

# Upcoming Training Classes & Volunteer Orientations

2007

## TRAINING and ORIENTATION ORIENTATION SESSIONS

ALL ORIENTATIONS ARE HELD AT  
CASABALTIMORE  
6:30 - 8PM

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

Thursday, June 21, 2007

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

Thursday, May 31, 2007

Thursday, August 9, 2007

## TRAINING SCHEDULE Spring/Summer 2007

Training Schedule Dates to be Determined

### REQUEST FROM SUSAN BURGER!!!!

\*\*\*\*IF YOU ARE EVER CONTACTED TO BE INTERVIEWED OR IF YOU EVER WRITE TO A NEWSPAPER OR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL ABOUT YOUR WORK AT CASA, PLEASE CONTACT SUSAN BURGER OR YOUR SUPERVISOR IMMEDIATELY, PRIOR TO MAKING A COMMITMENT!!! WE WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR COOPERATION IN INFORMING CASA OF BALTIMORE ABOUT THESE ACTIVITIES!!  
SUSAN

The Starfish is a publication of CASA Baltimore a 501C3 non-profit organization registered with the State of Maryland. It is printed six times a year. Any comments or submissions should be sent to our editor: Linda Koban @ lindarosek@aol.com or 410-244-1465. We reserve the right to accept, reject or edit any submissions to our publication. CASA Baltimore PO Box 13004, Baltimore, MD 21203.



The Starfish

Newsletter for *CASA* Volunteer Advocates

March/April 2007

Volume 06 Edition 2

## March/April Starfish Awardee - Scott Soffen



When Scott Soffen joined the Board of Directors of CASA he wanted to get a first hand look at the work that volunteers do, so he became one.

At first, when he was matched as a CASA in the spring of 2005 with Marcellus, a nine-year-old boy who was living in a group home and was scheduled to move to a relative's home, Scott was concerned that the case would be too easy. "It didn't fit the mold of what most of CASA's cases are like," Scott said.

Marcellus is the kind of child who appears to be so well adjusted that it's hard to reconcile the boy with his history. In 2003 he was taken to the hospital with an apparent seizure that turned out to be a manifestation of the fear he lived with every day in a home

filled with domestic violence. Not long after, his mother voluntarily placed him into foster care.

Yet, by the time Scott met Marcellus he found a child who was happy in his group home, a child who attaches easily to adults and gets along well with his peers. A bright student, Marcellus brings home top grades. He's what anyone would call an all-around great kid without any apparent issues.

So where was the challenge?

Marcellus didn't want to be adopted. He wanted to stay in the foster care system and because he would soon be 10 years old, the law allows him to make that decision. He did, however, want to live with a relative, a paternal cousin, and he kept hoping. And hoping.

For almost a year Scott kept hoping with him and doing everything possible to advocate for the move.

"It was frustrating," said Scott, a father of two, who lives in Ellicott City.

"She kept putting up hurdles for us to jump through and we kept jumping over hurdles and yet could never get to our goal and it took a lot of effort before we realized that she had no intention of ever taking him in."

During visits to his relative, for instance, the cousin reported a series of incidents where Marcellus stole items from the cousin's son who is the same age as Marcellus.

"I don't think she made them up," Scott said, "but she blew them out of proportion because she was looking for a reason not to take Marcellus into her home."

Over the year Scott had spent with Marcellus – during outings to the Orioles games and to venues like The National Aquarium – the two had bonded and Scott had hoped that Marcellus would eventually change his mind about adoption or think about a move into a foster home.

(Continued on page 2)

*Starfish Award (Continued from page 1)*

Marcellus finally agreed to go to a foster care home and in September 2006 Marcellus successfully transitioned to the home. When Scott checked in on Marcellus he noted again how well adjusted Marcellus was in his new placement.

But suddenly just around Thanksgiving 2006, there was an unexpected crisis.

“I thought I was done with the case. Here he was, happy with a nice family, in a nice townhouse in the county, with friends. But when I tried to call him I couldn’t get him.”

Apparently, he had been moved and Scott couldn’t get in touch with the DSS worker to learn what had happened or find out where Marcellus was living.

“I was worried,” Scott recalled, “because the foster mother kept changing her stories and it took a while before I found out what happened.”

The foster parent who had seemed so perfect told the DSS that she had a change in her work schedule and asked that Marcellus be removed after only two months.

Scott was certain that Marcellus would bounce back from the disappointment and he was right. Marcellus is currently living with a nurturing foster parent who in only four months has given Marcellus the stability he needs. She has assisted Marcellus in winning a scholarship to a prestigious private school where he will begin in the fall. She has also signed him up for karate and art lessons. Marcellus has clearly begun to bond with her.

Marcellus’s resiliency has both surprised and encouraged Scott in his work as a CASA.

As a board member he works on issues related to fostering the goals of the organization. His dual perspective – as board member and volunteer - has inspired him to speak out, including writing a letter to the editor of *The Sun* about the needs of children in foster care.

“The main benefit for me,” he said, “is that this work allows to me see what the volunteer job is really like as opposed to what it’s like in theory.”

Referring to the unexpected challenges that CASAs face, he lists: the difficulty of seeing his CASA child due to scheduling, such as showing up for appointments when no one was home; working with an excellent DSS worker who nonetheless was slow in returning calls; and not being alerted when his CASA child was moved to a new placement.

“Sometimes I’d get emotional but then I’d become rational and say that’s the reason you volunteer, to cut through the bureaucracy.”

Now that Marcellus appears to be settled, Scott is looking for another assignment, and as a board member and volunteer he knows there are plenty of them.



*Susan Burger, Executive Director,  
CASABaltimore*

### **TO ALL CASA BALTIMORE VOLUNTEERS:**

CASA Volunteers throughout the State of Maryland (14 programs) have been selected to receive a 2007 Governor’s Victim Assistance Award. The award will be presented at a luncheon which will be held on Friday, May 4<sup>th</sup> from 11:30 to 2:30 at the Sheraton Annapolis Hotel, 173 Jennifer Road, Annapolis.

### ***You are invited as our guest to attend the luncheon.***

You must let us know if you would like to attend no later than **April 13<sup>th</sup>!** Please call or email to indicate if you would like a ticket to the event.

CASA can only pay for a volunteer’s ticket but if you would like to invite a guest, tickets are \$26 and must be purchased in advance. If you let me know your guests name and forward a check for his/her ticket, I will include the guests in our ticket request. (Tickets may not be purchased at the door.)

The menu choice will be a chicken or a vegetarian dish. Please let me know, when you respond, if you are requesting a vegetarian lunch. Reasonable accommodations will be made for individuals with disabilities.

I hope you can attend this exciting event. The award is well deserved and I am sure there will be opportunities to meet your fellow CASA volunteers from around the State!

Susan Burger  
[sburger@casabalt.org](mailto:sburger@casabalt.org), 410-244-1465

## She's Not Angry for Nothing

### Unmasking the Hurt that Girls Hide Behind 2nd Annual Girls & Aggression Conference

By Phyllis Felton - Supervisor of Volunteers

March 30th with eighty plus mental health care providers, social service workers, guidance and grief counselors, I attended the 2nd Annual Girls & Aggression Conference. Together, we wrestled with the phenomenon of teenage girls whose aggressive actions have resulted in what “experts on youth crime view as a burgeoning national crisis: the significant rise in violent behavior among girls”. “According to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report, the number of girls 10 to 17 arrested for aggravated assault has doubled over the last 20 years. The number of boys arrested for weapons possession rose 22% between 1983 & 2003, while the number of girls increased by a whopping 125%. Today, one in three juveniles arrested for violent crimes is female.” News headlines are startling. “April 20, 17 year old allegedly slashed open the neck and face of another girl with a bottle of Twisted Tea... three teenage girls charged with 1st degree murder for participating in a drive-by shooting that left a 10 year old boy dead. May 3rd a 17 year old stabbed in her left breast and right armpit; 16 year old female classmate charged.” This spike in violence demands we ask why have teenage girls, ‘shifted from internalizing anger to striking out.’”

“Why is she so angry?” was the query. The Keynote speaker, Cassandra Mack, First Lady of Urban Empowerment, President and CEO of Strategies for Empowered Living Inc., opened our minds. The answers shared included, eyewitnesses to violence in the home; stolen innocence; loss of father’s presence in their lives; not having emotional needs met; nursing the wounds from birth to young adulthood; and unfavorable comparisons. Ms. Mack, author, motivational speaker columnist for The Harlem Parent and radio show host of The NO More Drama Hour of Power offered 7 key strategies to reclaim our daughters, nieces, cousins and facilitate their transition from ‘youth at-risk’ to Youth With Promise! These 7 strategies are: 1) Build Assertiveness Training; 2) Get Parents involved; 3) Build social skills training; 4) Teach our teen girls how to handle themselves in the face of peer pressure; 5) Use any and every moment to teach; 6) Show them how to transfer their street hustles into legitimate enterprises; and 7) Set high expectations.

As we engage those of our CASA kids who are teenage girls these 7 Key Strategies may just be the assist we need to empower our girls to break the cycle of violence, which threatens their futures as well as their lives.



**YOU'RE INVITED!**

*No act of kindness, no matter how small,  
Is ever wasted. ~ Aesop*

**IN OBSERVANCE OF NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK  
PLEASE COME TO  
CASA OF BALTIMORE  
VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION OPEN HOUSE**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 24<sup>TH</sup>  
8AM-6PM**

*Enjoy the company of CASA staff  
and fellow volunteers any time  
during the day. There will be  
food, gifts, and an opportunity to  
relax and connect with CASA Bal-  
timore!*

*Stop by any time during the day  
but please let us know if we can  
expect you by calling the office at  
410-244-1465 or sending an email  
to [sburger@casabalt.org](mailto:sburger@casabalt.org).*

*We hope to see you and spend  
some time with you.*

*Thank you for all you do for  
CASA of Baltimore!*

*“Never doubt that a small group of  
thoughtful, committed citizens can  
change the world; indeed, it's the  
only thing that ever has” ~Margaret  
Mead, anthropologist*



## **CASA VOLUNTEERS TELL IT LIKE IT IS**

*Several of our volunteers have used the Baltimore Sun to express the importance of the program and the true value of our children's lives. Our volunteers are our best publicists. Write about it or speak to your co-workers and friends. With more volunteers we can help more kids.*

### **How The System Failed One Slain Youth**

**A**fter reading The Sun's article about the murder of Jason Sanders ("Boy, 15, charged in brother's killing." Dec. 3), I felt compelled to write.

As a volunteer for the Court Appointed Special Advocates of Baltimore, I work in the foster care system in Baltimore. It was in my work with CASA that my relationship with Mr. Sanders began.

He was a troubled young man who was involved in the foster care system most of his life. His family's problems ran the gamut of those which beset so many Baltimoreans - namely addictions, poverty, loss of family unit, etc. When I met him at age 12, he was in a group placement - his third placement in two months.

I came to know a sweet young man who repeatedly related to me the pressures of living in his situation. He keenly felt the need to prove his toughness, often relating that if he wasn't tough he would never survive. And he must have told me 20 times that all he wanted was a dog that belonged to him, because nothing ever really did.

After several placements, including one out of state, he ran away. That ended my official involvement with Jason.

The next time I heard his name was when I read The Sun's article. I write this letter to put a face on this victim, not only of this horrible stabbing incident, but of a system that routinely dropped the ball for him.

How many murders do we need to realize something new needs to happen? I know this runs the risk of sounding like a cliché. But our children are our future.

*Continued on next page*

I hope this letter serves as a eulogy for my friend Jason, who in many ways was just another child. And let's not drop the ball again. Let's find a way to help our future.

Debbie Bertram  
Parkville

*The writer is a CASABaltimore volunteer.*

### **Lack of Volunteers Hampers the Helpers**

The Sun's article "Advocates fight for abused children" (Dec. 25) does an excellent job pointing out the essential work done by Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), which assigns advocates for abused and neglected children who have been removed from their homes.

What the article failed to emphasize was the need for volunteers to step forward.

Baltimore City has about 8,000 children who have been pulled from their parents, but for whom a permanent home has not yet been found.

Yet CASA of Baltimore can only help about 100 of these youths because of a lack of volunteers.

Scott Soffen  
Ellicott City

*The writer is a member of the board of CASA of Baltimore.*