

# Cornerstone of the Voice



Winter 2009

## The Illinois CASA State Conference Stand Up for an Abused Child What a great success!

The Illinois CASA State Conference Stand Up for an Abused Child was a great success! It was held in Oak Brook on October 9th and 10th. Thank you to all who joined us for this two day training. For those of you unable to attend we have a wonderful opportunity for you to still receive some of the information.

Jim L'Allier and Brenda Dissette of CASA Kane County have graciously provided pod casts of five of the trainings offered. These pod casts are condensed versions that allow you to receive the basic information and contain links to the supporting documentation provided by each speaker. Kane County CASA generously hosts us and provides pod casts for other continuing education targeted specifically for the CASA volunteer. Please visit Kane County CASA at [casakanecounty.org](http://casakanecounty.org) for more pod-casts. In order to receive continuing education credit for these pod cast, please speak directly to your CASA program.

Over the past several years repeated request have been made by conference attendees to hear from children who have experienced the foster care system. This year we were pleased to have joining us, three such young adults. Eugene Robinson, Jr. from the Youth Guidance program introduced us to Mica McNeil, Derrick Sims and Monique Banks. These bright and outgoing college students shared their moving stories and gave insight into the challenges facing them.

These financial times have created challenges not just for our CASA programs and families but for service agencies as well. In answer to the question, "what is out there and how can we use them for the children we serve," Illinois CASA provided a Resource Panel. Speakers included: Frances Elbert, DCFS-Education and Transition Services, Carol Casey, a supervising attorney at Office of the Public Guardian, John E. Payne, a retired Circuit Court Judge of the 15th Judicial Circuit and the Illinois Coordinator for Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)/ Redeploy Illinois and Geoff Schropp, Spectrum Wilderness Program. All presenters provided resources and education on how to access them around the state.

Saturday began with a very informative presentation by Deandre Davis and Penelope Ford from Adoption Information Center of Illinois. They discussed permanency and its impact on children together with the resources available. Steven Kossman, Director of Probation and Court Services presented Risk Factors for Juveniles. He started us out by defining risk factors and how they played into the outcomes for our children. He also provided

insight on how we as CASA's might better serve these children in need.

Our final presenter was Michael Sullivan, Deputy Chief of the Investigations Division for the Illinois Attorney General's Office and the ICAC Task Force Commander. His presentation on Internet Crimes was both eye opening and educational. He was able to tell us ways to protect our children while actually showing us in real time how predators on the internet work.

A group of CASA supporters begin 9 months in advance to ensure attendees of the State Conference have a rewarding and valuable experience. They sorted through speakers; choose topics, solicited needed items and give greatly of their time. This conference would not be possible without the hard work of the Conference Planning Committee:

Winnie Albright - DeKalb County, Kathy Byrne - Cook County, Elizabeth Dooley - Cook County, Nicki Herbst - Cook County, Clairice Hetzler - Adams County, Jennifer Jansen - Effingham County, Amy Mosley - Cook County, Jill Olson - DeKalb County, Donna Para - Kendall County, Bob Ptak - DeKalb County, Kit Woods - Cook County.

Finally, we need your help to plan next year. If you have ideas or would like to become part of the Planning Committee, send an email to [ruth@illinoiscasa.org](mailto:ruth@illinoiscasa.org). Be watching for the announcement of the 2010 Illinois State Conference. We hope to see you there!



*One child. One future. One voice. That is the commitment of CASA. Without your investment in Illinois CASA, one child's voice may not be heard.*

You may also call into the office at (309) 683-8788 for more information or visit us online at [www.illinoiscasa.org](http://www.illinoiscasa.org).

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YES! You can count on me! I would like to support the mission of Illinois CASA to develop local programs whose volunteers advocate for the best interest abused and neglected children in the juvenile Court system. My donation is:

## Will You Support Illinois' Children?



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# Local Programs

**CASA of Jefferson County** recently passed National CASA standards and is a member in good standing with National CASA and Illinois CASA. On November 23rd two more CASA volunteers were sworn-in and are ready to take a case. This brings the total of volunteers to 17. The next fundraiser is scheduled for January 23rd at the Holiday Inn, Mt. Vernon, IL. It is an interactive Murder Mystery dinner and wine raffle. For information please visit our website at jeffersoncountycasa.com

**Saline County CASA** has had a wonderful year. We trained 4 new advocates in April and another 10 were just sworn in for a total of 14 advocates trained this year. We also hired a part-time Advocate Coordinator.

**Jersey County CASA** has sworn in 11 new advocates in 2009, also, as of November 30, 100% of the children that have been assigned to CASA in Jersey County have a volunteer advocate appointed to them. We have tried a new fundraiser this year-we call it "Casas' for CASA-kids helping kids".

**Coles County CASA** had a good year. We swore in 11 new advocates in August. We have worked with 54 children this year and have closed 15 cases. We are working with DCFS and our juvenile judge to establish a Family Treatment Court, similar to the one that exists in Danville.

**McLean County CASA** graduated 6 new advocates in November. We now have 95 volunteers available to assist our children in foster care. We also provided many presentations during the year to raise awareness in our community about our program and the advocacy our volunteers provide.

**Boone County CASA** We have added 6 new advocates to our program this year. We were proud to sponsor a national speaker in April. We also started a program newsletter.

**Macon County CASA** swore in 3 new advocates (38 total) in October and added 1 new board member (12). Our 1<sup>st</sup> Halloween CASAtume party and our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Rummage Sale was a success.

**Kendall County CASA** has had a great year. We closed more cases in 2009, than in any other year. We have trained 10 new advocates. We have been very active in helping the States Attorney's office with the Child Advocacy Center.

**Champaign County CASA** recently graduated a class of 6 advocates in November and plan to have quarterly trainings in 2010, in the hopes of adding several more. Our 2nd annual Tip-A-VIP fundraiser was held in October and was a great success.

**Lee, Carroll and Ogle County / CASA 15th Judicial Circuit** Our program concluded our Fall Training Class and had 9 new volunteers sworn in. We added two new fundraisers, Celebrity Waiter Dinner which encompassed Lee, Carroll and Ogle County, and our 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Ogle County Bowl-a-Thon this past year. The September class yielded 14 new CASAs and the November class graduated 24 new volunteers. A very successful fundraiser, our annual CASAblanca event, was held on November 7, 2009.

**CASA Lake County** will host an all-day Seminar—a re-visit by Jodi Pfarr and her "Bridges Out of Poverty" presentation February 20, 2010. For more information please call: (847) 808-9154

**DeKalb County CASA** swore in 8 new advocates on December 10th and are pleased that 3 of them are men! We held our annual Holiday Tea Open House on December 5th.

**Will County CASA** conducted a swearing In ceremony on October 29th bringing on an additional 15 new volunteer advocates. The program currently manages 76 volunteers serving 183 children in the Will County community.

**Winnebago County CASA** just finished our fall, 2009, training on December 2, 2009. It yielded 8 new CASAs volunteer advocates

**Knox County CASA** recently graduated our largest class of new advocates - 10. This was such a great group of people and brings our total advocates to 30. The most we have had in our history at one time.

**McHenry County CASA** swore in 6 new advocates on December 4<sup>th</sup>. This latest training brings CASA of McHenry County's volunteer total to 59 advocates serving 103 children. In October, CASA of McHenry County partnered with District 200 schools to raise funds for CASA in the Coins for CASA fundraiser.

**Kane County CASA** is thrilled to announce that we have hired a full time Development Director. Her name is Karen Kay and she will officially join our staff on January 4<sup>th</sup>. We are busily preparing for our annual auction. This year's theme is VIP, and the event will take place on Saturday, March 6<sup>th</sup> at the Eagle Brook Country Club in Geneva. To date, our 215 CASA/GAL volunteers have served 532 children. We trained 39 new volunteers this year.

## Board Member Spotlight

### Jill Olson

Jill has been the Executive Director at CASA DeKalb County since 2001. Prior to coming to CASA, she was an attorney in private practice in Aurora, Illinois for 13 years and also volunteered as a pro bono attorney for Kane County CASA for 6 years. Jill has been active in DeKalb County organizations serving youth and family including DeKalb County Youth Service Providers and Networking for Families. She is currently serving on the Long Term Alternative Placement committee dealing with foster placement issues in DeKalb County as well as the DeKalb County Training Consortium planning committee for training opportunities for nonprofit organizations.

Jennifer has been married to her husband Jack for almost 20 years. She has two children, Jaclyn (19), who will be a Sophomore at Baylor University in Waco Texas and plays golf for the women's golf team, and James, (16), who attends Effingham St. Anthony High School and will be a Junior this year. Prior to taking the position of Executive Director, she served on CASA of Effingham County's Incorporating Board, helping to get the program up and running. Jennifer enjoys being a part of the Illinois CASA network, "I have enjoyed meeting many wonderful people from different CASA



Jennifer Jansen (Effingham County) and Jill Olson (DeKalb County)

programs throughout Illinois who have been extremely helpful. As the director of a new program there were many times I was in need of help or had questions and the support I received from programs all over the state was overwhelming. I look forward to serving on the Illinois CASA Board of Directors as the Southern Region Representative."

## Advocate of the Year 2009

Each year at the State Conference Illinois CASA takes time to recognize the overall successes of the CASA network as a whole. This year's award luncheon recognized the advocates from local programs who were nominated for Advocate of the Year: Lisa Beaupre - Peoria County, Orville Dash - Macon County, Nancy Draper - Sangamon County, Nancy Gage - DuPage County, Barbara Marriott - Cook County, and Rick Poulton - Kane County. It is a very difficult job to choose just one advocate and this year was no exception. Our anonymous statewide judging panel scored the nominations based on: 1). Exemplifies a high level of ethics in his/her role as a CASA, 2). Demonstrates exceptional diligence, 3).thoroughness and persistence in conduction research, in making the system respond to the needs of the child and in representing the child's best interest to the court, and 4). Contributes to the local CASA program (ex: service on committees, fundraising, event planning, etc.). Illinois CASA is proud to award the Advocate of the Year to **Cathy Vendemia** from Boone County.

The Illinois CASA Board of Directors chooses one person or group that has demonstrated uncommon commitment, exemplary dedication and service to our states abused and neglected children. The Judge Anthony Peccarelli Award was given to the Illinois CASA Advocate Network team or ICAN. This group of advocates has for the last three years worked tirelessly each and every quarter to make an advocate e-newsletter possible. Even though they already carry cases in their own local program they give of their time and talents to help advocates all over the state improve their knowledge and skills to better serve our children in need. There are times when coming up with a fresh and valuable continuing education option seems impossible but they never give up. They bounce ideas and brainstorm with fun and camaraderie until they have something that meets their standards. They have committed to this like they have committed to their CASA kids. Never give up. Our kids deserve the best. It is with gratitude and pride that we acknowledge the dedication of: Elizabeth Dooley - Cook County, Jacqueline Fehring - Cook County, Shannon Hodge - Cook County, Rick Johnson - McHenry County, Denise Niesman - DuPage County and Cathy Vendemia - Boone County. In order to receive the ICAN newsletter please sign up on our web page [illinoiscasa.org](http://illinoiscasa.org).



Cathy Vendemia accepts her award from Bill Baumann, Board President

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#### MISSION

The mission of Illinois Association of Court Appointed Special Advocates is to provide leadership and support in the development and growth of local programs whose volunteers advocate for the best interest of children in the Juvenile Court System.