



CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CASA OF WESTMORELAND, INC.

CASA of Westmoreland, Inc.
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- Vicki Shields, BS
Volunteer Coordinator
- Meredith Hayes, BA
Volunteer Coordinator

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CASA Connection

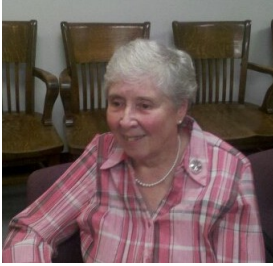
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Pictured from left are: Sherri Bett, Board Secretary; The Honorable Judge Feliciani; Mary Ann Petrillo, Board President and Mandy Welty, Executive Director

On Friday, April 29, 2011 CASA of Westmoreland, Inc. held their Third Annual Leadership Breakfast at Word of Life Ministries. It was quite a morning with nearly 230 in attendance. At the event supporting CASA were Judge Christopher Feliciani, Judge Chris Scherer, Judge John Driscoll, and Judge Michele Bononi. The event is an outreach event to inform community members about the role of CASA in the court system and the impact CASA has on individual cases. The goal of CASA is to be the voice of children in court and to advocate to find them the best permanent living arrangements. Executive Director, Mandy Welty expressed how much CASA has expanded in its first 5 years of existence. She also reinforced how the support of the community has started the program and allowed us to grow. The guests were also honored by hearing from a seasoned CASA volunteer, Jeanne Cerce who became a CASA in May of 2008. Jeanne has been a dedicated volunteer who has tackled 5 cases, 2 of which are still active. Other speakers included Judge Feliciani who recounted his vision of CASA of Westmoreland, Inc. and all the work that went into our organization. The final speaker was CASA Board President, Mary Ann Petrillo. Mary Ann told a touching story about a woman who raised 3 successful daughters on her own. The surprise twist in this story was the woman Mary Ann was speaking of is her mother who attended the breakfast from Florida. It was great to have her there along everyone else who attended. Thank you to Yes We Cater from Monroeville who again provided the amazing breakfast. Thank you to Word of Life Ministries who donated their beautiful space for our breakfast. Also, thank you to Fundraising Committee and volunteers. We are very honored to have so many wonderful people join us and we can't wait to see you at next year's breakfast!



Volunteer Spotlight: Sister Pat Wilson

Sister Pat Wilson was living and working in Raleigh, North Carolina, in the late 1990s, when the local newspaper featured an article about the *Guardian ad Litem* program (the equivalent of CASA in some other areas). She contacted the GAL office in Wake County, applied, was trained and sworn in for services. For two years she served as advocate for children in two families in Wake County before returning to Greensburg in 2002. The experience was so great that she was disappointed to learn that Westmoreland County did not yet have a CASA program in 2002. By luck or design, just as she retired from full time, active ministry in the spring of 2007, CASA of Westmoreland, Inc. had come into existence and was seeking volunteers. Again, Sister Pat applied and was accepted for training, and was sworn in with the other "pioneers." Since then she has served as child advocate for six Westmoreland County families.

Sister Pat also volunteers on a limited basis with the Forbes Trail Faith in Action, an interdenominational program that provides supportive services to seniors wishing to remain in their own homes. Sister Pat believes, "Children and the elderly are the two most vulnerable groups in our society. There are many small ways that each of us can reach out with help."

Sister Pat has served in many ministries during her 60 years as a Sister of Charity of Seton Hill. For many years she was a teacher, mainly secondary school; then was assigned to a position in financial administration within the congregation. Perhaps, her most personally rewarding years were those working with families at St. Barbara parish in Penn Township. For sixteen years in North Carolina, Sister Pat was director of the church court (Tribunal) in the Diocese of Raleigh. She says it may have been working with Church law that nurtured her later interest in being an advocate on behalf of children. Now that Sister Pat is retired her favorite thing to do is read and states that her library card is in constant use!

CASA graduated its 9th class of volunteers on Tuesday, June 7th. Judge Feliciani swore in the volunteers as they took an oath of dedication to advocate for abused and neglected children. The ceremony included Judge Driscoll, Judge Bononi, Commissioner Ted Kopas, Hearing Master Annaliese Masser, Assistant Director of the Westmoreland County Children's Bureau Chuck McCallen, friends and family of the CASA volunteers and CASA board members Scott Turer and Angela Rose-O'Brien. Following the ceremony everyone was treated to a wonderful lunch from Chick-Fil-A provided by board member Angela Rose-O'Brien. Graduating from this class were Ron Dillon, Jackie Henry, Rebecca McCormick, Michael O. Ortiz, Karen Rattani, Kory Smith and Erika Wahl. Congratulations to all of our new CASA volunteers! Thank you to the Westmoreland Bar



Association for allowing CASA to use their facility for lunch! (standing from left: Commissioner Ted Kopas, Volunteer Coordinator Meredith Hayes, Judge Driscoll, Kory Smith, Board Member Scott Turer, Judge Bononi, Judge Feliciani, Ron Dillon, Volunteer Coordinator Vicki Shields, Hearing Master Annaliese Masser, Michael Ortiz, Executive Director Mandy Welty; sitting from left: Board Member Angela Rose-O'Brien, Jackie Henry, Rebecca McCormick and Erika Wahl)

Interested in Becoming a CASA Volunteer?

CASA volunteers are dedicated, committed men and women who care about children and who are willing to make a life-long difference in the lives of children. The court process can be difficult for a child and as a CASA volunteer you can be there to look after the best interests of the child. CASA volunteers should be willing to commit to the duration of a child's case. You will be the one constant in this child's life when caseworkers and service providers change. By getting to know the child and circumstances, your recommendations are a critical part in the courts decision. Becoming a CASA volunteer requires you to complete a 10 week in-depth training course, have good oral and written communication skills, and have a passion for children. Applications are now being accepted for the Fall Training Session which will begin September 22, 2011. You can obtain an application by visiting our website at www.westmorelandcasa.org or by calling the office at 724-850-6874.



CASA Viewpoint: Meagan Bilik DeFazio, Board Member

Meagan Bilik DeFazio is an attorney residing in North Huntingdon Township. Currently, she is in private practice with the law firm of Loughran, Mlakar & Bilik. Additionally, she serves as an Instructor for Duquesne Law School's Trial Moot Court program, in which she instructs students in trial technique and strategy, and the rules of court and courtroom etiquette. She assists the competitive trial teams in preparing for regional and national competitions.

Meagan was born and raised in Hempfield Township, and graduated from Hempfield Area High School. As a member of the Phi Alpha Theta Honor Society, Meagan graduated *magna cum laude* from Saint Vincent College in 3 ½ years. Meagan earned her law degree from Duquesne University School of Law, where she graduated at the top of her class and was awarded the Louis L. Manderino Honor Society Award for excellence in trial advocacy.

Focusing her career in the area of litigation, Meagan has spent much time in the courtroom. In particular, she is well-versed in the proceedings of Criminal Court. For five years she was an Assistant Public Defender in Westmoreland County, during which time she handled hundreds of criminal cases from the filing of charges through jury trial and appeals to the PA Commonwealth, Superior and Supreme Courts. Meagan has handled cases in nearly all counties in the Commonwealth, in both state and federal court. Prior to her current position, Meagan worked as a Senior Law Clerk at Robb, Leonard & Mulvihill and a Law Clerk for the Pennsylvania Superior Court.

Professionally, Meagan is a member of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, the Westmoreland Bar Association, the Pennsylvania Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Commission on Women in the Profession.

Meagan is actively involved in her community. She was honored with 2010 Award for Community Service given by the Westmoreland County Winner's Circle and Seton Hill University.

Meagan is a member of the CASA of Westmoreland, Inc. Board of Directors as well as North Huntingdon Twp. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Norwin Lions Club, Emilia Sammartino Lodge #2831, Order Sons of Italy in America, the Westmoreland County Commission for Women and Families, Italian Heritage Society of Monessen and the League of Women Voters. In 2002, Meagan donated extensive legal services to incorporate and establish non-profit status for Westmoreland Walks, Inc: Taking Steps Against Breast Cancer, a grassroots organization located in Westmoreland County that has raised more than \$200,000.00 for breast cancer treatment, research and education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Meagan has remained a member of the Board of Directors for Westmoreland Walks, Inc. and is a past President. In addition, organizations such as the PA Breast Cancer Coalition, Susan G. Komen for the Cure and the Avon Breast Cancer Crusade have received thousands of dollars in contributions due to her efforts.

Meagan and her husband, Andy, reside in North Huntingdon Township with their three children, Anna (6), Michael (3) and Caroline (5 mos.).

**Happy Birthday to the following
CASA Volunteers!**

May:

Christine Bennett
Fred "Chip" Funari
Joyce Morgan

July:

Alan Baum
Debbie Fredo
Kari Halaut
Mary Lou Hugus
Susan Koury
Claudia Tipler

June:

Annette Kostelnik
Jessica Rafferty
Rochelle Thompson
Sister Patricia Wilson

August:

Jill DeRoche
Kelly Lee
Jeffrey Lyon
Roseann Mohler

Volunteer Coordinator's Update

- 183 - The number of children who have been served by CASA to date
- 116- Current number of children being served by CASA's from 58 families
- 52 - The number of Volunteers assigned to a case
- 84 - Number of Volunteers who have been sworn in by the Family Court
- 67 - Children whose Cases have closed
- 50.8% - the percentage of children whose cases closed and went to adoption
- 38.5% - the percentage of children whose cases closed and returned to their family

Provider Prospective

In this section you get to hear from service providers that we work with everyday to ensure that abused and neglected children find a safe, loving and permanent home.

I was asked to write an article pertaining to our practice for the CASA newsletter. As some of you know the agency where I work, C.A. Hughes and Associates, provides counseling services for a variety of issues but is best known for our work with sexual abuse, physical abuse, attachment and trauma. I had kicked around several ideas for an article relating to these issues, such as family reunification of families that have experienced sexual abuse. Another topic that I thought about writing about was related to some of the proposed changes regarding how individuals are labeled with the status of Indicated Perpetrator by Pennsylvania's Childline Registry. While I set out on deciding to write about these or several other subjects I was delayed because several of the children I work with abruptly changed foster homes. Sometimes things just don't go as planned and we need to direct our attention to pressing issues. But sometimes, things happen because there is a purpose. Last week I walked into the new foster home of one of my older children and I spied her suitcase in the corner of the living room. This made me think of how many times I had witnessed the same scene with children over the years. So I would like to dedicate this article to these children and if the article needs a name, the appropriate name would be **"Sometimes."**

Sometimes they arrive in the middle of the night with garbage bags filled with their clothes and some of their "valued" things. Sometimes they arrive dressed in dirty ragged clothes that generations ago would have been described as "ragamuffins." Sometimes they arrive with their things neatly packed and we discover that they are the seasoned travelers through the system. Sometimes they know that if they leave something behind, chances are they will never get it back. Sometimes they have numerous sets of aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters and parents. Sometimes they are looked at as objects filling an unused bed in the foster home. Sometimes they are looked at as extra nontaxable income.

Sometimes they arrive scared, angry and confused. Sometimes they are torn from their parents and siblings. Sometimes this is their first experience of being away from home. Sometimes they cry and fight and kick. Sometimes they don't have any tears left as sometimes they ran out of tears years ago. Sometimes they know that nobody wants a crying kid on their hands. Sometimes they understand that if they cry some professional will classify them as being depressed and make them take medication. Sometimes they are smart and sophisticated beyond their years. Sometimes they don't miss home because they have never really had the same home for a long period of time.

Sometimes others don't understand why they have some of their peculiar behaviors. Sometimes foster parents assume that loving them will make them complete again. Sometimes they are told that they are a member of the family but when things go wrong, they are asked to leave. Sometimes they question why a family would ask a member to leave. Sometimes they learn that people say what they don't really mean. Sometimes they are expected to never exhibit any poor behaviors and when they act out, they are being ungrateful to those who "saved" them. Sometimes their new caregivers have expectations that exceed the ability of most children.

Sometimes we don't understand why they want to return to the people who abused, neglected and abandoned them. Sometimes we forget what Dorothy said in Wizard of Oz about "there's no place like home." Sometimes we try to tell them a truth they aren't ready to accept or understand. Sometimes they don't want the truth because the fantasy is the only thing they have to hold onto in their lives. Sometimes they don't know anything more than the clutter, chaos and abuse they have experienced. Sometimes they don't trust most of the people that are supposedly helping them.

Sometimes we wonder what is in their best interest. Sometimes when things work we wonder how and why it worked this time and not the countless times in the past it failed. Sometimes things work out for them. Sometimes it just doesn't seem to be enough.

Joe Narduzzi , LPC

Save the Date!

CASA Events

Save the Date!

Second Annual CASA Golf Tournament

Location: Latrobe Country Club
Date: **Friday, August 26, 2011**
Time: 9:00am Registration
10:00am Team Shamble
4:00pm Dinner Program
Please consider attending the dinner

For information or to register call the
CASA of Westmoreland, Inc. office at:
724-850-6874.



Please join the Young
Lawyers Committee as
they host the 3rd Annual
Fundraiser for CASA on
**Thursday, September
15th** from 4:00-6:30 pm.
Tickets are \$25 for
people 35 and younger
and \$50 for 36 and over.
Ticket price includes
complimentary food,
beer and wine. All
proceeds benefit CASA
of Westmoreland, Inc.
To RSVP call the WBA at:
724-834-6730.



Save the Date!

CASA Costume Ball

Join us for our 3rd
Annual Costume
Ball on **Friday,
October 28th** from
7:00-11:00 pm at
the St. Vincent
Conference
Center. Enjoy
food and drinks, a
basket raffle, silent
auction and even
a costume prize.
For more
information please
call 724-850-6874
or visit the event
page on our
website at
[www.westmoreland
dcasa.org](http://www.westmorelandcasa.org).



CASA staff from left, Vicki Shields, Volunteer
Coordinator; Mandy Welty, Executive Director;
and Meredith Hayes, Volunteer Coordinator at
Westmoreland Croquet Tournament at University
of Pittsburgh at Greensburg on June 12, 2011.



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CASA connection

Summer 2011

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2 North Main Street
Greensburg, PA 15601

Please send all donations and requests for information to:

CASA of Westmoreland, Inc.
2 North Main St.
Greensburg, PA 15601

If you would like to contribute to **CASA of Westmoreland, Inc.** or would like to have more information please fill out and return the following:

CASA of Westmoreland, Inc. is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

___ I am enclosing a cash donation of \$_____ in support of abused and neglected children in Westmoreland County

___ I would like to sponsor a CASA child for one year and am **pledging** my donation of \$1,200 over the next year

___ I am interested in supporting CASA annually and I am **pledging** to become a:

- Friend of CASA, \$50 and under Patron of CASA, \$100-\$500
- Hero of CASA, \$500-\$1,000 Champion of CASA, \$1,000 and over

___ I am interested in becoming a CASA volunteer. Please contact me with more information

___ I would like a CASA informational presentation at my business or community organization. Please contact me to set up a date/time

CASA of Westmoreland, Inc.
On Facebook

facebook

www.facebook.com/casawc

Check our page often for updates, picture and important information about the CASA program!

Don't forget to visit our website!

www.westmorelandcasa.org