

The CASA Link

April 2009

Message from the Executive Director



Board of Directors

Jeffrey A. Thompson, Pres.
Russ Graunke, V.P.
Curtis Reed, Treas.
Connie Shipman, Sec.
Tim Daw

Board Advisors

Nancy Battaglia

General Counsel

Elizabeth Bates
Huck, Bouma, Martin,
Charlton and Bradshaw, PC

Staff

Mary A. Chicoine,
Interim Executive Director

Joan Ranz,
Office Administrator

Beth Brownson,
Program Coordinator/
Advocate Supervisor

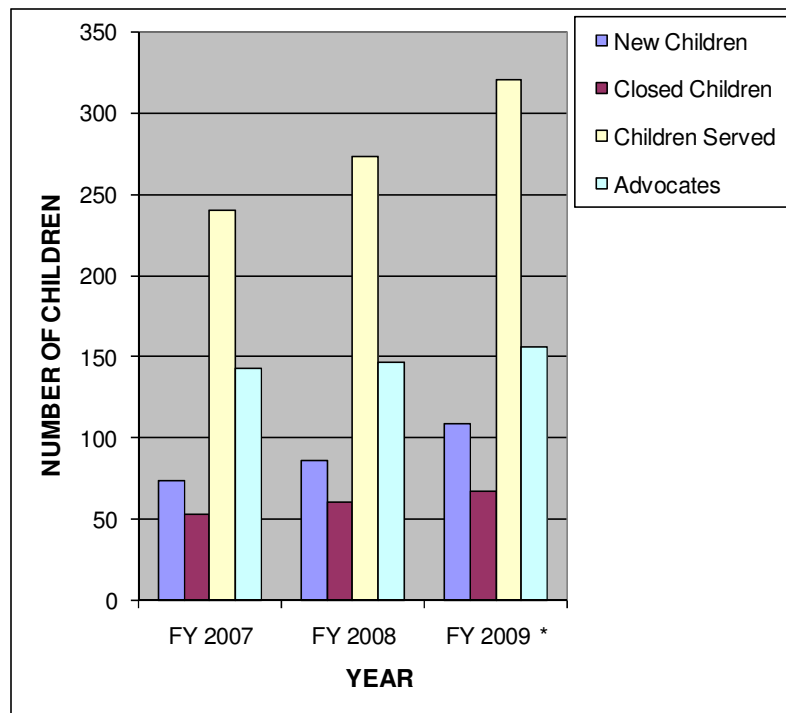
Kathleen Bondi,
Advocate Supervisor

Ruth Laughlin,
Training Coordinator/
Advocate Supervisor

Kathie Paravola,
Advocate Supervisor

It has truly been a pleasure to have been a part of CASA of DuPage for the past three months. I am edified by the work I see being done by Advocates and Staff for the most defenseless members of society, our children.

This fiscal year we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of children being served by CASA of DuPage. These statistics reflect the startling impact of our lagging economy on our children. The following chart and graph reflect this increase. In the past nine months of this fiscal year we have served 48 more children than we did in all of last year. This increase in child neglect and abuse was also evidenced at DCFS who received more than 4,000 reports in DuPage County last year.



Number	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009 *
New Children	74	86	109
Closed Children	53	61	67
Children Served	240	273	321
Advocates	143	147	156

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Message from Mary	1
CEC, etc.	2
Message from Ruth	3
Other News	4

* through March 31, 2009

As a result of this increase, we will be holding an additional training session in June. Already we have more than a dozen individuals who wish to join our CASA family. Here in DuPage County we do not lack for compassionate people like yourself who wish to be of service.

Thank you all for the dedication and compassionate service you provide to each child who through no fault of his own has become a part of our judicial system.

Continuing Education Highlights

Upcoming CEC Opportunities

May 14th – Chat; Supervisor Beth Brownson Home, 5904 Downers Drive, Downers Grove, 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM

May 26th – Brown Bag (topic to be determined); CASA office, 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM

June 11th, 15th and 18th - Next Pre-Service Training Class (topics and timing to be announced), CASA office, 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM

June 30th – Brown Bag (topic to be determined); CASA office, 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM

This quarter, we are planning to provide some evening “refresher” courses on some of the basics. To date, these will include court process and hearing sequencing, educational advocacy and report writing. They will be in the home of one of the Supervisors and emails will be sent when specifics are in place.

Here are ways you can help:

- Identify topics you’d like to see covered
- Offer your home as a location for an evening opportunity (other venues charge rent, and the courthouse is not available after hours)
- As you learn of pertinent community offerings, submit them to the Training Office so they can be included on the CEC calendar

REMEMBER: June is fast approaching and Advocates must complete 12 hours of Continuing Education Credits to remain in compliance.

Congratulations to our Newest Advocates

In March Judge Stanley Austin presided over the swearing in of 15 new Advocates to CASA of DuPage County. I know you join with us in welcoming in alphabetical order: Robin Currie of Glen Ellyn, Linda D’Onofrio of Winfield, Lisa Giese of Chicago, Paul Hanft of Naperville, Patty Kiraly of Naperville, Jennifer Larrabee of Glen Ellyn, Lisa Milligan of Lombard, LaTrecia Moore

of Bolingbrook, John Pikolcz (not Pictured) of North Aurora, Lee Robertson of Downers Grove, Gail Rush of Darien, Gregory Sammarco of Elmhurst, Tamara Urish of Lombard, Carolyn Winfrey-Thompson of Naperville, and Helen Wolfe of Naperville.



Tracking Your Hours and Mileage Why is it Important

Every month we ask you to tell us how many hours you worked and how many miles you drove on behalf of CASA. We know that this can be annoying information to track, but it is critically important as we make our case to potential funders.

We are supported by grants and donations. To be awarded these, a compelling case for CASA of DuPage must be made. A huge component of making this case relies on the number of hours provided by advocates at no charge and miles driven with no reimbursement. This is why you are asked for this information (the case tracking information) on a monthly basis by your Supervisor. Collection of this data is critical for our ongoing support.

Thank you to all of you who diligently provide this information monthly. To the rest of you please help. We need this information. Imagine seeing a press release where we talk about the number of volunteer hours donated in a given year. I can tell you that 13,000 has a far greater impact than 5,000.

A Message from Ruth Laughlin

Before I could be sworn in as an advocate in 1999, I was required to sign a document asserting that I would comply with the policies of CASA of DuPage County. During the training that accompanied that signing, it was made abundantly clear that any violation was grounds for immediate dismissal.

There have recently been two occurrences of policy breaches. In the course of responding to these, we have come to understand that we have not been clear enough in our expectations of you, the advocate, as it pertains to policy compliance. This article is one step in that remedy.

The two policies that were violated involve driving a child and contact with media. The intentions in each instance were beyond reproach, the advocates involved thoroughly committed to CASA and its mission. It was this commitment, as a matter of fact, which led directly to the breaches. That said, intention doesn't matter. There is no justification – ever, under any circumstances – for policy violation. There are reasons for them.

Let's take driving first. The risk with this does not belong just to the advocate, meaning that you cannot choose to do so because you are willing to assume that personal risk. Whenever you engage – at any level, in any way - with the child, or any party in the case, regardless of the type of relationship you may have established, you are acting on behalf of CASA of DuPage. This renders CASA a liable party for any behavior of any advocate.

When driving, you could be involved in an accident that you don't contribute to at all. While your personal insurance would not be affected in such a case, the cost to CASA could be financially crippling because the child, indeed any party, is not ever to be in your vehicle. Also, our policies aside, just as no one has the right to transport one of your children without your consent (as your child's legal guardian), you do not have the right to transport a child without the consent of that child's guardian.

Foster parents are not guardians and cannot give permission. They have physical custody. DCFS, in the name of D. Jean Ortega-Piron, is the legal guardian, the parent, of every child in the system. Rightfully, the parent's consent is required for **any service** provided to the child.

On the other hand, if a child is not being driven to things that would serve that child's best interest, while you can't perform the service, you can kick and scream and raise havoc about it until you have the necessary attention. You will be joined in this effort by the CASA staff because THAT is our job. And it's much more productive and gratifying ultimately, anyway.

Less probably needs to be said about media contact, largely because the opportunity doesn't present itself often. Let's say, though, that you have a high profile case and the media is outside the courthouse. This is when you get to say "no comment". You can also just play deaf. And those are your only two options. The incident referred to earlier involves an advocate who, initially unknown to staff, had been in touch with a media figure. The only purpose in this was to be an agent for good for CASA. We understand that. Fortunately, this particular incident ended well. But I suspect most of us realize how innocently and inadvertently something damaging could be said in public forums. Confidentiality could be breached; something slightly mis-stated, or mis-edited, could cast us in an unfavorable or questionable light and would be forever "out there". There is, after all, no un-ringing of a bell. This is not a risk we can afford, and it is not something that can be tolerated. Additionally, imagine the missed opportunities when such an exposure is not deliberately and proactively managed. CASA policy dictates that any communication with media has the prior written consent of the Executive Director. Violations of the above policies could result in an Advocate's immediate dismissal. Please know how heart-wrenching it is when we need to dismiss an advocate. Don't do that to us, and – please - don't take people like you away from the families who need you.

Volunteers Needed Ribfest Naperville Exchange Club

On Thursday, July 2nd through Sunday, July 5th Naperville Exchange Club will host its annual Ribfest. Every year CASA provides volunteers for this wonderful event. As a result of the volunteer hours provided by CASA volunteers in 2008, we received \$25,500 from the Naperville Exchange Club. To register as a volunteer please visit www.ribfest.net. If you have any questions, please contact Joan Ranz, CASA Office Administrator at 630-221-0889 ext 304 or joan@dupagecasa.org.

Volunteer shifts are from 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM and 4:00 PM to 10:00 PM
As recipients of the Naperville Exchange Club grant, we are asked to sign up to work at the gates or the child ID tents.

CASA Hosts Russian Delegation of Family Service Providers

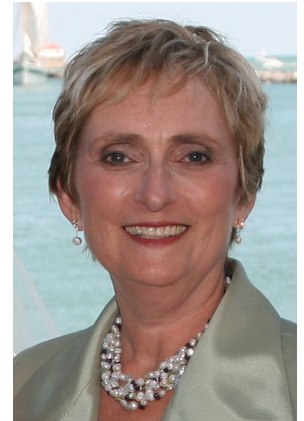
On June 1st, CASA will host George Palamattan, a delegation of 10 family service professionals from Russia plus 2 translators. George Palamattan is the Executive Director of CIP (Council of International Programs) in Chicago at Loyola University. These visiting professionals will participate in a Three Week Training Program on Community-Based Assistance to Vulnerable Children and are desirous of learning about interventions for children at risk that are alternative to the state-run organizations in their country. CASA is facilitating a day long program that will introduce these individuals to key service providers in DuPage County. Topics that the Russian delegates hope to have addressed include: abandoned and homeless children, runaway children, boarding schools for the disabled, orphans, lack of parental care, trafficking for sexual exploitation, HIV/AIDs, drug-related problems, etc. In Russia, because services are mostly run by the state, the role of community-based or non-profit organizations is minimal. These delegates hope to bring home with them some tools for change. Coincidentally, June 1st is

Children's Day in Russia. It is a privilege for us to be part of an effort that may benefit children in need in another corner of the world.

Becky Shook In Loving Memory

CASA of DuPage County recently lost a champion. Becky died from breast cancer on April 6th.

Becky trained in 2002 and very shortly thereafter accepted a case with a challenging and troubled teen-age girl. This girl was moved all over the place; it was with Becky that the phrase was coined "Join CASA. See Illinois". Becky was relentless, tireless, faithful, generous and kind in everything she did. And not just for her charge – she was this way in her support of training, office help, and financial contributions. When her case finally closed, she opted to stay with CASA but to not take a new case. She realized during her advocacy experiences how much the system lacked in support of older youth. She had some very ambitious and admirable ideas and was willing to put her time and money where her heart was. She was researching options when cancer struck. Her faithfulness to the children served by CASA is being expressed even in her death – her family has requested that donations be made to CASA of DuPage County in lieu of flowers.



Thank you, Shook family, for sharing Becky with us. Our thoughts are with you, and we will miss her.

**The CASA Office will be closed on:
Monday, May 25 - Memorial Day
Friday, July 3 - Independence Day**