



ADVOCATE ADVISOR

CASA OF THE EASTERN PANHANDLE NEWS & UPDATES

IN THIS ISSUE

- 1** Letter from the Executive Director
- 3** 2020 High-Impact Highlights
- 4** Mission Moment
- 5** Announcements
- 7** In the News



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This has been an unprecedented year for all of us, and so many things have changed. But one thing that hasn't changed is the difference that a volunteer makes in the life of a child. Thanks to you, CASA of the Eastern Panhandle (CASA-EP) can continue this critically important work in these challenging times.



During the pandemic, families have been quarantined and separated for months from their loved ones in an effort to stay healthy. Imagine what it's been like for hundreds of children across the Eastern Panhandle who were removed from their homes and placed in foster care during that time. Picture nearly 600 children having to relocate to a new home and school plus attend courtroom hearings with a revolving door of adults—all while coping with the trauma of abuse or neglect.

Our staff and nearly 80 volunteers have seen firsthand the pandemic's impact on the 325 children and families we served last year. This includes the disruption of children's support networks and the suspension of critically important services such as visitation with family, therapy, and special education services.

Thankfully—and with much community support—CASA-EP pivoted to serve more children and families

+50%
MORE
CHILDREN
SERVED VS.
2019

+42%
MORE VOLUNTEER
ADVOCATES VS.
2019

➤ *continued*



***“This new year
holds the promise
of endless
possibilities for
all of us.”***

in 2020. We continue to recruit, provide online training, and hold virtually and socially distanced swearing-in ceremonies for new volunteers. Staff and volunteers are also providing socially distanced advocacy—FaceTiming, texting, Zooming, and “visiting” from the safety of the sidewalk.

By being that caring, consistent adult, these volunteers have been the certainty in uncertain times for the children we serve. The determination of our staff and volunteers has truly inspired me, and I hope it inspires you.

This new year holds the promise of endless possibilities for all of us. We are very hopeful for a brighter year and a return to a routine—one that includes being connected with our friends and loved ones again.

Regardless of what this year brings, I know that with your help—as committed CASA-EP volunteers, generous financial supporters, and friends—we will be equipped to meet the challenges ahead. ■

Warmly,

Michelle Sudduth
Executive Director



2020 HIGH-IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



52% of Children involved in abuse and neglect cases who still need an Advocate

14 Largest Training Class



in CASA-EP history



32 New Recruits

Trained to be a Court Appointed Special Advocate in 2020



Volunteer of the Year
Pati LaBrosse

76

Open House Participants



attended five Open Houses hosted in 2020, of which four were held virtually to adapt to social-distancing measures



325

Children served by a Volunteer Advocate



250 Miles Completed



in the first-ever Superhero Challenge, a socially distanced fun-raiser that generated \$47K to change a child's story

3



New Staff Members

An expanded team has allowed us to open a new location in Morgan County, improve volunteer supervision and retention goals, and expand diversity and inclusion efforts across our programs

120,000 Impressions

on social media in National CASA Association-funded outreach campaign #ChangeAChildsStory

11

News Stories to raise awareness and share experiences of the volunteers supporting vulnerable children in our community

MISSION MOMENT

WANTS VERSUS NEEDS

BY CARI LEFEBER

Youth displaced or removed from their homes often have to face a world of realities quite different from their peers. They face traumatic experiences, difficult decisions, and unstable relationships, among so many challenges. Sometimes the role of a CASA-EP volunteer is to just advocate for letting a kid be a kid. Steven's Christmas story was one such case.



A CASA-EP Advocate was assigned to the case involving the three children of the Marks* family: a set of twin girls, Katie and Ashley (9), and their brother, Steven (16). The twins were placed in a foster home, and Steven was able to identify fictive kin who was willing to take him into her home.

Unfortunately, Steven's caregiver was not entirely prepared to care for an extra youth. When Steven was initially placed in her home, he had to sleep on a couch.

As the annual CASA-EP holiday gift drive approached, our advocates began gathering wish lists for the children they served. Over 60 children ended up getting a Christmas instead of little or no Christmas at all.

When I saw Steven's wish list, I thought of how this boy had seen quite a lot in his life. Like so many other children in foster care, Steven's list asked for a bed, sheets, socks, and other basic needs. His advocate and I knew that we needed to step up and help to supply not just his list, but to give him more than that. I wanted this young man—who has experienced years of trauma and neglect—to have a child's Christmas.

Thanks to the substantial support of donors and advocates, we were able to purchase items to meet Steven's basic needs, including clothing, a new bed, mattress, and bedding—all delivered directly to his kinship home.

Even more exciting, we were able to add gifts from Steven's "want" list through the additional financial support of the Eastern Panhandle Bar Association Foundation and the WV Bar Foundation.

Together, we made a boy's dream of a hoverboard for Christmas come true--plus a basketball and some new basketball shoes! And for at least one moment in his life, Steven was able to relax and stay a child just a little while longer. ■

**all names have been changed*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolutions for 2021

MORE VIDEOS!

Follow our new [YouTube channel](#) (@mycasaep) to see a Virtual Open House, view some of our favorite CASA-EP stories, and hear more from us in 2021 as we tell the stories of the children in need and the volunteers who serve them in our community.



EXPANDED TRAINING!

New training options launching February 1, 2021 will offer greater flexibility and support for new volunteers. To meet the growing need for volunteers, the National CASA/GAL Association has approved CASA-EP to be part of its guided learning model, which allows for self-guided training on a volunteer hopeful's own time so as to better accommodate conflicting schedules.

MORE CONNECTION!

We look forward to engaging more deeply in 2021 with partner organizations in the community and our common missions to improve how we share the message of the impact that just one person can have in a child's life. Contact us if you'd like to be part of this initiative: volunteer@mycasaep.org.

Watch these highlights from 2020:

- [Sunset Chat with Judge Debra McLaughlin](#) - September 22, 2020: Sunset Chat with Judge Debra McLaughlin of West Virginia's Twenty-Third Judicial Circuit Court, hosted by Michelle Sudduth, executive director of CASA-EP. In this interactive session, Judge McLaughlin discussed the impact of recent WV Supreme Court decisions related to child welfare, child safety decision making, and court-appointed child advocacy. She also addressed the role of a CASA-EP volunteer in the judicial process and took questions from current volunteers and other virtual attendees.



2021 TRAINING

Launching February 1: **Guided Learning**

**NEW
FORMAT**

Self-paced online training;
on your own schedule/time

February 22 - March 5: **In-person Virtual Training**

In-person CASA-EP staff-led
training; M-Th from 1-4:30 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) - December 11, 2020: How One Positive Role Model Can Change a Life with Cynthia Robertson, MA. Presentation with Morgan County Starting Points and Project Build, in partnership with United Way of the Eastern Panhandle.
- [Diversity Town Hall](#) - July 13, 2020: Dr. Tom Seger facilitated a Town Hall for CASA-EP staff, volunteers, and board members to discuss the topic of diversity and inclusion, a topic intimately connected with issues dealt with through the child welfare system.



GIVE TO OTHERS!

Research has shown that children with a CASA-EP volunteer spend less time in out-of-home or foster care (five months less); are less likely to re-enter the foster care system; and do better in school. Considering foster care savings alone of \$11,000 per child (five months less time in care x \$2,200 estimated state monthly cost), CASA-EP programs save the state over \$25 million dollars. But your continued support is needed in order to recruit, train, and support volunteers as well as grow the CASA-EP program in 2021 to include other necessary supports for youth in the child welfare system.

DONATE TODAY

Thanks to your support, we are changing a child's story. ■



**CHANGE A
CHILD'S STORY™**
WWW.MYCASAEP.ORG

**HELP A
CHILD THRIVE**



IN THE NEWS

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



Proudly announcing 2020 Volunteer of the Year, Pati LaBrosse, for her many years of service to children of the Eastern Panhandle. Pati has moved to Nevada for new adventures, but hopes to reconnect with a National CASA Association program close to her and support upcoming CASA-EP trainings in 2021. [▶ read more](#)

EP BAR GIFT DRIVE

Deep thanks and appreciation go to the Eastern Panhandle Bar Association Foundation for leading the 2020 Christmas gift drive for vulnerable children served by CASA-EP volunteers. Over 60 children were provided gifts this year through their great generosity.

[▶ read more](#)

NONPROFIT OF THE YEAR

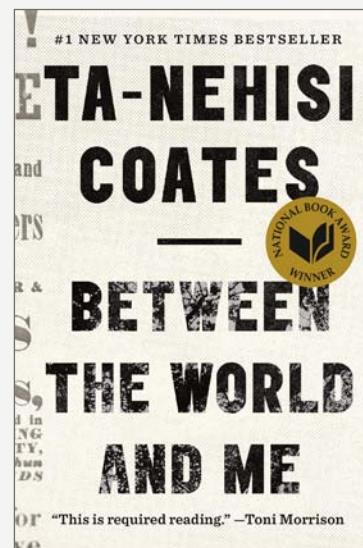
Martinsburg-Berkeley County Chamber of Commerce awarded this great honor to CASA-EP on November 4, 2020. [▶ watch the video](#)

WE'RE ON THE MOVE!

After many years at the St. Joe's Parish offices, we will soon be moving to a new Martinsburg location. Until then, continue to call us at 304-263-5100 or email us at volunteer@mycasaep.org. Of course, you can still find us in your email, the news, and on social media! ■

WHAT WE'RE READING:

[*Between the World and Me*](#)
by Ta-Nehisi Coates



Current events have caused the National CASA/GAL Association and local programs to reflect and find ways we can address racism, injustices, diversity, equity, engagement, and inclusion. It is critical to the work we do to understand subjects that may ultimately impact the children we serve. With this in mind and in recognition of Black History Month in February, we'll be reading *Between the World and Me*.

CHAT N' CHEW

This continues the first Saturday of every month at 10 a.m. These sessions are great opportunities for new and seasoned advocates to discuss court advocacy issues, resources, and best practices. Get to know your fellow volunteers! Contact Cari Lefebvre for more information: cari@mycasaep.org