



CASA of the Eastern Panhandle, Inc.

CASAEP.ORG

WINTER 2008



At **CASA**, we believe that every abused child deserves a safe and permanent home. Toward that end, we recruit and train community volunteers to be Court Appointed Special Advocates for abused and neglected children. **CASA** of the Eastern Panhandle (**CASA-EP**) is an independent non-profit program that serves children who have been removed from their homes in Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan counties. **CASA** volunteers advocate on behalf of abused and neglected children within the court system, and make sure that the voices of these children are heard.

CASA-EP currently has 43 trained volunteers, and has provided services to more than 202 children in the Eastern Panhandle.

For more information on how you can help **CASA** help abused and neglected children, contact us at:

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Letter from the Executive Director

Dear CASA-EP Friends,

With the holidays behind us and 2008 ahead of us now, I'm excited about the prospects of the New Year. And I'm looking forward to participating in the continued growth of the CASA-EP program. Before moving on though I thought a summary recap of 2007 might be useful—particularly vis-à-vis sharing a bit of my optimism and motivation for coming year.

CASA-EP volunteers served 128 children and their families and other caretakers last year. This means that we were able to assist 62% more children than in the previous year. We also grew in terms of number of volunteers—we currently have 44 and are preparing for a training class to begin in late January (this class is in lieu of the previously planned end of the year independent study), in which we hope to have between eight and ten new participants. Further still, our individual donations were more than double those in 2006. The latter may be an indication that our community outreach and awareness efforts are having some impact.

I'm happy to make this brief report, but unfortunately there's another side to our story I must share: Right now there are more than half of a million children across the country who are waiting for safe and permanent homes—more than four thousand of those children are in foster care here in West Virginia. And even more alarming are the facts that: 1) A child in West Virginia is abused or neglected every hour; 2) A child in west Virginia is born into poverty every two hours and; 3) A child in West Virginia dies before his or her first birthday every two days.

To be sure, this information is hard to digest, but it is the truth, (according to various sources—in this case, the Children's Defense Fund) and rather than turning away from these harsh facts, we must look at these realities as an opportunity reach deep inside ourselves and work to cause the change(s) necessary to improve the conditions of the lives of these, our most vulnerable children.

Now the good news is that while so many of our children are experiencing the pain and plight involved with abuse and neglect, CASA-EP (and other agencies here in the Eastern Panhandle) is here. We are here, nearly 50 volunteers strong, volunteers who have gone, and who continue to go, above and beyond what is asked of them. We are here, 19 board members in place, completely dedicated to managing and fortifying the organization in ways that make accomplishing our goals and objectives less arduous and absolutely doable. We are here, the whole of the CASA-EP family—local governments, churches, civic organizations, the business community, foundations and other grantors—supporters of every kind, able in every sense of the word to find safe and permanent homes for the children we serve.

So let's make 2008 a banner year. Let's grow our program. Let's reach 100 volunteers. Let's serve every child removed from his or her home here in the Eastern Panhandle because of neglect or abuse.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Peace Be With You
Vickey M. Wilcher, Executive Director



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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Executive Director

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Volunteer Coordinator

Shawn A. Valentine
Asst. Volunteer Coordinator



CASA Volunteers: Why do they come back for more?

My professor at Mountain State University once told me a story that I will never forget. He told me about the rescue dogs that would search through the rubble of Hurricane Katrina to find victims, whether living or not. After several days of search and rescue, the number of living victims was growing smaller and smaller until finally, the dogs only turned up the remains of victims' bodies to return to families for burial. Once this happened, the dogs would literally lie down and refuse to work. These well-trained, purpose-driven animals turned their backs on their trainers and simply would not go on. It wasn't just one dog – all of them suffered. What were the trainers to do? The answer was: children. The dogs were given a day or two to run around in the grass and play the day away with the children who survived the disaster. After frolicking about with the kids, the dogs were once again ready to return their very important rescue work.

Whenever someone asks me how our volunteers can come back to their work, day after day, facing the suffering of so many families, I remember this story. The look of recognition on a child's face, and their sweet embraces are incentive enough. Some other reasons I've heard from volunteers are:

"If I feel this bad, just imagine how the child feels."

"I may not be able to fix everything, but at least I can *do something*."

"I know I have the support of the other volunteers and the staff whenever I need it."

And, my personal favorite,

"I'm going to have a lot of explaining to do when I get to the Pearly Gates, but the one thing I won't have to explain is why I turned my back on children."

It is the children, time after time, that recharge us. If you recognize this feeling within yourself, then I invite you to join us and become a CASA volunteer!

Kaare A.
Martinsburg

Mary B.
Berkeley Springs

Tammy B.
Kearneysville

Sally B.
Great Cacapon

Frank B.
Shenandoah
Junction

Vickie C.
Martinsburg

Debra C.
Shepherdstown

Daneille C.
Frederick, MD

Lorraine C.
Berkeley Springs

Paul D.
Hedgesville

Sharon D.
Berkeley Springs

John F.
Kearneysville

Marie F.
Hedgesville

Robin G.
Hedgesville

Mike H.
Great Cacapon

Sandy H.
Berkeley Springs

Serina H.
Shepherdstown

Brenda J.
Hedgesville

Renee K.
Martinsburg

John K.
Gerrardstown

Kimberly L.
Gerrardstown

Thomas L.
Hedgesville

Jack & Nancy M.
Hedgesville

William M.
Martinsburg

Allison N.
Shepherdstown

Quincy N.
Shepherdstown

Tonya P.
Bunker Hill

Pat P.
Inwood

Tally R.
Berkeley Springs

Kathy R.
Shepherdstown

Karen R.
Harpers Ferry

Teddy R.
Martinsburg

Joyce R.
Charles Town

Vincent & Pat S.
Hedgesville

Angela T.
Hedgesville

Pam T.
Martinsburg

Michael T.
Martinsburg

Natalie T.
Shepherdstown

Anne T.
Shepherdstown

Lois W.
Hedgesville

Roxanne W.
Kearneysville

If you would like to support CASA-EP in our effort to find safe and permanent homes for abused and neglected children in the Eastern Panhandle, please use the enclosed envelope to send your tax-deductible gift; or visit our website at www.casaep.org



Everyday Heroes



I solemnly swear I will be a future CASA volunteer... just like my mommy!



CASA Town Hall meeting.



Judge Silver and Fall 2007 training class.



CASA at the Boys & Girls Club of Morgan County for the United Way Day of Caring.



Jan Callen attending the Fall 2007 Swearing in ceremony.



Two Toms.



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CASA-EP Volunteers: Every Day Heroes

A mother and her two children were successful in removing themselves from an abusive man. Their new home, however, was in need of major repairs. With little family support and no one in her life to repair the home, the mother felt helpless. CASA volunteers – even those who weren’t assigned to this case – gathered forces to help this family. As a team, they were able to mow the lawn (which hadn’t been touched all year), set up a new washer and dryer, donate an air conditioning unit, and provide a new stove. When the CASA volunteers asked the young child what they should tell the Judge, the child replied, “Tell the Judge I would like pizza.” CASA surprised them with a pizza oven! The mother called the CASA office in tears, saying “You all are angels sent from heaven!”

Kohl’s department store, under the program “Kohl’s Cares for Kids,” donated several song books and accompanying CDs to children with CASA volunteers. They were a huge hit with the children, including one who now likes to be called by the nickname, Bebop! When CASA visited the children, they played their favorite songs and sang along. According to one volunteer, “The songs were adorable -- rock ‘n roll for kids -- especially the child’s very favorite called ‘Pots and Pans.’”

One teenager had both a juvenile services and an abuse case open simultaneously. The child had to live temporarily in a residential facility. In a Multi Disciplinary Team meeting, the child stood up and announced to everyone present, “I don’t trust anyone. The only person I trust is my CASA volunteer.”

Along with our volunteers, CASA-EP appreciates a very committed staff, board, and community. On Christmas Eve, one staff member came in to the office in order to receive a community member’s donation of Christmas gifts for families in need. CASA-EP was able to coordinate the delivery of the presents through staff and volunteers to the families for Christmas.