

A Message from Our Executive Director

It's hard to believe Passaic County *CASA* is in it's third year! We've held eight volunteer training classes with more scheduled as we go to print! We are proud to announce that 61 *CASA* volunteers have been sworn in and are currently serving 77 children in out of home placement.

We are in the middle of a Summer Book Club session in which the volunteer participants receive in-service training credits for various book club activities.

We attended Wayne Day on June 7th and distributed countless packages of *CASA* information to interested parties. We are preparing to attend Pompton Lakes Day on Sunday, September 9th and North Haledon Day on Saturday, September 19th. While we do have many who have signed up to volunteer to 'man' the tables, more are always welcome.

We are proud to say that one of our volunteers, Shirley Laiks, had a very informative letter published in the editorial section of *Wayne Today* about Passaic County *CASA*. And, check out the September/October 2009 issue of *AARP Magazine Service Rocks* article and read about a fellow Atlanta *CASA* volunteer!

We are in the middle of a School Supply drive, we're planning an fall Art Show, and very busy applying for additional funding to keep growing our volunteer ranks in order to serve more and more Passaic County children in need of a *CASA*.

Thank you all for your continued support and for advocating for the children who need you the most.

Erica Fischer-Topp

The Case Manager Corner by Megan Hein

I could share with you all what a typical day in the life a Case Supervisor looks like, but there is no such thing for either of us. So instead, I've decided to share some of the things to keep in mind while writing court reports and some pearls of wisdom from your fellow *CASA* volunteers to keep in mind no matter what stage you are at in your case.

TIPS for Writing Court Reports

- Remember to submit reports to your Case Supervisor two weeks before the scheduled hearing. This allows time for editing and dialogue.
- Be sure to speak to as many players as possible prior to writing your report.
- Every person you spoke to should be listed in the 'Contacts' section as well as in the "Current Status" section in the same order with the child listed first. Use an initial for the foster parents' name.
- The 'Background' portion of the report should include the date of removal, reason for removal, all past placements and current placement.
- Record facts in the body of the report. Your opinions will be in your recommendations.
- Recommendations should relate directly to issues addressed in the report
- And remember: Your Case Supervisor is always there to assist you! ...continued...

ART SHOW

VIP Gallery Reception

A Collection of Art by Passaic County Children in Foster Care

In honor of National Adoption Month in November we will be hosting an Art Show displaying pieces created by none other than our *CASA* children. The purpose of the show is to create awareness of the needs that these children have and to encourage people to become foster/adoptive parents or to volunteer as a *CASA*.

Each work of art will be identified by the child's first name and age and will depict some aspect of their personal situation.

Mark your calendars:

When: November 12, 2009

Where: Passaic County Administration Building (The Court House)

What time: 5:00—8:00 PM



continued

Advice from Fellow CASA Volunteers

- "Hang in there and be patient because you may think you're not helping or seeing results when all of a sudden it will become clear that there was a positive result."
- "Be confident, persistent and when you think your patience is at its end...breathe in deeply, remember you are making a difference for your kid, and dig a little deeper."
- "Keep a notebook once you get an assignment and write down everything including the date—sometimes the most important. The notebook is your log. Your log of calls made, voice mails left and information you need. It's a great resource to you."
- "Remember, it takes time for some individuals to call you back, so make sure you leave enough time to get the information you need when you need it. Sometime, they don't call you back, and don't take it personally (even though it's in a good way). So keep calling them until you get the information you need."
- Also, read the file and take notes while your are doing it. The smallest thing might not seem important initially but could add insight after you've gotten to know the players better."

Wayne Today / Letter to the Editor

August-2009

CASA volunteers are voice for children

Dear Editor:

Although there are 530 foster children in the Passaic County system who do not have a CASA assigned to them, many people do not know what a CASA is or does.

A CASA is a Court Appointed Special Advocate who is a trained and supervised volunteer appointed by a judge to advocate for a foster child—a child who is a victim of abuse or neglect and who is under the court's protection. A CASA volunteer is appointed to represent the child's best interests and to provide an independent investigation of the child's circumstances for the judge. A CASA offers a child someone to trust and feel safe with during often complex legal proceedings designed to assure that the child will ultimately be able to live in a permanent, safe and nurturing environment.

CASA volunteers are ordinary citizens who share a concern for foster children and have a willingness to provide a voice for a child in an overloaded court system. No legal background is required. Thirty hours of training and a court observation are required. A volunteer must be at least 21 years of age, have a valid driver's license, be fluent in English and have a flexible schedule during business hours.

Become a powerful voice. For more information about the opportunity to make a difference in the life of a child, call Passaic County CASA Director, Erica Fischer-Topp at 973-832-4002 in Wayne.

Shirley Laiks

CASA Volunteer

Woodland Park

June Advocate Tom Lowe

Congratulations to Tom Lowe for being selected as Advocate of the Month for June! Tom has worked tirelessly on behalf of three young girls since May 2008. Because the case is considered 'high profile,' Tom faced road blocks almost immediately in being told there was restricted access to the case. After submitting extremely detailed and thorough court reports, Tom has attended each and every hearing (and there have been many) and has been told by the Law Guardian that she often receives new information from Tom first. On behalf of CASA, we thank you for your energy and dedication, Tom.

July Advocate Jan Gavzy

Congratulations to Jan Gavzy for being selected as Advocate of the Month for July! Since the beginning of her case involving four siblings, Jan has been working to find a resolution where all four of the kids can stay together. She has met a lot of obstacles along the way but she continues to work her hardest. Jan's court reports are always on time, filled with useful information, and the court has commented on how helpful they are.

August Advocate Andrea Nieves

Congratulations to Andrea Nieves for being selected Advocate of the Month for August! Andrea just received her case in June and has hit the ground running. She is in constant contact (that's a good thing!) with her Case Supervisor and really knows everything about the case. The first court hearing was a few weeks ago and Judge de la Carrera called Andrea up to the bench to comment on how great her court report was.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO AS A PASSAIC COUNTY CASA.....



SAVE THE DATES

Come visit our table...or volunteer to help!

POMPTON LAKES DAY

Sunday 9-6-09

NORTH HALEDON DAY

SATURDAY 9-19-09

SCHOOL SUPPLY DISTRIBUTATION DAY

Presented by:

Passaic County CASA and Children in Court Unit

This year in appreciation for all the DYFS does for the children in Passaic County we have undertaken the task of collecting school supplies. Through very generous donations by both friends of CASA as well as the efforts of the Summer Book Club members, we have been collecting school supplies throughout the summer months. School supplies will be presorted for children by age and gender.

Where: Passaic County Administration Building

Room 311

Thursday, August 27th

2:00—4:00 PM

Welcome to the SPRING 2009 new CASA Volunteers sworn in on June 11, 2009!

Nancy Soto

Jocelyn McKinnon

Louis Gaitanis

Melinda Maslo

Debbie Thewes

Bruce Weiner

Zna Hanna

Michael Hanna

Natassa Contini

Shirley Laiks

Michael Morano

Amanda Jewell

Mary Ellen Flatt

Andrea Nieves

Welcome to the SUMMER 2009 new CASA Volunteers sworn in on September 3, 2009! This class was unique in that these volunteers participated in an independent study session, so most of their work was done on their own.

Carol Ann Manfri

Edward Lynch

Ashley Puryear



Summer 'Electronic' Book Club

On June 23rd we kicked off the Summer Book Club with a meeting setting out the goals, tasks and the timeframes to meet in-service training requirements. The three books on the reading assignment list are:

- 1) Three Little Words by Ashley Rhodes Courter
- 2) I Speak for This Child by Gay Courter
- 3) That Mean Old Yesterday by Stacy Patton



While most of the work was done electronically, the culmination of the group will be a session with Stacy Patton on Monday, September 21 at 6:00 in the CASA office.

These books come highly recommended and while not 'light' reading provide very insightful glimpses into the lives of children in foster care and the life of CASA worker Gay Courter. Ashley Rhodes Couter, author of Three Little Words, was in foster care at the Courters' prior to being adopted by this family.