

- The first Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in Virginia was started in Newport News in 1986. Today, there are 27 local CASA programs across the Commonwealth.
- In Fiscal Year 2006, Virginia's CASA volunteer workforce was comprised of 1,347 individuals. A total of 4,261 children were served by a trained community volunteer.
- The training "Building Connections for Children: CASA and the Courts" is the first program designed in conjunction with the Court Improvement Program to target CASA's partnership with Virginia's court system.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) For Children

The Court Appointed Special Advocate Program provides trained volunteers to advocate on behalf of children who are the subjects of juvenile court proceedings involving allegations of abuse and neglect. Appointed by juvenile court judges, CASA volunteers advocate for the best interests of abused children. CASA volunteers stay with each child's case until the child is placed in a safe, permanent home with hope for a positive future.

Virginia's first CASA program was started in Newport News in 1986. In 1990, the General Assembly enacted legislation (see Virginia Code § 9.1-151) that provided for statewide implementation of CASA. The Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) is the state agency responsible for monitoring these local programs. Today, there are 27 local CASA programs in Virginia.



The duties of a CASA volunteer, as outlined in the Code of Virginia, include: (1) to thoroughly investigate the abused/neglected child's situation; (2) to submit to the Court a written report regarding the child's best interests; (3) to monitor the case to ensure that the child receives services ordered by the Court; (4) to aid the Guardian Ad Litem

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Local Virginia CASA Program Directors/Supervisors Attend Statewide Training

The Court Improvement Program (CIP) and the Virginia CASA program partnered to develop a day long training for Program Directors and Supervisors of local CASA programs. The training, "Building Connections for Children: CASA and the Courts," was held on June 1, 2007, at the Virginia Crossings Resort in Glen Allen, Virginia. Participants arrived at 7:30 AM to a continental breakfast. Lelia Hopper, Director of the Court Improvement Program, and Melissa O'Neill, State CASA Program Coordina-

tor, kicked off the training by welcoming the members of the 25 out of 27 local programs available to attend, as well as special guests Darby Lowe, Esq., a CASA Advisory Board Member, Dodd White of the National CASA Association, and Robin Johnson, CPS Program Specialist with the Virginia Department of Social Services. Special Guests from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services included Fran Ecker, Division Director, Hope

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CASA Program Directors/Supervisors Attend Statewide Training

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Hodgson, CASA/CSA Program Assistant, and Laurel Marks, Juvenile Services Section Chief.

Lelia Hopper and the Hon. Nolan B. Dawkins, Judge, Alexandria Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, continued the morning with a plenary session titled "CASA: Advocating Permanency for Children," which was designed to help CASA better understand the juvenile court process and their roles during each stage of permanency planning.

Following the opening session, participants were given the option of attending one of three breakout sessions. The first option, "CASA Leadership and Community Collaboration for Children & Families," was led by the Hon. Stephen Rideout, Judge (Ret.), Alexandria Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court and CIP Judicial Consultant. Lynda Williams, Executive Director of Fairfax CASA, and Meloni Hinnant, Recruitment and Training Manager for Fairfax CASA co-presented. The presenters discussed rules of leadership and the role of CASA in the community. Ms. Williams and Ms. Hinnant shared success stories from their local program and gave attendees valuable ideas for recruitment and retention of volunteers.

The second breakout option was "Confidentiality: Sharing and Accessing Case Information." Presenters for this session included Melissa O'Neill, State CASA Program Coordinator, Thomas Beck, Esq., Sharon England, Esq., and the Hon. Anita Filson, Judge, Lexington/Rockbridge Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, who served as a resource for the panel. The dis-



Hon. Stephen Rideout, Judge (Ret.), Alexandria J&DR District Court, and Fairfax CASA's Executive Director, Lynda Williams, and Recruitment and Training Manager, Meloni Hinnant, present the breakout session, "CASA Leadership and Community Collaboration for Children & Families."



Pictured right to left - Fran Ecker, Division Director, DCJS, Dodd White, National CASA Association, Hon. Stephen Rideout, Judge (Ret.), Alexandria J&DR District Court, Hon. Nolan Dawkins, Judge, Alexandria J&DR District Court, and Melissa O'Neill, State CASA Program Coordinator.

ussion focused on state statutes and regulations governing Virginia CASA programs. Consent to release information, HIPAA and other applicable laws, confidentiality as it relates to the CASA Volunteer, and the content of CASA reports and issues surrounding their distribution were also discussed.

"Legal Connections: How CASA Works with the Court, Attorneys, and the Local Social Services Agency" rounded out the three breakout sessions. John Oliver, Deputy City Attorney for the City of Chesapeake, Edan Griffin, Social Worker with the Chesterfield Department of Social Services, and Louis Harrison, Esquire, Guardian Ad Litem from Bedford, presented. Judge Dawkins served as a court resource. The content of this session was drawn from a series of questions submitted in advance of the training by registered attendees. The discussion centered on community and professional relationships between CASA and Guardians Ad Litem and local departments of social services. Legal documents and procedures, including the appropriateness of CASA volunteers testifying in court hearings, and circumstances under which a therapist, Guardian Ad Litem, or social worker may be quoted in a CASA report were also discussed.

Immediately following the breakout sessions, participants were divided into four profes-

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Louis Harrison, Attorney and GAL, Edan Griffin, Chesterfield Co. Dept. of Social Services, John Oliver, Deputy City Attorney for City of Chesapeake, and Hon. Nolan Dawkins, Judge, Alexandria J&DR District Court, during the breakout session, "Confidentiality: Sharing and Accessing Case Information."

sional designation groups:

- Rural Directors, Program Coordinators, and Development Directors
- Rural Volunteer Coordinators, Case Managers, others
- Urban/Suburban Directors, Program Coordinators, and Development Directors
- Urban/Suburban (Group A and Group B) Volunteer Coordinators, Case Managers, others

The groups were asked to discuss the implications of collaboration by and with CASA when meeting the needs of children and families involved in child dependency cases. Each group was assigned a facilitator who led the group discussion, and a panelist who was asked to share key points of the group's discussion in the plenary session immediately following the lunch break. Groups were specifically assigned the task of answering three questions:

1. What would you identify as CASA's successes?
2. What does CASA do well?
3. What are three common challenges that CASA faces and how is your program addressing these challenges?

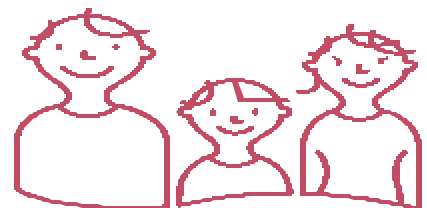
The afternoon portion of the training program began with a plenary session consisting of reports from the professional designation groups. Five CASA representatives, Jim Quesenberry, 28th Judicial District CASA, Barbara Washington, CASA of Central Virginia, Terry Willie-

Surratt, Richmond CASA, Sarah Serra, Colonial CASA, and Phoebe Frosch, Piedmont CASA, took part in this session, each giving a five-minute presentation on their group's discussion. Each group's answers differed depending upon their location. However, in general, groups felt that their ability to advocate for children and their impartiality has led to their success. Sustainable funding for local CASA programs and the lack of local and national CASA program recognition, were seen as challenges.

The final session of the day, "CASA's Role in Establishing Permanent Connections for Teens" was moderated by Judge Filson. Participating in the panel discussion were Cathy Roessler of the Charlottesville Department of Social Services, Scott Landry, Esquire, Guardian Ad Litem from Chesterfield, Cecelia Smith, CSA Coordinator for Richmond, and John Oliver. Discussion focused on independent living programs and CASA's ability to help teenagers in foster care establish connections with agencies and people in their communities that will help them become self-sufficient.

Judge Dawkins closed the program with a summation of the events and lessons learned. Judge Dawkins described CASA as an important ingredient in the appropriate disposition of abuse and neglect cases before the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. While the local child welfare agency and Guardians Ad Litem are integral parts of these cases before the court, CASA helps bind the parties to adequately represent the best interests of the child.

CIP hopes to provide a similar training for local CASA programs during the 2008-2009 fiscal year. We will keep CASA programs informed as plans develop.



**Improving Court Practice
For Children and Families**

CASA's ability to advocate for children and their impartiality has led to program success.

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Virginia CASA Programs

28th Judicial District CASA	Hanover County CASA
29th Judicial District CASA	Henrico County CASA
Alexandria/Arlington CASA	Isle of Wight CASA Program
CASA for Children of Augusta Co., Staunton, and Waynesboro	Newport News CASA
CASA of Central Virginia	Norfolk CASA Program
CASA of Lee, Scott, and Wise Counties	Northern Neck CASA
Chesapeake CASA Program	New River Valley (NRV) Cares
Chesterfield CASA	Piedmont CASA, Inc.
Colonial CASA, Inc.	Portsmouth CASA Program
Fairfax CASA	Rappahannock Area CASA
FOCUS (Martinsville)	Richmond CASA
Franklin County CASA	Roanoke Valley CASA
Goochland CASA Program	Virginia Beach CASA
Greater Prince William CASA, Inc.	

CASA For Children

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(GAL), an attorney who represents the child's legal interests and (5) to serve as a mandated reporter of child abuse/neglect.

As of Fiscal Year 2006, Virginia's CASA volunteer workforce was comprised of 1,347 individuals. Volunteers logged 105,084 volunteer advocacy hours valued at \$2,282,424. A total of 4,261 children were served by a trained community volunteer.

"Building Connections for Children: CASA and The Courts" Available on DVD

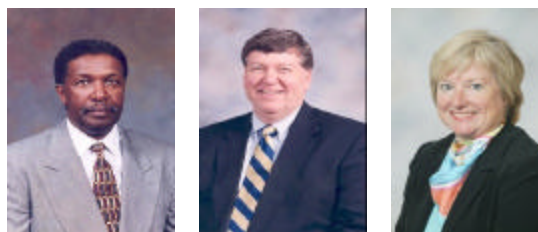
"Building Connections for Children: CASA and the Courts" is now available on DVD to all local CASA programs. Local programs are encouraged to use this DVD during training of CASA volunteers. Information on how to order the complete training program or a particular training session on DVD will be provided to each of the local CASA programs this month.

Virginia Key Contact Judges for CASA Programs

The Virginia Key Contact Judges Program provides mentoring to judges in communities seeking to establish CASA programs. The Key Contact Judge also serves as a resource to any judge who requests assistance in helping to resolve issues in which local CASA programs are out of compliance with CASA standards or state regulations, and will demonstrate leadership and innovation in promoting and supporting CASA within the judicial community.

Currently, 3 judges serve as Key Contact Judges for Virginia CASA programs, the Hon. Nolan B. Dawkins, Judge, Alexandria Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, the Hon. Denis F. Soden, Henrico Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, and the Hon. A. Ellen White, Campbell Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. These judges work collaboratively with Melissa O'Neill, the State CASA Coordinator, when consulting with judges and programs about CASA. This collaboration includes, among other things:

- Providing judicial expertise for training purposes and quality assurance issues.
- Providing education and updates about state laws and revisions to the volunteer training manual.
- Promoting and supporting CASA on the state and national level.
- Assisting in the recruitment of judges in judicial communities without CASA programs.



Pictured left to right, Hon. Nolan B. Dawkins, Judge, Alexandria Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, Hon. Denis F. Soden, Judge, Henrico Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, and Hon. A. Ellen White, Judge, Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court