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National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association [1]

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Speak up for a child.®

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“As we move to strengthen our commitment to the children and strong families of America, CASA stands as one of the most effective ways of helping abused and neglected children find their way through the court systems to safe, loving, permanent homes.”

— Robert W. Sweet, Jr., Administrator,
Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention
U.S. Department of Justice

“Abused and neglected children need someone to speak up for them. No one does this more effectively and with more dedication than the CASA volunteer.

As a judge, I rely heavily on the CASA’s insight and recommendation to the court. CASA does work.”

— Judge Salvadore T. Mulé, President,
National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges

National CASA Association
2722 Eastlake Ave. E., Suite 220
Seattle, WA 98102
(206) 322-8500

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The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

2722 Eastlake Ave. E., Suite 220 • Seattle, Washington 98102 • 206-328-8588 • FAX 206-323-8137

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March 31, 1993

Eli Segal
Director
Office of National Service
Old Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Segal:

Every child deserves a safe, permanent home and a chance at a future. The National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association is working to see that all abused and neglected children who enter the court system, find their way to safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible.

National CASA is an organization of programs that use trained community volunteers to speak up for abused and neglected children in court. Currently 30,000 women and men are serving as CASA volunteers in all 50 states.

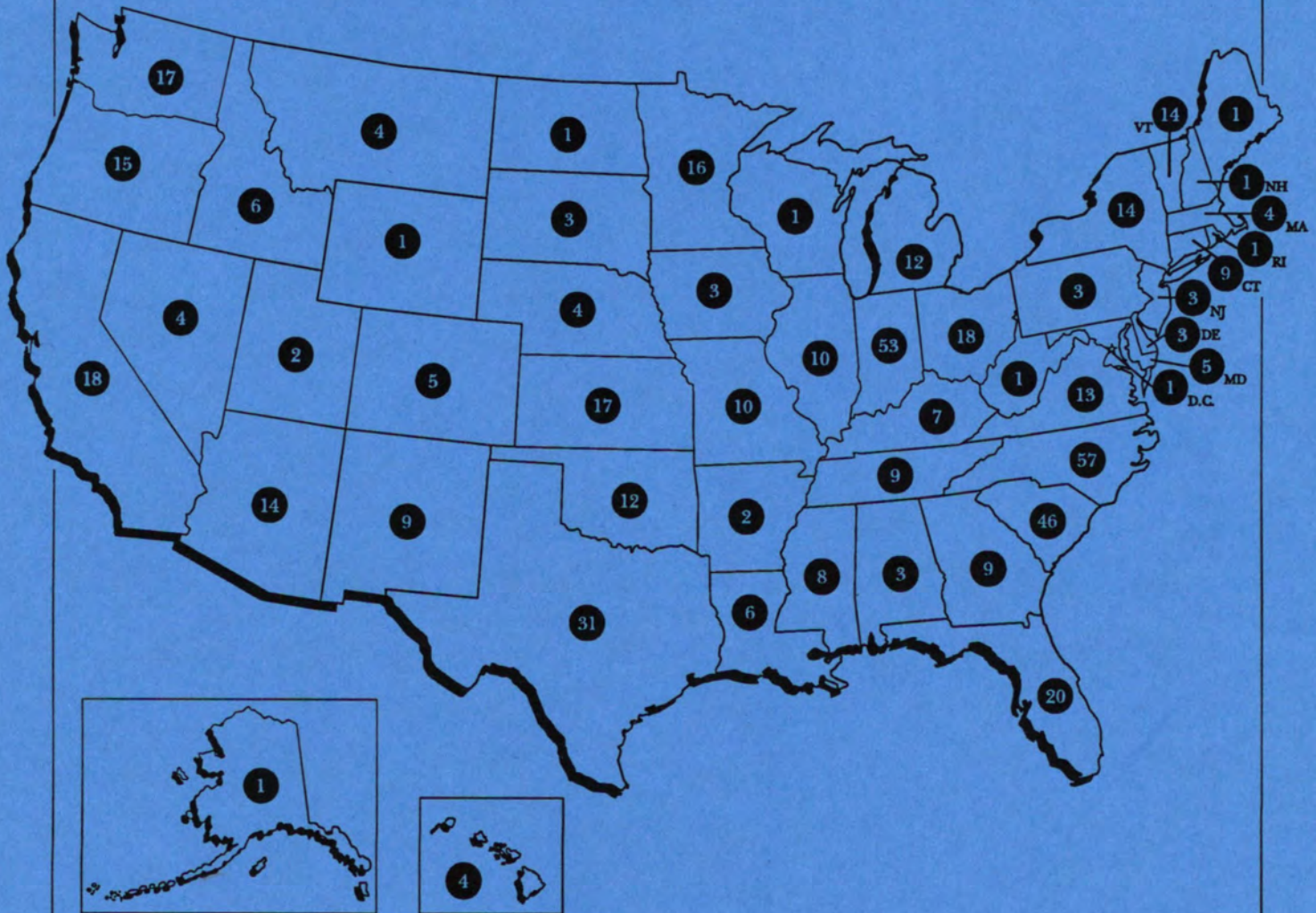
We are pleased to send you our information kit and under separate cover, you will soon receive our new poster, which is part of our public awareness campaign. We look forward to children's issues receiving the attention they deserve from members of the Clinton Administration.

Sincerely,

David Soukup
President

Beth Waid
Executive Director

A LOOK AT CASA ACROSS THE COUNTRY



There are 531 CASA programs in 50 states.

Approximately 30,000 men and women are CASA volunteers.

Last year, these volunteers spoke for an estimated 100,000 abused and neglected children in court.

New CASA programs start at the average of four per month.



1992 NATIONAL CARING AWARDS

Ten dedicated to the needy of all ages

A national organization dedicated to encouraging selflessness and public service?

In Washington, D.C., yet?

The Caring Institute, a non-profit group, was started in 1985 by public-service-minded brothers Bill and Val Halamandaris. Among its projects: surveying national leaders annually in search of caring people to hold up as role models.

Here's a look at the 10 adults who will receive the 1992 National Caring Awards this morning:

Father John Adams, Washington, D.C. For 13 years, he has been the driving force behind *So Others Might Eat*, founded in 1971. *SOME* provides 1,000 meals a day, emergency shelter, medical and dental care and self-help programs to the homeless, low-income and elderly.

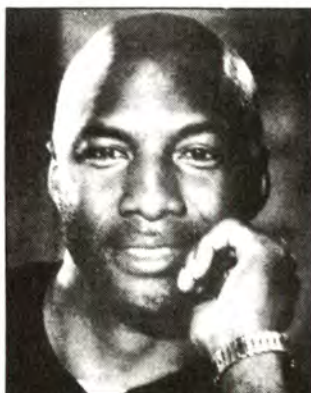
Mel Blount, Claysville, Pa. The former Pittsburgh Steeler founded homes designed to provide counseling, schooling, discipline and love to boys 7-13 who have committed petty theft or are truants.

Anne Brooks, Tutwiler, Miss. In one of the USA's poorest counties, Tutwiler was without a doctor for 13 years until Brooks, a nun and osteopath, opened a clinic with volunteers and donated equipment.

S. Truett Cathy, of Atlanta. Founded Chick-fil-A, a \$324 million corporation that has given employees college scholarships totaling more than \$7.3 million since 1973; also funds other youth programs.

Jo Ann Cayce, Thornton, Ark. For almost 40 years, Cayce has worked to help the poor in south Arkansas. Now 60, she works every day — sometimes 20 hours — helping elderly, disabled, abused and needy.

Clara Hale, New York. "Mother" Hale has provided a loving home for infants born to drug-addicted mothers since the late 1960s. She requires parents to complete a drug rehab program and visit regularly, working



MEL BLOUNT: Ex-athlete founded two homes to help troubled boys.



ANNE BROOKS: Her medical clinic revitalized a poor Mississippi town.



JOHN VAN HENGEL: Driving force behind network to feed the hungry.

toward her goal of reuniting the children with their families.

Kevin Johnson, Sacramento. In 1989, Johnson, a basketball player with the Phoenix Suns, founded St. Hope Academy; 20 underprivileged kids a year receive basic needs, academics and character building.

Ferdinand Mahfood, Deerfield Beach, Fla. He gave up his claim to his family's multimillion-dollar business to start Food for the Poor in 1982 to improve health, economic, spiritual and social conditions of underprivileged. It has provided \$110 million in aid in the U.S. and abroad.

David Soukup, Seattle. Judge Soukup established the first Court-Appointed Special Advocate program in 1977, to train private citizens to monitor the cases of abused or neglected children, follow developments in the children's lives and represent the children in court. Today, 28,000 volunteers help 91,000 children a year.

John Van Hengel, Phoenix. He founded St. Mary's, the world's first food bank; he's credited with being the "idea man" behind the international food banking industry. Now, there are 200 food banks across the USA. Semi-retired, he spends most of his time on world hunger issues.



A child's voice in court.®

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Managing Editor
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Caring
PEOPLE

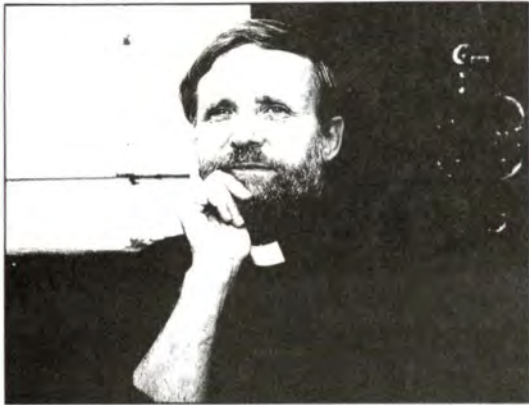
THE 1992 NATIONAL CARING AWARDS

FEATURING THE 10 MOST CARING PEOPLE IN AMERICA



The fifth annual National Caring Awards honors 10 extraordinary men and women whose compassion for humanity and contributions to society remind us that one individual can make the world a better place. With the National Caring Awards, the Caring Institute seeks to recognize their commitment to service, to reinforce their activities, and to create role models for society. Those selected for a National Caring Award help set the highest standard of social responsibility.





DAVID SOUKUP

Judge David W. Soukup's professional career and his private life have been devoted to the idea that all children deserve a permanent, safe, and loving home. He is the founder and president of the National CASA Association, a nonprofit organization of volunteers who speak for abandoned, neglected, and abused children in court proceedings throughout the United States.

In 1976 Soukup, then a Superior Court Judge and chairperson of the Juvenile Court Judges Committee in King County, [Seattle] Juvenile Court, perceived that something was missing in the juvenile justice system. Judges, charged with safeguarding the rights of abused and neglected children, were making decisions based on incomplete information.

Information about abused and neglected children came from the parties involved in the case, namely the parents, the state, and perhaps an attorney appointed for the child. Not unlike the overburdened caseworkers, attorneys did not have time to thoroughly investigate a child's circumstances and usually just appeared in court for the hundreds of children to whom they were assigned.

As Soukup describes it, "The typical case that brought me to this would be where I was being asked to decide whether or not to remove a little 3-year-old girl from her home. She had been brought in over the weekend through an emergency room hospital, and the doctor who saw her thought that the bruises that she had didn't actually occur when she

VOICE FOR CHILDREN

David Soukup founded the National CASA Association, a nonprofit organization of volunteers who speak for abandoned, neglected, and abused children in court proceedings.



Photos by Marla P. Halamandars



FACING PAGE: Soukup and his grandson, Benjamin Soukup. **THIS PAGE:** Former juvenile court judge Soukup believes that children have a right to independent advocacy: to a guardian *ad litem*, or court-appointed guardian, who would represent the child's best interests.



fell like her mother said, that they were possibly the result of abuse. So this case comes into my court on Monday morning, and I'm asked now to make a decision on whether to take this little girl out of her home or whether to leave her in a potentially hazardous situation.

"With nobody in the courtroom to tell me from the child's standpoint—strictly from the child's standpoint, because nobody is really a voice for this little 3-year-old girl—was really an impossible decision. So this flash came to me—it was undoubtedly divine intervention—I thought, 'Why don't we see if we can recruit and train some volunteers who can investigate the facts of the case—what is the best thing to do with this little girl?'"

"So I asked my bailiff to call four or five people who were involved with agencies that served kids in the Seattle area to talk about recruiting and training volunteers to speak for abused and neglected kids in juvenile court. The day of the meeting I walked in expecting to see four people, and there were 50 people. People had mentioned it to their friends and other workers, and that's what has happened to this idea ever since."

Soukup believed that children had a right to independent advocacy: to a guardian *ad litem*, or court-appointed guardian, who would represent the child's best interests. His program of training private citizens and having them represent the children was a revolutionary idea. The positive results of the program often speak loudest: "I knew that it would be successful, from the standpoint of other judges and the system, very shortly after we started the first program in January of 1977, when we saw the quality of work that was being done by these volunteers, and the fact that all the judges viewed the volunteers as the ones that had the best information about the case," says Soukup.

He believed that a volunteer could monitor the case and follow what was happening in the child's life, and therefore prevent that child from becoming lost in the foster care system. The volunteer or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) would

"speak up" for the child.

In terms of the size of the problem, Soukup has some shocking statistics. "There are over 300,000 kids in foster homes around the country, and certainly you can make a strong argument that every one of those kids really needs a voice in court," he states. "These are placements that are ordered by courts, and without somebody in that courtroom to speak for that child in an effective way, that child's interests are probably not being put first, as they should be."

In 1977 Judge Soukup helped establish the

first program to implement his idea: the King County guardian *ad litem* program in Seattle. By 1981 15 local CASA programs were in existence around the country. The following year the National CASA Association was established to provide support and cohesion to the network.

With the help of Soukup, the National CASA Association was incor-

porated in the state of Washington.

Today there are 520 programs in 49 states, known by a variety of names (CASA, Guardians *ad litem*, Voice for Children). Twenty-eight thousand volunteers are serving approximately 91,000 children annually. Soukup's concern for the welfare of the child has taken root and blossomed.

Asked what motivates him to do this work, Soukup responds, "It was important to me to know that I could go back to sleep after I woke up at 4 AM because the decision I made that day, if maybe not perfect, was as good as I could have made, that I had all the information necessary to make it. And then, kids have always been an important part of my life."

His advice to young people is: be true to yourself. "I guess the important thing and the difficult thing for young people is to realize that you can't really do anything for anybody else if you're not truly being yourself. It's a lot harder when you're young to be true to yourself, I think, than as you get older. As you see the end of your life coming, you say, there's got to be something more to life than what I've done so far—you begin to recognize that there are other people that have



Soukup discusses a child's case with Sandy Ottmar, director for Seattle's guardian *ad litem* program, the oldest in the country.

done things for you and that you have an obligation to do things for other people."

Soukup has his share of frustrations, as well, particularly when it comes to the allocation of public resources to children and children's programs. "There are so many areas in which we could be benefiting kids and in the long run saving tax dollars for society," he says. "The idea is to provide a secure, loving placement for a 1-year-old child instead of trying to respond to a 17-year-old hardened criminal who has no respect for you and no love for you because he has no self-respect and no self-love."

"Society doesn't spend a lot of money on kids," he continues. "Kids don't vote. When you need a mental health program for a child, you've reached the worst of all worlds with legislatures, because mentally ill people don't vote and kids don't vote, so mentally ill kids certainly don't vote, and the lobby for spending money for the programs that kids need when they're young is not as strong as a lot of other lobbies out there trying to get the same tax dollars."

Soukup's achievements, in light of this political reality, have been all the more extraordinary. His commitment to the rights of children has reached out and given thousands of children the opportunity to have better lives.

Soukup's efforts to protect the rights of children extend to many other areas of the community. He serves as a member of the board of the Children's Trust Foundation. He also chaired the Governor's Task Force on Fetal Alcohol Damage and was a fundraiser for Childhaven. Soukup left the bench in 1983 to resume private practice as a member of the law firm Levinson, Friedman, Vhugen, Duggan, Bland & Horowitz, whose pro bono project is to serve as volunteer attorneys for guardian *ad litem*.

As a private citizen, Soukup is himself a volunteer guardian. He also serves as president of the National CASA Association's board of directors. The association has a staff of 13. Soukup's continued work to help the CASA program grow is

reflected in the goal of the National CASA Association: to have a CASA volunteer for every abused and neglected child who needs representation by the year 2000.

A recent report by the US Advisory Board for Child Abuse and Neglect states that "child abuse and neglect in the United States represents a national emergency." The same report goes on to say, "Volunteers in CASA, guardian *ad litem*, and other child advocacy programs have helped make that [legal] system more child centered."

Soukup has labored to prevent abused and neglected children from being abused again by a complex and overburdened system.

Seattle Judge Jerome Johnson characterizes Soukup as a "person who wants things to work right and expects people to perform as they are obligated to do. If things in the system aren't designed well, you can count on him to offer a new design.... He has a wealth of experience and a lot of wisdom—a very gifted and tireless worker."

Asked how he would like to be remembered, Soukup is true to his cause. He relates the following anecdote: "I was presiding judge of King County and chairman of the state juvenile court committee at the time. I was involved in legis-

lation and had some heated discussions with a young staffer. At the end of one conversation with her, she got very angry, looked me in the eye, and said, 'You're nothing but a child lover,' and stomped out of the room. If people a hundred years from now would say, 'He was nothing but a child lover,' I would be very proud."♦



Soukup's commitment to the rights of children has given thousands of children the opportunity to have better lives.

Matthew McVay



Dru and John Fuller

Dru Fuller, a research associate for the Texas Senate Research Center in Austin, has been a volunteer for Court Appointed Special Advocates since 1989. Her husband, John Fuller, serves as assistant attorney general for the State of Texas.

Advocates for the innocent

By Ken Wibecan

Four-year-old Howard Jenkins* looks and acts much like Webster of TV fame, but, unlike Webster, he takes regular doses of AZT to keep AIDS under control. His mother is a drug addict who has tested HIV positive. His sister, Shameka, was born addicted and died at 15 months. If it weren't for 59-year-old George Quigley, a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteer in York, Pennsylvania, one wonders how Howard would have survived the court-ordered separation from his mother.

In Tucson, Arizona, Billie Johnson says she always provided her children with a good home, plenty to eat and toys to play with. But they were often in other people's care and rarely saw their mother, who practiced the world's oldest profession to make ends meet. After an intervention by Children's Protective Services, the court assigned CASA volunteer Joann Cesario, 81, to be an advocate for June, 3, and William, 2. Now, three years later, the youngsters have been adopted, with Billie's consent, and the case is closed. Cesario, however, maintains contact with everybody concerned. "I didn't trust anybody before I met Joann," says Billie, now 25 years old. "She taught me how to trust, how to love."

Since 1977, trained volunteers from the National CASA Association have helped thousands of the nearly 360,000 children nationwide who are victims of abuse, neglect or violence each year. CASA's cases usually involve youngsters taken from their parents' care and placed in the custody of the court. They are assigned to CASA volunteers, many of them

seniors, who represent the children's interests before the court and act as their "watchdogs" during the lifetime of the case.

CASA was the brainchild of its president, then-Superior Court Judge David Soukup, 58, of Seattle, Washington. The inspiration? Frustration. "I was making the most important decisions in the life of a child without anyone being there to give me information from the child's position," says Soukup, who has since retired from the bench and gone into private practice. "I never thought my little program would grow to what it is today. But even now we are serving only about a quarter of the kids who need our help."

Currently more than 28,000 volunteers staff 452 CASA programs in 49 states. Child abuse has become a serious problem in our nation; during the 1980s the number of child-abuse reports grew by 176 percent and juvenile courts are in a state of crisis. Unfortunately, federal funds for children's services during that same period were cut by \$90 billion, and volunteers have become increasingly valuable.

Sometimes advocates find it hard to let go when a case ends, and choose to continue the relationship. "Howard is a cute kid with great big eyes," says Quigley. "He's a bit spoiled, though—I guess I spoil him, too. Everybody does. I have five grandchildren of my own, and look at Howard as my sixth."

Even though the child's welfare is always the primary consideration, CASA cases don't always have happy endings.

"As hard as you try, you don't win them all," says Samuel McCoy, 59, a retired Marine master sergeant who has been an active participant in the Guardian Ad Litem program (as it is called in Fort Lauderdale, Florida) for two years. "As an old Marine I like to win all the time; I never get used to losing." In addition to being a CASA volunteer, McCoy and his wife, Ruby, regularly care for six foster children in their spacious six-bedroom home.

To learn how you can become a CASA volunteer, write the National CASA Association, 2722 Eastlake Ave E, Dept MM, Ste 220, Seattle, WA 98102. You will receive a brochure explaining the program, and the name and telephone number of the one nearest you. ■

** The names of the children and their parents in this story have been changed to respect their privacy.*



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THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Speaking Up for Children in Court

By Catherine Foster

Staff writer of *The Christian Science Monitor*

BOSTON

SUSAN MULLIN, a former stockbroker, squeezes past tearful mothers, social workers with armloads of files, and lawyers clutching stuffed briefcases jamming the hallway leading to Boston Juvenile Court. Ms. Mullin is here making sure the four children in her case don't fall through the cracks.

Mullin is a volunteer with Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), a national organization of trained local citizens ap-

pointed by judges to speak up for abused and neglected children in court. It's one time when a citizen can get up in court alongside lawyers and present information that may have some impact on how the case goes.

Since its inception in 1977, CASA has grown to 19,000 volunteers in 500 groups in 47 states. Each CASA is funded separately, with private or public money. Some, like the Boston group, are part of the juvenile court. The American Bar Association endorses the national association. The US Justice Department funds it. And President Bush honored it as a "Point of Light."

The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 requires states to provide a representative, called a *guardian ad litem* (GAL), for every abused child in juvenile court proceedings. In its last session, Congress authorized \$5 million to expand CASA nationwide and is now considering the actual appropriation.

Those who work in the teeming halls of juvenile justice say these volunteers ease a system overloaded with crack-cocaine and sexual-abuse cases. In 1987, there were 200 cases of children in protective custody in the city, says Boston Juvenile Court presiding Judge Francis Pointrast. This year, he estimates, there will be 800 cases.

In Los Angeles, says Beth Waid, executive director of the National CASA Association in Seattle, the number is 15,000.

"It's unbelievable," says Judge Pointrast. "We had six families recently whose kids were lost in the system. No one knew where they were. In another case, reports kept coming in on some kids who turned out to have been adopted months ago. We have to have someone who prevents us from losing the kids."

David Soukup, a retired judge in Seattle, says he felt that way when he started CASA in 1977. "The most difficult job I had to do as judge was being asked to make a decision whether to take three-year-olds out of the only home they know because they might be abused, or to leave them in the home and find out in the newspaper that something serious had happened to them. It's never an easy decision, and it's impossible if you don't have someone who can look at the facts from the child's standpoint and make a recommendation to you of what's best for the child in that case."

SOMETIMES lawyers or law students serve as court guardians; in other cases, CASA volunteers are assigned to cases. Most are women, and 98 percent have full-time jobs.

The volunteers talk to the child as well as everyone connected with the child's life. They present their findings and make

SUSAN MULLIN: A former stockbroker, she volunteers as an court-appointed advocate for neglected and abused children in a Boston program affiliated with the National CASA Association.



The Christian Science Monitor • R. Norman Matheny

recommendations in court.

"With 200 cases, no way can you give individual attention to keep kids from falling through the cracks," says Katherine Donnelly, a probation officer.

"They're sure able to visit children more often than we can," says Gerry Campanil, an attorney who represents children.

"CASA's been a boon to us," says Judge Pointrast. "This is the best program the courts have come up with to help in this area. Even though it's not that old, it's integrated into the system well."

Paul Lewis, another Boston juvenile court judge, says, "The opinions of CASA volunteers are refreshing. I postponed a case once because the volunteer couldn't make it, and I wanted her opinion."

CASA volunteers say they recognize that their presence can be interpreted as an encroachment on social service's department turf. So they work hard to keep their relationships positive with the social workers.

Boston's CASA program is able to serve only one out of every seven children because the demand is so great. The national situation is comparable; there are only 500 CASA groups in 3,000 jurisdictions.

Despite the 1974 ruling requiring special court guardians for every child, a US Department of Health and Human Services study showed that some states are not in compliance. CASA says some states are not providing any representation for any children.

But for Susan Mullin, the 12 to 15 hours a month she puts in tracking down the facts of her clients' lives are "terrific. Seeing when you can make a difference in someone's life," she says, "you feel elated."

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York's first newspaper

THURSDAY

175th Year, No. 326 • York, Pennsylvania

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Record photos by Bob Brode

Tina McCowin, left, embraces Patricia Sueck, a volunteer who helped McCowin recover from drug addiction and get back together with her two young children.

Back on her feet

Recovering addict
fights back with help
of a special volunteer

By DEAN WISE
Daily Record staff writer

Tina McCowin, 30-year-old single mother of two, has been down life's darkest path, inescapably landing in jail for drug dealing two years ago.

Coming back has not been a breeze. But, the return was made much easier by a relatively new York agency, the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program, and more particularly, one of its volunteers.

McCowin credits Patricia Sueck, a two-year CASA volunteer from Airville, with getting her back on track.

"She believed in me when no one else did and, through very strong support, has shown me a new and better way to live," McCowin said.

With almost half of her life spent in drug abuse and other vices, McCowin awoke to reality in 1988.

Getting hooked on drugs after smoking marijuana at age 15, McCowin sank lower and lower, get-



Tina McCowin's future is brighter today partly because of the helping hand she got from Patricia Sueck.

Please see **RECOVER** on 2B

RECOVER: Addiction

Continued from 1B

ting into intravenous use of heroin and cocaine by age 22.

She was caught for shoplifting at 18 and later was arrested three times for prostitution, a means to support her drug addiction.

Her mother, Agatha McCowin, blew the whistle on her. She called Children's Services in June 1988, objecting to her granddaughters, Chiann, now 9, and Jasmine, now 3, being caught up in her daughter's lifestyle.

Chiann, because of her mother's problems, has spent seven years with her grandparents, Linwood and Agatha McCowin.

"That call made me realize I had lost everything due to my addiction," McCowin said. "My kids were all I had left in life."

CASA and, more importantly, Sueck came into her life at this point.

In July 1988, she entered St. Joseph's Hospital in Lancaster for three days of detoxification. Then on Aug. 1, she was admitted to the 28-day residential substance abuse treatment program at Columbia Hospital.

After one month of intense efforts to become drug-free and go straight, McCowin relapsed and returned to drug use.

"I guess I knew no other way," she said.

That continued until Oct. 19, 1988, when she, along with 30 other Yorkers, was busted for a drug delivery that occurred earlier that year.

She sat in jail for eight months. "With no access to drugs, I sat and took a look at myself and my children," McCowin said. "I realized I was slowly killing myself and decided I did not deserve to live like that."

Sueck faithfully visited McCowin in jail, offering support and encouraging her to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings in prison.

"I started seeing people who could help and, while I never thought I could do without drugs, I was willing to give myself a chance," McCowin said.

Upon her release in June 1989, McCowin entered the six-month residential treatment program at Atkins House, a program in York for women offenders.

Having constant contact with her children helped her build a foundation for a new life.

"It was not easy but, by now, I knew I had to do it," she said.

Sueck followed her to Atkins House, visiting regularly.

Last Dec. 22, McCowin went to live with another recovering addict for one month, staying in daily contact with her NA group.

In February, McCowin got her own place to live on Salem Avenue, regaining physical custody of her daughters. Caseworker visits led to the return of legal custody in May.

McCowin moved with her daughters in July to a three-bedroom apartment at 623 Manor St., York.

Now job-seeking, she has applied to Penn State York for en-

Volunteers needed

Daily Record staff report

Training sessions for prospective new volunteers for York County's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program begin Tuesday.

The 10 sessions, each featuring speakers on different topics, will be in Court Room 4 on the third floor of the county courthouse.

Sessions will be from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays except the weeks of Christmas and New Year's Day. Swearing-in ceremonies are scheduled Jan. 17.

Training objectives and roles and responsibilities will be presented by Cynthia Holleran, CASA director, and Wanda Noll, volunteer coordinator, at Tuesday's session.

People over 18 who are interested in serving as court advocates for abused and neglected children are asked to call the CASA office, 771-9754.

rollment in studies in human behavior. She said her goal is to someday "help kids headed down the same path I trod."

McCowin, who dropped out of high school, earned her General Education Development certificate of equivalency in jail in 1980.

Sueck, a registered nurse, retired in 1985 after working nine years at Colonial Manor nursing home. She started her own small business of making patient gowns, a venture she continues each Friday morning at Farmer's Market in York.

With retirement, Sueck said she had time for volunteering and, in 1988, chose CASA. After training, McCowin's children became her first CASA assignment.

Although her priority was to look after the children's best interests, Sueck said she realized the family unit could be strengthened by assisting the mother.

"Tina was an interested young woman desperately seeking help for drug addiction and other problems," Sueck said.

"Her cry for help, her sincerity and her determination were all I needed to become involved," she added. "I saw a good possibility of reuniting this family."

Sueck said McCowin deserves a lot of credit. "She knew she had to get it together to make a life for her and her kids and she's done it."

The CASA worker also credits Margaret Moore, a Children's Service caseworker, as being "very supportive" in McCowin's turnaround.

"My role was to be available to her as a friend, answer questions and find resources ... to show the way," Sueck said.

CASA volunteering requires a deep understanding and passionate concern for people, Sueck has found.

"We all need to know that someone cares," she said.

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November 6, 1990

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FamilyCircle



BY JANE MARKS This is the story of Tess Maye, one of the estimated 1,200 child-abuse fatalities that occur every year. To those who knew Tess, however, the chubby, bright-eyed toddler was far more than a statistic: She was a beautiful, happy, loving little girl. What happened to her is truly a tragedy of our time.

A Shaky Start

Tess was born in Westchester County, New York, on September 4, 1985—a sickly three-pound baby. For some time she had to be kept in an incubator, where she was visited only rarely by her parents, Marvin and Tracie Maye. Even when they did visit, they virtually ignored the nurses who tried to teach them how to care for her and wouldn't even say where they lived. And so when Tess was 3 months old and ready for discharge, the hospital social worker recommended a foster home.

A worker from Westchester County's Department of Social Services (DSS) then got in touch with Pam and Rick Miller, a Tarrytown, New York, couple with three of their own children and a foster baby, Lindsay, whom they hoped to adopt. "We were a bit apprehensive about assuming responsibility for this sick little baby," Pam says. "But DSS wanted Tess placed in our home because I'm a nurse." Pam couldn't turn them down.

"Tess was so sweet," Pam recalls. "At first she didn't eat or sleep well, but after a lot of holding and cuddling, she began to gain weight—and to smile and coo at us. My kids adored her. They would kiss her on her neck, and she'd laugh. Whenever we took her to a restaurant, everyone was attracted to her. She was a real 'people' baby."

Jane Marks is an author and columnist who writes extensively on family issues.

Tess's social worker, Katy Tuck (not her real name), told the Millers of her attempts to reach the parents. The father, Tuck said, was a somewhat menacing man who wouldn't allow her to see his wife or their apartment, and no other relatives had come forward on Tess's behalf.

In the four months that followed, the pattern of no visits and no contact from Tess's parents continued. Tuck told the Millers, "Tess will most likely be freed for adoption. We feel her mother has abandoned her, and we plan to file a petition for termination of parental rights."

The Millers were glad Tess would have a permanent home and wanted to adopt her themselves, but DSS said no; it wouldn't be fair to Tess because she was black and the Millers were white. Eager to help, Pam sent photos of Tess to the DSS home-finding office. She knew that the longer it took to find an adoptive home, the harder it would be for Tess to separate from the Millers. "I felt I was racing the clock," she says.

A Family for Tess

A month or so later Pam got a phone call from Maritza McCaskill, the principal of the school the Miller children attended. Mrs. McCaskill said that she and her husband, Tom, were interested in adopting a baby and that DSS had offered Tess to them. The McCaskills were black, and they lived in a neighboring town with their teenage son, Brian. Pam invited them to come and meet

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Woman's Day

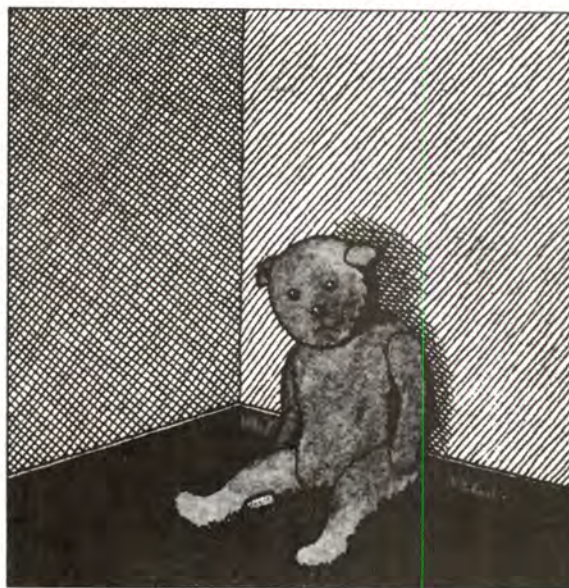
America's Personal News Magazine • October 30, 1990

Law

Our legal system is guilty of child abuse. Far from protecting the most vulnerable members of society, the criminal-justice system hands out meager sentences to offenders and then returns these pederasts, child

Suffer

beaters and incestuous fathers to their homes and communities to repeat their crimes.



the Children

BY SHERRY HENRY

■ THE RONALD D. CASE WHEN THE LAW DOESN'T OBEY THE LAW

As a matter of law, every abused and neglected child who is brought before any court in this country must be represented by a personal advocate. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, passed by Congress in 1974, says that each of these unfortunate children is entitled to a personal advocate or what the law calls a guardian *ad litem*.

As a matter of fact, this rarely happens. Why? Because the Congress did not appropriate any funds to implement its own law. The result is that untold numbers of children who have already been abused and neglected by their parents and guardians are neglected once again by the law.

Ronald D. was one such unlucky child. Social workers took him away from his indigent, unmarried, 16-year-old mother, charged her with neglect and placed him with a foster mother. At the time, Ronald, who suffered from cerebral palsy, was 9 months old and weighed an appropriate 17 pounds. After eight years of abuse in foster care and legal neglect, Ronald still weighed 17 pounds.

For eight years Ronald had been denied food, physical therapy and medical care, although his foster mother did bring him to a doctor when he was 2 years old, claiming that his leg had been "accidentally broken." According to his teachers, he often came to school filthy, with roaches in his clothing; his gums bled from lack of proper nutrition and dental care. The school told social workers about burns on his elbows and various bruises and genital sores, but no one ever followed up. Indeed, Ronald's torment might never have come to the attention of the court if he hadn't been placed in a special-care foster home after his foster mother needed hospitalization. Administrators at the home notified authorities. "He looked like a Biafran child," said Allan Button, who was a juvenile defender in Louisville, Kentucky, at the time. Ultimately it was Button who saw that Ronald was reunited with his birth mother, who by then had earned a high school diploma and was cleaning hotel rooms for a living.

If the law had appointed an advocate to monitor Ronald's progress, she or he would have visited him periodically at his foster home. The advocate would have seen the roach-infested home, observed Ronald's battered and filthy body, and would have made sure that the law rescued the child.

In an effort to make up for the failure to implement the law, some caring members of the legal community have organized a nationwide volunteer army of advocates, called Court Appointed Special Advocates. These CASA volunteers are ordinary citizens who are trained to check on a child's family situation and provide the court with the information it needs to decide whether a child should be removed from the home, placed in foster care or adopted. So far, CASA volunteers serve in 393 jurisdictions around the country, filling in for a legal system that shortchanges its youngest and most vulnerable members. Until funds are made available, volunteers are the only other resource to speak for troubled children in court. The National CASA Association in Seattle is officially demanding a change in national policies at the federal level, calling on Congress and federal agencies to ensure that all U.S. courts comply with the 1974 Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act.

■ THE POMERANTZ CASE WHEN THE LAW PUTS CHILDREN AT RISK

Sexual offenders rarely attack just one child. Over a lifetime, an average deviant will abuse 117 different children,

according to Ernest Allen, president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Yet even when authorities know who these serial offenders are, they often fail to keep them away from young children. Arthur Pomerantz, a school psychologist in the Fairfax County, Virginia, school system, is one such compulsive deviant.

In 1981 police brought incriminating photographs of Pomerantz to the attention of school officials. Though clearly pictured in sexually explicit poses with a young boy, Pomerantz was not fired, but instead placed on "sick leave." By the time police had identified the boy in the pictures, however, he was no longer a minor and was unwilling to testify. No charges could be brought, and Pomerantz was allowed to return to his job *working with troubled youngsters*.

In early 1985, a neighbor in Falls Church, Virginia, became concerned about the large number of adolescent boys visiting the condominium nearby and called the police. An investigation revealed that Arthur Pomerantz was one of two men living in the apartment. "That set off warning bells," remembers Corinne Magee, a Fairfax attorney who prosecuted the case. Undercover agents snapped photos of boys entering and leaving Pomerantz's residence, and were able to find a child willing to testify.

On August 16, 1985, Fairfax County Police charged him with sexually molesting a school-age boy. News accounts of that arrest prompted another one of Pomerantz's young victims to call the police. By the time Pomerantz stood trial in 1986, he faced four separate counts of engaging in sex with teenage boys. Though sentenced to 20 years, he became eligible for parole last year. So far, parole has been denied.

Once Pomerantz is free and at large, what can society do to protect his potential victims? "I know this sounds big-brotherish," says Ernest Allen, "but let's provide follow-up and monitoring on the streets. We are not talking about denying anybody's right to work. But let's deny them the opportunity to be employed or licensed in areas that involve the care of children." That means automatic criminal history background and fingerprint checks of all applicants for jobs with children. Currently, 22 states mandate such checks for school employment.

But restricting pedophiles from working around kids will not keep them from approaching children outside these work situations. So Allen and the Center for Missing and Exploited Children are calling for stringent parole guidelines that require proven offenders to register with law enforcement agencies when they leave prison. California now requires such registration, and in a pilot program in ten counties, even keeps computerized accounts of where offenders live, and what methods they use to corner their victims. Then, when a similar crime happens in their neighborhood, the police have ready information on which to

base an investigation. Civil liberties groups are unhappy with the program, "But to date," says Allen, "the courts have upheld the law."

THE INCESTUOUS FATHER CASE WHEN THE PUNISHMENT DOES NOT FIT THE CRIME

How severe a punishment is, under our criminal codes, is supposed to be a clear reflection of how serious society thinks the crime is. So what are we to make of the fact that the maximum sentence for incest in New York is four and a half years, while a first-time rapist can be sentenced up to 25 years? Yet to a 5-year-old, rape by a stranger, or rape by a member of the family, is still rape. And the psychological damage can be even *greater* if the child is related to her attacker.

These facts make Andrew Vachss, an attorney who works closely with The Children's Safety Project in New York, an angry man. "The incest law appears right on the same page as adultery in the New York State penal law," he says. "That's how seriously it's taken. Offenders are considered to be 'sick,' and 'need help.' And every single incest offender is automatically eligible for probation." He's also angry that he must tell the ensuing story without names attached because the father he took to court twice for raping his daughters is now walking free.

Vachss was the lawyer for a daughter in her early teens who testified in court against her brutal father who raped and sodomized her repeatedly. He also forced her to have several abortions. On the strength of the evidence, the father pleaded guilty to incest in criminal court, and served less than two years.

Upon his release, according to Vachss, the father returned home and resumed his incestuous activities. This time it was his 14-year-old daughter whom he allegedly raped. When charges were brought against him for a second time, the father chose to accept the maximum punishment—termination of paternal rights—rather than go to trial again.

Historically, laws against incest were placed on the books as a taboo against consenting adults who might produce defective offspring. But the recent dramatic upsurge in all types of child sex abuse, including incest—up 277 percent in the last nine years according to the Child Welfare League of America—demands new thinking. As of 1980, 19 states still consider incest among their least serious violent crimes, and punish offenders with less than seven years in prison. Vachss thinks that differentiating between incest and rape is outrageous. "I don't think you should get any immunity because you grew your own victim." **WD**

Sherrye Henry is a broadcaster and journalist, and a candidate for the New York Senate from the First District.

July 10, 1989

Newsweek



DAN WHITE

Geese helps troubled kids

KANSAS

An Advocate

For about 30 hours each week Kathy Geese acts on behalf of abused and neglected children in the court and foster-care systems around Kansas City. "I hate that anybody has to do this job," says the 35-year-old mother of one, who lives in Lenexa, Kans. The strength of Geese's commit-

ment to children stems from her own troubled past. Beaten by a relative, she had to testify in a trial when she was 12 without anyone on her side: "I think back now and wonder how I ever lived through it." Thanks to Geese, there are some kids who don't have to go through troubled times alone.



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The Seattle Times

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TUESDAY
January 10, 1989

Mending a broken hearth

Child-advocacy program begun in Seattle is a national model

by Nancy Bartley
Times staff reporter

Eugene was a 17-pound 9-month-old when he was placed in a Kentucky foster home.

Nine years later, authorities, acting on an anonymous phone call, found him in the back room of the home. He still weighed 17 pounds.

Blind and handicapped by cerebral palsy, he had spent his entire life on a cot. He had been placed in the home by the state after his 15-year-old mother was unable to care for him. But after placement was made, Eugene became "lost in the system."

The incident happened in 1984, when the news was filled with stark photographs of children starving to death in Ethiopia. But Eugene's case was even more horrifying to District Court Judge Tom McDonald of Louisville. Eugene was starving in his city.

So McDonald, another judge and a group of dedicated child-advocates brought the Seattle solution to Kentucky. They founded that state's CASA program.

The initials stand for The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association. What it offers is a child's voice in court.

Twelve years ago David Soukup, a Seattle Superior Court judge, was the first judge in the country to use trained community volunteers to investigate child-abuse cases, monitor a child's progress and, when necessary, speak up for the child in court. The 12th anniversary is being celebrated today.

Locally the program was known as Guardian Ad Litem, but as the concept spread across the nation, many communities chose other names.

In 1982 the National CASA Association was established and began operating from Seattle, linking all the child-advocacy groups together under the term CASA, from the Spanish word for home.

Today there are 332 member organizations in all but five states, and the Seattle program is credited with revolutionizing the juvenile justice system nationwide by putting citizen child-advocates in the previously closed juvenile courtrooms.

CASA volunteers, acting as an arm of the court, have the time to



Fred Birchman / Seattle Times

keep in touch with children whose lives are in turmoil from neglect or abuse. Social workers usually are burdened with too many cases to give any one child the extra attention he or she needs, judges said.

Routine foster-home checkups by a CASA volunteer could have spared Eugene from years of neglect, McDonald said. Instead, "he got lost in the system."

Soukup, retired from the bench and in private practice, laments that a CASA volunteer was not assigned to monitor the recent case of a child beaten to death by the mother's boyfriend.

Had the social worker filed a petition with the court explaining that the child was in potential danger, the court could have assigned a volunteer to monitor the home and make sure the boyfriend was indeed out of the home as the mother had promised.

"Too many people view the court as a threat and not as a resource," he said. "By using the guardian program, we have the ability to monitor the home setting."

Soukup started the program because he felt all the necessary information about a

case was not being presented.

"In criminal and civil cases, even though there were always many different points of view, you walked out of the courthouse at the end of the day and you said, 'I've done my best. I can live with this decision,'" he explained.

"But when you're involved with a child and you're trying to decide what to do to facilitate that child's growth into a mature and happy adult, you don't feel like you have sufficient information to allow you to make the right decision."

CASA aims to fill in those gaps.

While volunteers go through extensive training and background screening before being accepted, "You don't want a layperson giving psychological evaluations. What we're relying on is common sense," Soukup said.

The importance of that fresh, objective layman's viewpoint in the heat of courtroom battle prompted the U.S. Justice Department to allocate \$499,985 to the National CASA Association for its 1989 operations, which include providing training, consultation and educational services to the national CASA network.

Benefactors are also coming from the private sector as the

program grows. It now involves 12,000 volunteers, serving 40,000 children each year nationwide.

"This is a movement where the community itself becomes concerned about its own kids," said Peter Forsythe, vice president of New York City's Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, a supporter.

"It gets involved not by giving money or doing something distant, but by doing something with its own time, energy, skills and compassion," he said.

"Dedicated CASA volunteers are critical to helping the courts sustain America's families and assure hundreds of thousands of abused and neglected children of permanent, nurturing homes," said Verne L. Speirs, acting administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in Washington, D.C.

A recent federal study of abused and neglected children in the juvenile justice system showed that the most effective way to represent their needs in court is through a trained community volunteer.

The study by the Administration on Children, Youth & Families compared the performance

of volunteers to the work of attorneys and law students.

The study concluded that children who have a CASA volunteer on their case:

- Have a better chance of receiving court-ordered services;

- Are more likely to have their cases reviewed regularly by the court;

- And have the most outcomes in their best interest.

The findings were based on data collected at nine court sites across the country, including the King County Juvenile Court. The Seattle Guardian Ad Litem program was part of the study.

"Seattle is known for things like Microsoft or the Sonics," said Beth Waid, national CASA director. Lesser known has been CASA. "One of the most effective changes in the juvenile justice system in the last 20 years started here. I think people can be very, very proud," she said.

CASA's goal, according to Waid, is to have a volunteer for the 270,000 children in the nationwide foster-care system.

"There's no question about it," McDonald said. "Seattle has definitely been a model, definitely had an impact on the rest of the country."

CASA volunteers keep in touch with children whose lives are in turmoil.

SUNDAY, JULY 31, 1988

PARADE

Who Speaks For The Lost Children?

A REPORT ON
FOSTER CARE
IN AMERICA

By Tom Seligson

Foster parent
Brenda Erwin
with Virginia,
whom
she adopted.

INSIDE: A Low-Cholesterol Meal That's Rich In Taste

Nearly 300,000 children are caught up in the foster-care system because of abuse, poverty or neglect. Some never get out.

Wanted: A Permanent Home

By Tom Seligson

WHEN LINDA WAS 3 MONTHS old, she was raped by her father. She required surgery, after which she was placed with her grandmother. The grandmother returned Linda to her father, who raped her again. Following a second operation, Linda was placed in foster care. For seven years, social workers arranged visits with her parents, in an attempt to rehabilitate them. For five more years, during which time the parents never came to see her, Linda remained in foster care. Because her parents' rights to her had not been terminated, 12 years after she'd first been raped, Linda was still in foster care, not yet freed for adoption.

Thomas Alley, now 8, lives with his mother and three sisters. The family is close and loving. However, two years ago they became homeless, and Thomas' mother contacted the local child-welfare agency and asked for help. They offered to place the children temporarily in foster care, until she found a new place to live. Though she rented a house within two weeks and asked to have the children returned, the agency refused. The family remained separated for more than 15 months, during which time Thomas was moved to five different foster homes and was told he would never again live with his mother.

Though Linda and Thomas came into foster care for entirely different reasons, both got lost there. This is of special concern because the foster-care system was created to protect and care for our neediest children—children vulnerable because their parents, their natural protectors, have in some way failed them. Foster care means to save these children—from abuse, poverty, neglect—and offer them a future in a stable environment. And, indeed, the children who pass through the system generally are well taken care of. But they often are denied their greater need, which is a permanent home. Foster care is supposed to be a temporary haven. Yet the way the system operates, children frequently are left in limbo for years on end—unable to be adopted by a family who wants them, unable to return to the family that had difficulty caring for them in the first place.

"There is a definite place for foster care," says Abigail English of the National Center for Youth Law. "But for many children, the foster-care system itself is a destructive force."

The foster-care system had its origins in the mid-19th century, when the New York Children's Aid Society began sending street kids to Midwestern farm families. It has evolved into an unwieldy bureaucratic system of social-service agencies run by the states and local communities under federal guidelines.



La Donna Alley, 10, from Denham Springs, La., almost got lost in the foster-care bureaucracy two years ago.

Foster care is meant to be temporary. Yet it can take years for a child saved from abusing parents to be adopted, or one removed from a poor but loving family to be returned.

In 1977, there were 500,000 children in foster care, by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates. By 1983, that number had been cut nearly in half, to 260,000, following the passage of a 1980 federal law designed to reduce the number of children in care. However, the number was back up to 270,000 by 1984 (almost half of them minorities) and continues to rise, primarily because of increasing reports of child abuse across the country.

In fact, 61 percent of the children are taken from their parents because of abuse and neglect. Homelessness is another cause. Out of 6500 children in foster care in New Jersey, 18 percent came from homeless families. "A family who loses its home also risks losing its children to foster care," says Ciro Scalera, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey.

Clearly, the problems of abused children and homeless children need to be solved differently. Yet the system—in trying to accommodate both circumstances—treats neither adequately.

The process differs across the country, but typically children can be taken into foster care when a neighbor or teacher complains about abuse or neglect. A social worker is sent to investigate. If the worker finds a child who is bruised, obviously malnourished or living in filth, he has the emergency power to remove the child immediately. Hearings are held to explore either removing the child permanently or reunifying him with the family. Meanwhile, he is placed with a couple who have been certified as foster parents—which can involve a screening process, a home study and completion of a training course.

Good foster homes are in short supply. Though we do hear stories about foster parents abusing children, they are rare. And while some foster parents may be attracted by the extra monthly income (ranging from about \$250 in New Mexico to as high as \$465 in New York), most do it because they love taking care of children. Brenda Erwin of Monroe, La., is a good example. "I learned about abused kids from the *Donahue* show," she says. "I really wanted to help them." She has cared for close to 50 sexually abused children over a six-year period.

Removing a child from his home is traumatic. He's generally separated from his brothers and sisters. Even children removed from the most abusive homes miss their parents. "I think one of the hardest things to understand is that no matter what a parent does to a child, the child loves the parent and prefers to be with him," says Anne Desiderio, who has been a foster mother for 60 children and who now heads New Mexico's Foster Parents Association. "Remember, the child doesn't know any different. He feels guilty about being taken away and thinks it's his fault."

Put into a loving environment, can such a child flourish nevertheless? "Yes," says Dr. Albert Solnit, a pediatric psychiatrist. "But only if it's permanent."

And that is the crux of the problem. No matter how good the foster home, foster care is intended to be temporary. "Success is quick adoption," says Desiderio, "or when a child comes into care because of some problem in the family, the family is given services it needs, and the child returns to a better family."

Unfortunately, most agencies routinely put off making a final decision about a child's future. "I had more than 50 cases to take care of," explains Johnny Vega, a former New Mexico social worker. "And the process takes forever. It takes at least 18 months to even begin to move for termination of rights."

The reason for such delay seems to result from basic confusion about what child-welfare agencies should do. In some cases, the parents simply need

Everytime you remove a child from a loving home, you destroy his ability to bond and trust," says one expert. Yet many foster-care children are moved several times.

Below, left: Dennis Smith, now 28, was placed in 16 foster homes before he left the system at 18. Right: Thomas Alley (La Donna's brother), 8, lived with five families in 15 months before he was reunited with his mother.



housing or employment, yet the child-welfare agency makes no effort to help provide it. However, when the problem is as major as a parent's fundamental character, the agencies cling to the belief that any parent can be rehabilitated.

"We adopt a higher standard for proof in parental-termination cases than in criminal cases," says Richard Ducote, a New Orleans lawyer. "With the same evidence that would enable a D.A. to send a parent away for 15 to 20 years for what he did to his kids, some juvenile- and family-court judges are still reluctant to terminate rights. That's what's crazy."

By taking so long to decide the fate of the children in its care, the foster-care system actually ends up making them unwanted. "If you take a 1½-year-old kid who has been battered," says Andrew Vachss, a New York lawyer who defends children, "and you work with the family for a year and nothing happens, you still have an adoptable kid. If your work with the family for six or seven years, you have an unadoptable kid."

Even as a child adjusts to a new foster home, he is apt to be suddenly uprooted again. Foster parents can suddenly decide that they are unable to care for

a child, or they may simply not get along. In New York, a typical child stays 2½ years in foster care; some have lived in four homes before being reunited with their parents. "To a child who's 5," says Anne Desiderio, "2½ is half his life. Plus every time you move that child, you damage his ability to bond and trust."

Ann Warner entered foster care at age 7, after her mother had committed suicide. She lived in eight different homes before she was 18. "Every time they moved me to a new place," says Ann, "I remember thinking, 'What's this one going to be like? Oh, God, will this one work?' By the time I was in my third home, I came to know that any moment I could be sent off again."

Warner, who just graduated from law school, credits a supportive marriage and therapy with enabling her to overcome the anger and low self-esteem she acquired growing up in foster care.

Dennis Smith is still trying to heal his emotional wounds. After he was born, his mother traveled from Oklahoma to Alameda County, Calif., and gave him up for adoption there. Misdiagnosed as mentally retarded, which made him difficult to adopt, Dennis lived in 16 foster homes before he was 18. "By the time I was 10, I came to understand that I was a government child," says Dennis. "Once, I even thought of jumping out of the welfare-office building, to make a statement about what they were doing to me. To this day, I have real difficulty developing relationships. I don't trust, and I can be very needy. When I first got out of foster care, I was very depressed, and I spent a great deal of time in bed. It has only been since last year that I stopped living like that."

Last December, Dennis finally received his B.S. degree, at age 28. He plans to be a social worker and hopes to protect other children from suffering like he did.

Not all children survive the system as well as Ann Warner and Dennis Smith. Marcia Robinson Lowry

continued

WANTED/continued

of the American Civil Liberties Union's Children's Rights Project estimates that as many as 50 percent of America's runaways were raised in foster care. Though there are no hard figures, social workers say that a large percentage of our prison population also came through the system. Which is another reason, besides our compassion, why we should make foster-care reform a priority. "We have to act in our own self-interest," says lawyer Andrew Vachss. "Today's victim is tomorrow's predator. You put your money not into the prevention of child abuse but into the prevention of monsters."

"Children don't vote," adds Vachss, explaining why children in foster care need lawyers. "Someone has to yell and scream, and a kid can't do that. Every year, I free a couple of dozen kids for adoption. A good lawyer can still manipulate the system. But the system is bankrupt, and unless the child's lawyer pushes it, the child can't help but get lost."

Can the system be changed? What are some of the things being done and what more can we do?

• **Terminating rights quickly.** "We have to make decisions based on the time-needs of the child, not the adult," says Dr. Solnit. "Children's interests should come first." Says Vachss: "If a kid is removed today, there should be a trial within four weeks rather than nine months. That alone would radically reduce his time in foster care."

• **More accountability.** In a way, Dennis Smith already has helped save other children. In 1976, he sued Alameda County. "We claimed that the agency made no efforts whatsoever to find him an adopted home," explains his lawyer, Abigail English. "They had a responsibility to him, and they did nothing. Though legally we were not successful, the case attracted a lot of attention. Congress was aware of Dennis' case and others like it when drafting the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act."

The act, passed in 1980, seeks to decrease the number of children in foster care by offering federal aid to local governments, which in turn are expected to provide supportive services to families. The law also established standards for the length of time a child may stay in foster care. But compliance is still a major problem. "The states are taking the federal money but not doing what they're supposed to do," says Marcia Robinson Lowry. "We have to keep bringing lawsuits to make sure the laws are enforced. We are currently involved in active litigation in Louisiana, New York, New Mexico, Missouri and Kentucky."

• **Finding creative solutions.** Most experts agree that the best overall solution is to keep as many children as possible out of foster care. "If you look at this system, child by child, family by family, it's not that complicated," says Abi-

gail English. "What can be provided to a family that will enable it to function? If a family is living in a car, it's pretty clear what they need."

Families in which the children have been abused are being helped by a program called Homebuilders, which originated in Washington State. The program offers intensive in-home therapy to families in crisis. Of the 2400 families it has served in Washington, 90 percent have stayed together. "It is cheaper than placing a child in foster care," says Peter Forsythe of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, which supports the program. Similar projects are operating in New Jersey, Maryland, California and New York.

• **Citizen review boards.** Public awareness may be the key to protecting our children. "The system is conducted in secret, insulated from scrutiny," says lawyer Richard Ducote. "The process has to be made public. The most powerful weapon all citizens have is the power to ask the question, 'Why is this child still in foster care after seven years?'"

Citizens can ask those questions through citizen review boards, which operate in 21 states with about 6000 volunteers. "Our task is to oversee the bureaucracy," says Joe Paull, a social worker who now serves on the New Mexico Citizen Review Board. "A hearing is held for each case. We demand to know what the permanent plan is for every single kid. That way, not one of them gets lost."

Even more direct participation is possible through the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program. A volunteer is appointed to an individual child in foster care and may even represent the child in court. The volunteer notes what services are provided to rehabilitate the family and if steps are being taken to free the child for adoption. Some lawyers question the qualifications of such volunteers to represent a child in court. Nevertheless, the group has supported such participatory programs in 45 states, utilizing 12,000 volunteers on behalf of more than 40,000 abused, neglected or abandoned children.

Can the system work? "All the foster-care system has to do is its job," insists Marcia Robinson Lowry. "That is to act as a temporary situation for kids in trouble. Get involved in the trouble and resolve it one way or another. We're not pushing any new social theory here. We just know that these kids are hurting, and we have the opportunity to help them. We just have to do it."

If you would like to become more involved in helping foster-care children, write to: National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association, Dept. P, 909 N.E. 43rd St., Suite 202, Seattle, Wash. 98105; or National Association of Foster Care Reviewers, Dept. P, 3627 E. Indian School Road, Suite 107, Phoenix, Ariz. 85018.

CHILD ADVOCATES

HOME & FAMILY

Stand by me

Volunteers help children involved in court cases

By Amy Brooke Baker
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

MOE WHITAKER is a semiretired grandfather who keeps a child safety seat for his 1984 Buick. But Mr. Whitaker doesn't have it for his two granddaughters — who are too old for baby seats now. He keeps it to take four-year-old Maria (not her real name) to visit her natural mother, buy ice cream, or attend some special event.

Whitaker is a court-appointed child advocate, and the children he may take for ice cream are embroiled in some of the toughest cases in Santa Clara county's juvenile court.

Like other volunteer advocates, Whitaker assumes a dual role in such cases. He represents the child's perspective in court, and he becomes a special friend to a child who may not have any other support.

There are more than 271 child advocate programs in 44 states (the first was begun by a Seattle judge in 1977), operated by different organizations under a variety of names. In a court system where social workers and probation officers juggle oppressive caseloads, child advocates provide a much-needed service, according to Nora Manchester, who supervises Santa Clara's advocate program.

Without advocates, "you never get the child's story," Ms. Manchester says, in an office full of furry stuffed animals. "You get [the story] from an adult perspective on an adult timeline."

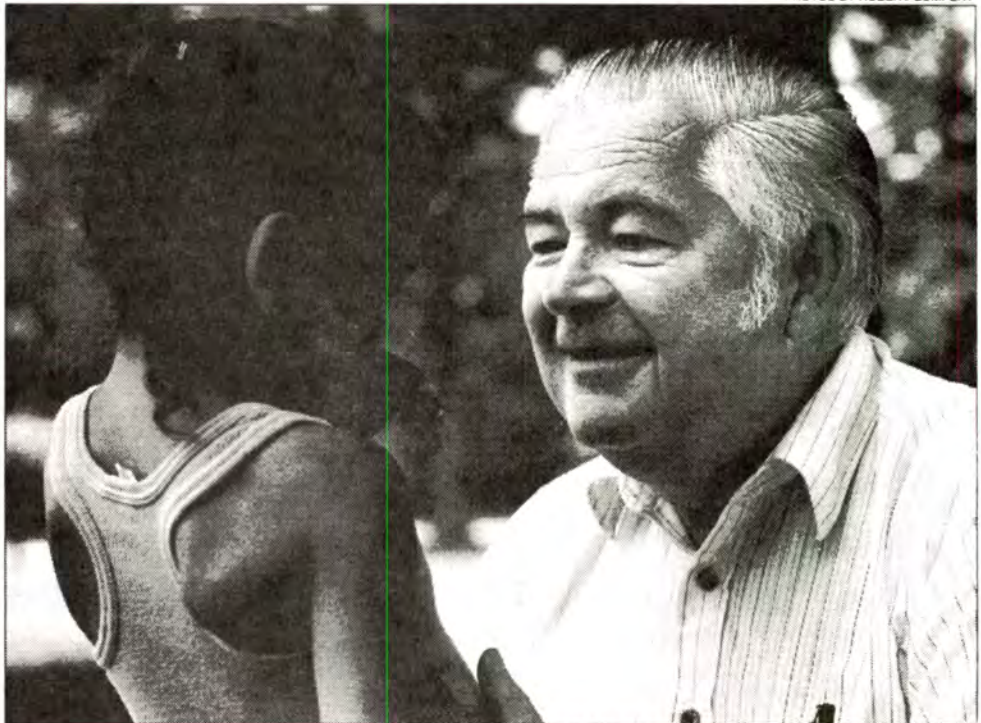
The advocate makes recommendations in court about the best interests of a child and, Manchester explains, can have a significant effect on the judge's ruling. And — with only one or two cases to focus on — an advocate can spend extra time on the interviews and investigative work needed to make those recommendations — something social workers don't always have time for.

That extra effort is important, Manchester explains, because advocates in her program are assigned by the juvenile court to its toughest cases: cases in which the child is not living with his or her natural parents or where the child is being fought over by parents or relatives. Almost half of the cases involve sexual abuse, and about half of the children these advocates work with are under nine years old. The majority live in foster homes while their cases inch through the court process.

"If the child has any support, we wouldn't get the case," Manchester says.

The program she heads is called Court Designated Child Advocates. It was begun less than two

San Jose, Calif.



Volunteer child advocate Moe Whitaker, of San Jose, Calif., and friend have a talk in the park

years ago by Santa Clara County Juvenile Court Judge Leonard P. Edwards and is run by the local branch of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ).

The conference's program is unusual, Manchester says, because of the special support its advocates give their court-assigned children. "Some programs are much more court oriented, more legalistic," she explains. "They're not so much a support system for the child."

But advocates in this program, like Jennifer Berger, place special emphasis on befriending the child. Mrs. Berger, an advocate for an eight-year-old girl, has "really just spent time with [her child]," — including teaching the girl how to paint. She also had the girl memorize Berger's home telephone number. That way the child — who will be returning to her natural mother from a foster home — can call the advocate "in case she ever feels uncomfortable." Berger adds that there is evidence that the child has been molested by a family member.

Advocates can also make certain that a child receives the services that he or she needs.

"Most of these kids need comprehensive testing," says Lynne Bush, another advocate. "They don't do well in school or they need [counseling]. The advocate may have more time to ensure that the child gets that. Foster parents are usually just too busy with their family."

A number of the advocates in the NCCJ program actually drive their children to such counseling — or to supervised visits with their natural parents. Many children staying in foster homes or institutions have no other method of transportation. No one else may have time to drive them.

But perhaps most important, an advocate can provide continuity for a child in an ever-changing legal system. During the years it may take for a child's case to be resolved, Whitaker explains, "everyone in the system will change. Social work-

ers will move on, attorneys will come and go, the child will have different foster parents.

"Most of the time there's no one person who stays in the case through to the end," he says.

And, Whitaker says, there's another advantage to child advocates. Unlike social workers and foster parents, who are required to work for reunification of the child with his or her natural parents, advocates have no hidden mandates.

"I just tell it like I see it," Whitaker states. "I don't report to any agency."

Under the NCCJ's program, volunteers receive at least 20 hours of training to become advocates, and, once assigned to a case, are required to spend at least eight hours a month with the child until the case is resolved — which can take years.

Manchester says her program has attracted all sorts of volunteers: "nurses, Realtors, teachers, lawyers, insurance brokers." Most hear of the program by word of mouth — and in less than two years, more than 200 advocates have enlisted.

The program — which maintains a paid support staff for the advocates — is funded through grants and community donations. A similar program in nearby San Francisco, Manchester says, recently folded because of lack of funds.

Given proper funding, Manchester has great hopes for the NCCJ's advocate program.

"Right now the process [of juvenile justice] isn't child centered," she says. "It's all legal. Half of the people involved have never seen the children." But she says the child advocate program can help to change that.

**'Right now the process
[of juvenile justice]
isn't child centered.
It's all legal.'**

— Nora Manchester, Court
Designated Child Advocates



Nora Manchester with some of her 'friends'

Court appointed guardians 'speak up' for children



Walt Johnson of The Times

Liz Still, right, and Pam Montgomery discuss methods of beginning a guardian group for abused and neglected children.

By Patti Harper
Times Writer

On any typical work day Rod Jackson may be tromping down dirt roads or scuba diving for soil samples in his work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In his office, Jackson's silver hair may be bent over lab reports as his scientist's eyes search for statistics on contaminants which may alert him to an environmental hazard.

But every once in a while, he

takes a very short break to make important telephone calls which have nothing to do with his professional duties. He takes time out to help a child.

Jackson is one of 20 Court Appointed Special Advocates in Anchorage. The advocates are volunteers who agree to act as temporary guardians for abused and neglected children, charged with representing the child's best interests in court. Their motto is "Speak up for a child."

They are teachers and homemakers, biologists and students and priests, among other things.

What they have in common is a desire to make a difference in the difficult lives of abused and neglected children.

Jackson said he has long been concerned about the problem of sexual abuse in our society. "I had previously just given money to like, STAR (Standing Together Against Rape), and saying 'Well, I helped.' That wasn't

Continued

Court appointed guardians 'speak up' for children

satisfying."

Pam Montgomery, a social worker at the state's Office of Public Advocacy who coordinates the program, says advocates must have "the ability to look at real complex problems and be open minded, and a belief in a child's right to healthy, safe, and permanent families."

Montgomery screens and supervises the volunteers with the assistance of VISTA volunteer Liz Still, a 35-year-old nursing student, ex-air traffic controller and mother of two who wanted to help develop the advocates' program after serving as a foster parent.

Criminal records checks are run on the volunteers. They are interviewed to be sure that they don't have a personal agenda or bone to pick which would interfere with their objectivity. They are given 24 hours of class and courtroom training. And they are provided with back-up supervision and staff support.

The program in Anchorage is one of 201 such programs operating nationwide. The one here is just a year old and growing as fast as any infant. Its volunteer ranks are about to double as 18 new advocates are sworn in by the Children's Court Master, William Hitchcock, on Nov. 2.

Hitchcock makes final decisions about such things as where abused or neglected children who come before him in court should live. The advocates, more directly than the social workers from the state's Division of Family and Youth Services or the attorneys involved in the process, are there to be his eyes and ears, so to speak, in a particular situation.

"I'm very pleased with what I'm seeing so far," he said.

Before the advocate program, most temporary guardians were attorneys appointed by the court to represent the child's interests. Hitchcock doesn't see any problem with using non-professionals.

"This kind of thing is best

done by people who are lay people, not professionals," he said.

Lay people aren't bound by preconceived theories about child protection and through their own knowledge can broaden the outlook of the professionals working on cases, he said.

Organizers of the program are candid about the fact that the volunteer program was begun to ease the burden on professionals with burgeoning caseloads.

The two attorneys and two social workers on the Office of Public Advocacy staff who are the public employees paid to act as guardians each handle about 150 cases at any one time, said Montgomery.

"There just aren't enough hours in the day," she said, to do much besides cope with immediate crises.

Volunteer advocates work on just one to three cases at a time. They spend about 10 hours per month on each case.

Most of their time is not spent with the child or children whose interests they are representing. What they advocate may be something the child doesn't want.

"You're the child's advocate, you're not a big brother or sister. You're not a friend, not a therapist," said Montgomery.

The time is spent talking to anyone who can provide perspective about the child's situation.

Much of that is done by playing telephone tag with teachers and doctors, therapists and others.

The need for face to face meetings may be rare, and can be flexibly done in evening or weekend hours.

Jackson found that he's been able to do most of what he needed to on the telephone, during short breaks at work. He's had to leave work just three or four times for court hearings in the last nine months. He said his volunteer effort doesn't interfere with his work, and that his supervisor is supportive of his efforts.

Though the advocates don't spend a large amount of time on each case, they can sometimes spend more time, more immediately on a case than the paid professionals could do.

"What I'm seeing from some of the written product I've gotten back is that they're able to do a more thorough investigation," said Hitchcock.

Sometimes an advocate's conclusion is in concert with what the social worker and other professionals think is best for a child.

Rod Jackson agreed with a state social worker that a nine-year-old boy with a mother who lived as a street person and a loving but alcoholic father should be sent to live with out-of-state relatives willing to care for him, while his father goes through treatment.

But when a social worker recommended a 10-year-old girl in a foster home be allowed overnight visits with her alcoholic mother, something the child wanted badly, Liz Still, who herself works as an advocate on some cases, gathered ammunition to fight the plan in court. She won.

She got testimony from a doctor that the mother didn't reliably give the girl the consistent medication needed for a chronic condition. Still also arranged testimony from a therapist that the mother wasn't dealing with her alcohol problem, and presented other information to support her case.

The girl is at a group home where she is getting counseling and the mother is working on her alcohol problem in therapy, said Still. They see each other several times each week. She said she wants to see them reunited, and hopes that can be soon. Having them together will be in the best interest of the child when the problems are resolved.

"She has so much love for her mother, and her mother has so much love for her," Still said.



NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED
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"A CASA Volunteer is often the only voice of reason
in an abused child's chaotic life."
—Judge Robert R. Hockensmith
Ft. Wayne, Indiana

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What is CASA?

All children have a right to a home with loving people to care for them. But each year in the United States, millions of children are abused, neglected or abandoned by their families. Over 430,000 of them are removed from their homes and placed in foster care or institutions. Eventually, they end up in court. Their only "crime" is that they have been victims.

It is up to a judge to decide their future. Should they remain in foster care? Be reunited with parents? Or be adopted?

In these cases, many children also become victims a second time, lost in an overburdened child welfare system that cannot pay close attention to each child whose life is in its hands. Sometimes a child can remain adrift in foster care for months, even years.

That's where CASA comes in.

CASA volunteers are Court Appointed Special Advocates for children — trained community volunteers appointed by a judge to speak up for abused and neglected children in court.

What Does A CASA Volunteer Do?

CASA volunteers are men and women who want to help their community's children. They work for the judge, alongside attorneys and social workers, as appointed officers of the court.

When a CASA volunteer is appointed to a child's case, he or she is responsible for taking the time to find out as much as possible about that child. CASA volunteers search for information. They review records. Interview parents. Talk to teachers, neighbors, and — most important — the child.

These volunteers then appear in court to recommend to the judge what's best for a child's future.

You Can Become A CASA Volunteer

Are you a mature, responsible adult? Can you talk to people who are having problems? Do you have time to commit? Do you care about children?

If you answer "yes," then you may qualify to be a CASA volunteer.

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life. They have a variety of professional, educational and ethnic backgrounds. No special experience is required. Volunteers are selected on the basis of their objectivity, competence and commitment.

Once accepted, volunteers are trained. They learn about courtroom procedure, the social service and juvenile court systems, and the special needs of children who have been abused and neglected.

It takes about 10 to 15 hours a month to be a CASA volunteer. It's hard work, and very gratifying. If you are interested, contact your local CASA program or the National CASA Association.

You Can Start A CASA Program

There are CASA programs operating in nearly every state. Volunteers are known by many names — Volunteer Guardians Ad Litem, Child Advocates, and Voices For Children, to name a few.

But many jurisdictions still need CASA programs to speak for children in court.

If your community does not have a CASA program, The National CASA Association can help you start one. We offer resource materials, funding, training, referral and support. Just write or call, and we will be glad to assist you.

You Can Support The National CASA Association

The National CASA Association is a non-profit organization created to support the development, growth and continuation of CASA programs.

Our purpose: for every abused and neglected child who needs one to have a CASA volunteer.

We can reach that goal — with the help of concerned people like you. Please take a moment to send a contribution today.

Your gift can help new programs get started. It can ensure that existing programs continue to grow. And it can make a lasting difference in the life of a child.

"As a judge, I had to make tough decisions. I had to decide whether to take a child from the only home he's ever known, or leave him someplace where he might possibly be abused. I needed someone who could tell me what was best for that child—from the child's viewpoint. That's what CASA does."

—David Soukup
Founder of CASA

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