

From the National CASA Conference...An In-service Training Opportunity...And Lunch!

Don't miss a "live" opportunity to hear CASA volunteer, Beah Zander, and CASA Supervisor, Carolyn McQuaige Howard, tell you about the favorite workshops they attended at the National CASA Conference that was held in June in Orlando, Florida.

- Beah will be sharing her wisdom from the workshop entitled, "Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities", that examined strategies for improving outcomes for people living in poverty as well as providing a broad overview of concepts related to poverty.
- Carolyn will be talking about what she learned from the workshop, "The Transitioning Youth Project" that addressed the issues of older youth in the child welfare system and the role each of us plays in preparing them to transition to self-sufficiency.

**Please come for lunch and information
on TUESDAY, AUGUST 7TH
FROM NOON-1PM
at our improved office space
511 E. Baltimore Street!!
(Please RSVP to your supervisor by July 30th)**

SPECIAL DAYS GIFTS FOR CASA CHILDREN!

We have a small supply of children's gifts available to you if you are in need of a gift for your CASA child's birthday or some other special occasion. There are also a few gift certificates to Target or Walmart available. Check with your supervisor or come in to the office to look through what we have!

In-Service Training

Twelve in-service training hours a year are required by the National CASA Association and CASA of Baltimore for all CASA volunteers. We know that it's hard to put in additional hours for training. One way to obtain some of the 12-hour requirement is on-line at CASAnet.org. At CASAnet.org you will find various online resources and a self-guided course for volunteers that can be monitored by your supervisor. Watch for a new series on the subject on youth aging out of foster care this Fall!

National CASA has posted recordings on CASAnet.org of selected workshops from the annual conference. These twenty minute audio clips are accompanied by a worksheet for you to complete and share with your supervisor.



The Starfish

Newsletter for CASA Volunteer Advocates

May/June 2007

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May/June Starfish Awardee - BETTY GILLIS WILLIAMS

Who is Betty Gillis Williams? This CASA Volunteer is a wife, mother of 8 children, grandmother raising two teenage grandsons, retired US Army veteran, a retired Maryland State Social Services employee and active volunteer in her church. In her own words, "I am passionate about life and living it to the fullest is my favorite past time". Betty came to CASA with the same zeal, which she applies to life. "I like children and too often they get overlooked because their voices go unheard. Since I have no problem speaking out, I decided I wanted to speak out for our children."

Betty advocates for a 17-year-old teenage mother whose life is filled with abandonment. Betty, after hearing Denise's story, realized that Denise 'is left with her belongings in hand, dropped at a relative's doorstep hoping they will take her into their home and shelter her and not much else'. Denise and her 2-year-old son did find a home with her maternal aunt. Even at her aunt's home, Denise does not

expect much more than room and board but as Denise confesses, it is better than being on the streets. Denise tries to be a good parent but Betty realizes that at 17 years of age Denise knows very little about being a responsible parent. At the first court hearing, when questioned about her parenting skills, Betty promised Denise and the Court that she would do everything in her power to help Denise learn to prevent her baby boy from coming into foster care.

Betty describes Denise as a polite, attractive young woman who barely completed the 6th grade, and was terribly frustrated because she lacks social and educational skills, to cope with the routines of daily life.

This CASA volunteer tried everything to facilitate Denise's enrollment in a GED program, which is only blocks away from her home. Betty, realizing that Denise is not a self-starter and does not see the task through to completion, has willingly accompanied Denise to the life skills

training, helped Denise find baby-sitting, made numerous phone calls to keep Denise's spirits up but to no avail. Denise is stalled unable to even start the GED program. Betty admits to her frustration but she is adamant, "I will not give up; I won't let her slip through the cracks."

"Trying to break this cycle of abandonment, to get her to see that she cannot leave herself, that is my job, that is my motivation. Her baby needs her and that is what I am trying to help her see." Betty catches glimmers of hope when Denise talks about her desire to be emancipated. This young woman seems to have no 'future story' but she wants one. Betty sees this wanting a future as an opportunity to help Denise establish some goals to realize her 'emancipation'. Betty is cautious about the help she offers because she does not want Denise to wind up like so many teen mothers, lost and dependent on social services.

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Starfish Award (Continued from page 1)

Betty's CASA assignment is now 14 months old. When asked how she is feeling about the future of her relationship with Denise, with a broad smile she answers, "I smell success so I must remain diligent, patient and affirmative! Too many times in her past, significant persons have given up on Denise but I refuse to add my name to that list! There are two lives at stake here and they will not be lost, not on my watch!" Betty admits that what keeps her going is Denise's affirmation, "I like talking to you, I want you in my life and I can't lose you!"

The CASA volunteer's journey is full of ups and downs, sometimes more downs than ups according to Betty but what makes it all worth it is, witnessing the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction your CASA kid demonstrates when they take that first step toward fulfilling their dream. "I rejoice at her small steps, try hard not to criticize when she makes some unsatisfying choices, prod her when she stalls, and praise her all the time. Praise makes the difference!" This is Betty Gillis Williams, spunky, tenacious full of good wishes and hope!

CASA VOLUNTEERS RECEIVE THE 2007 GOVERNOR'S VICTIM ASSISTANCE AWARD!



1311 children were served by CASA programs in Maryland between July 1, 2005 and June 30, 2006. A total of 877 individuals volunteered as Court Appointed Special Advocates during this time. The work of these hundreds of citizens greatly improves outcomes for maltreated child victims and demands the attention and urgency to their situations that would otherwise not be provided.

These citizens are an illustration of how caring adults can affect the development and lives of the youth in Maryland.

CASA Volunteers from all the 14 CASA programs throughout the State of Maryland were selected to receive a 2007 Governor's Victim Assistance Award. The award was presented at a luncheon held on Friday, May 4th at the Sheraton Annapolis Hotel with several CASA of Baltimore volunteers and staff present.



New Staff come to CASA of Baltimore!

You may be hearing the voice or seeing the email address of one of our three new staff members who have been hired to provide volunteer training and supervision and wondering...who are these people??? New to CASA of Baltimore but not to the world of child welfare and volunteer management we welcome:

Stefanie Hopkins - *Stefanie received her MSW degree in May and has had internships with the Baltimore City Public Schools and the Community Mediation Program. She has been a Program Coordinator for the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives and Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator for the South Baltimore Learning Center.*

Jeff Plankeel – *Jeff is also a Social Worker who comes to CASA having worked in various capacities at the Arrow Project Diagnostic Center and Center for Education, the Baltimore County Department of Social Services in Treatment Foster Care and several other positions addressing the needs of families and foster care children in Baltimore City.*

Lesley-Ann Morrissey – *Lesley is an Attorney who has worked for the Maryland State Department of Education and the Law Offices of Callegary & Steedman, PA, representing clients before the Office of Administrative Hearings in appeals of child abuse and neglect determinations and Child Care Administration license denials/revocations as well as representing children in special education. Lesley also directed the fundraising and development activities of the Judith P. Ritchey Youth Services Center in Baltimore. Lesley knows all about CASA as she was on the Planning Committee and later became the President of the Board of Directors of CASA of Baltimore County!*

Stefanie, Jeff and Lesley are enthusiastic about CASA and we are excited to have them join our dedicated staff that includes; Linda Koban, Phyllis Felton, Carolyn McQuaige-Howard, Cindy Griner and Lynera Gregory. Some of the staff works part-time, but there is always someone available to assist you with any questions or concerns you may have. Don't hesitate to contact us!!

Upcoming Training Classes & Volunteer Orientations

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

Thursday, August 9, 2007
Tuesday, September 11, 2007

Thursday, July 19, 2007