



PRESS RELEASE

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CASA of Lancaster County Hosts “Light of Hope” Vigil

LANCASTER – Speaking up for children who would otherwise have no voice – that’s the goal of the newly formed CASA of Lancaster County.

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. The advocate is a trained citizen volunteer who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interests of the child in court. Children helped by CASA include those who are a dependent of the court, or victims of abuse and/or neglect.

“CASA volunteers provide an abused or neglected child with a voice to the court,” said Dr. Carol Gilmore, President of the Board of Directors of CASA of Lancaster County. “The CASA volunteer learns about every aspect of that child’s life and reports directly to the judge assigned to the case,”

In a CASA program, the judge appoints a volunteer to the child's case. The volunteer then becomes an official part of the judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys and social workers as an appointed officer of the court. Unlike attorneys and social workers, however, the CASA volunteer speaks exclusively for the child's best interests. By handling only one or two cases at a time the CASA volunteer has the time to explore thoroughly the history of each assigned case to ensure that each child's best interests are served, and that each child is given the opportunity to be placed in a safe, permanent and nurturing home.

“The detailed information CASA volunteers gather, and the oversight role they play in a child’s case, should help to speed up the process of getting children to safe, permanent homes,” said Judge Leslie Gorbey, Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas.

Crystal Gingrich, Executive Director of Lancaster County Children and Youth Agency, says her agency receives more than 75 new child abuse cases each month, and more than 100 allegations of neglect and mistreatment. Gingrich is eager to partner with CASA of Lancaster County and served on their steering committee.

“This will be another voice for the children, another piece to the puzzle, and another role model for the child,” said Lisa McCoy, an attorney and guardian ad litem who was also on the CASA of Lancaster County steering committee.

“CASA is a strength-based approach to enhance the child welfare system,” said State Representative Katie True, who championed legislation in the Pennsylvania General Assembly (Act 128 of 1998) that provided for court appointed special advocates in juvenile matters.

True added, “I would like to see a CASA program established in every county in Pennsylvania.”

There are currently 19 CASA programs in the Commonwealth.

The mission of CASA of Lancaster County is to advocate for abused and neglected children. In collaboration with community resources, CASA volunteers provide a voice to the Court on behalf of children with a belief that all children deserve safe, nurturing, and permanent homes.

Speakers at the “Light of Hope” vigil included Dennis Hockensmith, Executive Director, PA CASA, Dr. Carol Gilmore, Board President, CASA of Lancaster County; Judge Leslie Gorbey, Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas; Crystal Gingrich, Executive Director, Lancaster County Children & Youth Agency; Lisa McCoy, guardian ad litem; and State Representative Katie True.

CASA of Lancaster County is a member of the National CASA Association.

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