

KEEPING OUR PROMISES

*From National CASA's
2010–2013 Strategic Plan*

trust home
WELL-BEING
permanence
equity culture
POSITIVE FUTURE
connection



Facing the Future: Helping Youth Make Successful Transitions to Independence

In the parking lot of an Orange County, CA, supermarket, Javier (not his real name) shook hands with Ron Herzig, his CASA volunteer. He made eye contact and spoke in a clear, strong voice. After a final once-over by Herzig, Javier went into the store and returned with a 10-page job application. “We sat in the car and filled it out line by line—together,” says Herzig.

Herzig and Javier met when Javier was 16. With Herzig as his advocate and advisor, Javier used those two critical years before aging out to get a job, open a bank account, learn to drive and save enough money to buy a car. He kept his grades up and enrolled in after-school independent living classes. On outings with Herzig, Javier learned about employment, insurance, housing, banking and so much more.

Each year, approximately 54,000 young people like Javier age out of the foster care system when they turn 18—ready or not. And without a permanent family or a strong connection to an adult, most leave foster care with no financial security, inadequate emotional support and few of the skills they need to live successfully on their own. Having at least one interested adult is critical for a successful transition out of foster care. And it’s a role that CASA volunteers are perfectly positioned to assume.

Preparing youth for successful transitions to adulthood is one of National CASA’s primary strategic goals. Over the next several years, National CASA will design a network-wide curriculum that draws on best practices from programs across the network as well as outcomes-based research—all while ensuring that youth voices are engaged in the process. It’s all part of the *Fostering Futures* initiative, which is supported by a \$1.6 million grant from the Walmart Foundation.

When Herzig volunteered for Orange County CASA nine years ago, there was very little to help him guide youth through the transition to independence. Things are very different today. Greg Bradbard, executive director of the program, has overseen the change with his staff, partnering with other local organizations to prepare older youth for independence. “Our volunteers work with youth one-on-one to reinforce life skills in the real world,” he says. Together, they visit banks and apartment buildings. They take buses and do laundry. They practice interview skills and etiquette. They create plans for the young person to follow when they age out of care.

This type of one-on-one planning and focused support is a common theme among successful initiatives for older youth. Another is easy access to a depth and breadth of

Forgotten Children Campaign Raises Money and Awareness



Through its *Forgotten Children* campaign, National CASA has co-sponsored awareness events in scores of communities throughout the US. (See page 2 for Miami’s example). To date, the events have raised approximately \$500,000 for local CASA/GAL programs. *Forgotten Children* events are scheduled through 2010. For more information, visit CASAforchildren.org.

crucial resources, like those provided by *Power Up*, a project created by the First Judicial District CASA program in Santa Fe, NM. A central feature of *Power Up* is YouthPowerUp.org, a comprehensive online guide to local, state and federal resources for transitioning youth.

“*Power Up* is an idea whose time has come,” says Janice Quinn, executive director of the Santa Fe program. “CASA programs throughout New Mexico are already customizing it for their regions,” she says, adding that programs anywhere can do the same.

Lisa Church, a CASA volunteer in Santa Fe, says *Power Up* is invaluable as she helps youth weave together services and plans for independent living. “I’ve been there when foster kids turn 18, and it’s not a celebration,” says Church. “Kids are definitely afraid of what turning 18 means.”

Starting with these types of best practices from programs across the CASA network, National CASA’s *Fostering Futures* initiative will strengthen every program’s ability to provide older youth with

an adult advocate who is fully capable of helping them prepare for independence. For more information about other local initiatives for older youth in foster care, or to learn more about National CASA’s goals for older youth, visit CASAforchildren.org.



Forgotten Children Chronicles: Miami Raises over \$100,000



The jobless rate in Miami-Dade County surged to 11.6% this year—the highest in 26 years. But the Voices for Children Foundation, the nonprofit arm of the county’s Guardian ad Litem Program, asked the region’s already stretched residents and businesses to stretch a

little bit more to stand up for abused and neglected children. The community rose to the occasion.

The result was a *Forgotten Children* event that Miami will remember for a long time. The event raised more than \$100,000 for the Guardian ad Litem program of Miami-Dade’s 11th Judicial Circuit. Just as importantly, scores of people stepped up to volunteer. The program’s monthly volunteer training in October was its largest ever.

On Saturday, September 12, hundreds of marchers carried 850 life-sized cutouts of children through downtown to Miami’s Bayfront Park. The march ended in a rally followed by *A Children’s Celebration*, Voices for Children’s signature family-friendly festival.

The cutouts—representing the 850 abused and neglected children who enter foster care each day in the US—remained in Bayfront Park until after the Monday-morning commute, reminding Miami’s workforce of the approximately 3,000 children in foster care in Miami-Dade County on any given day.

Mission Statement

The National CASA Association, together with its state and local members, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused and neglected child can be safe, establish permanence and have the opportunity to thrive.

Inclusiveness Statement

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

Dr. Phil Show: Bringing Volunteers to CASA Programs

Dr. Phil and Robin McGraw, spokespersons for National CASA’s *Forgotten Children* campaign, motivate masses of potential volunteers when they focus their syndicated television show, *Dr. Phil*, on the theme of Court-Appointed Special Advocates. Every themed show brings an average of 10,000 hits to National CASA’s website. In 2008, the McGraws’ efforts contributed to a 30% increase in the number of inquiries from potential volunteers.

Partner Profile: New Partnership Brings Greek Energy to CASA Programs



Lambda Chapter of Omega Delta Phi at the University of Washington

The men of Omega Delta Phi Fraternity (OD Phi) like to challenge the traditional perception of fraternities. For these young people, public service is the top priority and partying hard isn't even on the list. "We provide a social outlet for our brothers, but

community service comes first," says Ivan Jaime, director of national programs for OD Phi and a 2005 alumnus of the University of Texas, Austin.

Now the men of OD Phi are bringing their considerable energy, talent and intellect to CASA programs across the US.

National CASA is pleased to announce that the brothers of OD Phi have chosen us as their national philanthropic and service partner. With more than 45 undergraduate chapters in 13 states and alumni groups in five states—and more chapters coming online every year—the OD Phi network is well positioned to help local programs with fundraising, awareness and recruitment.

"Many of our brothers are first-generation college students, and the majority of them are bilingual," says Jorge Garcia, OD Phi president. "They come from every walk of life, and a number of them are no strangers to a rough childhood."

OD Phi chapters have "a lot of manpower, but not much money," says Jaime. They will be leveraging that manpower to support local CASA programs and to help increase the participation of people of color as CASA volunteers. "The vast majority of our brothers are men of color," says Jaime. "We're going to be working on getting people in our communities to be advocates for our foster kids."

New Online: National CASA Launches New Website

Come visit National CASA's new home on the web, CASAforchildren.org, for compelling stories, multimedia tools and resources for a broad range of users.

Dave Forrester, who in August became National CASA's first director of online, calls the new website "a platform for community-building," incorporating social networking tools, video and other new media. He adds that the site allows users to "become part of the conversation" about National CASA—from a variety of different viewpoints.

The new site collapses the boundaries between National CASA's previous websites, one of which was geared toward the general public and the other toward local CASA program staff and volunteers. The new site is more than a sum of the

old, however. It is the central tool for facilitating the communication needed to expand the CASA program to more children. The site gives the general public a more comprehensive view of the CASA network, and it offers constituents in-depth resources that are easy to access and use.

In addition, the site has distinct areas for volunteers, state and local program staff as well as judges. For instance, volunteers can easily drill down to find links to YouTube-based training videos, resource libraries and other information tailored to their needs.

From the site, users can join other National CASA fans on Facebook, plugging in to an energetic community of supporters. Likewise, supporters can follow National CASA on Twitter.



The new site grew from the *CASA Connects* project, which was generously underwritten by Jewelers for Children, the charitable arm of the jewelry industry composed of jewelry retailers, manufacturers, watch companies and trade associations. Additional funding was provided by an anonymous couple and the Hearst Foundations, whose goal is to ensure that people of all backgrounds have the opportunity to build healthy, productive and inspiring lives.

Backstage at the Daytime Emmys: CBS Cares for CASA

During rehearsals for the 61st annual Daytime Emmy Awards, Hollywood's best and brightest sampled swag and refreshed their palates at the Lipton Green VitaliTea Gift Lounge backstage at Nokia Theater. Thanks to CBS Cares and Lipton Green Tea, the celebrity hosts, presenters and performers who visited the lounge also raised \$20,000 for National CASA.

For every celebrity host, presenter and performer who stopped by the lounge to

compete in the Lipton Green VitaliTea Challenge, Lipton Green Tea made a donation to National CASA. Celebrities like Jennifer Love Hewitt, Jamie Kennedy and Jimmy Fallon took blindfolded taste tests of new flavors, shot hoops and participated in other challenges.

Thank you, CBS Cares and Lipton Green Tea, for helping Hollywood to stand up for abused and neglected children and youth.

CBS Cares



Stacy DeFino with Lipton Green Tea, a sponsor of the Emmy gift suite

Volunteer Spotlight: Kiaya Combs Update

When National CASA featured Kiaya Combs in its video and 2005 annual report, she was 11 years old and had been adopted by a loving family. The job of Kiaya's CASA volunteer, Jane Hegstrom, was officially over. But at Kiaya's choice, their friendship was not.

This fall, Jane wrote to update National CASA CEO Michael Piraino on Kiaya's life. "I know that dealing with child abuse and neglect issues on a daily basis can really take a toll," Jane said, "so I thought you might want to hear some good news!" Jane, Kiaya and her family agreed to share this letter with Powerful Voice readers.

Dear Michael,

Kiaya recently called me to tell me all about her first day of high school! Since her adoption at age 7 she has been home schooled, but this year she is attending a public charter school that is known for its academic rigor. She tried out for the volleyball team and plans to join clubs and really participate in all that high school has to offer.

My life has been richly blessed by knowing Kiaya and her family; to watch her progress has been to witness a miracle.

Kiaya was only in the 1st grade when I met her in the school nurse's office. She had type 1 diabetes but was receiving no medical care. She was pale, shaking and frightened. As Kiaya's CASA volunteer, I worked with a team of professionals to coordinate an action plan. We got her mom involved in training for diabetes care and into parenting classes, and we helped her find psychological care. But she was addicted to narcotic painkillers and was simply unable to take care of Kiaya. When Kiaya collapsed on the school playground, she was rushed to the hospital and removed from her mother's care. She never returned home.

I believe Kiaya would probably be dead now if the child welfare system had not intervened. But if she hadn't had a CASA volunteer, she might easily have been stuck in the system, bounced around to foster homes or even returned to her original unsafe home. Kiaya had some very good social workers, but they turned over every few months. As Kiaya's CASA volunteer, I kept her case on the front burner, her interests front and center. That's the huge difference that a CASA volunteer can make in a child's life.

As it turned out, Kiaya was adopted by her very first foster family. She was one of the lucky ones. I am continually amazed at what a wonderful, thoughtful person Kiaya has become and how well she has handled the trauma of her past. She actually told me not long ago that she believes everything happened to her so that she can help other kids. Quite insightful for a 9th grader. She also wanted to know how old she has to be to become a CASA volunteer!

In the meantime, Kiaya is supporting CASA programs in other ways. At the end of the summer, she had a lemonade stand at a busy park near her home where she passed



Jane Hegstrom and Kiaya in 2006



Kiaya Combs, age 14

out CASA brochures and information. She raised a grand total of \$63, which she donated to our local CASA program.

Kiaya is a healthy, happy teenager living in a safe, loving home. It's the outcome that every CASA volunteer wants to see for every child. It's really what every child deserves.

I hope this news makes your day a little bit brighter.

Jane Hegstrom
Volunteer, CASA of the Pikes Peak Region
Colorado Springs, CO

Special Offers from Our Partners: Gifts that Give Back

Please consider shopping with these dedicated partners this holiday season. Visit CASAforchildren.org/cause.

Plates With Purpose™

Like the tree and its seedling in this design, CASA volunteers stand up for our nation's most vulnerable children. This beautiful recycled glass plate is available in three sizes and makes the perfect place-setting or gift. For every CASA Tree plate, platter or tray sold, 15% of the price will be donated to support the CASA mission.



CASA House Charm

Purchase this sterling silver CASA charm designed for our *Forgotten Children* campaign and \$2.00 will be donated to National CASA. Text on the back of the charm reads "Not Forgotten."



CASA Charm Bracelet

For every purchase of this sterling silver charm bracelet with silver CASA charm, \$5.00 will be donated to National CASA.



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Keeping Our Promises: National CASA Looks Ahead

A message from National CASA CEO Michael Piraino

Every time a child or youth is taken from a home and placed in foster care, implicit

promises are made. You will be well cared for. The trauma of this separation will not be compounded. You will soon have a safe, permanent home.

It's not just the government making these promises—it is all of us. Caring for these children is not something the government can do on its own. Our promises to abused and neglected children can only be fulfilled by the collective efforts of many. It takes a community of caring adults.

CASA volunteers are the caring adults who are often most consistently present in the lives of children and youth who have suffered abuse and neglect. Our volunteers know that it takes trust, commitment and plenty of persistence to fulfill our promises to these young people.

This fall, the National CASA Board of Trustees approved a national strategic plan, aptly named "Keeping Our Promises." Over the next four years, the plan will guide us as we broaden our promises to some of the most at-risk youth living in foster care. The plan outlines initiatives in five areas:

Promise #1: *We will provide the highest quality advocacy from a diverse pool of volunteers who are screened, trained and supported using state-of-the-art information*

and techniques. This issue of *Powerful Voice* offers a glimpse into how we are keeping this promise. For instance, our recently launched website (see page 3) is a volunteer recruitment tool as well as a portal for volunteers and staff of state and local programs to take advantage of interactive training and support tools. New collaborations, like the one with Omega Delta Phi Fraternity (also on page 3), tap into a rich vein of diverse and committed volunteers.

Promise #2: *We will ensure equitable outcomes for children, regardless of race.* Child abuse does not discriminate; children of all races and ethnicities are equally subject to abuse and neglect. But when children enter the state's care and protection, equality too often ends. African-American and American Indian/Alaska Native children—and in some locations, Hispanic/Latino children—are much more likely to be removed from their homes and languish in foster care. Our strategic plan includes staffing, training and research goals to promote racial equality network-wide.

Promise #3: *We will prepare youth for a successful transition to adulthood.* Youth who age out of foster care without finding permanence often struggle with substance abuse, unemployment, homelessness and mental illness. "Keeping Our Promises" creates advocacy tools for volunteers that are tailored to the needs of older youth. It also creates an advisory role for former

foster youth within National CASA, and it promotes collaborations with other organizations serving older youth.

Promise #4: *We will raise positive awareness of and funding for the CASA mission to increase community support, diversity of volunteers and the number of individual donors sustaining our network.* As we take steps to keep this promise, you are an important part of the plan. I encourage you to join us as we leverage assets and relationships to further this goal (the article about the Daytime Emmy Awards on page 3 is one example). Thank you for all you do to spread the word about CASA volunteer advocacy.

Promise #5: *We will strengthen the capacity of local and state CASA/GAL programs to provide quality advocacy for abused and neglected children.* As the CASA network expands, we renew our commitment to strengthen and sustain local programs by providing funding and other resources. We want every CASA program to be able to recruit, train and support all the volunteers it needs to provide gold-standard advocacy to children. (For a glimpse of how advocates make a life-and-death difference, see the story on page 4.)

We take our promises seriously. Over the next four years, I will update you on our progress toward our strategic goals. In the meantime, I hope you will visit CASAforchildren.org to learn more about "Keeping Our Promises."

Giving Corner: Make a Tribute Gift Honoring Someone You Love this Holiday Season

Show your thoughtfulness while supporting the mission to provide CASA volunteers for waiting children through your tax-deductible donation.

We'll send a card personalized with your message to announce your caring support. You may make a tribute donation online at CASAforchildren.org or by calling (800) 628-3233, ext. 263.



The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

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Knowing Jo has completely changed my attitude about life. Without her, I would be on a different path. She's a motivator, and she's motivated me to strive for what I want in life.

—Brittany, 18
Spartanburg, SC



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