PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

by Vicki Simons

Any newcomer to Piedmont CASA will be struck immediately by the breadth of support that the organization receives from the community. Although some things have changed over the years, CASA’s collaboration with its many partners has not. If anything, that partnering has grown along with the organization. CASA was born of collaborative efforts and will continue to thrive because of support from the community it serves.

Piedmont CASA is one of over 900 state and local CASA programs nationwide, and although the locations of CASA offices vary, the need does not: to provide a voice in court for abused and neglected children. And just as the needs of each child differ, so do the sources of community support that Piedmont CASA enjoys.

Since its founding in 1995, with only two volunteers and a staff of one, PCASA has grown to 10 staff members, and over 100 volunteers who serve abused and neglected children in our area. CASA has expanded its service area as well, to include not only the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County, but also Greene County. And the organization just extended its services in January 2013 to nearby Louisa County, opening its doors with three volunteers, one more than the organization originally had when it began those many years ago.

Early in her 18-year tenure, former CASA President Ruth Stone said, “Generous people, whether CASA volunteers, board and committee members, trainers for our classes, community organizations, or individual donors have come together to provide time, talent, resources, and gifts to support our work for children. We could not do this without your help.” She was prophetic.

Today, as it was from the start, Piedmont CASA’s work brings together a variety of people and organizations to help meet its mission. CASA is a partnership of community advocates, professional staff, and volunteers, without whose efforts CASA would cease to exist.

CASA Volunteers

Currently numbering 110, CASA Volunteers serve as the eyes and ears of the court. They are out in the field, visiting children, meeting with parents, talking with teachers, consulting with doctors and learning from therapists before reporting their findings to the court to help the judge make the decisions that will result in the best possible outcome for the child.

The CASA Volunteer brings a non-institutional perspective to the child’s case, focusing on only one child or one set of siblings, to gain the greatest insight. As a local judge has said, “By the time we get to the court hearing, no one in the room knows that child better than the CASA.”

CASA Staff

CASA staff, particularly the Supervisors who work hand-in-hand with the volunteers, is also an integral part of the equation. It is the Supervisors who screen, train, and support the volunteers in their work. Theirs is a seamless effort, with each party assiduously assuming his or her role in the process and performing their respective duties like clockwork.

Working in tandem with CASA staff and volunteers are local social service agencies and child-centered programs, “official agencies” that partner with CASA to serve its constituency. Also, the courts, Guardian ad litem representatives, and other members of the judicial system work together for the safety and welfare of the child. It is all about the child. There is nothing more inspiring than to see all the moving parts working together for one common goal.

CASA Donors

Like all nonprofit agencies, CASA relies on the financial support of those who believe in our mission. And fortunately, CASA’s financial base of support is diversified so that we can continue to operate during unexpected downturns. It is the combination of individual donations, state and federal grants, local government grants, and foundations, clubs, and churches that sets CASA apart.

When an individual or organization makes a gift to CASA, that support provides hope to local abused and neglected children; hope that they would not have if CASA did not exist. These gifts support the efforts of a myriad of people dedicated to helping...
Following are the wonderful community partners who support our work. Thank you for all that you do to help us succeed.

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ensure these children have voices in court, and these gifts are an endorsement of Piedmont CASA's mission. CASA is grateful for this support.

GE Intelligent Platforms

Local businesses, too, have been integral to the support of CASA and CASA kids over the years, particularly GE Intelligent Platforms, which has been an active and consistent supporter of CASA for over 10 years, making back-to-school time and holidays bright for these children.

It is like Christmas in August when school backpacks, prepared by the GE volunteers, are delivered to CASA each year; last August alone (2012) 78 school backpacks, filled with age- and gender-appropriate items, were donated to CASA children so that they could start the new school year in style.

“Our employees always look forward to the backpack drive,” said Kristie Spencer, Marketing Operations Director for GE. “Many of them make a family activity out of it and take the opportunity to teach their children and grandchildren about charity and compassion for those in need. We hope that the backpacks and supplies start all of the CASA kids off on a very happy and productive school year,” she added.

And the GE volunteers do not stop there; every holiday season they wrap and deliver a plethora of Christmas gifts to CASA children who might otherwise have no gifts at all. This past Christmas season over 130 gifts were delivered to CASA for the children. The GE volunteers selected, wrapped, and delivered the gifts so that the children could experience the joy of the season. CASA Supervisors provide a wish list for the CASA kids for guidance, and the very generous GE santas fill just about every one! CASA remains very grateful for GE’s extraordinary and generous support.

Student Support

No list of CASA supporters would be complete without the many student groups at U.Va.; it seems that almost every week one of these groups reaches out to CASA to offer assistance for whatever may need to be done. Although many of the students who volunteer are not old enough to serve as a CASA Volunteer (volunteers must be at least 21 years of age), that does not deter them from lending a hand.

Whether it is hand addressing envelopes and solicitation letters or doing some much-needed cleaning, the U.Va. students are eager and willing to help. This past fall, CASA received help from several U.Va. groups, the first being Project SERVE, whose mission is “to introduce incoming students to service and service learning opportunities at U.Va. and to familiarize them with local agencies that rely on the continued dedication and commitment of the University community,” according to Project SERVE’s site.

Ten University of Virginia students spent a Sunday afternoon, September 9, hand addressing envelopes for CASA’s fall solicitation drive, while September 27 saw the arrival of three Black Law Student Association members who completed the hand addressing. Among their numbers was Aida Fitzgerald who had served as a CASA Volunteer; Aida plans to go into social service law.

Rounding out the fall group of student volunteers were five representatives from the Indian Student Association, whose members spent time at CASA doing some much-needed fall cleaning. All four academic class years were represented by the ISA group, with one student from first, second, and third year respectively; and two fourth years.

And just last month, spring volunteers included 12 members of Madison House, the student volunteer organization at U.Va.

Volunteering as part of “Cavaliers Care,” they spent Saturday morning, April 13, cleaning and organizing CASA offices, and weeding and mulching outdoor beds. They did such a fantastic job that CASA staff were hoping to get them to come to their homes as well!

Having the support of these various student groups is a win-win situation for all involved; the students’ efforts help CASA complete tasks which might otherwise not get done, and the students learn first-hand about the great work being done by CASA, while gaining practical volunteer experience which will hopefully establish a lifelong pattern for volunteerism.

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change. Transition. These are concepts familiar to the volunteers, staff and Board of Directors of Piedmont CASA. As a group, we are constantly striving to change the outcomes for abused and neglected children in our community. We work to ensure that kids have happy and healthy home environments in which to thrive. To accomplish this mission, we focus much attention on our community, the agencies with whom we partner to make life better for children, and on the system that we all navigate.

Our mission-driven focus never wavers. In the past year, Piedmont CASA has served a record number of children; as I write 115 CASA Volunteers have served 197 children, and we have 39 children on the waitlist; never before have we had such a large caseload at this point in the fiscal year. To help meet the need we have already held three CASA Volunteer training classes, and another in Louisa is scheduled for June – in the past we have only held two training classes per year. Clearly the need for our services continues, and so we maintain our focus on our community’s most vulnerable citizens whose lives are marked by the need for change and transition.

In December 2012 we were required, however, to face the concepts of change and transition ourselves when Ruth Stone decided to retire. Piedmont CASA found itself in unfamiliar territory. Ruth, a founder of Piedmont CASA, had been President since 1995. She was the organization’s leader for 18 years by the time she left. At her final board meeting, Ruth reiterated her confidence that Piedmont CASA is bigger than any one person, and the organization would continue successfully to focus on the important work of helping local children in need.

There was already an ambitious agenda for the year: getting children off CASA’s waiting list, expanding services to Louisa County, and completing a self-assessment from National CASA. I knew the organization would meet these goals; CASA’s mission is focused, the staff and volunteers are outstanding, and the community is highly supportive. But replace the long-standing founder of the organization – the one who had grown us from two volunteers serving three children to an annual roster of 100+ volunteers serving more than 200 children? I had less confidence in our ability to succeed in that arena.

In December and January the task began to take shape, and the entire organization started to think about Piedmont CASA’s next chapter. The Board asked former Chair and current CASA Volunteer, Paula Newcomb, to spearhead a Search Committee comprising past Board Chairs, current Board members and current volunteers. The staff offered their input into the process, masterminded the publicity of the position, and collected the resumes. But above all else, each staff member at Piedmont CASA, with the excellent leadership of Interim President Rachel Lloyd Miller, kept the daily focus on helping local children.

In April, the search committee had narrowed their recommendation for the next President to two candidates. Each individual came to Piedmont CASA’s office to have a series of interviews and meetings with the full Board, staff and Search Committee. At the end of a long day, there was unanimous consent on which candidate was the best fit for Piedmont CASA. An offer was made and accepted.

CASA Facts as of May 10, 2013...

- Piedmont CASA Volunteers have served a **record 193 children** so far this fiscal year
- **263 children from 160 families** have been referred to Piedmont CASA
- In April we had a **record 44 children on our waitlist; today we have 39**
- The average volunteer age is **55 years old**
- **124 CASA children** have been removed from their homes
- **43% of CASA children are boys**
- **83 children’s cases have been closed** so far this fiscal year
- **54% of Piedmont CASA Volunteers have served for more than 2 years**
- Piedmont CASA turned **18 years old this year**

Join the social media era!

CASA is ramping up its Facebook page and we invite you to join us as we expand our presence in the community. Help us by visiting the link below and by “Liking” the page. You will be helping us to spread the word about our work, while you keep abreast of all that is happening at CASA.

“Like,” share, comment. Be part of the effort!

https://www.facebook.com/PCASACharlottesville

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On May 1, Alicia Lenahan began her tenure as Piedmont CASA's President. She has run a CASA program in Massachusetts, practiced law for 15 years, and served more than 20 years in various not-for-profit organizations. I very much look forward to having all of our volunteers, donors and community partners meet and get to know Alicia.

The past few months can only be described as highly dynamic. As an organization, we have said thank-you to Ruth Stone for devoting 18 years to Piedmont CASA. At a lovely evening event a few weeks ago, Ruth was toasted and given the key to the City of Charlottesville for the superior work she has done advocating for local children. Rachel Lloyd Miller has done a superb job at the helm as Interim President, keeping the mission of Piedmont CASA at the forefront. The organization will be saying good-bye to Rachel as well, as she made the decision some time ago to focus her attention on her family once Piedmont CASA had hired a new President.

Now we turn our focus to Piedmont CASA's next chapter with Alicia Lenahan at the helm. And although it was nerve-racking to think about change and transition as it applied to finding a new President, I can clearly see how the process has strengthened the organization. Each staff and Board member rose to the occasion by taking on more responsibility and by taking ownership for hiring a new leader. And we are thrilled with the outcome as we face a future with Alicia leading us.

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, please consider:

Support 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.

Designate 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.

Make 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.

Media

Last, but not least among CASA’s wonderful network of supporters are local media organizations, both print and broadcast. CASA has made great inroads in this area, establishing strong and respectful relationships with Charlottesville’s top media outlets. The Daily Progress newspaper has been instrumental in helping spread the word about CASA and its efforts, as has been WINA radio, 92.7 KISS (WUVA), and WNRN, which has featured CASA several times on its Community Connection, most recently in April to promote CASA’s special summer training in Louisa. CASA has been very fortunate to get a host of airings free of charge, courtesy of WNRN, and the exposure has generated not only good publicity for CASA but also a number of prospective volunteers. Thank you WNRN.

In the television realm, CASA has enjoyed support from NBC-29 WVIR’s Norm Sprouse, who continues to provide innumerable mentions of upcoming training and Information Sessions. CASA’s Hope Payne and Rachel Lloyd Miller appeared on What’s Up Charlottesville, hosted by Lighthouse Studios, to discuss CASA. Lighthouse is a nonprofit filmmaking center dedicated to helping film students “develop their vision and share their work.”

CASA also joined the Moms Everyday segment on local ABC and CBS affiliates, with Vicki Simons doing the honors for CASA, discussing everything anyone wanted to know about CASA in just two minutes. The taping, with Newsplex’s Rachel Edwards, took place January 30 and the segment, which is still being shown, continues to generate interest and inquiries. Links to the TV and radio spots mentioned above can be found on the various media outlets’ websites.

As CASA looks toward the future, names and faces will change but one thing will remain the same, and that is the broad-based support of the community it serves. CASA’s long history of collaborating with community partners will remain strong, not only retaining but also building on the solid foundation of support that it has enjoyed from day one.
Spring 2013 Piedmont CASA Volunteer Class

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Photos courtesy of Larry Bouterie
Join Us: Volunteer To Advocate For A Child

Fall 2013 Training Begins September 14

To find out how you can help abused and neglected children find safe, permanent homes please call Piedmont CASA at (434) 971-7515, email pcasa@embarqmail.com, or apply on-line at www.pcasa.org.