



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

LOUISIANA

Speaking Out for Louisiana's Abused and Neglected Children

ANNUAL REPORT OF CASA IN LOUISIANA

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Louisiana CASA Association

www.louisianacasa.org

Mission

The mission of Louisiana CASA Association is to support local programs in their efforts to ensure that abused and neglected children in the Louisiana legal system have a competent and caring volunteer advocate through quality, local CASA programs.



A Message from the President of the Louisiana CASA Board of Directors...

Greetings once again! It is with great pleasure that I present to you the 2007 Annual Report for the Louisiana CASA Association. Whether you are a CASA volunteer, local program staff member, or stakeholder, I want you to know that Louisiana CASA is committed to its mission of supporting local programs in their efforts to ensure that abused and neglected children in the Louisiana legal system have a competent and caring volunteer advocate.

I would like to personally thank every CASA volunteer in Louisiana for your dedication, commitment, and caring spirit toward the child, or children, that you serve. You truly represent the best of Louisiana –and the best of CASA statewide! Without you, we could not serve over 3,800 children in 2007.

I also want to personally encourage each of our volunteers to consider encouraging family and friends to join us as CASA volunteers. Certainly you know firsthand the rewards of volunteering with CASA as well as the need for more advocates.

The local CASA program staff and Boards of Directors should be commended for their efforts as well. Without you, LACASA would not have the many, wonderful stories to share. Your stories of humble service to children and of successes provide us the encouragement to advocate on your behalf to the best of our abilities.

Finally, special thanks to my fellow board members who have so graciously volunteered their time, energies, and experiences in contributing to the mission of LACASA. It is through your leadership and your effort that we continue to see LACASA grow itself into the Association we all know that it can be.

I am looking forward to another exciting and fruitful year in 2008!

~Stanley Dameron
Covington, LA

CASA Services in Louisiana

CASA in Louisiana works to provide quality advocacy and a strong voice to abused and neglected children in the state's care. CASA --through recruitment, training, and supervising volunteers-- serves as the eyes and ears of the judge in working collaboratively to find safe and permanent, nurturing homes for Louisiana's most vulnerable children.

What We Do

- Louisiana CASA programs provide unique and specialized advocacy for children in foster care. Trained volunteers work with children, their families, their communities and the child welfare system to provide each child with a safe, permanent home. CASA programs also build the capacity of local communities to acknowledge and protect their most vulnerable, young citizens.

Commitment to Excellence

- Louisiana CASA programs are members of National CASA, which sets standards of operation for all CASA programs in the country. Louisiana law mandates that Louisiana CASA programs adhere to these standards.
- CASA programs ensure that all volunteers working within their programs are properly screened, trained and supervised, in compliance with both Louisiana law and National standards.

Cost Effectiveness of Community Involvement

- Each CASA volunteer from the community may provide advocacy for two children or sibling groups at a time. In turn, each specially trained supervisor works directly with 30 volunteers. As a result, one paid staff member supervises volunteer services for 60 or more abused and neglected children, maximizing the impact of dollars spent.
- In 2007 alone, local community CASA volunteers across the state contributed time valued at over \$4 million.

Why CASA Is Unique

- Focused exclusively upon the child's best interest, a CASA volunteer provides individualized one-on-one advocacy. Advocates are recruited from the community and selected for each child to maximize the unique abilities of the advocate.
- A CASA volunteer works with all agencies and parties involved to gather information and to provide an independent report for the Court with recommendations based solely upon the child's best interest.



“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.”

Former Superior Court Judge David Soukup, Founder of CASA

A Message from the Louisiana CASA Executive Director...

Another year already in the books! Actually, we are now well into 2008, but nonetheless, it’s important to take a few moments and reflect on 2007. It was another year of growth and improvement for Louisiana CASA. Here are some highlights:

- In 2007, CASA in Louisiana served 3,873 children!! We looked as far back as we could and discovered that CASA served 771 children in 1993.
- In the Year 2007, CASA in Louisiana had 1,437 volunteers advocating for the best interests of abused and neglected children.
- In 2007, CASA began a partnership with the “Together We Can” Conference, and LACASA supported over 150 CASA attendees’ participation in the conference from all over Louisiana.
- LACASA provided additional training to local programs, including volunteer recruitment and retention as well as Training of Facilitators and other opportunities, reaching over 100 individuals through those efforts.
- A new, two year strategic plan for Louisiana CASA was adopted and implemented. Our plan charts our course and clearly defines our Vision for CASA as well as our core values.
- In 2007, we began a partnership with the Corporation for National & Community Service through its AmeriCorps*VISTA program. Through this partnership, CASA has 20 slots for fulltime VISTA members. These members will assist with recruitment and outreach efforts!

Those are just a few of the many, small victories LACASA was able to enjoy in 2007. Its not often we take the time to celebrate these moments but, reflecting back, it’s important that we do!

We once again salute the efforts of our local programs –their Boards, staff, and volunteers—and thank them for making the difference in the lives of thousands of Louisiana’s abused and neglected children.

I also want to take a moment to welcome Jacqueline Wilson and Tommy Overton to the LACASA team! Jacqueline is serving as the Director of Program Operations and brings a wealth of knowledge and experiences that she can call upon in supporting local programs through individualized technical assistance as well as training opportunities.

Tommy is serving with LACASA for 12 months through the VISTA program. As our Outreach & Awareness Coordinator, Tommy has been invaluable to the Association. His efforts have helped increased the capacity of LACASA in serving local programs through the development of new resources and materials.

LACASA also revived its tradition of recognizing efforts with our state awards in 2007. The recognition was held in conjunction with the Together We Can conference. Learn more about our 2007 winners by reading about them in this edition of the Annual Report. LACASA salutes and thanks them for their efforts!

As you can imagine, 2008 is already off to a fast start. The possibilities for CASA in Louisiana are endless, but more importantly, the opportunity to serve more children must be embraced. Although we are serving more children than ever before, CASA must continue to work hard until all children in foster care can experience the compassion and competency of a dedicated CASA volunteer!

John E. Wyble
Executive Director, Louisiana CASA Association

From the desk of the Program Operations Director...

During my 10 years working within the CASA movement, one thing that I've learned is people within this network are some of the most phenomenal, principled and passionate people one could ever meet. Watching the network grow and expand from an inside perspective has been fascinating. The overall result has been a positive step forward, but as those of us who have been with CASA for a while well know, there is always work to be done. Coming aboard with Louisiana CASA Association as Programs Operation Director is an exciting opportunity for me to work more closely with the talented folks in our network. I look forward to working with each of you and learning how Louisiana CASA can better serve your needs as you focus on the best interests of the children in your local community.

Louisiana CASA partners with AmeriCorps VISTA

Our statewide project with AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) kicked off in the fall of 2007 and is well underway. As a national service program designed to address the needs of low-income communities, VISTA focuses on building permanent infrastructure in organizations. Upon successful completion of their service, members receive an AmeriCorps Education Award of up to \$4,725 to pay for college or graduate school or to pay back qualified student loans. During their service, members receive health coverage, training, student loan deferment and a modest living allowance.

Our three year project will sponsor twenty full time AmeriCorps VISTA members who will serve their commitment at CASA programs all over the state by focusing on volunteer recruitment, awareness and outreach. Currently there are four active members in the CASA network including one VISTA member assigned to the Louisiana CASA office. An additional six VISTA members will join the CASA network by the end of spring. Recruitment is ongoing until all slots are filled. If you know anyone who may be interested, please have them contact Tommy Overton at our office at (225) 706-0018 or e-mail tommy@louisianacasa.org.

Independent Research Demonstrates the Effectiveness of CASA Volunteers for Children*

The Office of the Inspector General Report: In 2006, the US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of the National CASA Association, as required by Congress.

Audit Report Results for CASA Advocacy

- When a CASA volunteer was involved, both children and their parents were ordered by the courts to receive more services. **The audit concluded that this was an indication that**

“CASA is effective in identifying the needs of children and parents.”

- Permanent closure is defined as the case being closed for any reason and the child not reentering the child welfare system (CWS). **Cases involving a CASA volunteer are more likely to be “permanently closed” (i.e., the children are less likely to reenter the CWS) than cases where a CASA volunteer is not involved.** The statistics vary from only 1.4% of children with a CASA volunteer reentering the CWS (CASA Data Request) to 9% of CASA children reentering the CWS (Youngclarke Review). This is in contrast to 16% for children not served by a volunteer

Additional Studies Document Results of CASA Volunteer Advocacy*

Like our volunteer advocates, the National CASA Association and our local programs strive for fact-based decision-making. Below is a summary of conclusive results from the Caliber study and other CASA studies selected by researchers with the University of California, San Francisco Fresno Medical Education program for their high methodological quality.

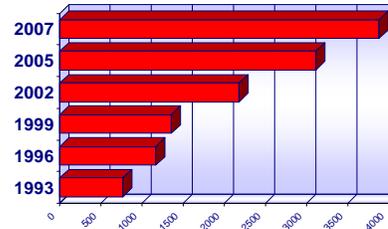
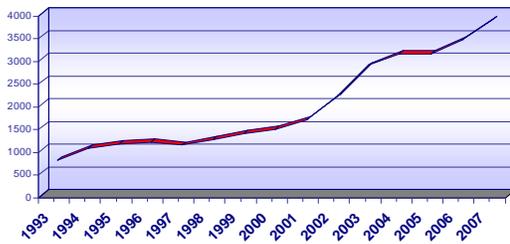
Notable conclusive results from these studies include the following:

- CASA volunteers spend most of their volunteer time in contact with a child.
- CASA volunteers are highly effective in getting their recommendations accepted in court. In 4 out of 5 cases, all or almost all CASA volunteer recommendations are accepted.
- When a CASA volunteer is assigned, a higher number of services are ordered
- A child with a CASA volunteer is less likely to reenter the child welfare system. The proportion of reentries is consistently reduced by half.

**Source: National CASA Association*

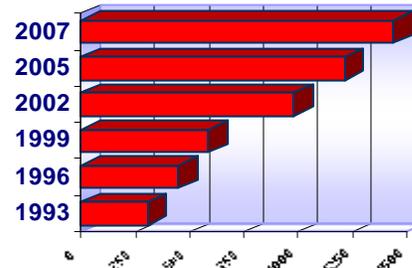
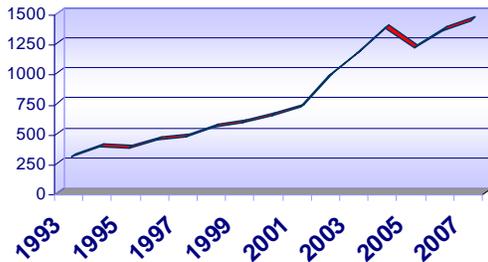
CASA serving more of Louisiana's Children*

*In 2007, CASA programs in Louisiana served over 5 times the number of children when compared to 1993.
(771 Children served in 1993 compared to 3,873 Children Served in 2007)



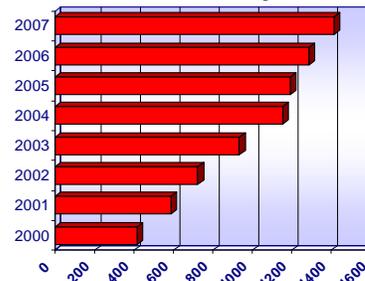
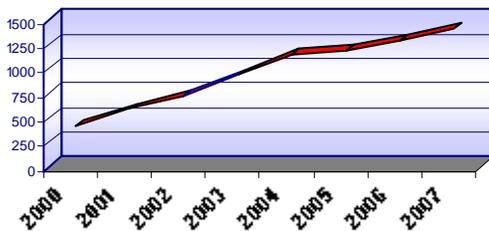
Thousands of CASA Volunteers have served Louisiana's Children*

*In 2007, nearly 5 times as many volunteers were actively serving children in foster care as compared to 1993.
(305 Active Volunteers in 1993 compared to 1,437 Active Volunteers in 2007)



CASA's efforts and assistance have helped find safe, permanent homes for thousands of Louisiana's children*

*Since 2000, 7,700 children have found safe, permanent homes with the assistance of diligent CASA volunteers working in close collaboration with Louisiana's child welfare officials.
These graphs represent the number of cases closed each calendar year.



CASA Volunteers' time equals millions of dollars in service for Louisiana*

*Since 2003, CASA Volunteers have contributed time valued at over \$19 million in service to abused and neglected children placed in Louisiana's Foster Care System.

In 2007, CASA volunteer contributions valued at

\$4.048 million!!!

Louisiana CASA Honors "Special" Heroes for Outstanding Efforts in 2007!

LACASA, in partnership with its member programs, revived a past tradition by honoring outstanding individuals for their service to children through CASA. Although we value all of the outstanding volunteers, staff, and stakeholders we work with, CASA wanted to present special recognition for those individuals who have gone that extra mile for children.

In 2007, the honorees were recognized at a special CASA Assembly, which took place as a part of the Together We Can Conference. For 2008, LACASA is planning a special luncheon banquet to continue the tradition of recognizing excellence in CASA statewide.

JUDGE OF THE YEAR

Judge Robert Black truly makes a difference for Louisiana's children



Judge Robert Black of Bogalusa was selected as the 2007 Judge of the Year for Louisiana CASA. Nominated by Youth Services Bureau CASA, Judge Black values the independent perspective of the CASA volunteer and truly utilizes CASA as one of his tools in the difficult, decision-making process regarding the future of abused and neglected children. YSB also added that Judge Black respects the CASA volunteers and always takes a moment to thank them for their volunteer work on the case when leaving the witness stand. Judge Black will even assist with recruiting more CASA volunteers! Respected in his community, Judge Black doesn't hesitate to join the CASA staff with recruitment efforts.

Judge Black was accompanied to the Together We Can Conference to receive his award by his wife, Chris. Thank you both for your support of CASA and for your work on behalf of abused and neglected children!!

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AWARD

Jackie Perkins is an example of leadership and collaboration for Louisiana's Children



Jackie Perkins, Regional Administrator for the Monroe Region of the Office of Community Services, does it all for CASA from collaborating on training to honoring and celebrating their local CASA program. Nominated by the Center for Children and Families' CASA of Northeast Louisiana program, Mrs. Perkins was described as an example of leadership and collaboration and a shining star for the Office of Community Services.

Since being named Administrator, she has set an entirely new tone of collaboration between CASA and OCS. She has actively worked with OCS and CASA to promote collaborative efforts on behalf of abused and neglected children. She personally makes sure that CASA staff are invited to speak to all of her supervisors and management staff to make sure that each understands the other's roles and are working toward the same goal.

Mrs. Perkins is happily married, with three daughters and four grandchildren. She has been employed with DSS since 1976. Congratulations!!!

OUTSTANDING CASA STAFF MEMBER

Lakisha Hills recognized for her integrity, work ethic as she leads by example



For over five years, Lakisha Hills has worked with the Child Advocacy Services CASA program, growing from a new Advocate Supervisor just out of college to Program Director for CASA during that time. Currently, Ms. Hills provides leadership and guidance to the CASA program which services a 10 parish area of Southeast Louisiana.

Ms. Hills leads by example, demonstrating the value of respect for others; kindness and honesty; and expecting no less from her staff. Ms. Hills continuously pushes herself and her team toward the goal of making better lives for the children of her community.

She works tirelessly in advocating for youth and family services that directly improve the lives of children. As her personality demonstrates, she is bright, articulate, motivated, and conscientious. Ms. Hills has a true understanding of the CASA mission, but, more importantly, the need for protective services for children.

Acknowledging her qualities of excellence, Ms. Hills truly is the CASA Staff Member of the Year for 2007!!

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Courtney Arceneaux recognized as the CASA Executive Director of the Year for 2007!



With, literally, an appreciation for all perspectives regarding the work we do, Courtney Arceneaux has excelled as Executive Director for the CASA Terrebonne and Lafourche Program.

From media appearances to actually being a foster and adoptive mom, Courtney has brought a diverse set of experiences to her CASA program. Mrs. Arceneaux is described as a leader who is honest, hardworking, dedicated, responsible, and genuine. Her focus remains on children and her staff's loyalty is often expressed in their own love for their work.

In a recent newspaper article in the Houma community, she expressed her mission is to open doors for children. In fact, her career is one of the reasons she wants to open doors to children in the state's custody. As a foster, and now adoptive, parent herself, she understands firsthand the challenges these children face.

Mrs. Arceneaux maintains an open door policy and makes herself available to staff, volunteers, media, board members, and anyone interested in CASA. Though her title is Executive Director, she continues to give her time to so much more than what is listed in her job description! Courtney Arceneaux is beyond doubt leading by example!

Being the difference...

...behind the numbers

CASA Staff & Volunteers serve as everyday heroes for abused and neglected children...giving hope for tomorrow

A SPECIAL HERO...

Louisiana's CASA Volunteer of the Year!

Diane Ferguson



CASA of Central Louisiana, serving the Natchitoches area, nominated Diane Ferguson for Louisiana's Child Advocate of the Year because she has been a faithful and loyal CASA volunteer for over two years. Her great enthusiasm and positive outlook have been contagious to not only other advocates, but CASA staff as well. Mrs. Ferguson treats her role as a CASA volunteer as if it were her career.

Her efforts don't end with advocating for the children in her case! Within the community, Mrs. Ferguson has networked and established numerous contacts which have benefited the local CASA program and all of the children served by the program. Businesses within the community have generously supported CASA because of her efforts and persistence. She is always available anytime

the program has a need in addition to attending all meetings, trainings, and fundraising events. As an outstanding advocate, she is a true team player!

CASA of Central Louisiana expressed their gratitude and appreciation for Mrs. Diane as a wonderful wife, mother, friend, and—especially—as an outstanding CASA Volunteer!

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