



Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

ALLEGHENY COUNTY

CASA of allegheny county

newsletter *spring 2010*



*celebrating over 10 years of service to children*

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## Melissa Protzek Named National CASA Director of the Year

CASA of Allegheny County is thrilled to announce that our Executive Director, Melissa Protzek, Esq., has been selected among over 1,000 current CASA and GAL member program directors as the Kappa Alpha Theta's Program Director of the Year! The award, sponsored by the Kappa Alpha Theta national sorority, was founded to recognize the diligent work of all CASA and GAL program leaders and it was presented to Melissa at the National CASA Awards Banquet in Atlanta GA on April 17, 2010.

The Program Director of the Year is selected based on outstanding leadership qualities resulting in the enhanced quality of a program's advocacy. Melissa has demonstrated excellent leadership, guiding CASA through turbulent times and helping ensure success throughout her tenure. Highlights include a 140% increase in fundraising and a 90% increase in grant funding; a 50% increase in new volunteers and a 300% decrease in volunteer attrition; and the expansion and stabilization of CASA's Board of Directors.

However, Melissa's leadership success does not end there. To build upon the new stability and to expand upon past success, Melissa worked with the Board and senior staff to create an unprecedented twenty-five year plan that has outlined annual budgetary and recruitment

goals to allow for a 400% increase in CASA's service to children. CASA has met the first two years of benchmarks and is continuing a path of growth and stability that has only been possible under Melissa's leadership. When complete, this plan will allow CASA the ability to serve each of the children who live in foster care – a number that currently totals 2,500.

Involved with CASA since 1996, Melissa initially began as a volunteer advocate and took the helm as Executive Director in 2005. In addition to holding degrees in Philosophy and Political Science from Penn State University, Melissa earned a Jurist Doctorate from The University of Pittsburgh School of Law. Because of her work in improving the child welfare system, Melissa was named one of *Pittsburgh Magazine's* "40 under 40" in 2004 and was named the 2006 Woman of the Year by the Pitt Law Women's Association and the Allegheny County Bar Association.

Melissa's accolades don't end with this award from National CASA. She was also honored by the Pittsburgh Business Times as a 2010 Women in Business Awardee. We at CASA are honored to work with Melissa and are thrilled that she is receiving some of the attention she deserves. We look forward to working with you in the future and building more success for our community's children!

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# volunteer spotlight

JANUARY 2010

## Volunteer of the Month

*Cindy Tomaro*



CASA of Allegheny County is proud to name Cindy Tomaro as the Volunteer of the Month for January 2010. Cindy has past experience in the medical field and serves a child who has a complex medical condition. She visits the young girl on her case frequently, both at home and at school, and has involved herself in Mother's training to assure that Mother

understands the complicated feeding procedures that are necessary for her daughter's condition. Cindy is very committed to attending all of the court hearings and, with her background, she has been able to translate medical information to the Court. She also avails herself to the professional meetings pertaining to this young girl's care and has demonstrated dedication to the entire family. It must also be mentioned that Cindy is extremely organized and was able to prepare her first CASA Court Report draft and translate complex medical information into the report without assistance. Congratulations Cindy – you are very deserving of the Volunteer of the Month award!

FEBRUARY 2010

## Volunteer of the Month

*Rachel Rockwell*



A new volunteer, Rachel Rockwell is honored as the CASA Volunteer of the Month for February 2010. Rachel quickly began on a case involving eight brothers by identifying numerous and significant unmet needs of the children, including court ordered mental health therapy for the boys. She has a strong working relationship with the boys' mother and works

with her to have the boys' needs met in between court hearings. In fact, Rachel was praised in open court by the Judge, attorneys and Mother for her thorough advocacy for the children. Mother even stated on the witness stand, "the best thing to happen to my boys was when CASA became involved. Nothing was happening for my children until CASA started working on the case." Rachel works collaboratively with the system professionals to solve issues outside court, most notably with the educational systems. She has thoroughly researched options for treatment for the boys and their Mother and remains in continual contact with all service providers, schools, foster parents and children and youth caseworkers. Rachel also visits consistently to each placement, which has included as many as six homes, each month. Thank you Rachel for all that you do! Congratulations on your Volunteer of the Month honor!

MARCH 2010

## Volunteer of the Month

*Michele Alexander*



Congratulations Michele Alexander for being named the CASA of Allegheny County Volunteer of the Month for March 2010! A new volunteer, Michele meets with every service professional face-to-face regarding the children she serves. She also maintains contact with the children through regular visits at both Mother's and the Paternal Grandparents' homes and continues her contact

between visits with both Mother and Grandparents. Michele responds quickly to any crisis that arises on her case and is committed to attending all court hearings. Recently, Michele coordinated a meeting with service professionals to assure all information was consistent and shared; she was also instrumental in getting the children involved in summer activities and mentor programs. Michele understands the dynamics of the family she serves and is therefore better able to address their needs. Congratulations Michele and thank you for your outstanding service to the children on your case!

APRIL 2010

## Volunteer of the Month

*Eddie Swihart*



Eddie Swihart is a most-deserving Volunteer of the Month for April 2010! Trained in the spring of 2009, Eddie advocates on an extremely complicated medical case involving six children, one father and two mothers that covers three states. Three of the children have illnesses that, if left untreated, would be fatal. The authorities were first

introduced to this case because of the children's untreated medical conditions, domestic violence in the home, child sexual assault, untreated mental health for the children and the parents, truancy for the children and parental drug and alcohol abuse issues. Eddie quickly immersed herself in the case, compiling personal treatment histories for the children, which spanned more than a decade of mental health needs for the older children and included several psychiatric hospitalizations. She has also helped to provide constant oversight so that the youngest children, who both suffer from cystic fibrosis, have the medical care they need to assure healthy development. Eddie is on top of every case detail and even quickly compiled a 33-page report for the Court to help the Bench grasp the complex needs of the children and the challenges faced by the entire family. She diligently meets any obstacle with persistence and passion and CASA of Allegheny County is proud to honor her as the Volunteer of the Month!

## Spring Events

This spring, CASA of Allegheny County hosted two very special events to honor CASA friends and volunteers and to encourage more members of our community to get involved in the lives of children who live in foster care.

### The Annual CASA Volunteer Recognition Dinner

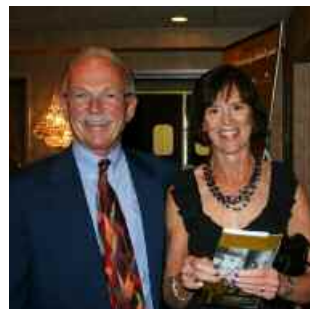
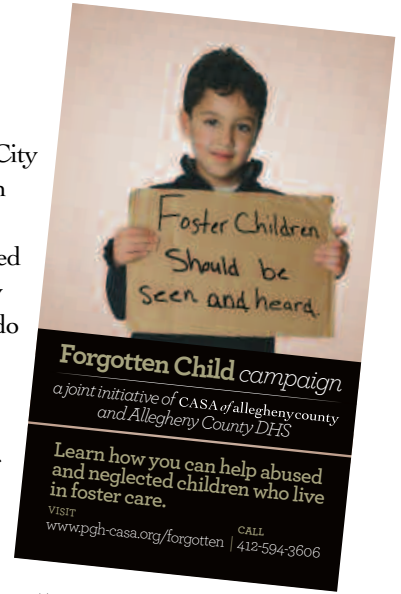
The Annual CASA Volunteer Recognition Dinner was held Thursday, April 29th at the LeMont Restaurant on Mt. Washington. During the evening, CASA honored the sacrifices and commitment of all CASA volunteers. In addition, CASA recognized the special contributions of the following award winners:

- Jill Beck, Esq. – Children’s Voice Award
- Kathy Slencak – David Perry CASA Champion Award
- Charity Imbrie and Chris Rizzo – Breakout CASA Awards
- Jean Harkins – CASA Veteran Award
- Mary Jo Neff – 2009 CASA Volunteer of the Year

### Forgotten Children Campaign

At noon on Tuesday, May 11, CASA and DHS hosted a very special rally on the steps of the City County Building. The Forgotten Children rally was attended by nearly 100 people and highlighted the various ways in which every member of the community can do their part to help children in the foster care system. Speakers, including CASA Volunteer Michele Alexander, shared their experiences as a volunteer or as a child who was helped by the commitment of a caring adult.

For more information on the Forgotten Children Campaign, please visit [www.pgh-casa.org/forgotten](http://www.pgh-casa.org/forgotten).



# Spread *the* Word!

( about CASA training )

If you, or someone you know, is interested in learning more about the many ways to become involved with CASA, please attend one of our monthly Open House sessions. They are held at 6PM on the third Wednesday of every month in the CASA office. For more information, or to RSVP, please contact **Daren Ellerbee at 412-594-3606 or dellerbee@pgh-casa.org.**

## CASA is participating in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's Community Partners Concert Featuring Gloria Gaynor

Join the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra for the seventh annual PSO Community Partners Concert featuring the sounds of Gloria Gaynor and the winner of the renowned 2010 Sphinx Competition, violinist Gareth Johnson. The 2010 Community Partners Concert is hosted for the second year by the Honorary Chair, Mr. Lynn C. Swann. The PSO's Community Partners Concerts have raised more than \$470,000 for partnering nonprofit groups since they began in 2004.

CASA is one of 50 Community Partners participating in the concert. If you designate CASA as your partner of choice, ticket proceeds will directly benefit abused and neglected children in Allegheny County.

Tickets are available by calling 412-392-4900, 800-743-8560, [www.pittsburghsymphony.org](http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org) or through the CASA office. To ensure that CASA benefits from your ticket purchase simply use our designated code **18192** at the time of purchase.

For more information or to purchase tickets through CASA's office contact Daren at 412-594-3606 x207.

## CASA COUNTS *waiting list*

**175**  
children have a CASA volunteer

**29**  
children are on CASA's waiting list

**115**  
children's cases have closed this year – the most ever for our agency!

## CASA Mission

To ensure that every child has a safe, supportive and permanent home by providing volunteer advocacy for the best interests of abused and neglected children within the child welfare system.

### CASA Board of Directors

- Steve Esber, *President*
- David R. Perry, P.G., *Vice President*
- Edward McKenna, Esq., *Secretary*
- Michael Kirk, CPA, *Treasurer*
- Kent Baldauf, Esq.
- Jarene Barnes
- James Bernier
- Reed Kimbrough
- Frederick L. Kraft
- Jacqueline B. Martinez, Esq.
- Adam Yofan, CPA

### CASA Honorary Council

- Stephen Lackey
- Ambrose Murray
- Dennis Noonan
- Farrah Penn
- Louise Sciannameo
- Vickie Violi

### CASA Staff Members

- Susan Allardice, *Financial Manager*
- Daren Ellerbee, *Outreach Coordinator*
- Monica Manes Gay, *Development Director*
- Sandy Locust, MAT, *Case Manager*
- Danielle Morrison, MSCP, *Program Director*
- Teddi Prettiman, *Development Coordinator*
- Melissa Protzek, Esq., *Executive Director*
- Marlyn Robinson-Gorman, *Interim Case Manager*
- Maral Taylor, *Interim Case Manager*



*Members of CASA Training Class 43 along with Judges from Allegheny County Children's Court*