clear in a national qualitative study of 50 foster youths, age 14 or older, commissioned by National CASA in 2008. Here are just two examples of what these youths told us:

A lot of people these days . . . put us all into one cluster. “Okay, you’re a foster child, you did something bad.”—female foster youth in Dallas, Texas

People tell us we must have done something that didn’t satisfy our parents. That’s how I get it. “You had to do something wrong.”—male foster youth in San Diego, CA

But these foster care youths don’t want to be victims. They simply want and need support from people whom they can trust and depend on. There’s no doubt that a CASA volunteer can be vital to push them in a positive direction:

What I like is they [CASA volunteers] can give you emotional support. Like “You’re going to make it through this.” They help you to stay positive, instead of negative.—female foster youth in Miami, FL

Please take this opportunity to read this issue of *Powerful Voice* to learn more about the challenges older youth in foster care face—year-round and especially during the holidays.



800-628-3233 | nationalcasa.org