

CASA of Kent County, Inc.

180 Ottawa NW, Suite 3500 • Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Phone 616.632.5311 • Fax 616.632.5181

www.CASAKentCo.org



Board of Directors

William J. Weitzel, *President*
Sigrid Valk-Feeney, *Vice President*
Terri Gray, *Secretary*
Richard L. Chrisman, *Treasurer*
Susan Brasic
Dan Jablonski
Nick Koster
Tim Sheridan
Suanne Watt-Stay

Staff

Patty Sabin, *Executive Director*
Rosemary Allen, *Advocate Supervisor*
Kathleen Brach, *Advocate Supervisor*
Kari Williams, *Advocate Supervisor*
Deb Kammer, *Office Assistant*
Norma Posthumus, *Office Assistant*

A Warm Welcome to the Spring 09 Training Class

On April 21, 2009 — as proud family members, friends and staff looked on — eleven trainees were sworn in as CASA volunteers. Conducting the swearing in and sharing words of wisdom and encouragement were Judges Carpenter, Yates and Zemaitis. New volunteers include Michelle Born-Fischer; Linda Cisco, Dustie DeVille, Melissa Dietz, Lisa Ellison, Jenna Gray-Shomler; Cindy Ritter; Walt Schultze, John Shomler; Mark Smith and Jason Werkema. These individuals underwent extensive training and screening and should be proud of this accomplishment! Welcome Spring Training Class of 2009!

The cost to provide a year of service for a single child is \$1,000.

How Can You Help the Children of Kent County?

As an individual or member of a group or organization, you can help support CASA of Kent County in a number of ways:

Volunteer

We are always eager for new faces to join our cause whether it is as a CASA board or committee member; CASA case volunteer or office support. We welcome and encourage volunteers from all cultures, professions and educational backgrounds.

Donate

Because CASA is a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit, we are in need of community donations to support the children already affiliated with our program, as well as to meet the significant need for additional CASA services in our community. While any donation amount is welcome, the cost to support one child for one year is \$1,000. All donations are tax deductible.

CASA is always on the lookout for small donations as well. Little things that go a long way include:

- Gas cards to help cover volunteer mileage
- Phone cards to help volunteers with long distance calls made to children, support staff and to conduct other matters of court business
- School supplies: markers, crayons, pencils, paper, play dough
- Store gift cards so CASA children can pick out much needed clothing, personal care items and school supplies
- Tickets/passes/gift cards for volunteer/child outings:
 - Movie theatres
 - Common restaurants (McDonald's, Applebee's, etc.)
 - Cultural events
 - Any learning oriented activity

CASA of Kent County, Inc. is dedicated to recruiting and training community volunteers to advocate for the best interest of abused and neglected children who are in need of safe, permanent homes by being their voice during child welfare legal proceedings.



CASA of Kent County Presents



Building a Foundation for Advocacy & Success

The CASA Spotlight: A Closer Look at Someone Making a World of Difference



Name: Susan Moushan
Years with CASA: 1.5
Cases worked on: 2
CASA volunteer hours: 200+
CASA court appearances: 5
CASA miles traveled: 2,500

"The children know that they will have me, their CASA, and I will keep them in my heart."

At CASA, people are at the heart of our work and also compose the core of our success. This space is dedicated to highlighting one of the many members of the CASA volunteer family who make our organization and community better through their dedicated service.

For this issue we interviewed Susan Moushan, a relatively new CASA volunteer who has already contributed greatly to the lives of CASA kids. Susan works as an Interior Designer for Israel's Designs for Living, a position that she has held for thirty years. She began her work as a CASA volunteer just over 15 months ago.

How did your involvement with CASA begin and what attracted you to work as a CASA volunteer?

Susan: I first read about the CASA program in a local news article and decided to apply. The work of a CASA appealed to me because it would give me the opportunity to be a friend to a child who was in stress and pain as well as an opportunity to make a difference in a child's life.

Can you share an overview of your first year of working with CASA?

Susan: So far, I have been assigned to two cases, totaling eight children. Over the last year, I have logged over 200 volunteer hours. I usually see the children once per week or no less than twice per month. I have prepared reports and appeared in court for hearings five times. I have testified on one occasion.

What are some highlights of your association with CASA?

Susan: The caliber of the CASA staff and volunteers inspires respect and camaraderie. We see many sad situations firsthand. Our supervisors listen to us, pat us on the back and send us back out there, renewed in our dedication to the children we serve.

In my first case, I was assigned to five children who experienced a range of physical and emotional abuse. They were also extremely limited in their access to activities and social opportunities. Once removed from this environment, the children began to experience healthy childhood activities. I had a ball taking them to the Zoo, Meijer Gardens, to the library and to movies. *continued on page 2*

"There is wonderful respect for our program by the Family Court judges who see the benefit of our volunteers in their courtrooms."

-CASA Board President Bill Weitzel

Join our quest to provide an advocate for every abused and neglected child in Kent County.



www.CASAKentCo.org

An Experienced & Dedicated Addition: New Executive Director Patty Sabin

On July 2, 2009, CASA of Kent County welcomed Patty Sabin as Executive Director. Patty is intimately familiar with CASA's impact in the community having served in a variety of capacities including Child Advocate Volunteer, Advocate Supervisor and Interim Director. Patty's employment as a CASA Advocate Supervisor followed years of management positions within the retail industry. Her own parenting experiences and belief that "we have only one chance with our children" led to a deep resonance with the mission and work of CASA. Since her start as a volunteer in 2001, Patty has advocated for 12 children. She shares that "some had happy endings and some not so happy, but all of the children had a voice."



The experience of working for CASA as an Advocate Supervisor motivated Patty to return to school full-time earning her degree in Nonprofit and Public Administration at Grand Valley State University. She continued to work as a CASA volunteer while employed with the YWCA's Safe Connections program, working with families with domestic violence and sexual abuse issues.

Patty shares that she is "very excited" to be joining the CASA community as Executive Director. She adds that she is "thankful for the foresight and hard work of Julie Mauer, since the foundation for the program is solid and strong."

Recognizing that the need for CASA is only growing, Patty adds, "I am committed to the ultimate goal of providing a child advocate for any child that needs one." With 43 active requests from judges seeking volunteer advocates for children, she acknowledges that "we have our work cut out for us" but that she is

"looking forward to bringing CASA to the next level." It is a significant undertaking but Patty says it best: "It just takes one person to make a difference in a child's life. One person to listen, digest and act on the child's behalf."

Welcome Patty. The children of Kent County and CASA look forward to the positive impact you'll make.

A Wide Range of Support

CASA is thrilled to share that in addition to our annual House Party fund-raiser, we're poised to benefit from an assortment of initiatives this year. In May, Koetsier's Greenhouse donated 10% of all CASA-specified purchases at our 4th Annual Spring Plant Sale. And keep an eye out for information on upcoming giving opportunities including table-hosted events, CASA jewelry sales and CASA holiday cards.

We're also pleased to share that CASA of Kent County continues to garner critical funding from a variety of community grants. Considerable support has been gained through the partnerships of these important partners.

We are grateful for our scope of support and for all the individuals, groups and initiatives that do so much to uphold the work of CASA of Kent County.

Thank you to:

The Baldwin Fund

The Dyer-Ives Foundation

The Grand Rapids Community Foundation

The Schmidlapp Fund

The Sebastian Foundation

The Steelcase Foundation

The Steve & Cindy VanAndel Foundation

The CASA Spotlight continued from page 1

I decided to have a tea party for the girls who were delighted to dress up for the occasion. It was then that I discovered that the children did not know how to use eating utensils as their previous experiences had been limited to paper plates or napkins. Between the foster mother and myself, the children learned how to properly eat with utensils; a milestone during their time in foster care.

The birth parents have committed to months of individual and family counseling and other court intervention services. If successful, the reunification of the children and their parents will be due to the intensity of the services and the dedication of the professionals in this case. Under any outcome, the children know that they will also have me, their CASA, and I will keep them in my heart.

Thank you to Susan for her passionate service and for taking the time to share her experiences with Home Pages readers.

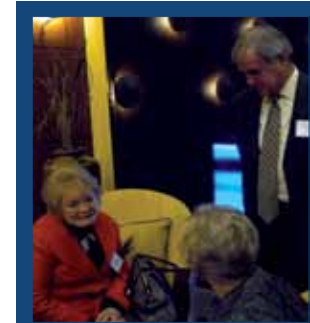
Kent County CASA volunteers donate over 8,000 total hours of service per year to children in our community.

House Party 08: A Roaring Success

CASA of Kent County enjoyed our second annual fund-raiser, a Great Gatsby-themed house party, to raise funds vital to the continuation of our mission and work.

Enormous thanks to all who joined in the "Roaring Good Time at River House" event hosted by Bob and Shari Grooters in their beautiful downtown condominium. It was a grand evening on the Grand River with over 100 generous attendees and over \$35,000 raised. CASA is profoundly grateful for the recognition and philanthropic support of the charitable West Michigan individuals and businesses that made the evening an overwhelming success.

We are already looking forward to coming together again in the fall of 2009 to highlight another year of advocacy and to celebrate the generosity that makes so much of CASA's work possible.



Honorary committee members Cheryle and Tom Stevens discuss CASA's impact with former Executive Director Julie Mauer

CASA Ambassadors Run in the G.R. Marathon

Fourteen dedicated supporters hit the pavement (and the puddles!) as CASA Ambassadors for Children in the 2008 Metro Health Grand Rapids Marathon on October 19, 2008. Rain and chilly temperatures did not stop the CASA contingent from raising over \$3,000 in recognition of CASA of Kent County. Thank you to these dedicated athletes who also helped to raise awareness of CASA in our community and to the CASA cheer team and supporters who contributed to their success.

A Tireless Leader: Julie Mauer Retires

A true champion of CASA of Kent County, Director Julie Mauer officially retired from her leadership role in June. Julie worked for CASA for nine years—beginning as a volunteer and working diligently for the children of Kent County from the start. As director, Julie took on the monumental task of transforming CASA of Kent County from a court-funded entity to a non-profit organization.

"CASA has been fortunate to have had a leader like Julie who worked tirelessly to help us make the transition from a public agency to one that could become, to a large degree, dependent upon our community's support," says Board President Bill Weitzel.

We extend our deepest gratitude for Julie's contributions. A celebration of her many years of work is planned for early autumn.

Around the Table: Get to Know the CASA Board

CASA Board of Directors Vice President Sigrid Valk-Feeney brings welcome experience and enthusiasm to the CASA organization. A professional Turn Around Manager, Sigrid is regularly contracted to help businesses learn how to improve operational performance and to maximize efficiencies in existing procedures. Prior to her current work, Sigrid ran and sold a successful plastics manufacturing business.



Sigrid originally approached CASA to inquire about working as a court appointed advocate. As her skill sets and experiences became known, CASA leadership was quick to recognize that she would be an asset. Sigrid understands how important a high functioning Board can be to an organization. She shares that "it is important to learn how to establish an organization so that it can be self-sustaining" and that "the skills necessary from an organizational standpoint need to be implemented while also getting the word out about the organization's mission."

For Sigrid, work with the CASA organization is a family affair. Her husband, Tom, is a CASA volunteer and her children prepared and distributed balloons for CASA at the Grand Rapids Marathon. Sigrid believes "the children we serve today, and will serve, are our community's future" and "if we cannot help to make their lives easier as they make their way through the foster care system, then as a community we have failed." She adds, "Knowing that we are instrumental in helping a child makes me believe more than ever that investing in CASA is a direct, positive impact on a child's future."

Name: Sigrid Valk-Feeney

CASA Board Position: Vice President and Program & Policy Committee Chair

Years with CASA: 3

Highlights: Working with families to support CASA initiatives