



The CASA Quarterly

Court Appointed Special Advocates

Newsletter of CASA of Los Angeles | 2012 Spring Edition

A Special Message from Dilys Tosteson Garcia, Executive Director of CASA of Los Angeles

Here we are, poised for the final quarter of this fiscal year, coming up on our second full year as a non-profit CASA program. How are we doing? As of the end of February 2012, CASA/LA volunteers have served 507 children FY2012 to date of the 770 target we set for ourselves. Recruitment and training of new volunteers continues with four more classes scheduled in MP and AV between now and the end of our fiscal year. With at least 75 new volunteers scheduled for training by June 30, we are poised to serve the same number of children as we did last year.

[Read all of Dilys's message inside](#)



Upcoming Events

May 13, 2012

“I Am For The Child” Mother’s Day Celebration

Feel good about not attending this year. No need to dress up, attend the party or listen to speeches. Spend your day enjoying time with your loved ones.

June 9-12, 2012, Washington, DC

2012 National CASA Conference

Join more than 1,400 colleagues from around the country for three-plus days of information-packed workshops and inspirational keynote addresses from leaders in their fields.

FEATURED STORIES



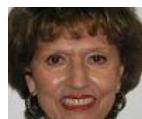
Message from Bruce Herron, CASA and Board President

For the past several years, CASA of Los Angeles has largely relied on previously-raised federal earmark dollars to fund its programs: \$800,000 in FY2011 and \$800,000 in this current FY2012.



Rosario’s Story

I grew up in domestic violence in a household where my mother was trying to fight her own demon of schizophrenia. I too suffered abuse by the hands of my father. There were eleven siblings, and my older sister and I had the responsibility of caring for them.



Remembering Marie Scanlan

We mourn the passing of long-time CASA Marie Scanlan. Marie became a CASA volunteer in January 1994 and remained active until June 2011 when she had to curtail her activities due to health problems.

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Main Offices

**Edmund D. Edelman
Children’s Court**
201 Centre Plaza Dr.
Suite 1100
Monterey Park, CA 91754
Ph: 323.526.6666

ANTELOPE VALLEY OFFICE:

Alfred J. McCourtney Juvenile Justice Center
1040 West Avenue J
Room 1153
Lancaster, CA 93534
Ph: 661.723.CASA(2272)



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Here we are, poised for the final quarter of this fiscal year, coming up on our second full year as a non-profit CASA program. How are we doing?

- As of the end of February 2012, CASA/LA volunteers have served 507 children FY2012 to date of the 770 target we set for ourselves. Recruitment and training of new volunteers continues with four more classes scheduled in MP and AV between now and the end of our fiscal year. With at least 75 new volunteers scheduled for training by June 30, we are poised to serve the same number of children as we did last year. Acting Director Monique Stevens is working closely with program staff, volunteers and the management team to identify avenues for additional growth before year end and for more robust growth in the new fiscal year ahead as part of our strategic commitment to serving a larger percentage of the county's vulnerable children with CASA advocacy. All growth ideas are most welcome!
- The CASA/LA Antelope Valley office is contributing mightily to our growth, with a staff of 5 now in place and 50 volunteers working with children. This is the highest number of volunteers we've ever had in our Lancaster office. Kudos to the leadership of Monique Stevens and her collaboration with Danica Hartshorn in engaging AV volunteers in community outreach that is benefiting more children than ever before. Thanks also for the support of board members Jean Youngquist and Dan Silva, who have been key to these efforts. Stop in and take a look at the beautiful appreciation scroll presented to our AV team by Supervisor Antonovich's office.
- In January we began a round of strategic staff conversations to refine our thinking on how to successfully move towards higher, more volunteer-driven service levels than ever before. We learned that we need to work more intentionally to successfully make our program structure, advocacy and outcomes more data driven and evidence-based — so that we are well positioned to perform and attract donor support. A work group was formed to develop more specific plans for migrating our model from the expensive case supervision model of the past towards a more flexible coaching model that trains and activates larger numbers of volunteers to serve larger numbers of children. Our sister programs in Orange County, San Diego and Phoenix help shine the way by sharing how they reached service levels of 1,000 children per year, reminding us that, yes, it is possible. This growth capacity involves updating our training content, as we have done with the new Early Childhood (EC) specialty track and in our pre-service training; becoming more flexible in our training delivery by using off-site and online opportunities, as we have begun in Antelope Valley and with our EC online modules; seeking more feedback from volunteers with regular surveys, the first of which is already in development; using that information to drive best practices in advocacy that continually improve how we prepare all of you to seek better outcomes than ever for our children; and lastly building better measurement and evaluation in order to make a bullet proof case for CASA.
- We are very proud to have kicked-off our Early Childhood Initiative with trainings in Monterey Park and Antelope Valley, getting our first generation of staff, volunteers and partners ready to participate in courtroom pilots that will engage CASAs with children 0-5, as they first enter the system. Kudos to Lauri Halderman, Monique Stevens and Lesley Bois for getting the EC program at CASA/LA off to a great start.



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Continued: A Special Message from Dilys Tosteson Garcia

- Our long awaited Technology Initiative finally began! In December and January we installed a proprietary server for CASA/LA that enables us now to have a local network with shared drives, a new Outlook based email system, faster internet speeds, and a platform for developing volunteer management online system and tools and improved donor management systems. Special thanks to board member Frank Addante's firm The Rubicon Project for donating equipment that provided new work stations for all staff! Soon we hope to announce an automated online application process and the first of many electronic tools for volunteer contact information and scheduling. Stay tuned for continuous improvement in this area.
- Our new 6-Month Case Assessment & Outcome Survey is making its debut this month, and we will begin taking 6-month measurements of progress that we can aggregate, analyze and from which we can learn. Evaluation and measurement are key for major funders and will open new doors of funding to CASA/LA. Kudos to the group of staff and volunteers who worked on this important project for over 18 months. A special thanks to Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey and doctoral student James Simon from the USC School of Social Work for donating their time to lead our study design and implementation.
- Board expansion and diversification continues with our latest additions of Lynn James, a CASA and private wealth manager at Wells Fargo; Cristine Reynaert, the development volunteer who led our Justice Jog efforts and a lawyer with Goodwin Procter; and Deborah Greaves, a trained CASA and corporate counsel at True Religion Brand Jeans. We are working to build board size and increase representation from a variety of communities in support of CASA's work throughout LA County.
- Our Glamour Gowns Preview Party on March 23 at the LA Convention Center was a big success with more attendees than ever. We are deeply appreciative of this year's Glamour Gowns Committee and their year long effort to stage a 2-day event, bigger and better than ever. Congratulations to our fantastic Glamour Gowns Committee led by co-chairs Jennifer Parker-Stanton and Michaela Pereira for another spectacular event providing young foster teen girls with an important esteem building experience. Thanks to all the CASA volunteers and others from the community who showed up to support the Glamour Gowns Committee in making this event a huge success.
- New faces at CASA/LA include include program assistant Yesenia Collier in our AV office, administrative assistant Tania Williams supporting development and operations, interim business manager Kurt Swanson moving into a regular staff position with us as operations director, interim development director Bill Jones, and program supervisor Louise Bieschke moving into outreach manager position. Monique Stevens, in addition to her responsibilities as leader of our AV office is now serving as Acting Program Director and senior staff team leader as we seek to fill this position. We continue to strengthen the organization at every opportunity, bringing on people with skills and talents that enhance our team for the challenging year ahead.
- We're one quarter away from our June 30 fiscal year end, looking to raise the \$400,000 needed to make our \$2.0MM budget. The holiday appeal and small fundraising house parties are helping us grow individual giving. On March 29 in MP and April 3 in AV we kicked-off our spring appeal, a Mother's Day "Non-Event" inviting folks to buy tickets and tables in support of CASA and stay home! We will be asking all of you to help us send as many invitations to as many people as possible, widening our circle of support. A personal note from you accompanying the CASA electronic and/or regular mail invitation will help generate the response we need. Join us at the kick-off events to learn more on how you can support this important fundraising effort. We're targeting to raise \$200,000 with this event. Help us make it happen! This year's Mother's Day Non-Event is a great warm up to the Spring 2013 Gala already in planning led by Gala 2013 Chair Jim Rishwain, CASA board member and global chair at Pillsbury Law.

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Continued: A Special Message from Dilys Tosteson Garcia

- Our efforts with the Board of Supervisors have not yet succeeded in securing our targeted \$250,000 from each district for CASA. We need to continue building our relationships with deputies at each of the district offices and will need volunteer involvement in this important task. Volunteers recently suggested forming a government relations committee to improve our connection with government and we will soon convene an open meeting for all interested in contributing ideas to this project.
- Preparation and planning for the next fiscal year is already underway. With the new fiscal year starting in July 2012 for the first time in over five years CASA/LA will have no federal earmark money with which to anchor its budget. We need to make up this difference! For the past two years we have had the luxury and good fortune of relying on previously raised federal earmark dollars to the tune of \$800,000 in FY2011 and \$700,000 in this current FY2012. This makes every dollar we raise now more important than ever, for any surplus we create this year will anchor the next.
- Private dollars must become a bigger part of the pie for CASA/LA. Given such high levels of past government support, historically only about 10% of CASA dollars in LA County came from individual donations even though 80% of all U.S. philanthropic dollars are in fact generated from private individual gifts. We need to build private giving to CASA from 10% to well over 50%. That means we need to challenge ourselves to give more and we need to invite others to join us in widening CASA's base of support.
- I continue my campaign to meet individually with each and every one of our donors and volunteers. Thanks to those of you who have already joined me to brainstorm about CASA/LA's future. I look forward to continuing these meetings with all of you. We all know what a difference it makes to provide a child with a caring adult. Let's make sure that the rest of our community knows and joins us in support.

Very special thanks to those of you who have personally given and to all who have personally asked others to support our work with children in the dependency system.

On behalf of all those we serve, please accept our deepest gratitude for making a difference for children in our community. It is my privilege to serve you — such an extraordinary group of staff, board and volunteers.

Antelope Valley CASA office receives Commendation

On March 15, 2012, the CASA of Los Angeles Antelope Valley office was presented with a Commendation from Fifth District Supervisor Michael Antonovich. The Commendation was in honor of the dedicated service in the community by CASA of Los Angeles and its advocates for the benefit of all the citizens of Los Angeles County. Many thanks to Supervisor Antonovich's office and CASA volunteer Diana Love for putting together this wonderful recognition!



CASA staff members Lesley Bois, Danica Hartshorn, Monique Stevens, Jasmine McClendon, and Yesenia Collier receive the Commendation at the Antelope Valley office.



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Message from Bruce Herron, CASA and Board President

By Bruce Herron, President of CASA of Los Angeles Board of Directors

For the past several years, CASA of Los Angeles has largely relied on previously-raised federal earmark dollars to fund its programs: \$800,000 in FY2011 and \$800,000 in this current FY2012. When our new fiscal year begins on July 1, 2012, for the first time in over five years, CASA of Los Angeles will no longer have federal earmark money anchoring its budget. This makes every dollar we raise now more important than ever.

If you have not done so, today is a great day to make a real difference in the life of a foster child. Please consider a gift to CASA of Los Angeles to allow us to continue to improve the lives of abused children in our foster care system.

CASA of Los Angeles, through its Court Appointed Special Advocates, is making a critical difference by standing up for the rights and interests of the vulnerable children in our foster care system in Los Angeles County. Our trained volunteers are helping foster children access the medical, legal, educational and financial aid that will carry them through their fragile childhood and prepare them to lead successful lives. But we need your help so we can train more volunteers and serve more foster children.

CASA of Los Angeles is now a 100% non-profit, self-supporting entity and we truly need your financial assistance. With a generous donation to CASA of Los Angeles, you can make a big difference and help bring stability and hope into the lives of these kids—the most vulnerable members of our community. Our goal for this fiscal year is to raise over \$2 million dollars by June 30th. We have already raised \$1.6 million towards that goal.

One of the ways in which you can support CASA of Los Angeles is by taking part in our Mother's Day Non-Event. CASA of Los Angeles plans to raise over \$200,000 from unidentified sources before the close of this year's fiscal year on June 30th. The Development Committee has committed to this task and has created the Mother's Day Non-Event to facilitate this. It is a play on a traditional gala event like we will have in the Spring of 2013, but rather than inviting people to actually attend a dinner or luncheon, we ask them instead to commit to supporting CASA of Los Angeles by making a contribution to buy a "table" or "ticket" and stay home to celebrate Mother's Day with their loved ones.

Please reach out to your network and invite them to support CASA/LA in our Mother's Day Non-Event this May, and with donations in time to help us make our June 30 goal of \$2 million dollars to help children in foster care. Thank you!



"I Am For The Child" Mother's Day Celebration

You are invited to stay home on May 13, 2012

Feel good about not attending this year. No need to dress up, attend the party or listen to speeches. Spend your day enjoying time with your loved ones.

Visit casala.org/mothersday to make a **special donation** online for the Mother's Day Celebration.





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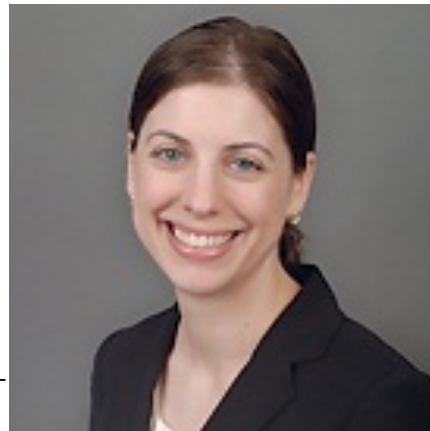
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New CASA/LA Board Member – Cristine Reynaert

Ms. Cristine Reynaert's legal and managerial experience, coupled with her devotion to serving foster children, makes her a valuable addition to the CASA/LA Board. A graduate of Harvard Law School, Ms. Reynaert is a Senior Associate practicing business litigation at Goodwin Procter LLP, as well as the founder of Counsel for CASA, a group of lawyers and law firms dedicated to raising awareness for CASA/LA. She has also served on the Development Committee of CASA/LA for the past two years.

Ms. Reynaert has a long history of pro bono service and outreach in the Los Angeles community, providing legal representation and other forms of direct service to some of L.A.'s most vulnerable residents. But her greatest passion is to improve the lives of foster children, giving them the best possible chance of a hopeful future and a secure and loving present. "Supporting CASA of Los Angeles is the best way I've found for the average Angelino to have a true and meaningful impact in the lives of local foster children. CASA volunteers have court-backed authority to make real change happen for these children, and I am thrilled to put my energies towards this cause and this organization in particular." As a member of CASA/LA's Board of Directors, Ms. Reynaert looks forward to increasing her efforts towards raising awareness and support for CASA/LA's mission within the Los Angeles legal community specifically and throughout L.A. County more broadly.



New CASA/LA Board Member – Deborah Greaves

Deborah Greaves currently serves as the secretary and general counsel of True Religion Brand Jeans, a fast growing premium apparel company with over 100 retail locations in the United States, Canada, UK, Japan and Germany and licensed stores worldwide. Greaves also serves on the Board of Directors of the International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition (IACC) and the Executive Committee of the California State Bar Intellectual Property Section, for which she is also a featured writer.

She attended Los Angeles Valley College Sawyer Business College in Pasadena, Calif. before earning her J.D from Glendale University College of Law in 1996. Ms. Greaves has been interviewed for and appeared in news reports and articles regarding apparel counterfeiting published by CNN, ABC News, the Los Angeles Times, Time/Warner, CBS News, FOX News, the Daily Journal, the Wall Street Journal, Corporate Counsel Magazine, Apparel News and Women's Wear Daily.



Ms. Greaves received the 2011 International Law Office (ILO) Global Counsel Award for Intellectual Property and has been admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court, the California State Bar Association and the U.S. Central California District Court.



Rosario's Story

By Rosario Simpson, CASA Volunteer

I grew up in domestic violence in a household where my mother was trying to fight her own demon of schizophrenia. I too suffered abuse by the hands of my father. There were eleven siblings, and my older sister and I had the responsibility of caring for them. On November 22, 1975, my baby brother, Antonio, fell ill at 3 months old. My older sister took him to a nearby hospital on foot because my mother was ill and could not understand what was going on, and we could not find my father. On that day, my life changed forever.

Hours later, police and social workers came into our home because no adult was present when we took Antonio to the hospital. They investigated, then loaded all my siblings and me in the police vehicles. My mother was arrested and charged with neglect. Antonio died December 3, 1975.

I learned how hard a foster child's life can be

I went into an emergency foster home for the first two weeks while a more permanent foster home was located. Everything happened so fast that I did not have time to think of what was truly going on.

When I went into a more permanent foster home, I found myself alone and without a voice. I was in a new environment, feeling the loss of my family and the death of my brother, growing into being a teenager, and not knowing where I belonged. I felt helpless in foster care. I was depressed. Although I did not see my siblings often, a few of my siblings were able to stay together in foster care. I was alone.

What made foster care especially difficult for me was all the new rules I had to live by. First, I was told to call this new foster woman my "mother." My foster family did not respect my religion, Catholicism, and I was not allowed to continue practicing it. I had been raised not to eat pork, and now I was required to eat it. These things really bothered me and whenever I tried to speak up, I was told that I was the problem, not them. One day my foster mother told me "You are worth \$345 dollars to me a month because that is what I get for you".

Their own biological children received blatant preferential treatment. When one of the biological daughters got into my clothes and damaged them, I voiced my concern, but I was considered the problem because I did not want to share my clothing. The one memory that stands out the most is that my foster mother kept nagging me to cut my long hair. It was long, thick, and wavy down to my waist and when it was lopped off, I cried. I cried for days.

From age 14 to age 17, I was in seven foster homes and I barely graduated high school. I felt I was permitted to graduate even though I was ill prepared to take on adulthood. I eventually had to leave my foster home when I graduated high school.

At 17, I was out of foster care and focused only on survival

I lacked a proper education and had no skills to offer. I had a minimum wage job, so I rented a very small attic above a garage, and told myself to pay the rent and to stay out of trouble. Although considered an adult, I felt completely unprepared to face the world on my own. I did not dare to dream or have goals, as they were not within reach. Survival was my focus for a very long time. My extended family did not offer me support in any way, shape, or form. I was completely on my own.

I tried to better myself by attending college and discovered I was a very poor student. I did not have confidence in myself. I applied for a job in a stock brokerage firm that paid a little more than minimum wage and was hired as a junior assistant to an assistant. I was still in survival mode, but with a little more money. I worked for this firm for a few years and again tried college. I managed to pass a few classes, but just barely. I knew education was the way to a better life, but I lacked confidence in my ability to learn.

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CASA Volunteer Rosario Simpson



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Rosario's Story (Continued)

Continued from previous page...

A work opportunity re-directed my life

I continued working at the stock brokerage firm when an opportunity arose that would take my life in another direction. The firm was offering sales assistants a chance to take the Series Seven Securities exam. The firm would pay for the classes and study materials. If I passed the exam, I would receive \$1,000 and a raise. \$1,000 was a lot of money, and a raise was an opportunity I couldn't say no to. I accepted the challenge and studied for the exam. However, I did not pass. I was very upset with myself.

After my pity party, my inner voice got very loud and told me to study again and re-take the exam. My anger led to determination: I would take another chance at passing the exam. For the next three months, I went to work, came home, had dinner, and went right to studying. I went over the material many, many times until I fully understood it. I kept re-taking the practice exams and did not let up. I was finally ready for the exam.

It was not an easy exam, and when I finished answering my last question, I held my breath, knowing my results would show in a moment. I had passed! I accomplished something that I felt was not within reach. I felt such a joy.

With that success, I returned to college

I eventually went back to college and took it much more seriously than before. I got my Associate of Science Degree, Paralegal Certification, and Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice, additional Security Licenses, and Life and Casualty Insurance Licenses. I am now currently seeking a Culinary Arts and Baking Certification.

The CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) Program came into my life when I was watching "The Dr. Phil Show." Dr. Phil is a national spokesperson for CASA. I saw a young man talking about his life in foster care. He spoke of how his foster parents would give him rotten fruit while their own biological children got the fresh fruit. I knew what he was feeling. I cried as memories of my own experience in foster care came to the surface. I felt such sympathy and empathy for him. I knew at that moment that I wanted to be involved in a foster child's life through CASA.

Now I am a CASA volunteer

Today I am involved with CASA of Los Angeles in the Antelope Valley. I am currently an advocate for a teenage boy, Redford, who came into the foster care system due to physical abuse. Redford is a great kid and wants to be a police officer when he gets older. He understands that I am his voice, and I will communicate his wishes to the judge. Once Redford learned that I am with CASA as a volunteer and am not being paid, he understood that I truly care for his well-being.

Redford appreciates what I have been able to do for him as a CASA volunteer. Through CASA, I was able to get Redford a bike so he can ride it to the library and school. I was also able to get Redford his first library card. Redford is currently taking electric guitar lessons and, through the generous donation of The Guitar Center, Redford now has an electric guitar and accessories to practice his lessons at home.

CASA helped me find my own voice—and use it for children in foster care

I am no longer silent. CASA has given me a voice, a voice that I now use for children in foster care. CASA has given me a wonderful purpose in life, and I hope to honor that purpose by giving my very best for children in foster care. My ultimate reward would be for them to succeed in healthy, loving, productive lives and to come back to CASA and give to the foster youths in our society.



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Antelope Valley Winter 2012 CASA Graduating Class



From left to right: Randall Duran, Lesley Bois, Susan Reinford, Referee Marilyn Mire Mordetzky, Raymond Lilly, Brandee Anderson, Rebecca Sellnow, Pamela Potts, Tania Williams, Angie Whitmarsh, Yesenia Collier, Cheryl VanDenberg.

Monterey Park Winter 2012 CASA Graduating Class



Top Row from Left: Jason Roach, Karen Ilich, Claudia Vides, Joseph Cruz, Janet Charlin, Patricia Franklin, Susan Williams, Debbie Richardson, Johanna Neumann, Lorena Parra

Middle Row from Left: Karen Darling, Tami Zussman, Marie-Helene Demers, Angie Kim, Amy Shim, Griselda Pineda, Dana Galen, Suzanne Geary, Lori Haas

Bottom Row from Left: Danica Jamieson, Samantha Feld, Karen Garipay, Cheryl Spencer, Meghan Daum



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Remembering Marie Scanlan

We mourn the passing of long-time CASA Marie Scanlan. Marie became a CASA volunteer in January 1994 and remained active until June 2011 when she had to curtail her activities due to health problems. During her 18 years with CASA/LA she served as a CASA advocate for children and worked on behalf of one special needs child for over 10 years. She was a Children's Court Assistant – part of the Tuesday Girls – and she helped with donor development. Of course, Marie had a wonderfully rich life beyond CASA. Below is text adapted from Marie's Celebration of Life.



Marie spent twenty years in the stock brokerage business becoming one of the very early female stock brokers, and finished her career at Lehman Brothers. She was then a realtor in Beverly Hills serving clients across the Los Angeles Westside. Pursuing her artistic desires, Marie got a degree in Interior Design and spent the next twenty-five years bringing beauty and warmth into the homes of her clients. Marie was renowned for her prowess as a hostess in her home, and her artistry as a gourmet chef. At age sixty-five Marie ventured into painting with wonderful initial success, but her budding career was halted due to family health issues.

In her last two decades, Marie found her most fulfilling career. Marie was a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).

Marie's sustenance's in life were love, energy and beauty in all their forms and through any media. She radiated these virtues tenfold to all she met. Marie was loved by all who knew her. Yet her greatest role throughout her life was that of mother.

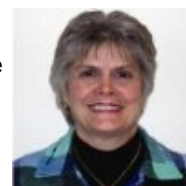
Marie will be remembered for the many lives she made better, and for the love and forgiveness she gave to all.

Everyone at CASA of Los Angeles extends heartfelt condolences to Marie's husband, Bob, and her sons Robert Laning and Robert Scanlan, Jr.

New CASA/LA Board Member – Lynn James

Ms. Lynn James is a valuable addition to the CASA/LA Board. She currently serves as a Vice President and Senior Planned Giving Advisor in Wells Fargo's Center for Planned Giving, where she monitors and manages client relationships.

Prior to working with Wells Fargo, Ms. James worked as a senior consultant with Staley Robeson Ryan St. Lawrence in Chicago, Ill., where she analyzed and advised in all areas of fund development, major gifts, planned giving and direct mail and annual appeals. James also worked as the Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations for Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, where she participated in planning and implementing a \$15 million capital campaign. Ms. James has also served as the Associate Director of Fund Raising for the Lincoln Park Zoological Society, participating in the planning and implementation of the Centennial Capital Campaign and working to fund the zoo's Farm in the Zoo program. Lastly, Lynn James has spent 12 years working for The Salvation Army in various capacities in Chicago, San Francisco, and finally Los Angeles, where she worked as the Associate Director of Social Services with oversight of 20 programs.



She received her Bachelor of Science and Master of Social Work from the University of Illinois, Chicago, and her J.D from IIT Kent College of Law.



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Donate Your Used Vehicle



Now you can donate your used car, truck or van to CASA of Los Angeles on our website! Even motorcycles, boats and airplanes are accepted! Donors will receive a tax deduction while turning the used vehicle into cash to support CASA of Los Angeles programs and services for foster children in our community. For more information or to donate a vehicle, boat or plane, go to this website address:
<http://casala.org/donate-your-vehicle/>

2012 National CASA Conference

**June 9-12, 2012,
Washington, DC**

Join more than 1,400 colleagues from around the country for three-plus days of information-packed workshops and inspirational keynote addresses from leaders in their fields. Visit the national CASA for Children website for more information.

The Importance of Photos

By Lauri Halderman, Program Manager

CASA Janet Blair was appointed to baby Julie in March 2011. Julie, a medically fragile infant, was placed in a medical group home. While Janet got busy on her advocacy work for Julie, she also began creating a photo history for Julie so that Julie would have photos documenting her early life. Julie worked with the placement to secure photos they had taken before the CASA was appointed. Ms. Blair began taking photos during every visits with Julie. When Julie was placed in a potential adoptive home in September 2011, Ms. Blair presented the foster/adopt parents with the photo album containing the photos of Julie from her earlier life. This allowed the parents to connect and see Julie's growth and life. They were so excited and appreciative to have these earlier images of Julie. Julie, when she grows up, will have photos documenting who she was when she will little. What a gift to both Julie and her future parents!



CASA Anita Aratow was appointed to Michael, a 2 ½ year old, special needs little boy. Michael, placed in the foster system, soon after birth, had been living in the same foster home for 2 years. The foster family did not want to adopt. Ms. Aratow started taking her camera with her to each visit to capture images of Michael during his different activities; she wanted to document his childhood. To her amusement, Michael actually started taking pictures as well! Recently, Michael was placed with a Native American prospective adoptive family who resides out of state.

Ms. Aratow created a pictorial history of Michael using photos she had taken along with photos provided by the foster family to give to the adoptive family so that they could see Michael growing up those years that he was not with them.

Ms. Aratow also secured photos of extended family so that when Michael has questions about his biological family when he is older, "his parents" can answer the questions and show him his family. Michael's prospective adoptive mother was very appreciative that she can share in Michael's early childhood through these photos.

Photos of our CASA children are very important for many reasons. I believe they remind the Court about the child for whom it is making decisions especially when the child is not at court. Photos can document, for the Court, the child's progress or lack thereof in a powerful way. Pictures can also be used to create histories and document memories of our kids' experiences and childhoods. Normally, parents, including myself, take photo after photo of our kids to document their every movement or achievement. Yet, foster kids don't always have someone who documents these childhood events and experiences. The photos become gifts to our CASA kids. These pictures can also connect adults who seek to provide permanence for our kids now with times in the child's life when the adult was not with the child. So grab you camera and start taking those pictures.



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CASA Book Groups: A Story Worth Reading

by Eileen Sheiniuk, CASA

“I really enjoy getting to know other CASA volunteers in a deeper way, sharing some of our experiences and learning from one another,” says Renne Bilson, CASA for 25 years.

“I enjoy the people in our group and it forces me to read books that might not come to my attention,” says Trudy Armer, CASA for 15 years.

So how did the CASA Book Group idea start? The answer is “Simply.”

Sue Redman, a CASA for four years, always loved reading books. While she was attending a Recruitment and Retention Committee meeting in 2009, she came up with an idea to start CASA book groups. “I thought it would be really helpful to talk to other CASAs,” said Sue. Now, more than 30 CASAs enthusiastically agree. CASA-LA’s book groups in the San Gabriel Valley, the San Fernando Valley and the West Side are buzzing. Just a few months ago, one CASA couple in the Antelope Valley started a Chat Group.

These groups appeal to new CASAs as well as seasoned CASAs. Gloria Gonzales became a CASA in September 2011 and attended her first book group session two months later. “This is a wonderful opportunity for me. The books give me more insight into foster care and the challenges that come with it,” says Gloria, adding, “It is a chance to socialize with other CASAs and support one another.”

Marlene Rapkin, an attorney and a CASA, says, “I think every new CASA should be hooked up with a book club. It is an important resource for answering questions or giving referrals.” Mariann Fagner, a CASA less than one year, agrees, noting, “It is so nice to be able to discuss strategies and get new insight from more experienced CASAs.”

Although many of the participants were already avid readers, Kay Van Horn pointed out that her book group introduced her to books “I may not have heard about, giving me more information and knowledge that enables me to be a more competent CASA.” Some books cited multiple times as favorites include:

[A Piece of Cake](#), by Cupcake Brown; [Tattoos on the Heart](#), by Father Greg Boyle; [The Glass Castle](#), by Jeannette Walls; [True Notebooks](#), by Mark Salzman and [A Framework for Understanding Poverty](#), by Ruby Payne.

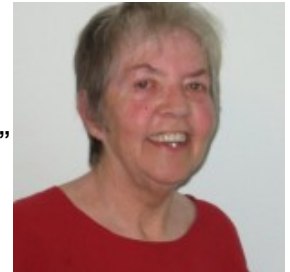
“Just the facts”

Most agreed there is a special alchemy at the meetings. Debbie Keen is clear about it, “I had found my CASA work, with its necessary heartaches, to be a lonely journey at times. The support and help that my book group CASA friends have given me is a huge benefit and makes me a better CASA.”

If you would like to join one of the following book groups or perhaps start another, please contact Sue Redman at sueredman@att.net. Currently there are three book groups and one Chat Group.

[San Fernando Valley Book Group](#): Meets approximately every 8 weeks at 7 p.m., often on Thursdays, usually at a member’s home in Studio City. [San Gabriel Valley Book Group](#): Usually meets approximately every 6 weeks on Saturday afternoons at 2 or 3 p.m., at various members’ homes, frequently in Pasadena. [Coastline CASAs Book Group](#): Meets approximately every 8 weeks, usually on Tuesdays at 1:30 p.m. somewhere along the coast or inland from Pacific Palisades to Manhattan Beach. [AV \(Antelope Valley\) CASA Chat Group](#): Usually meets the second Saturday of every month at 2:30 p.m. AV Chat Group coordinators Rayna and A. Jay Harman write, “We meet to relax and unwind together, share CASA experiences together...commiserate and enjoy each other...We have food, coffee, soda, fudge and new recipes any one of us might want to try out.”

Here is another reason for filing monthly data sheets and turning in book group attendance sheets. CASAs may receive three hours of continuing education credit for each book they read for book group and two hours of volunteer time for attending meetings.





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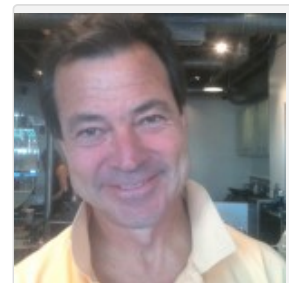
My CASA volunteer experience with Kevin

By Brian Gadinsky

One thing that I can say about my experience at CASA is I have gotten so much more than I have given. I was assigned to Kevin four years ago when I finished my training. He was 10 at the time, living with his sister in a very nice foster home in suburban Hacienda Heights and his foster mom was welcoming to me. Although Kevin was born to a prostitute who was addicted to drugs and alcohol, he is a sweet, intelligent boy who is extremely artistic.

When I found that he was struggling at school in special education, I agreed to assume his educational rights. I was told that Kevin suffered from fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) which explained his attention deficit, low executive functioning, very weak reading skills, and poor decision making, but he did not have an official diagnosis.

At my first I.E.P., it was clear that Kevin was not getting the services he deserved. His teachers and administrators were all cooperative and wanted the best for Kevin, but what they could do was not enough. So I requested a state appointed attorney and the school district settled out of court to provide Kevin the help he really needed, the highlight of which was a one-on-one reading tutor, an angel named Trina. In three months, Kevin went from 3rd grade literacy to his age-appropriate 8th grade level. In addition, I was able to get him officially diagnosed as FASD, which enabled Kevin to get the counseling and proper medication he needed.



CASA Volunteer Brian
Gadinsky

“Kevin is 15 now. My goal before this case closes is to see him off to college, but it won’t be easy. He has a very difficult time comprehending the consequences of his actions.”

But it wasn’t all smooth sailing from there. Kevin’s path into high school was almost permanently severed. He was being unduly and negatively influenced by another child and apparently made some kind of threat to another student. Kevin was going to be expelled for his actions under the LAUSD ‘no tolerance’ policy. That was a very dark day; no one wanted to expel him. His teachers all liked him very much (“he’s a good kid”), but there was nothing they could do. I talked to his counselor and learned that the only way I could save Kevin was to request an emergency district hearing and demonstrate that Kevin’s actions were directly tied to his FASD, which impairs judgment skills. Fortunately I was able to do that and we prevailed. To use a terrible mixed metaphor, we really dodged a bullet there!

The fight is not over. Now we have gotten Kevin to high school and he really likes it, but he is no longer coddled by his teachers and counselors. He has no safety net, and I am sad to say that he is failing. Through a program that I was told about by Trina, the angel who taught him to read, I got Kevin a one-on-one mentor, a teacher at his high school who has taken him on as her project. Ms. Kellie Fran is wonderful and she is doing her best, but now, once and for all, it’s up to Kevin. He is a lucky boy to have so many cheerleaders and specialists behind him.

Kevin is 15 now. My goal before this case closes is to see him off to college, but it won’t be easy. He has a very difficult time comprehending the consequences of his actions. I will continue to work hard to help Kevin win this ultimate battle. I cannot put into words how lucky I feel to be making a difference in this young man’s life, and it’s all because of this amazing CASA of Los Angeles organization.



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Leave a Lasting Legacy to CASA of Los Angeles

As a CASA of Los Angeles volunteer, you understand more than anyone else what it means for children in the foster care system to have dedicated advocates in their lives. Please consider a gift to CASA of Los Angeles in your will, trust or estate.

A bequest to CASA of Los Angeles is one of the most effective and simplest ways to leave a lasting legacy—making a lasting impact on the lives of at-risk foster children in Los Angeles County. You may specify a specific amount or a percentage you wish to give to CASA of Los Angeles. If you would like to make such a gift to CASA of Los Angeles, you may include language similar to the following:

“I, [name], of [city, state, zip code], give, devise and bequeath to Friends of Child Advocates DBA CASA of Los Angeles, a nonprofit public benefit corporation having its principal office at 201 Centre Plaza Drive, Ste. 1100, Monterey Park, CA 91754-2142 [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] to be used for the furtherance of its charitable purposes in the discretion and at the direction of its board of trustees for its unrestricted use and purpose.”

If you are considering making such a gift by bequest, please meet with your attorney first. Discuss the ramifications of your gift and, if appropriate, update your will. Friends and supporters who express their intention to include CASA through a planned gift in their estate plan may be recognized as a member of our Legacy Society by providing us a copy of the page in the will or trust in which a planned gift to CASA of Los Angeles is mentioned. Simply mail it to: CASA of Los Angeles, 201 Centre Plaza Drive, Ste. 1100, Monterey Park, CA 91754-2142 attn.: Development Department.



We'll miss you, Sarita

By Sue Thompson

Sarita Carden began her nearly 20-year commitment to CASA as a volunteer in 1993. At the time, she was a successful businesswoman, who founded and directed her own paralegal firm, sought-after by major Los Angeles law firms to provide investigative research, in-courtroom assistance, and other paralegal services to firms engaged in large, complex litigation matters.

CASA was a perfect fit for Sarita's skills, knowledge and deep concern for the well-being of disadvantaged children. And, in 2001, when our program experienced an abrupt shortage of supervisors, Sarita offered her services and became a CASA Supervisor.

In 2010, when severe statewide budget cuts forced the court to end its public-private funding relationship with Friends of CASA, the program's nonprofit arm, Sarita was asked by Friends' board of directors to take a lead role with program staff and volunteers during this difficult period of transition. She did so with grace, extraordinary dedication and leadership.

Although we are extremely sad to see Sarita go, we are forever grateful for her many, many contributions to CASA, its volunteers, and the children we serve. Sarita not only lifted up thousands of children's voices, but also their lives. She shall forever be "a jewel in the crown" of CASA of Los Angeles. We will miss you, Sarita.



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MISSION STATEMENT: The mission of CASA of Los Angeles is to improve the lives of the children in the dependency court system through trained, dedicated, and effective volunteer advocates who are professionally supported by an experienced staff.

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