They met on November 9, 1999. Francesca had just finished CASA Volunteer training and was primed to take her first case. Kiara was nine years old — but quick to point out that she would soon turn ten. Francesca remembers that Kiara had “no filters and lots of energy.” Kiara asked Francesca immediately, “Why are you white?” and “Why are you here?” Just as immediately, she showed off for Francesca, breaking into song and dance — performing and demanding attention, asking: “Do you like music? Do you like to dance? I can do both!!” Francesca was quickly hooked, and said that when she met Kiara she “couldn’t wait to initiate changes for her.” Change, of course, comes slowly. Neither of them realized that their relationship as CASA Volunteer and CASA Child would last for almost a decade. And neither of them realized that their friendship would extend for years beyond that.

Kiara was first removed from her mother when she was just a baby. She had been homeless, lived with relatives, lived in foster care and lived in residential placements. Her behavior was unpredictable, and she had been expelled from multiple schools. She was, in her own words, “a little crazy...a little out there.” At first — for several years, really — Kiara “didn’t care to get to know” Francesca. She had been homeless, lived with relatives, lived in foster care and lived in residential placements. Her behavior was unpredictable, and she had been expelled from multiple schools. She was, in her own words, “a little crazy...a little out there.” At first — for several years, really — Kiara “didn’t care to get to know” Francesca. Kiara’s life was defined by change and chaos. Schools changed. Social workers changed. Why should she expect that this person — this CASA Volunteer — would be any different? As time went on, however, she noticed that one thing didn’t change, one person didn’t leave: Francesca. Kiara says, “Francesca always followed through on what she said. She was always at Court. She was always there. I could count on her.”

During their eight years together as CASA Volunteer and CASA Child, Francesca and Kiara slowly forged a strong and committed relationship. At first Kiara talked and Francesca listened. Then they talked to each other and they were honest with each other. Ultimately, they knew what to expect from each other. Francesca always listened to Kiara — she didn’t judge, she didn’t even always offer her opinion. But she made sure that she heard Kiara and she made sure that Kiara was heard by others. Kiara’s life did not appear to be full of hope and promise. She was not going to go home, because her mother couldn’t care for her or keep her safe. She had been separated from her four brothers as well as the rest of her family, and her multiple diagnoses had resulted in multiple medications and little hope for adoption or permanency. She says she “learned things the hard way” and “had no respect for authority.”

...she made sure that she heard Kiara and she made sure that Kiara was heard by others.

NewsLetter

BECOMING A DIFFERENCE-MAKER:
Kiara and Francesca | by Rachel S. Lloyd Miller

This article introduces you to former CASA Child, Kiara Miller, and CASA Volunteer, Francesca Diggs. Kiara first returned to Piedmont CASA approximately two years ago, wanting to reconnect with her CASA Volunteer. Since that time, Kiara and Francesca have kept in close contact — and recently they approached us about sharing their story.

continued on page 2
Kiara and Francesca

Kiara’s childhood is not the kind of childhood we like to imagine. From birth until adulthood, Kiara moved from place to place—never home to home. She never had the opportunity to bond or attach to a parent—she never had the opportunity to progress in school—she never had the opportunity to have any sense of what most of us would consider a “normal” childhood. But now, despite the odds, she is taking classes at PVCC and is working toward a future in which she contributes positively to her community. How did she get to this point? Why is she successful? A big part of “why” is the fact that she had a CASA Volunteer.

Kiara’s success is the kind of success we want for all CASA children—we hope they will have the ability to overcome the extraordinary challenges they face so that they can, as adults, have lives full of opportunity. Fortunately, most of the children we serve are able to return home or live permanently with a caring family, and their cases do not last for 8 years, like Kiara’s did. But ALL of the children we serve have experienced grave neglect or abuse—after all, Piedmont CASA only serves cases that require court intervention to keep children safe. Children do not deserve to go without dinner night after night, or to be routinely humiliated, or to withstand ongoing physical abuse. These are examples of what brings children to Piedmont CASA. Kiara’s story is an example of how a CASA Volunteer is an essential part of the process by which their lives are turned around.

So, I thank you for your support of Piedmont CASA. When you make a gift, you help ensure that we can continue to recruit, train and supervise the volunteers, like Francesca, who make such profound differences for children. We couldn’t do this work without you.

Kiara had a CASA Volunteer, a difference-maker, in her life; now, she wants to be the difference-maker.

Kiara has clearly thought a lot about her life, who she was, is and wants to be. But she wasn’t always introspective and she didn’t always want to understand. Kiara lived in placements, not homes, for so long that “nothing had meaning” and everything was “fragmented.” She fell behind academically because when placements changed, schools changed or there was no school for periods of time. Throughout these difficult years, Francesca remained by her side; she “saw everything ... listened to Kiara ... and made sure that everyone was on the same page.” Francesca couldn’t give Kiara a family or a stable home life. But she could and did give her sincere and focused attention, making sure she was safe, her voice was heard and needs were met. Francesca visited, listened, observed, and reported—she was the consistent presence for a child who had known only constancy prior to their meeting. What Francesca ultimately helped Kiara to develop was a sense of strength and the knowledge that she was worth the effort. She had potential and she could “do this” life.

What is a successful outcome for a CASA Child? Why is Kiara’s life now full of intention and potential? Why isn’t she one of the kids who wound up homeless or resorted to drug and alcohol abuse? Her childhood was far from ideal—she did not have a father into whose strong arms she ran after coming home from school. She didn’t have a mother who tucked her in and kissed her goodnight. She did not have a safe, loving, nurturing and permanent home. But she did have a CASA Volunteer. And she did have—and still does—a strong, stubborn and resolute core. Between having a CASA on her side and having exceptional tenacity, Kiara learned to focus on the future. She intentionally focuses on the next hurdle, seeking to grow personally as she progresses toward a future filled with opportunity. She wants to do something meaningful with her life. She wants to work with children—and she knows from personal experience that art therapy can be a powerful means of connection. Kiara had a CASA Volunteer, a difference-maker, in her life—now, she wants to be the difference-maker.

A LEGACY OF VOLUNTEERISM

by Daniel Nagin, Board Chair

Almost six years ago, I received a message from Lillian Beckler, now Professor of Law Emeritus at the University of Virginia School of Law, asking me if I would join her and several of her colleagues on the Piedmont CASA Board for lunch. Lillian was at the time Chair of the CASA Board and I was a relative newcomer to the Charlottesville community. In her message, Lillian said that they wanted to meet with me to discuss CASA and explore ways I might contribute to CASA’s mission.

Although I already had more than enough on my plate and was quite tempted to decline the invitation, I said yes for two reasons. The first was that the invitation came from Lillian. If Lillian—a nationally known legal scholar, a mentor and teacher to countless law students, and someone deeply engaged in the local nonprofit community—recommends something, you ought to listen very carefully. The second was that, while I was new to Charlottesville and did not yet know Piedmont CASA, I had a vague familiarity with CASA’s role in the court system from work experiences in other cities. I was intrigued and now had the opportunity to learn more.

At our lunch meeting, Lillian and her Board colleagues spoke with singular passion about Piedmont CASA—it’s incredible cadre of volunteers who advocate for abused and neglected children, its dedicated staff supervisors who train and guide the volunteers, and its impressive advancement and management teams. Together, they made clear that Piedmont CASA was something very special. When that lunch meeting later blossomed into an invitation to join the Board, it was one of the easiest decisions I have ever made.

But before I said yes, I first asked around a bit about Piedmont CASA to make sure I was getting a variety of perspectives. I spoke to local lawyers, to those involved in nonprofit...
A Legacy of Volunteerism  continued from page 2

leadership, and even had occasion to query a CASA Volunteer. To a person, they echoed what I had heard at that first lunchtime discussion: Piedmont CASA was a very special organization. Piedmont CASA was doing great things for the most vulnerable members of the community, and doing so with little fanfare. Indeed, hard as it was to imagine, the more I looked into CASA, the more convinced I became that I needed to find a way to support its vital work.

As I now reflect back on what first drew me to Piedmont CASA, among many things, one thing in particular stood out most—and it is something at which I continue to marvel. In many respects, it is easy enough for one to say he or she is opposed to child abuse and neglect. And it is easy enough for one to say that he or she wants children to have a meaningful voice in our overburdened child welfare system. Thankfully, many people (and organizations) say these things. What is truly remarkable about Piedmont CASA, however, is that it transforms the desire to make our community a better place for vulnerable children by harnessing the talents and energy of volunteer citizen advocates. CASA does not have a large paid staff. There are only seven employees. What it does have is a large volunteer corps. There are over 100 currently active volunteers.

These volunteers don’t stuff envelopes—they complete a rigorous multi-session training curriculum, they meet and get to know abused and neglected children whose lives are caught up in the child welfare system, they investigate the children’s circumstances, vulnerabilities, and resources, and, with the guidance of expert CASA Supervisors, they make absolutely critical recommendations to local judges about what placements and services these children need in order to be safe, to be secure, and to thrive. These are enormous commitments and heavy burdens. All undertaken by volunteers. Think about that. Lay volunteers—our neighbors, our friends, our colleagues—donating their time to address a difficult community problem in a hands-on, personal, and, often, emotionally wrenching way. What a remarkable and inspiring model for how communities can come together to make a difference for those with the least.

Lest there be any doubt about how CASA’s mission can inspire, consider the following. When my predecessor as Board Chair, Paula Newcomb, stepped off the Board, she had every reason to close the book on her active involvement in CASA’s everyday life. She had worked tirelessly to help CASA secure its beautiful new building and could rest comfortably knowing that she had made innumerable contributions to CASA’s wellbeing over the years. But rather than search for something else into which she could pour herself, as she had every right to do, Paula jumped right back into CASA. No longer able to serve on the Board because of term limits, Paula found a new way to contribute: she became a CASA Volunteer. Today, Paula doesn’t review CASA budgets and organizational strategy. Instead, having completed her training, she is now out in the community getting to know the child to whom she has been assigned, meeting with teachers, family members, and service providers, conferring with her CASA supervisor, and ensuring the local judge has all of the necessary information to make the right decisions for that child. Paula’s renewed commitment reminds us again of CASA’s capacity to inspire—and its powerful and unique legacy of volunteerism.

CASA Facts as of May 15, 2012...

- 239 children from 154 families have been referred to Piedmont CASA
- 27 children are on our waitlist
- The average volunteer age is 51 years old
- 104 CASA Children have lived in foster care this fiscal year
- 47% of CASA children are boys
- 93 children’s cases have been closed so far this fiscal year
- English is NOT the primary language for 7% of CASA children
- Piedmont CASA turned 17 years old this year

Thank you for supporting and believing in Piedmont CASA. Your contributions to our Annual Fund make an extraordinary difference to our community’s children. If you haven’t yet made your tax-deductible gift to Piedmont CASA, there is still time to contribute!

Piedmont CASA and Our Community:
Highlights from the Second Half of Fiscal Year 2012

Piedmont CASA is incredibly grateful for the support we receive from the community. Because of you, local children who have suffered abuse or neglect at the hands of their parents or other caretakers have well-trained, caring and committed volunteer advocates by their sides.

ACAC
ACAC Charlottesville generously gave Piedmont CASA a supply of passes for volunteers to use with their CASA children. We also want to extend a special thank you to CASA Volunteer, Steve Cooper, for facilitating this partnership.

Judge Edward DeJ. Berry
Judge Berry spent an evening talking to current and prospective CASA Volunteers about the Court’s expectations regarding their roles on cases and their Court Reports. He also spent time talking about the importance of the CASA program and the tremendous positive effects our Volunteers have on children’s lives. Thank you, Judge Berry!

Cavaliers Care from UVA’s Madison House
Ten students from UVA’s Madison House Cavaliers Care program came to Piedmont CASA and spent a Saturday morning helping us to hang blinds, organize office space and beautify our landscaping. We are so grateful for their enthusiasm and energy!!

McIntire School of Commerce
In March and April, MS Accounting students in Professor Meghan Murray’s consulting skills course at the McIntire School of Commerce partnered with Piedmont CASA on a consulting project focused on fundraising. PCASA thanks Professor Murray and her eleven students whose research efforts and final presentation culminated with thoughtful and pertinent recommendations for future fundraising efforts.

Michelle Barry Franco
Ms. Barry Franco provided an evening in-service training session, “From Reluctant to Productive” for current CASA Volunteers. This important training focused on how to have meaningful and ultimately productive conversations with people who are experiencing tremendous stress and difficulty in their lives. Many thanks to Ms. Barry Franco for her informative session!

Elizabeth Irvin
Ms. Irvin conducted a powerful training session on secondary trauma; the training was open to current CASA Volunteers. Her session at Piedmont CASA was well-attended by CASA Volunteers who grapple with the emotion and stress of the cases they work. We are incredibly grateful for her time and wisdom.

There are many ways you can support Piedmont CASA!

Piedmont CASA relies on friends like you for support each year -- your contributions to the Annual Fund are critical for day-to-day operations and the advocacy services we provide abused and neglected children. In addition to supporting us through the Annual Fund, have you considered:

Supporting Piedmont CASA through your IRA? You can ask your financial advisor to send you a Beneficiary Change Form and you can then make Piedmont CASA a beneficiary of a percentage of your retirement account. Although IRA distributions are usually taxed, they are NOT taxed when paid to a charity.

Designating Piedmont CASA as a beneficiary of your will? If you would like to support Piedmont CASA and the children we serve in this significant manner, one of the best ways is through your estate planning.

Making a gift to Piedmont CASA’s Endowment? Another way to help ensure that Piedmont CASA is able to serve children in need for years to come is by making a gift designated to our endowment. As the Endowment Fund grows, it helps to assure that for as long as there is a need, Piedmont CASA will be here to advocate for abused and neglected children.

You can help local abused and neglected children for years to come! If you have any questions about these or other ways to support Piedmont CASA please call us at 434-971-7515 or email pcasa@embarqmail.com.

Have you found Piedmont CASA on Facebook yet? To easily access our Facebook page, visit our website at www.pcasa.org and “Like” us! 

4
Piedmont CASA is proud to welcome 14 new CASA Volunteers!
Lucy Ackers-Allen • Sandra Cook • Teresa Gillie • Grace Giras • J. Roy Hopkins • Patt Keats • Rebecca Keese • Elizabeth McConnell
Jennifer McLeod • Natalie Palmer • Susan Quisenberry • Marjory Ruderman • Jan Schneider • Katerina Silcox

Spring 2012 CASA Volunteer Appreciation Picnic
Thank you, Volunteers, for ALL that you do to make life better for our community’s abused and neglected children!
Many thanks to Wells Fargo for supporting Piedmont CASA’s mission and underwriting the Spring Newsletter.

Join Us: Volunteer to Advocate for a Child