

# THE Connection

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association



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## volunteer voice

### Katy Valesky

Member, Board of Directors  
Tennessee CASA Association

As a member of the board of directors of Tennessee CASA, I work to help CASA programs in our state prepare teenagers for successful transitions from foster care to independence. It's something I know a lot about. When I meet youth who are facing this difficult transition, it's exciting for me to be able to say, "I was a teen in foster care, too. The CASA program is here to help you."

During three stretches of my childhood—from ages 4 to 6, 9 to 10 and 14 to 18—I lived in foster care. I never had a CASA volunteer, but I did have reliable adults in my life. I had two sets of excellent foster parents, and I always had a connection to my biological mother. When I lived with my mom, my foster parents welcomed us into their homes and kept tabs on me.

I was a good student who used school as an escape from a chaotic life, and I was very lucky to spend four years at the same high school. I also had a mentor, whom I met when I was 15. She got me a trunk with a padlock so I could have some personal space in a house filled with foster kids. I knew I could count on her and trust her. That's something every child needs.

The CASA program entered my life 10 years ago, when I was a young case manager for the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS). Several children on my caseload had CASA volunteers, including an infant. When I visited this baby's home, I was surprised to see a stable mother with good parenting skills, but I didn't know whether to trust my gut. So I met with the CASA volunteer, who reinforced my thoughts and agreed that reunification was the right path for this family. Collaborating with the CASA volunteer made me better at my job and helped put a family back together.

A year at DCS was enough for me—it was obvious that the child welfare system was too broken to fix from the inside. To promote change, I had to get outside the system to where real innovation was happening. While my professional path has taken me away from child welfare, I will never stop volunteering my time and energy to advocate for change.

I have been a committed member of the Foster Care Review Board for many years. Through special training, this board concentrates on seeing that the needs of teens are addressed. I am also deeply involved in the Tennessee Court Improvement Program, which works to improve the juvenile courts' response to children living in foster care. One of the things I'm most proud of is my role in helping change policy to say that foster parents have the *right*, not just the *opportunity*, to speak in court.

It was through the Court Improvement Program that I met the executive director of Tennessee CASA, who, with a fellow child welfare advocate, invited me to join the board. I'm so happy I did.

We are very excited to have a pilot site in Tennessee for National CASA's *Fostering Futures* program, an initiative to improve outcomes for transitioning youth. My main focus as a board member has been to get this pilot up and running. Next I'll be focusing on a related issue—homelessness among former foster youth—that happens to dovetail with my day job as a consumer advocate for the National Health Care for the Homeless Council.

I often wonder why I made positive choices that took me to college while my foster sisters made negative, destructive choices. I know now that God had a plan for me. I survived—and thrived—so I could help others get through similar situations and break the cycle of abuse for future generations.

Being part of the CASA program is helping me make that difference. Many foster youth can't plan for the future because they can't imagine having one. CASA volunteers change the horizon for young people by fighting for them in court and helping them see that the gifts and talents they have will help them create a great future for themselves and for others. 📣



# The Distinct Roles of Attorneys and CASA Volunteers

Britt Banks  
Principal, NovaWest LLC, Denver, CO  
President, National CASA



Recently there has been a lot of discussion, nationally and in many states, about the distinct roles of attorneys and CASA volunteers in the child welfare system—and whether these roles are in conflict or are somehow incompatible or duplicative. Being an attorney myself, I take great interest in the debate and would like to offer a few considerations.

First, while the vast majority of legal professionals understand and support the role of CASA volunteers, there are unfortunately a few misguided attorneys out there alleging that volunteers are somehow attempting to practice law—in violation of laws in all states that prohibit non-attorneys from giving legal advice. This is simply not the case. CASA volunteers are focused exclusively on the facts of their assigned cases and are specifically trained not to attempt to offer legal advice.

To use an analogy from the legal world, I like to think of CASA volunteers as similar to court-appointed “special masters” in complex litigation cases. These special masters are often appointed by a court in complex cases to conduct a factual investigation and make a report to the court containing specific findings. The first role of a CASA volunteer is very similar: the court appoints the volunteer to conduct an independent factual investigation of a particular case and report those findings to the court. The second role of the volunteer is to offer an opinion, based on the facts of the case, on what course of action would be in the best interests of the child.

In both cases, CASA volunteers are in the role of Sergeant Joe Friday—they want “just the facts.” They are trained to defer to the judge and the lawyers in the case on the law and its application. Last year’s National CASA Child Advocate of the Year, Frankye Hull, said it best: “Being a [CASA] volunteer is a lot like being a detective. You have to be nose-y. To help a child find a safe home, you’ve really got to want to know what is going on.”

Second, and more important, there need not be any conflict between the role of a CASA volunteer and that of an attorney

representing a child in the system. Instead, the two should work together, and the roles should complement each other and aim toward achieving the same result. In fact, this is what is already happening in many communities around the country. We in the CASA network recognize that it is important to have an attorney represent a child who has been abused or neglected. A child needs to be apprised of his or her legal rights and to have those rights vigorously advanced. While attorneys are primarily charged with representing the wishes of their clients, they are highly trained professionals who will almost always consider the best interests of the child in deciding how to represent their clients. Further, the wishes of the children *are* important and need to be heard by the court and others involved in the case. No one disputes the important role that attorneys play in the process.

At the same time, attorneys by definition are focused on offering legal representation, and they often simply do not have the time or resources to do most of the things that a CASA volunteer does. Indeed, the vast bulk of a volunteer’s work occurs outside of the courtroom—interviewing the adults in the child’s life, tracking down lost or missing relatives, assessing the viability of alternative placement proposals, offering assistance in finding or accessing resources and, most important, forming a bond with the child and listening to his or her perspective. These things take time, and it’s simply unrealistic to expect that most paid attorneys or caseworkers will have the time to do the things that a CASA volunteer does. That is not to criticize the work that attorneys or caseworkers do; rather, it is to commend the unique contribution that a CASA volunteer can make.

Each party has a unique role to play, and each of these roles is crucially important if the best interests of the children are to be served. So during 2011, we at National CASA intend to reach out to the child welfare bar, initiate a dialogue and work toward a shared vision for how attorneys and CASA volunteers can better work together to serve the children in the system. We’ll keep you posted on our progress. 📩

# THE Connection



News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

A publication of the National CASA Association, representing 955 programs and 75,087 CASA volunteers serving 240,164 children nationwide.

The nationwide Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) movement mobilizes community volunteers to speak up for the best interests of abused and neglected children.

CASA volunteers work for the judge to review and monitor cases of children who become part of the child protection system. CASA volunteers work closely with the child and family to bring an independent assessment of the case to court, recommending to the judge what is best for the child's future.

CASA volunteers help prevent children from becoming "lost" in the child welfare system. They give children a chance to grow up in safe, permanent homes.

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# How My CASA Volunteer Helped Me Flourish

Jaleesa Suell

When I was 8 years old, I was removed from the custody of my mother—a drug addict—and separated from my siblings. At the time, I was living in a two-bedroom apartment with my four brothers and sisters, my mother and my grandmother in the heart of West Oakland—one of the most dangerous parts of the city, where drugs and gang violence rule the streets.

After I was uprooted, it became increasingly difficult for me to feel a sense of security. I became skeptical and created a barrier between myself and everyone else. My inability to trust and connect with others resulted in feelings of low self-worth. This was one of my greatest challenges because it affected my ability to make friends. I was often depressed, and by the time I entered middle school, I was very withdrawn.

Things changed when I was 11. That year, I was assigned a CASA volunteer. It was through her influence that I began to step out of my shell and to flourish and grow into the outgoing, confident, motivated and open-minded young woman I am today.

In 2002, when I met Nicole, my CASA volunteer, I was very reluctant to accept her. I was standoffish and fearful that she, too, would walk in and out of my life. Nicole felt defeated at times because she didn't know how to get through to me. Though she owed me nothing and had absolutely nothing to prove to me, she was determined to show me that she would be a reliable and consistent figure in my life.

I met with Nicole a couple of times a week, and she exposed me to many different things. We went to plays, the symphony and dance performances. It

was through these enrichment activities that I realized I wanted to learn how to play the piano and to dance.

During my second year of high school, I realized I was not being academically challenged; I thought this would affect my chances of getting into a competitive university. With Nicole's encouragement and support, I applied to a number of private schools in the Bay Area. I was accepted into Holy Names, where I excelled and blossomed into an accomplished young woman.

My CASA volunteer went above and beyond the call of duty. I believe that everyone is born with the ability to succeed but that some fail to meet their potential. As youth in care, we need more support to know what we are capable of because we often feel we are less than average. My CASA volunteer provided that encouragement and support.

The things I learned as a child from Nicole have helped me to be the person I am today. I learned the value of hard work and determination. I learned that I have to be tenacious in my pursuit of success. My CASA volunteer also taught me that service to the community is not only beneficial to the individuals we serve but to the entire community. It is through service that we uplift one another and can have a tremendous impact on the lives of others. Nicole has inspired me to give back in hopes of influencing someone's life the way she influenced mine.

I am now matriculating at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. I have also maintained a stable job and a vibrant social life. Because of Nicole, I have been able to develop secure and healthy relationships. My



career goal is to influence child welfare policy. I want to eliminate the policy barriers that prevent children from receiving the family that they deserve. I wish to divert other kids from a life of poverty, drugs and violence and point them toward a productive path.

Many people think it is difficult to influence a teenager, but my experience with my CASA volunteer is proof that it's not an impossible task. Because we are uprooted and moved from placement to placement, we are vulnerable and less likely to allow others into our lives. Nicole and I were able to move past vulnerability and build a relationship because she was patient, reliable and unconditionally accepting. She helped me understand that I am capable and deserving of a better life than the circumstances that caused my entry into care. Nicole provided me with a sense of security, belonging and acceptance. Not only was she my CASA volunteer, but she is now someone I consider family. 🗣️

*Jaleesa Suell, 20, was named a 2010 Outstanding Young Leader by FosterClub. As a member of the CASA of Alameda County Volunteer/Youth Speakers Bureau, she encouraged people to volunteer for the organization by talking about the benefits of advocacy to the youth receiving services. Through her involvement with Foster Care Alumni of America and the Orphan Foundation of America, Jaleesa has also advocated for the rights of former and current foster youth.*

# Volunteer Trends and Implications for CASA Programs

Richard Lynch  
President  
Lynch Associates



Volunteering in America declined through 2008, the last year for which we have Bureau of Labor Statistics information available. I suspect the 2010 report will show an upsurge of volunteering due to the recession. In the economic climate that began in late 2008, organizations have been overwhelmed with requests from potential volunteers who want some work experience to put on their resumes while they look for new employment. Once the employment picture starts to improve, I think the earlier trend will reassert itself.

The decline in volunteering exists in part because the people who made up the “civic core” that volunteered in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s are retiring from volunteering, dying or becoming clients rather than caregivers. The volunteers replacing this earlier generation have different values, needs and motivations. For example, they do not like to make long-term commitments. In addition, they want to engage in something enjoyable and do something significant.

These trends affect CASA programs in a number of ways, including our attempts to retain the services of a volunteer after a case has ended. As Rob Jackson, England’s leading thinker on volunteer management, put it, “Those organizations that manage to retain volunteers will be the ones who are willing to let them go. The organizations that are willing to let volunteers walk away will be the ones volunteers keep coming back to, because they know they won’t be pressured into staying forever.”

The trick to making this work is to help volunteers maintain a sense of connection to the program after they have finished a case. One strategy for maintaining a connection is to find out what volunteers enjoy doing most and think of ways they can use those activities to help the program. This may involve contributing professional skills that they enjoy using, or it may involve doing something very different.

CASA programs too often confine the volunteer role to being an advocate. There are lots of other things volunteers can do to help a program. There are people out there who love doing everything that needs to be done. I know one program, for example, that discovered a volunteer’s secret love of proofreading. The volunteer mentioned that she couldn’t read the paper before her husband did because she couldn’t help correcting the grammar and punctuation in the articles. She then volunteered once a week to proofread proposals and public documents for the program. If you get to know

volunteers’ passions while they are involved as advocates, you may be able to create enjoyable roles for them that enable them to maintain their involvement after they finish a case.

Another strategy is to continue to communicate with volunteers after they have left the program. If you have a thorny issue you are struggling with, call and ask them for their advice. If someone they worked with has a birthday or is recognized for a contribution, email them photos of the event. Keep them informed of the latest statistics on the success of the program and the scope of the abuse and neglect problem in the community. Ask them to speak on behalf of the program at an event. Start a private page for volunteers on Facebook or another social networking site that they can visit after they are no longer actively involved.

The purpose of these and other efforts is to help former advocates maintain the feeling of being an insider, of being connected to the program. At some point, you may even come across a new case for which they are perfectly suited, at which point you could ask them if they would like to take it on.

A third strategy for maintaining connection is to ask current and former volunteers to get involved in an awareness-raising or fundraising event. Such events can take many forms, from a fashion show to an auction to an informational program about the community’s abuse and neglect problem and what the CASA program is doing about it. Planning and taking part in such events can be enjoyable and short-term *and* can have a significant impact on the program’s level of community support.

CASA programs are engaged in the most important work in the country. If we were to succeed in ensuring that every child grows up in a safe, loving and permanent home, we would solve most other social ills. This mission fits the mindset of the new volunteer like a custom-made glove. Just remember, though, that today’s volunteers don’t want a role that feels like a job. They are better treated as community partners who are helping us accomplish our mission. 🚩

*Management consultant Richard Lynch helps organizations throughout the world create good places to work. He is the coauthor of the books *Secrets of Leadership*, *Keeping Volunteers* and *Volunteer Management*, the world’s best-selling book in the field of volunteer management. See [ricklynchassociates.com](http://ricklynchassociates.com).*

# Current Trends in Volunteering with an Impact on CASA Programs

Susan J. Ellis  
President  
Energize, Inc.



Everything in the world changes, and volunteering is no exception to that rule. As economic, social and cultural trends evolve at dizzying speed, organizations able to adapt will attract and retain paid staff and volunteers through both good times and bad. The CASA network has an enviable track record of quality volunteer involvement, but is it keeping up with today's issues? Let's examine a few of the challenges faced by volunteer efforts everywhere, consider questions these obstacles raise for CASA programs in particular and brainstorm how to deal with their impact on current and potential CASA volunteers.

To learn how programs in the CASA network are dealing with some of these trends, see the next feature, "Program Spotlight." Sidebars that work hand in hand with this article are a list of resources on volunteer trends, a summary of National CASA's technical assistance bulletin on using non-advocate volunteers and brief profiles of two non-advocate volunteers. Also see the update on National CASA's "flex training" initiative now in development, which will provide web-based training of new advocates to reduce the number of required "live" training hours.

## The Economy

Whenever the economy is bad, the mass media and politicians rediscover volunteers—for all the wrong reasons. They assume that volunteers are "free" labor ready and willing to make up for budget cuts. This uninformed and highly unrealistic belief materializes as rah-rah campaigns to "get people to volunteer," even though what is most needed is training and support for organizations to engage volunteers successfully.

How can a CASA volunteer recruitment campaign maximize this media attention while minimizing the wrong messages about volunteering? Consider these ideas:

- Acknowledge the current attention to volunteering, but note that your program is not new to this subject—you've always been committed to the value of volunteers.

- Confront the issue: "We are *not* seeking volunteers because we don't have money. For CASA programs, volunteers have always been our *first choice* for serving our children—whose needs were critical long before the economy tanked."
- Unless you're engaging in fundraising at the moment, note that your CASA program is seeking time, not money.

Of course, the economy might also be affecting current CASA volunteers. Pay attention to whether some volunteers or their family members have lost their paying jobs, are having trouble making ends meet and so on. Is it time to offer reimbursement for expenses? Or to start a barter exchange of goods and services among volunteers so they can help each other out?

## "I Don't Have Time"

There is good evidence, however, that the biggest obstacle to volunteering is not a lack of money but rather a lack of *time*. People are working longer hours, find themselves continuously on-call through email and smart phones and are so overscheduled that the family calendar is a complex jigsaw puzzle of pieces to fit into place. We all long for quiet time. So it is understandable that potential recruits are often unwilling to commit to long-term, ongoing volunteering and that veteran volunteers sometimes drop out to regain some sense of control over their lives.

In response to time pressure, we've seen a proliferation of single "days of service," such as Make a Difference Day, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service and even September 11 as the official National Day of Service and Remembrance. Ironically, there are now so many days of service that someone could engage in one almost every week of the year—so much for limited time!

A more extreme trend has evolved over the past year as even shorter bursts of volunteer activity have been organized under the name "micro-volunteering." Micro-volunteering is service that can be performed in only a few *minutes* at a time, very often by cell phone or smart phone.

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The trend toward volunteering in small chunks of time can be baffling to CASA programs, whose work is definitely not quick or short-term. How can the network achieve its critical child advocacy mission while accommodating the time pressure volunteers feel? Consider these ideas:

- First, don't apologize for the time commitment needed and don't minimize it! Just as the Marines seek only "a few good" recruits, CASA programs want volunteers who are looking for a serious challenge and who see the commitment as a badge of honor. You're the antidote to superficial, one-shot volunteering.
- Find ways to "job share" among volunteers when it makes sense (it may mean getting permission from the court first). For example, consider partnering two or more advocates so that they can be available to stand in for each other occasionally with the other's assigned child. Or do what many programs now do, which is assign a husband-and-wife team to serve on a single case.
- Recruit new volunteers not to become advocates but instead to become an advocate support team, taking some of the load off the advocate for tasks that are time consuming and not face to face with a child, such as scheduling appointments.

### Non-Advocate Volunteer Profile

#### Erin Wright, Kappa Alpha Theta Supporter

By day, Erin Wright is a busy attorney at a downtown Chicago law firm. But during her off-hours, she spends 15–20 hours a month building bridges between local women and two Chicago-area CASA programs, CASA of Cook County in Chicago and CASA of Lake County in the suburbs.

As CASA liaison for her Kappa Alpha Theta fraternity alumni chapter, Wright reaches out to her Theta sisters to keep them involved in the group's official philanthropy. "We do everything we can to help our CASA programs carry out their mission," says Wright. That means Thetas staff registration tables for CASA events. They turn out for fundraisers. In honor of National Child Abuse Prevention Month in April, a team of Theta women runs a 5K race next to other CASA volunteers.

The CASA program's mission, says Wright, resonates with her as a lawyer. And as a Theta, she has a deep connection to the CASA cause. Kappa Alpha Theta has been supporting National CASA and its network of programs for more than 20 years. "By the time Thetas graduate, they have a deep connection to CASA and to service," says Wright. "My job is to communicate that the service can—and should—continue after graduation."



### Ideas for Using Non-Advocate Volunteers to Build Capacity in CASA/GAL Programs

National CASA's 2008 *Technical Assistance Bulletin* of this title ([bit.ly/non-advocate](http://bit.ly/non-advocate)) suggests myriad ways to foster volunteers' further involvement in the organization as board members, legislative advocates, fundraisers, administrative supporters, etc. The document describes the benefits of using non-advocate volunteers and provides tips on screening, supervision, training, cultivation and retention of these supporters. It also offers ideas for partnering with other organizations. Sample potential volunteer activities from the bulletin include:

- Writing/laying out/editing/distributing a program newsletter
- Designing a website/maintaining current information on a website
- Recruiting volunteers via public speaking, staffing tables at events, talking to friends
- Providing data entry services
- Inviting CASA staff to present a program to their community or civic group
- Getting CASA information out in their workplace via e-newsletters, posters, brochures in pay envelopes
- Getting CASA information out in their faith community via bulletin or newsletter inserts; speaking to small groups with a mission focus; speaking during worship; hanging posters; requesting a donation
- Organizing or selling tickets to a fundraiser
- Contacting businesses for in-kind donations: food, prizes in connection with a special event or for volunteer recognition, office supplies
- Presenting an in-service training workshop on a topic about which they have professional expertise
- Connecting CASA staff to potential donors or foundations
- Making their home or workplace available to the CASA program for training, volunteer recognition, special events
- Writing thank-you notes for donations or after a special event
- Serving on governing boards, advisory councils or committees

Keep brainstorming, and do not stop yourself because an idea seems like a radical change. Find ways to address the time it takes to be a CASA volunteer and to give advocates an occasional break.

### Boomers, Millennials and Social Entrepreneurs

Countless research studies have appeared in the past decade anticipating changes in volunteering due to the expected influx of retiring baby boomers. The challenge is separating fact from fiction in these predictions. Since the economic bust, many boomers are finding they cannot retire for a very long time, as their retirement nest eggs



have disappeared. Those who can afford to step out of the labor market often want to travel or do things other than what they consider old-fashioned volunteering.

Those who are between 50 and 65, who look at community service as a chance to *redirect* instead of retire, tend to want opportunities that are challenging and that offer some freedom of choice. They want to make a difference—not by filling a slot on a schedule or completing a checklist of 25 tasks but rather by helping to create their own volunteer assignments. Doesn't this sound like the CASA brand of advocacy?

Here's something that may come as a surprise: the things that boomers identify as attractive in a

volunteer role are the same things that millennials (also called Generation Y) want, too! Young adults in their late teens and 20s also seek control over the volunteer work they do.

The wish to forge a new path instead of filling a predetermined position comes at a time when the business world has evolved the concept of *social entrepreneurship*. Social entrepreneurs are business owners with a commitment to making money *and* doing good; either they give a major percentage of their profits to causes they care about or they start nonprofits using the funding stream of a commercial business. Social entrepreneurship holds great potential

for those volunteer programs willing to step outside of the comfort zone of carefully defined volunteer positions.

Given the court-defined advocate role, how can CASA programs accommodate new volunteers who want to find creative ways to help families? Consider these ideas:

- Focus on the ultimate *goal* of CASA volunteer work—helping abused and neglected children find safe, permanent homes. Create a recruitment campaign that *offers a challenge*: “Can you help us meet our goal?” (Instead of “Become an advocate and do what our position description says.”)
- Explain that every case is different and that every advocate is called upon to individualize the CASA program’s service to the needs of each child.

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## Resources on Trends in Volunteer Management

A full list of resources related to volunteer management is available at [CASAforChildren.org/Trends](http://CASAforChildren.org/Trends). Here are a few examples:

### **A Billion + Change Initiative ([bit.ly/a\\_billion](http://bit.ly/a_billion))**

The Corporation for National and Community Service created this challenge to leverage \$1 billion in skilled volunteering and pro bono services from corporations.

### **Energize Online Library ([energizeinc.com/art.html](http://energizeinc.com/art.html))**

Susan Ellis’s Volunteer Management Resource Library provides a wealth of information for leaders of volunteers. See especially the *Internet, Online Community, Virtual Volunteering, Social Networking* section at [bit.ly/ellis\\_virtual](http://bit.ly/ellis_virtual). CASA staff members should also take advantage of the *Everyone Ready* training resource found at [CASAforChildren.org](http://CASAforChildren.org).

### **Focus on the Economic Crisis ([foundationcenter.org/focus/economy](http://foundationcenter.org/focus/economy))**

This site from the Foundation Center shares many perspectives on how nonprofits and funders are behaving.

### **Help from Home ([helpfromhome.org](http://helpfromhome.org))**

This UK-based site encourages micro-volunteering that can be done “in your pyjamas.”

### **Nonprofit Readiness Toolkit for Pro Bono Volunteering ([bit.ly/pro\\_bono](http://bit.ly/pro_bono))**

This online course from the Corporation for National and Community Service includes examples of pro bono engagement and a self-assessment for nonprofits interested in expanding their use of pro bono services.

### **TechSoup ([techsoup.org](http://techsoup.org))**

The “technology place for nonprofits” provides a comprehensive and up-to-date site for all technology issues.

## Non-Advocate Volunteer Profile

### Ivan Jaime, Board Member

The first time Ivan Jaime heard about CASA volunteers, he was standing in the office of Brush Country CASA in Kingsville, TX, with a check in his hand. He had just become director of border policy and community affairs at Union Pacific Railroad in San Antonio, and one of his tasks was to administer the company's local philanthropic budget.



What Jaime learned that day changed him. His twin sisters were adopted at birth, and suddenly he wondered what their lives would have been like if they had ended up in foster care instead. "I saw the challenges my sisters had—and they lived with just one family," he says. "I couldn't wrap my mind around the kind of suffering that kids go through when they move from home to home."

Jaime called Child Advocates San Antonio and offered to help. His talents, experience and professional connections made him a perfect candidate for the board of directors, a role he happily accepted. Jaime now chairs the program's fundraising committee and has presented the CASA mission to many influential people. He also introduced the CASA program to his fraternity, Omega Delta Phil (OD Phi). As a result, OD Phi last year adopted our organization as its national philanthropy.

## Pro Bono Service

There is nothing inherently new about volunteers donating professional expertise, but various national initiatives have been examining the potential of strategically applying business talents to the nonprofit world. Perhaps the most developed campaign is A Billion + Change ([bit.ly/A\\_Billion](http://bit.ly/A_Billion)), in which the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation and the Corporation for National and Community Service have issued a challenge to leverage \$1 billion in skilled volunteering and pro bono services from the corporate community. They define pro bono service as:

*...the donation of professional services that are included in an employee's job description and for which the recipient nonprofit would otherwise have to pay. It is a subset of skilled volunteering that gives nonprofits access to the business skills and experience they need to develop and implement sound business strategies, increase their capabilities and improve their organizational infrastructure. ([bit.ly/Pro\\_Bono](http://bit.ly/Pro_Bono))*

In other words, the door is open for you to go to corporations, universities and professional societies and start a conversation about the push toward pro bono work. This is not necessarily a new avenue for finding more advocates, but it holds enormous potential for recruiting board members, advisors, strategic planning consultants, marketing experts—anyone who offers skills that you would normally pay for.

Just because someone is an expert in his or her professional field does not automatically make that person a great volunteer for you. Apply all the volunteer management practices that you use with other volunteers: define the volunteer consultant role in writing, provide some orientation to the CASA program, assign a staff liaison, agree on how you will work together and so on. And when you ask an expert to give advice, be prepared to listen to it!

## Internet Technology and Social Media

*Social media* refers to communication tools available to everyone that facilitate sharing and exchange of information and ideas with anyone interested. These tools have transformed the internet from a place that allows some people to disseminate information and others to find information—pretty powerful in itself—to an even greater platform for interaction and exchange. *Social networking* is the use of social media tools to interact with people you know and then the people they know—and on and on. What's most remarkable about all this is that almost everything is *free*. Since volunteer-involving organizations rarely have a lot of money to invest in technology, having such great tools at no cost is pretty amazing.

Last year, *Everyone Ready* offered an online seminar called "Social Networking and Volunteer Involvement" (it is still available to CASA staff in the archive accessible from your *Everyone Ready* main page described at [CASAforChildren.org/Trends](http://CASAforChildren.org/Trends)). Trainer Michael Gilbert used the analogy of a forest fire:

*We want our volunteering message to catch fire, we want it to spread beyond our control, but somehow we want to control it at the same time. A forest fire doesn't spread based upon how big a match you toss into it; it spreads based upon how interconnected the trees are. And that's the paradigm shift: we have to pay more attention to the relationship between potential and active volunteers than to our relationship to them directly. The latter is the broadcast model, the former is the social volunteering model.*

One of the biggest roadblocks to this approach is the mind-boggling array of constantly emerging social media websites. Who can keep up—or find the most useful tools? The first thing is to stop worrying about "brands" (to Facebook or not to Facebook). It's not necessary to know every site out there but rather to understand the basic

social media tools they represent. Trainer Jayne Cravens offers this advice:

*Here's one way to think about internet tools—dividing them into asynchronous, which are those tools where users do not have to be online at the same time in order to interact with each other; and synchronous, which are those tools where users do have to be online at the same time in order to interact with each other.*

Anyone under age 25 is a “cyber-native,” unable to picture a world without computers and internet communication. This means, among other things, that the children you serve are fully networked. Is your program?

Online networking is a huge topic, but consider a few of the actions you might take to utilize the web productively and safely:

- Recruit “cyber deputies”—volunteers with solid knowledge of various online tools and the interest to help you use them. Cyber deputies never have to meet a child; they provide administrative support with special expertise.
- Learn to use the many websites established to help organizations recruit volunteers. Post interesting and appealing messages, targeted at the populations you most want to recruit.
- Recognize the critical importance of your own program website. Does it give detailed information about how to become an advocate and about the other volunteer roles available? Is the information current? Can someone apply online?
- Build an online community among current volunteers. Start an online discussion group for advocates to share experiences, ideas and tips (of course, they are trained not to reveal a child's or family's identity). Create a Facebook group open only to current volunteers—and another one for anyone who wants to learn more about the program. Get your cyber deputies to teach you how.
- Explore ways that current advocates can *add* internet communication to their contact with their assigned children. For example, if a teen has internet access, encourage Skype calls using video; it's much less time consuming than a personal visit, and yet it *is* a personal visit in the mind of the young cyber-native. Such calls can be an addition to, rather than a substitute for, regular in-person visits. Consider also whether you can use tools such as Skype to stay in touch with volunteers.
- Develop virtual volunteering opportunities for people who want to help the program on their own schedule, even in their pajamas. Online service is no longer an oddity. And as with pro bono volunteers, you can apply all the principles of real-world volunteer management. What can someone do virtually? Write a grant proposal, proofread materials, translate information into another language, search for discounts on needed supplies, set up online surveys, design new web pages for you, do web research on any topic. Get the idea?

## What Is Really Possible?

This article is meant to be provocative. The trends identified are documented and only scratch the surface of the many issues percolating in our communities right now. The proposed actions, however, are intended as *discussion starters*. You may find that each has merit but some are way off base

## “Flex Training” Option for Pre-Service Volunteer Curriculum


Recognizing the trend that volunteers are more pressed for time and require more flexibility, National CASA has undertaken a multi-year initiative to overhaul our pre-service training for volunteers. In the past, the only tool we have provided our programs is a 30-hour in-person training curriculum.

We have heard many positive comments about the newest version of our pre-service *Volunteer Training Curriculum*, which was updated most recently in 2007. One persistent comment, however, is that continuing to require 30 hours of in-person training can be a barrier to volunteer recruitment.

As a result of trends in volunteerism and our network's feedback around the length of in-person training, we are embarking on a project to develop a flex training option. With this option, volunteers will have the opportunity to complete their training through a series of combined in-person and online activities. This project, which has been partially underwritten through a generous grant from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, is projected to go through a pilot phase this summer. Pending feedback from this phase, we anticipate that this new, flexible format of the *Volunteer Training Curriculum* will be available to programs toward the beginning of 2012. CASA programs will have the choice of whether to utilize the new option.

While the content included in this version of the curriculum will align with what is currently in use, the format will be very different. Trainees will spend about 15 hours learning about child welfare legislation, cultural competency, working with children and families and communication skills through various online activities. Some of these activities will require trainees to interact with one another through discussion boards and other technology. Trainees will then have the opportunity to apply what they've learned from the online training during a series of interactive case studies, which will make up the bulk of their 15 hours of in-person coursework.

More details about this alternative, flexible training option will be released once the curriculum has been piloted and revisions have been completed.

for your program. On the other hand, look for the seed of an idea that gets your creative juices flowing. And invite current volunteers to help you debate the pros and cons. 

*Susan J. Ellis is president of Energize, Inc., an international training, consulting and publishing firm specializing in volunteerism. Ellis has written 12 books, and her “On Volunteers” column appears in The NonProfit Times. She is copublisher of the online journal e-Volunteerism (e-volunteerism.com) and dean of faculty for the online training program Everyone Ready, of which National CASA is a member. Browse 1,200+ pages of free volunteer management information at energizeinc.com.*

This issue's Program Spotlight features five local CASA programs spread throughout the United States. Their leaders describe how they're approaching some of the key trends in volunteerism identified in our cover story.

## Treasure in the Backyard: Investing in Current Volunteers for the Long Term

**Greg Guthrie, Director**  
**Chris Ramsey, Program Coordinator**  
**CASA of Northeast Louisiana**  
**Monroe, LA**



Chris Ramsey (left) and Greg Guthrie

Fatigued by the nonstop cycle of recruiting, training, assigning and losing community volunteers, CASA of Northeast Louisiana set out to discover a better way.

We found that we could better retain our current advocates by analyzing individual volunteers' *levels of satisfaction*. By routinely diagnosing satisfaction, our program was better able to make adjustments and customize the volunteer experience favorably. Community members who have high levels of satisfaction are more likely to commit to another case and to tell others about the program.

Another important measure is the *level of perceived contribution*. This is the degree to which volunteers feel that they are making a worthwhile contribution (to the child, the family, the program and so on). We found that a high level of perceived contribution led to a higher level of satisfaction.

The two key steps to investing in current volunteers for long-term return are:

**1. Tune In!**—Develop your skills at listening to and connecting with individuals. Increase your ability to read between the lines and determine the emotion underlying a volunteer's behavior and communication. Be willing to ask the hard questions.

**2. Check In!**—Once you've established a positive relationship, build on that foundation by monitoring each volunteer's level of satisfaction and perceived contribution. Create questions that tell you how a volunteer is doing. Set up routine times to ask these questions. Adapt the method (e.g., face-to-face visits, written communications and online surveys) to fit your unique style.

Since this is a relatively new process, we do not have long-term statistics to support our theory. What we do have are enough advocates to work all of the cases in our area. Also, our volunteers are doing better work than ever. This anecdotal evidence comes from our staff, volunteers, community partners and judges.

## Non-Advocate Volunteers Boost Capacity of Program

**Kim Deer**  
**Director, CASA Program**  
**Interim Director**  
**Okmulgee County Family Resource Center**  
**Okmulgee, OK**

To address retention rates in the Okmulgee County Family Resource Center (OCFRC) CASA program, we looked at closed volunteer files from 1987 to 2009. It was clear that although volunteers exited the program for various reasons, many of them were probably better suited to a non-advocate volunteer role. We decided that our CASA program should offer opportunities to engage volunteers who are not necessarily interested in advocating for children in court. The rationale for starting the non-advocate volunteer program was to free up staff time required for fundraising, outreach, recruitment and retention to allow us to address other unmet needs.

The first step in designing the program was to formulate a plan. We took advantage of the October 2008 National CASA *Technical Assistance Bulletin*, "Ideas for Using Non-Advocate Volunteers to Build Capacity in CASA/GAL Programs." The first tactic was to identify the demographics of those most likely to donate their time. Then we created a non-advocate volunteer manual that familiarized each potential volunteer with non-advocate roles and responsibilities, the history and mission of the CASA program, policies and procedures and confidentiality.



We require that non-advocate volunteers complete a one-hour orientation and a background check.

The results of the non-advocate program are very promising. To date, OCFRC has 43 non-advocate volunteers. The overall volunteer retention rate in the Okmulgee County program increased from 65% to 90% in 2010. Our fundraising events were a great success this year, and non-advocate volunteers played a large role. Little staff time is needed to manage the program, and we are seeing a broader demographic getting involved. Rather than close the doors to CASA volunteers for whom court advocacy isn't a good fit, we open the doors to other volunteer opportunities within the agency.

### **CASA of Lane County's Social Media Efforts**

**Sarah-Kate Sharkey, Associate Director  
CASA of Lane County  
Springfield, OR**

Last spring, several child abuse tragedies happened in our community within a short period. The tragedies were covered in depth in our local newspapers, and many people were left feeling upset, angry, frustrated and helpless. We knew this was an important time to reach out and let people know how they could take action to help the children in our community. I asked several marketing professionals to be part of a task force to advise us on the most effective outreach strategies. They all agreed on one key strategy: increasing our social media presence. With so many people regularly using social media, it is an easy and cost-effective way to communicate and build relationships.

Among the most popular postings on our Facebook page was a series of short profiles of new CASA volunteers. People love to read about other people, especially when they have inspiring stories to share about why they choose to make a difference for children. The profiles are excerpted from interviews conducted with volunteers and include their background, along with a photo. The profiles always receive several "likes" as well as comments of appreciation and encouragement.

Because Facebook is only one part of our overall outreach strategy, it is difficult to quantify its impact on support for our program. I can say that our friend base has nearly doubled over the past seven months from 500 to more than 900. Just about every time I post—typically



about three times a week—our Facebook friends respond. While Facebook interaction alone is unlikely to convert someone into a CASA volunteer or donor, it is one more way to connect with people and contribute to their decision to get involved. Our overall outreach efforts, including social media, are indeed leading to greater success. Just this month, 52 prospective CASA volunteers attended our Informational Night—more than twice as many as ever before—and we increased net income from our main fundraising event by nearly 60% over last year.

### **Using the Personal Touch to Recruit in a Difficult Economy**

**Kristin Kunz, Arapahoe County Program Manager  
Advocates for Children  
Aurora, CO**

Advocates for Children serves Colorado's 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, encompassing 6,142 square miles—the largest district in the state. While we serve between 650 and 800 children a year, these numbers constitute only 25–40% of children in need over the past five years. Recruitment and retention are the essentials of what we do. How will we attack the ever-growing problem of too many kids, too few volunteers and an economy that is volatile and changing? In our agency, we believe the answer lies in the personal touch.



At a time when human contact is dwindling, our board and staff believe that talking to a real person who is knowledgeable, warm and encouraging is critical. In April 2009, we recognized that responding to a prospective volunteer's inquiry by making a quick phone call and sending an informational packet in the mail was not enough. We decided that fewer potential advocates would fall through the cracks if we invested the time to give them a complete understanding of the CASA volunteer role from day one. Within 24 hours of receiving that first inquiry, our office manager calls to give potential recruits a comprehensive picture of who we are and what we do—and to answer all of their questions. These phone calls average 30–40 minutes.

Since around the time we implemented these follow-up calls, our volunteer training classes have more than doubled in average size. We are confident that the calls have played a significant role in that growth.

*[continued on page 12]*

## Nonprofit Auxiliary Allows Florida Program to Grow

**Gina Rossi-Scheiman, Board Member  
Guardians for New Futures, Inc.  
Port Saint Lucie, FL**

Inside the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program's Saint Lucie West Office, there are truly no frills. Staff and volunteers operate on a bare-bones budget. However, staff members here are not feeling the effects of a shrinking economy. They are reaping the benefits of a growing volunteer base and more program recognition than they are used to.



This is possible because of the organization's nonprofit arm, Guardians for New Futures, founded in 1981. This auxiliary has helped the 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit GAL Program's volunteer force expand by more than 123% since 2007; currently, it is the fastest growing program in the state. Due to this expansion, the number of children served has grown by more than 67% since 2008.

While state funding covers staff salaries for GAL programs in Florida, the counties in each judicial district pay for the programs' room and board. Additionally, each district in the state has a nonprofit arm that works in tandem with the program to make up for budget shortfalls through fundraising, recruitment and awareness initiatives.

Examples of Guardians for New Futures' success include the 2010 Holiday Gift Drive, which provided presents for 900 children, and the yearly Back-to-School Initiative that makes school supplies available to about 600 disadvantaged children. Additionally, through grassroots media efforts, the program has gone from no media mentions in 2007 to 342 in 2010.

The very active board of Guardians for New Futures makes all of this possible, as do other volunteers who assist the organization with grant writing, fundraising and web development. The increasing awareness and growing volunteer base energize the program and volunteers to reach their ultimate goal—100% representation for all children in need. 📣



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# 7 Ways to Enhance Your Experience as a Volunteer

John L. Lipp  
President/CEO  
PAWS, San Francisco

In working with thousands of volunteers over the past 24 years, I've heard one comment repeated over and over again in various versions. It goes something like this: "Thank you; I got so much more out of it than I gave." Hearing this from so many volunteers—but not all—got me wondering why some people have a better experience than others and, more important, how much of that is due to their own initiative. So while most of my work is dedicated to what organizations can do to support and nurture their volunteer programs, this column is devoted to things volunteers can do to get the most out of their experiences.

## 1. Find the Right Fit.

Organizations spend a lot of time and resources screening volunteers to make sure they match the right person to the right job. Yet with all of these screening tools, the only person who truly knows whether it's the right fit is *you*. If something isn't working for you, be honest with your supervisor and explore whether the job can be modified or there might be another opportunity in the organization. In extreme situations, another organization may be a better fit. There are thousands of great opportunities for volunteers out there; the volunteers who are happiest are the ones who take the time to find that right position.

## 2. Be Proactive.

Let your supervisor know what it is you want to achieve from your volunteer experience and periodically assess whether you are meeting your goals. Along the way, don't be afraid to speak up (in a nice way, of course!) and share your ideas for making things better. Even if your suggestions can't be implemented, making yourself heard

is a powerful way to build a deeper relationship with your co-workers and the organization you care so deeply about.

## 3. Understand the Big Picture.

Make a commitment to learn about all aspects of the organization you work for so that you understand how your service as a volunteer fits into the big picture. You may discover other volunteer opportunities within the organization, and at the very least, you will have an increased appreciation for all the moving parts that go into delivering services.

## 4. Be an Advocate for the Organization.

As a volunteer, you have a lot of knowledge and understanding about important issues affecting the community. Whether you help recruit new volunteers, collect donations or just open up a few minds, embrace your inner advocate and share your passion and knowledge with others. At the end of the day, there is nothing more motivating than sharing your experience with another person and seeing your own passion reflected back to you.

## 5. Acknowledge Your Co-Workers.

Take time to get to know your co-workers (paid staff, other volunteers and your supervisor) and pay attention to what makes them unique and effective. When they least expect it, let them know how much you appreciate them. As Mark Twain said, "The happy phrasing of a compliment is one of the rarest of human gifts and the happy delivery of it another."

## 6. Find Balance.

As much as you love your volunteer work and the difference you are making, part of what makes you successful is your ability to find balance in your life, keep things in



perspective and keep all the parts in harmony. Acknowledge your limitations—we can't be everything to everybody!—and know how much time you can realistically give as a volunteer. The happiest volunteers measure their success in the quality of the time they donate, not the quantity.

## 7. Know When to Leave.

Volunteering for an organization is a journey of discovery, and as with all journeys, there is an ending. Whether your volunteer tenure with an organization spans a couple of years or a couple of decades, there will come a time when that inner voice tells you you've given all you can give and it's time to start a new journey. When this happens, work closely with your organization to prepare an exit plan that ensures your important work will continue and other volunteers are in place, ready to fight the good fight. And, of course, just because you no longer volunteer for an organization doesn't mean you have to stop being an advocate (see #4 above!). 🗉

*John L. Lipp was the opening keynote speaker at the 2011 National CASA Conference in Chicago and is the author of The Complete Idiot's Guide to Recruiting and Managing Volunteers (Alpha/Penguin, 2009). Contact him at [John@Voluncheer.com](mailto:John@Voluncheer.com) or follow him on Twitter at [twitter.com/voluncheer](https://twitter.com/voluncheer).*

## Youth Behind the Lens and in the Forefront



Video participants (left to right) Jim Clune, National CASA director of communications; Megan Chao, director of development, Daniel H. Birman Productions, Inc.; Dan Birman, filmmaker; and youth formerly in care—Sumahirs Rivera; Camisha Nettles; Candace Kaimuloa; Shaden Jedlicka; Janessa Lee; and Monica Rainer

National CASA created an opportunity for talented former foster youth to gain the training and inspiration needed to tell their stories via video. The project was designed to provide youth an invaluable mentoring and educational opportunity that could lead to successful careers in the field of television and video production.

Six youth formerly in foster care were selected to participate in a two-day video workshop led by filmmaker Dan Birman. Birman's most recent documentary was *Me Facing Life: Cyntoia's Story*, which aired in March on the PBS documentary series *Independent Lens*. He is also an associate professor of professional practice with the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism as well as a former member of the board of governors at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

After two days in workshops at the offices of Birman Productions in Pasadena, CA, the young adults were sent home with high-definition cameras and given two weeks to produce video footage that creatively documents their personal stories. Each youth was then brought back to Pasadena with the raw footage to spend an entire day in an editing suite polishing their work with Emmy award-winning documentary editor Charlton McMillan.

The final videos will be reviewed by executives at CBS Television in New York City. One youth will be selected from this screening to consult on the next CBS Cares National CASA public service announcement, which is scheduled to be completed by July. All video project participants received certificates documenting their completion of the workshop and were able to keep their cameras to continue pursuing their interest in video production.

"Our young people had an amazing time with the video workshop!" exclaimed Celeste Bodner, founder and executive director of FosterClub. "I spoke with two of the participants,

Monica and Candace, and they both talked excitedly about what they plan to film when they get home. Dan Birman and his associate Megan were fantastic."

## New Milestone on Facebook—20,000 Fans Support National CASA

Every day, thousands of CASA/GAL staff, volunteers, board members and other supporters of the CASA cause come together on Facebook to exchange stories, celebrate victories, watch videos and listen to podcasts together. They also read about each other's programs, solve problems and find out the latest news about National CASA's work. Our 20,000<sup>th</sup> fan joined our Facebook page in April. We thought there was no better way to celebrate than to have our Facebook community tell us why they joined.



*I have been a CASA volunteer since the end of 2008 and I am so grateful to be a part of the community of people that care about children.*

Wendy W. (Josephine County, OR)



*I stay connected with National CASA because of my passion to help youth and professionals to better the system. I'm passionate about CASA because my CASA volunteer saved me from spiraling down and helped me see the opportunity for success.*

Mike E. (Fort Myers, FL)



*I completed my CASA training this month and have been assigned my first child. I believe in what this organization does and I have wanted to become a part of it for a long time.*

Karen A. (McMinnville, OR)



*In 1998, I became a CASA in Fulton County. I follow National CASA on Facebook because I feel connected and well informed on what's happening throughout the organization.*

Marilyn H. (Atlanta, GA)

You can be part of the conversation too. Join us at Facebook. [com/CASAforChildren.](https://www.facebook.com/CASAforChildren)



National CASA's 30th Annual Conference brought together CASA/GAL volunteers, staff members, judges, child welfare professionals and others for an intense few days of learning, sharing expertise and embracing the conference theme, *Building Hope for Youth*. A record 1,500+ people representing programs from across the country attended the conference, which took place March 19–22 in Chicago. Highlights included appearances by National CASA spokespeople Anthony Hamilton, Judge Glenda Hatchett and Jimmy Wayne as well as CEO Michael Piraino's State of CASA presentation.

## General Session Highlights

**Jimmy Wayne** kicked off the Opening Luncheon in memorable style, performing two songs and telling his powerful personal story. The country music artist spoke about his time in foster care and his efforts on behalf of older youth. He is National CASA's newest celebrity spokesperson.

*For all the children out there who don't get the chance to tell that person who helped them how much you mean to them, I'm speaking on behalf of them. I can promise you they appreciate it. They may not act like it at first—Lord knows I didn't act like it when I was in their place. But I know good and well they appreciate you.*



**John Lipp**, President/CEO, PAWS, San Francisco, and author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Recruiting and Managing Volunteers*, delivered an enlightening and amusing keynote address at the Opening Luncheon.

*It's our volunteers that give us that human talent to push forward, and to never rest on what worked yesterday but to ask ourselves "What's best for today?" and "Are we ready for tomorrow?" We all know humanity is going through a lot of changes, and there's a lot of heartache happening in the world right now. If ever there was a time for the world to come together—a time for people to reach out across neighborhoods, states and countries—if there was ever a time to fully embrace the power of the volunteer spirit and help others in need, I think that time is now.*

Grammy Award–winning R&B recording artist and National CASA spokesperson **Anthony Hamilton** opened Sunday night's Awards Banquet. Hamilton graced the audience with some moving a cappella singing and spoke candidly about his troubled childhood. He then pledged his dedication to representing National CASA as a spokesperson.

*A lot of people look at me and they see an entertainer, an actor, a father. But I was once a hurt child. That pain will last, but you can't let it destroy you.*

*I will use my voice as loud as I can to make a difference. I'm rallying more African American men and more men in general. We need men to come and say, "It's okay, young brother or young sister. We can lift you up and give you a chance at being a child." I stand here today as a CASA spokesperson, a new member, a soldier. Thank you for allowing me to be in a place that matters.*






In the Monday morning general session, **“From Disparity to Equity,”** experts discussed ways to provide equitable treatment to all children in care. The discussion was moderated by National CASA’s training director, Brian Washburn (far right), who asked questions sent from the audience via email and text message. From left: Chanin Kelly-Rae, National CASA senior director of inclusion and equity; Melissa Protzek, executive director, CASA of Allegheny County, PA; Terry Solomon, executive director, Illinois African American Family Commission; Charles Lerner, program manager, CASA of Santa Cruz County, CA; Ada Skyles, associate director and research fellow, Chapin Hall; Brian Washburn. For more information, visit [CASAforChildren.org/Equity](http://CASAforChildren.org/Equity).



National CASA CEO **Michael Piraino** delivered a compelling “State of CASA” address during the Monday luncheon. He also introduced our new communications and fundraising campaign, “Lift Up a Child’s Voice, Lift Up a Life.” Video of the session and related resources can be found at [CASAforChildren.org/StateofCASA](http://CASAforChildren.org/StateofCASA).

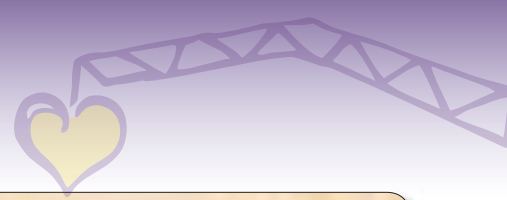


*Ours is the most inspiring mission of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let’s not be shy to say it. Let’s build that movement to include every community in this country. Let us bring justice to all the children. Let us lead the reform of our nation’s child welfare systems. Let us say very clearly that we are central to fulfilling that fundamental obligation of safety, the opportunity to learn and grow and to be in a loving family. Let us lift that voice of every child. Because as we lift that voice, we lift up our communities. As we lift up our communities, we lift up ourselves. And as we lift up ourselves and our young people, we lift up our world.*



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**Save the date** for the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual National CASA Conference: June 9-12, 2012, in Washington, DC. Choose from more than 60 workshops, hear from leaders in their fields, and network with more than 1,400 peers from across the country. Registration information will be available at [CASAforChildren.org/Conference](http://CASAforChildren.org/Conference) in December. If you would like to receive electronic updates about the 2012 conference, and are not already on our email list, please send an email to [staff@nationalcasa.org](mailto:staff@nationalcasa.org) with “2012 Conference” in the subject line.



The impressive talents of the award-winning Evanston Township High School Jazz Showcase Combo were on display as they provided a musical backdrop for the Awards Banquet.



Three National CASA celebrity spokespeople met for the first time at the conference. From left: Jimmy Wayne, Judge Glenda Hatchett and Anthony Hamilton.

## CASA Programs Share Best Work in First National Communications Contest

To encourage information-sharing and to shine a spotlight on creativity in the CASA network, National CASA held its first-ever network print communications contest at the national conference. Fifty-six programs submitted compelling and creative pieces, which were displayed in the exhibit hall. Conference guests voted for a winner in the “People’s Choice” category, which was awarded to the CASA Foundation, Clark County, NV (pictured). Other winners were Pawnee/Osage CASA (OK), Monroe County CASA, Inc. (IN) and CASA of Mercer County (NJ).

Conference attendees were also invited to leave their comments and suggestions, which included many like this one: “We love this and will copy!” See the winning submissions at [CASAforChildren.org/WinningPrint](http://CASAforChildren.org/WinningPrint).

PEOPLE'S CHOICE





# Awards of Excellence Winners Honored at National Conference

The Awards of Excellence, presented each year at the National CASA Association Annual Conference, recognize the exceptional contributions and dedication of child advocates, program directors, judges and board members. We also honor CASA/GAL programs excelling in diversity and inclusion efforts as well as other promising practices. Awards were presented during the recognition banquet at the conference. Below are quotes from award winners. Watch excerpts of acceptance speeches at [CASAforChildren.org/Honorees](http://CASAforChildren.org/Honorees). To nominate someone for a 2012 Award of Excellence, visit [CASAforChildren.org/Awards](http://CASAforChildren.org/Awards).



From left: Board Member of the Year Pat King, Director of the Year Beverly Levy, Judge of the Year Hon. Nan Waller and Volunteer of the Year Frank West

## 2011 G.F. Bettineski Child Advocate of the Year

**Frank West**  
CASA of Grant County, Inc., Marion, IN

*I do not believe that my actions were anything extraordinary, compared to any other volunteer in this room or in this country. I believe that trying to make your community, your city, your state and your country a better place is not only something we all need to do, but we have a moral responsibility to do.*

*It's unfortunate that too many young people in this country feel that they have no chance of happiness. As CASA volunteers, our job is to spread seeds of hope into the lives of those we serve. We don't do it because of recognition but because we understand that our country's most valuable resource—our children—is also our most vulnerable resource.*

## 2011 National CASA Association Judge of the Year

**Hon. Nan Waller, Circuit Court Judge**  
Multnomah County Juvenile Court, Portland, OR

*When a child's case comes before the court, often I'll be provided with useful information about the child. But it is usually a fairly bare-bones description which fails to capture truly who that child is and what they need. A CASA volunteer will breathe life into that bare-bones description. I'll learn that a child needs to be able to play football in order to feel like a regular kid. Or that another child is absolutely withering when they can only see their mother for one hour a week. Not only do CASA volunteers restore hope to children that their voice and their needs will be heard, but they work tirelessly to make sure that those hopes are realized.*

## 2011 National CASA Association Board Member of the Year

**Pat King**  
Child Advocates of Fort Bend, Rosenberg, TX

*We help kids we don't know, kids who look different, talk different. Kids who have lived different lives. Rich kids, poor kids. Kids who have suffered. Kids who are suffering. Kids without hope, without dreams. Kids without a mom or a dad to hug them, to tell them that they love them and to tell them they're special. That's what we do.*

## 2011 Kappa Alpha Theta CASA Program Director of the Year

**Beverly Levy, Executive Director**  
Dallas CASA, Dallas, TX

*None of our volunteers had to get involved. None of you have to get involved. And yet, you've chosen to spend the time providing our children with a powerful voice in court and a powerful voice in the community. Giving so much and asking absolutely nothing in return, except that our children have the decent childhood that they each deserve. I have loved every single day of helping children that we are all blessed to serve. I accept this award not for myself but for each and every one of you who work tirelessly every single day to bring children out of the darkness of their past and into the light of their future.*



**2011 National CASA Association Inclusion Award**  
 Child Advocates, Inc., Indianapolis, IN



From left, Child Advocates, Inc. staff members Greg Huff, Alane Singleton, Mark Bass, Chris Crowder, Gregg Ellis, Executive Director Cindy Booth, Earlon Hollowell, Danielle Pierson, Jamie Walden, LaShonda Wilson and Dionne Jones.

*When I became director of Child Advocates in 1996, we had eight employees. They were all white. Several years after that, I discovered that we had had a reputation for being exclusive. I was appalled that that was our reputation because we were supposed to be representing all the children in our city. That motivated me to change the way we do things at Child Advocates. In particular, LaDonna Wattley, our volunteer program director, has done a great job of challenging all volunteers in the training classes to examine themselves and how they view children of poverty and children of color. That has made us better advocates.*

—Cindy Booth, Executive Director

## Judge Glenda Hatchett Receives 2011 President’s Award

The National CASA President’s Award recognizes outstanding and sustained commitment to improving the lives of children. Not presented every year, it goes to an individual whose contributions to the welfare of children merit special distinction.

Judge Glenda Hatchett served for eight years with the Fulton County Juvenile Court in Atlanta. When she accepted the position in 1991, Hatchett became Georgia’s first African American chief presiding judge of a state court and the department head of one of the largest juvenile court systems in the country. She went on to star in the Emmy-nominated show *Judge Hatchett* for nine seasons. Judge Hatchett has also written two best-selling books.

A spokesperson for National CASA since 2002, Judge Hatchett has worked tirelessly to spread the message



of volunteer advocacy through her participation in national events and media tours. She has served as keynote speaker at two National CASA conferences, produced public service announcements and featured CASA volunteers on her nationally syndicated show. She has also written articles for the media as well as a quarterly column for *The Connection*.

Accepting the award, Judge Hatchett told three stories about youth in dire circumstances whom she had met through her courtroom. She dedicated the award to each of those children: “Tonight, for those three children, and for the hundreds and hundreds of children like them, I have a message: Just hold on. Hold on, understanding that there is going to

be hope on the other side of this dark, dark gap. We at National CASA—with our 70,000-plus volunteers—are moving to get you some help. Help is on the way!” 🗣️

## **NRCPCF Family Engagement Toolkit: Organizational Self-Study**

The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections has added an organizational self-study to the *NRCPCF Family Engagement Web-Based Practice Toolkit*. Programs can use this new self-assessment tool to review the core principles of family engagement practice, examine overall agency readiness and administrative policies as well as identify program strengths and challenges in engaging and working with families. This self-study can also help programs assess their technical assistance needs. Read more at [bit.ly/NRCPCF\\_selfstudy](http://bit.ly/NRCPCF_selfstudy).

## **Hard Times Made Harder: Struggling Caregivers and Child Neglect**

A new study by the Carsey Institute finds that children whose caregivers struggle with drug abuse, mental health problems, alcohol abuse or paying for basic necessities were more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than children from families without such struggles, even after controlling for other risk factors. The study brief, written by Wendy A. Walsh, recommends that government funding for child welfare be directed at preventive programs that help combat poverty and provide family support services. Read the brief at [bit.ly/hard\\_times](http://bit.ly/hard_times).

## **Fostering Connections Act Implementation—State Examples**

Two new resources provide information on how states are implementing the *Fostering Connections Act*. The National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, in partnership with Casey Family Programs, has surveyed all 50 states and the District of Columbia on their implementation of this law. Read the state-by-state results at [bit.ly/FC\\_state\\_survey](http://bit.ly/FC_state_survey). In addition, the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections has compiled information on how states are meeting the education requirements of children in 36 states and the District of Columbia. This review provides information on policies, practices and approaches to collaboration among systems. Read more at [bit.ly/FC\\_education](http://bit.ly/FC_education).

## **Transforming Virginia’s Child Welfare System**

A new case study from the Annie E. Casey Foundation tells the story of the great strides taken to reform Virginia’s child welfare system. In 2006, the state had the highest percentage of children aging out of foster care without permanent connections and significantly higher percentages of children in group and residential placements. By implementing a new

family-centered practice model, focusing on key priorities and putting a new data system in place, Virginia has increased child permanency rates to more than 80%. Read the study findings at [bit.ly/Casey\\_VA](http://bit.ly/Casey_VA).

## **Use of Differential Response by CPS Agencies**

The National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services has released an issue brief that summarizes how some state and local child protective services agencies provide differential response to child maltreatment reports. *Beyond Investigations: Current Innovations in Responding to Reports of Child Maltreatment* by Debra A. Gilmore is available at [bit.ly/QIC\\_DR](http://bit.ly/QIC_DR).

## **Discussion Group on Foster Parenting**

*Fostering Families Today* magazine and EMK Press have launched a new discussion group to share ideas, strategies and stories about foster parenting. The group is open to anyone connected with the foster care system, including parents, foster care alumni and CASA/GAL volunteers. The hosts plan to post a new topic every two weeks with suggested discussion questions to spark conversation. Find this group, hosted through Yahoo! Groups, at [yhoo.it/FFT\\_group](http://yhoo.it/FFT_group). 📩

## **A Question of Balance**

Newly revised

*A Question of Balance: Decision Making for CASA/GAL Volunteers*. Authored by Janet Ward of National CASA, this handbook for volunteers is designed as a guide to assist in the ongoing assessment of a child’s welfare and the development of recommendations for the court. It is intended to reinforce and supplement the knowledge and skills gained in volunteer training.

\$15.00 (\$14 ea. for 50 or more)

To purchase, visit [ShopCASA.org](http://ShopCASA.org).



A new look and updated content

# Volunteer Advocate Supports Program in Many Ways

Pat Slimmer  
Assistant Director  
CASA of Rochester/Monroe County, NY

How many ways can you utilize the talents of a CASA volunteer? Our program proudly declares, "Five ways."

After Linda Delaney retired, she learned about the CASA program and its goals. She decided it was the right fit for her, and she became a CASA volunteer in 2001. So far, she has been assigned to five cases involving 11 children. Permanency for the children has been attained in four of the cases. Currently Linda is investing a lot of time on her fifth case, making sure that the medical needs of the two teenage girls are addressed. She is also working with the dad to encourage him to take an active role in the girls' education. Her advocacy is showing success in both areas. Like the young man in the well known starfish story (see the back of the greeting card on this page), Linda knows that her efforts make a difference for each child.

But looking beyond her advocacy, we wondered how else we might harness the talents of this dynamo. When I learned that Linda was a golfer, I invited her to join the committee responsible for our annual golf tournament. Linda had gained considerable computer experience during her business career, so she took on the computer-related aspects of the project. Two years after Linda joined the committee, we asked her to serve with me as co-chair of the tournament. The two of us have become a mutually supportive team. The 2010 event made a profit of \$51,500—an exceptional result in these economic times!

What more could Linda do for us? Laurie Holmes, our director, was aware that Linda also had talent as an artist. So Laurie asked Linda if she would paint a picture of a starfish that might be used by the CASA program. Linda became our "resident artist," and her starfish watercolor joined the list of silent auction items at the tournament. Next we turned the artwork into a greeting card, with the starfish story printed on the back, for fundraising purposes. While Linda was in the midst of this task, we asked her to co-chair the fundraising committee with me as well.

Finally, Linda is a holiday donor. She and her husband have undertaken a special project for the past four years. They fill five laundry baskets with household and personal care products, and we give the baskets to families we serve.

CASA volunteer, co-chair of the annual golf tournament and the fundraising committee, resident artist and holiday



The author (right) and volunteer extraordinaire Linda Delaney

donor are all wrapped up in one special woman, Linda Delaney. She truly goes above and beyond. 🐠

CASA of Rochester/Monroe County is proud to make the starfish card available to the CASA network with a blank area on the back to add local information. A minimum order of 100 cards is available at \$1 per card (envelopes included), plus 10% shipping. Call (585) 428-5297.



## The Starfish Story

As dawn broke over the beach, the old man asked the youth why he was flinging starfish into the sea. The answer was they'd die if left in the sun. "But the beach goes for miles and there are millions of them," he muttered. "What difference is it going to make?" The young man looked at the starfish and said, as he threw it to safety, "It makes a difference to this one."



Watercolor painting by Linda Delaney, CASA volunteer  
©2010 CASA Rochester/Monroe County

## Singer Jimmy Wayne Congratulates New Volunteers Davidson County CASA, Nashville, TN



(Kneeling, left to right): New volunteers Casey Baker and Carrie Linn; singer Jimmy Wayne. (Standing, left to right): New volunteers Phyllis Robinson, Claudia Humphrey, Nehemiah Johnson, Carol Sorbo and Cheryl Benion; Jane Andrews, executive director of Davidson County CASA; Cheryl Hultman, executive director of Tennessee CASA; Will Campbell, president of Davidson County CASA

New CASA volunteers were sworn in the day country singer and former foster youth Jimmy Wayne visited the CASA program in Nashville. Wayne, who is also the newest spokesperson for National CASA, was present for the ceremony and spoke to the group about his experience in care as well as his passion for helping build awareness of the issues surrounding youth aging out of the system.

## Snowstorm Match Draws Hockey Fans and CASA Supporters

### CASA for the Sixth Judicial District, Gillette, WY

The second annual *Snowstorm Hockey Match* took place on January 29. Pitting players from the Gillette area against a team from Rapid City, SD, the event sold out and raised more than \$10,000 for CASA for the Sixth Judicial District. "I wanted to come up with something that hadn't been done a hundred times," explained Executive Director Rhea Parsons. She saw that the new Wyoming Center sports complex had rekindled a local passion for hockey and wanted to take advantage of the interest. Former Gillette residents flew back for the match from across the state and



around the country. Organizers included family-friendly features in the event, including face painting, a kids' slap-shot contest and a couples' sled race. The program raised funds by selling CASA-related merchandise, including hockey pucks and foam fingers.

## 41 Miles in 24 Hours

### Voices for Children, Carroll County, MD



On November 14 at 4:30 a.m., Greg Blair and six other members of Voices for Children set out to hike a 41-mile path along the Appalachian Trail. Their immediate goal was to complete the hike in 24 hours. But their larger goal was to raise awareness of the CASA program and recruit more volunteers. They titled their hike *41 Miles—24 Hours—One Voice* and used Facebook to spread the word, quickly attracting more than 600 supporters. The terrain was often difficult, and much of the hiking happened in darkness with nothing but headlamps for illumination. But the team managed to finish the hike in less than 17 hours. Blair has no plans to let this hike be his last one; his second will be a 27-mile trek along the Catoctin Trail in Maryland.

## Stars Dance for CASA Program

### Ottawa County CASA, Port Clinton, OH

More than 200 people turned out at the Port Clinton Elks Lodge to dance and support Ottawa County CASA. The third annual *Stars Dance for CASA* competition paired professional dance instructors with local celebrities, including council members and judges. Mayor of Port Clinton Debbie Hymore-Tester won the award for the most donations raised. The event brought in \$11,000 for Ottawa County CASA—approximately one-third of its yearly



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budget. "After three years, this has become an event that the community looks forward to," said volunteer Connie Snyder. "A lot of the movers and shakers came out this year."

### New Mexico Youth Wins National HALO Award CASA First Judicial District, Santa Fe, NM



Lauren Rivera-Huichan was one of four 2010 recipients of a HALO Award, sponsored by the network TeenNick. Honorees receive a \$10,000 scholarship, a matching contribution to the charity of their choice and the opportunity to meet a celebrity. The youth was paired with singer Mariah Carey (left). The award ceremony, hosted by singer and entertainer Nick Cannon (right), was broadcast nationally on TeenNick. Having benefited from the guidance of CASA volunteers, Rivera-Huichan works closely with CASA programs in New Mexico and is the president of Adelante, a foster youth advisory group. She is also participating in National CASA's *Fostering Futures* project.

### Young Fundraiser Honored by City Council CASA of Collin County, McKinney, TX

Nine-year-old Nathan Bush spent the past year raising funds for CASA of Collin County. Setting up booths and tables at local events throughout the year, Bush sold jewelry donated from his mother's local studio. He raised more than \$2,500 and donated all of it to CASA of Collin County. The program honored him for his efforts by naming its winter fundraising drive *Nathan's Challenge*. In March, the McKinney City Council presented Bush with a certificate of recognition and praised his dedication. "Nathan has done much more than raise thousands of dollars for CASA," said Development Director



Kathy Blank. "He has inspired others, especially other kids, and taught them that a small idea can go a long way."

### Baylor University Law School Hosts Professor Auction CASA of McLennan and Hill Counties, Waco, TX

Baylor Law recently hosted its first *Professor Auction*, giving students and staff the chance to bid on unique experiences with law professors. According to Susan Burt, program director of CASA of McLennan and Hill Counties, the event was the inspiration of Jessica Edwards, a Baylor Law student and CASA volunteer. Nearly 100 bidders turned out for the auction.



Three CASA program staff members spoke at the event about the importance of the organization's work. Professors offered activities such as cooking lessons, three-on-three basketball games, barbecues and hikes. The top item, an afternoon of skeet shooting and dinner with Professor David Guinn, raised \$380 from student Jordan Pauluhn. "I know that if I imagine my very worst day in law school, it is nothing compared to what these children have to endure," said Pauluhn. "I don't mind spending the money to help CASA put smiles on their faces."

### Dodgeball Tournament Draws 22 Teams CASA of the South Plains, Lubbock, TX

In January, CASA of the South Plains hosted its fifth annual dodgeball tournament, attracting 22 teams. The event began as a collaboration among the program and two local businesses that wanted to find a way to support the community. "It's not our largest fundraiser of the year," said Rose Carkeet, development director. "But it's definitely something that the community looks forward to." Carkeet also noted that the tournament has become a featured event among local and regional dodgeball leagues. Fox 34 News promoted the tournament on television and radio. 📺





## How Dare You Not?

Judge Glenda A. Hatchett  
National CASA Spokesperson

**M**y Aunt Francis was a pillar in our family. She was my grandmother's sister, an older woman, a wise elder. She had lived her life with dignity and finished her professional life with pride. Aunt Francis was also a devout Christian—very strict, but loving and warm. She had seen the worst days of the segregated South. Before she retired, she lovingly labored for more than 40 years as a schoolteacher—making half the salary of her white counterparts. I never heard her complain about that gross injustice. She had lived through enormous challenges, and she spoke eloquently, by her words and by her example.

At a time in my life when I felt particularly discouraged, I went to see my Aunt Francis, and her advice so changed me that the moment is emblazoned on my consciousness.

When I began my professional life, I chose to go to law school. I believed a legal career would permit me to fight for right and for justice. I expected that the law would help me to achieve and to contribute to bettering my life, my community, my culture and my country. I started law school with eager anticipation and with very high hopes.

My great expectations were short-lived. I soon faced challenges I had not expected. During my first year in law school, I became overwhelmed. I found myself sleep-deprived, overworked and stressed out. The pressure of my studies and the tremendous responsibility of working my way through school caused me to wonder what I had been thinking. I hated law school. I had only just started, but I was really questioning why I went in the first place. I needed advice, I needed sympathy, I needed affection. I knew where to go. So, on a cool fall day in Atlanta, I shut my books and drove to see my Aunt Francis at her house.

Aunt Francis kept the same old sofa for my entire life. I curled up on that sofa, and since Aunt Francis could see my heart was heavy, she asked me what was wrong. I was so stressed, I didn't need much prompting. I went on and on and

on about how absolutely miserable I was in law school. Aunt Francis sat and listened. I moaned and whined about how terrible law school was until Aunt Francis finally stopped me and asked just one question.

"Do you want to be a lawyer?"

I nodded, not even speaking aloud.

Then Aunt Francis said words that changed my life forever.

"Baby, if it were easy, everybody and their mama would be able to do what you're trying to do," she said. "But it isn't easy, and you've been uniquely situated and blessed with the gifts to be able to do what you set out to do."

My Aunt Francis held my gaze and stared deeply into my eyes as tears rolled down my face. I thought: *Aunt Francis has seen the worst of times. She has been a survivor and has been victorious with a mere fraction of my opportunities. Here I am, in law school. I have earnings, I have a car. I can pay my tuition. I didn't have to fight or march or file suit to get in. I am in law school, which is where I said I wanted to be. Aunt Francis has struggled more than I have ever had to. How dare I complain?*

I got up off Aunt Francis's sofa standing taller.

I made up my mind, from that day forward, that as I approached the important things in my life, I would keep my nerve and face my challenges. Strength, consistency, determination, integrity, purpose—these are all the values Aunt Francis and my grandparents and my parents lived by. These are the principles that helped keep them on the high road.

I had opportunities to live out my passion and my choices. I needed to do all I could to match my actions to my intentions, and no less. I needed to persist until I created the outcomes I was looking for. I needed to remain open to the possibilities that came along with the goals I set and the dreams I reached for. I needed to refuse to be derailed by the pitfalls.

That important talk with Aunt Francis helped me understand what to do when I found myself knocked down. It's as simple as this—Dare to get up. 🚩

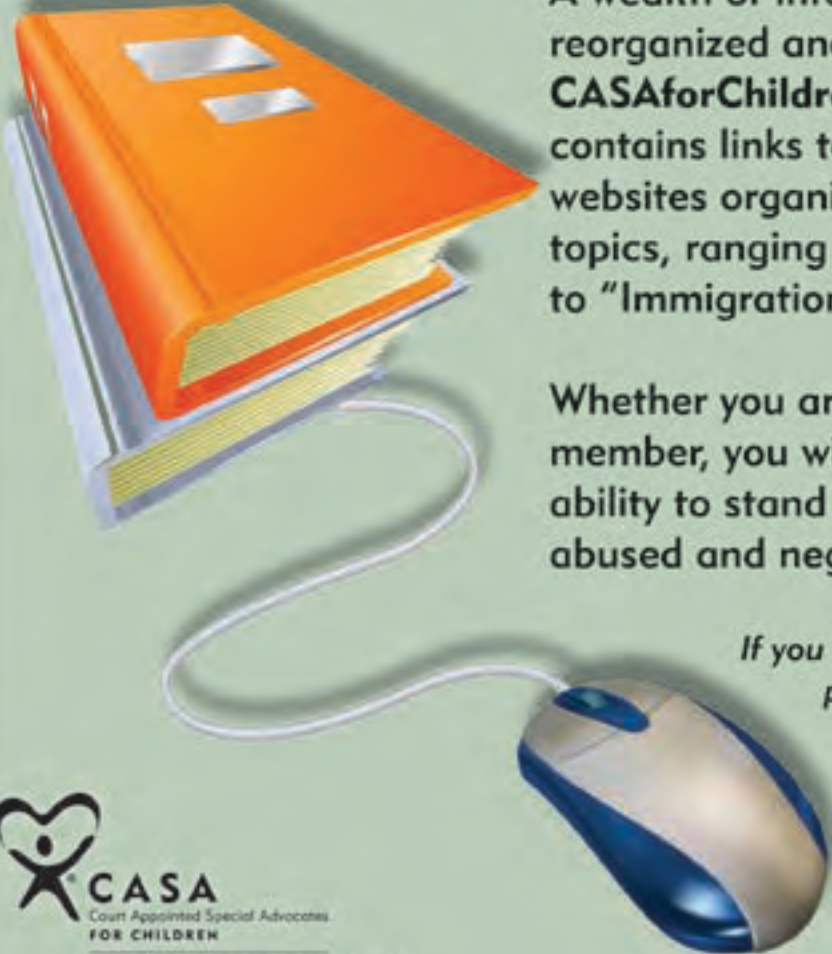
*Excerpted from Hon. Glenda A. Hatchett's new book, Dare to Take Charge. Judge Hatchett is an authority on juvenile issues known for her award-winning television series Judge Hatchett. See [glendahatchett.com](http://glendahatchett.com) and [parentpowernow.com](http://parentpowernow.com).*

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A wealth of information is waiting for you at the reorganized and expanded Resource Library on **CASAforChildren.org/Volunteers**. The library contains links to articles, publications and websites organized around timeless and timely topics, ranging from "Addiction/Substance Abuse" to "Immigration" to "Working with Older Youth."

Whether you are a volunteer, staff or board member, you will find resources to enhance your ability to stand up for the needs and rights of abused and neglected children.

*If you have suggestions or additions for the library, please send them to [staff@nationalcasa.org](mailto:staff@nationalcasa.org), with "Resource Library" in the subject line.*



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