

ADVOCATE ADVISOR

CASA NEWS UPDATE FOR THE EASTERN PANHANDLE OF WV



Judge Bridget Cohee swears in new advocates Heather Sprenger, Rosa Clark, Melody Stotler, Amber Griffith, Jeanette Sulzen, and Lynn Lewis.

CASA-EP GOES DIGITAL by Julia Yuhasz, outreach consultant

The year 2020 has brought major milestones for CASA of the Eastern Panhandle. Some of these milestones have been expected, and some have not, but all have resulted in a more adept and resilient organization. One of the most exciting moments this year was the first-ever virtual swearing in of new advocates. On April 16, Twenty-Third Judicial Circuit Court Judge Bridget Cohee swore in six new CASA volunteers in via Zoom meeting, ensuring people are still given the opportunity to help kids in the area despite COVID-19 social-distancing regulations. CASA-EP Board President Susan Caperton, Vice President Tim Hott, members Bill Wertman and Rosa Clark, and staff all joined in support. We extend many thanks to Judge Cohee for her words of inspiration, passion, and dedication, which will help CASA-EP continue to fulfill its mission. CASA-EP looks forward to implementing new virtual options throughout 2020 to better address child welfare needs in the Eastern Panhandle.

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GRATITUDE AND RESILIENCY

by Michelle Sudduth, executive director

In honor of May's National Foster Care Month, CASA-EP is sending a whole lot of gratitude to all foster families, child welfare professionals, judges, and volunteers who dedicate their lives to the over 500 children and youth in our three-county foster care system. Their unwavering dedication, selflessness and countless sacrifices day in and day out to support children who have experienced abuse or neglect inspire me every day.

It's no secret that children and youth who have experienced abuse or neglect are among the most vulnerable populations in our state. A child in foster care may have faced physical, psychological and/or emotional trauma - only to then face long periods of uncertainty.

With COVID-19, the foster care system is facing an even broader series of challenges, including visitation—with parents, siblings, social workers, CASA volunteers, and others; reunification struggles due to social distancing; permanency delays because of closed courts, children falling behind in school without access to technology and educational resources; and fewer foster families because of economic uncertainties and emotional stress, anxiety, and unemployment. These factors have combined to create a fragile, unstable system.

But there is hope. Many children in the foster care system demonstrate incredible resilience, adaptability, and flexibility throughout their life journey. This pandemic has presented challenges for adults that children in foster care face as a normal course of life. Those of us who serve, support, and encourage these children have an opportunity to show them that same ingenuity, flexibility, and resilience. According to Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, "The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a parent, caregiver, or other adult." CASA volunteers are often that person for a child in the foster care system. At this critical moment, volunteers are needed now more than ever. For more information about becoming a CASA-EP volunteer, visit www.mycasaep.org. Do you have a friend or colleague who you think would make a great CASA volunteer? Please send this person's contact information to del@mycasaep.org and we will follow up.

For those of you who have ever considered foster parenting, now is the time. If you're trying to fit in where you're most needed, being a foster parent is a great way to support a system and a society that desperately needs a safe, caring environment for children. For more information on becoming a foster parent, call Mission West Virginia at 866-CALL-MWV.

This month - and every month - let's all work together to support foster parents, child welfare professionals, CASA volunteers, and the many others who are working now and will be working in the future to meet the needs of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Let's show these children that they are not alone.

CASA STATE IMPACT

Susan Caperton, president of CASA-EP's Board of Directors, and Michelle Sudduth, executive director, visited the state capitol during the final crunch days of the 60-day legislative session that ended on March 7. As part of a state and nationwide network of CASA programs, CASA-EP was able to voice support for many important child welfare system reforms and new resources. Of specific interest was new funding for the rebuilding of the State of West Virginia CASA Association. The association serves 10 local CASA programs in 31 counties, and works with Department of Health and Human Resources, Child Protective Services, and other stakeholders in the child welfare system to improve outcomes for our state's most vulnerable families.

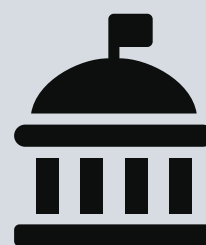
Last year, the 10 CASA programs in West Virginia recruited, trained, and supported 300 volunteer advocates and served 2,200 children before the courts. Research has shown that children who have a CASA volunteer's support spend less time in out-of-home or foster care (five months less); are less likely to reenter 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 programs save the state over \$25 million dollars.

CASA is a great investment, and we couldn't be more grateful for the steadfast support of ALL of our legislative leaders who represent Berkeley, Morgan, and Jefferson Counties. We're giving a special shout-out to Delegate Eric Householder - a leader with personal experience as a foster parent - who worked tirelessly on a number of important child welfare legislative issues during the 2020 session. Together, Eric and Senator Craig Blair provided leadership in securing new funding for the WV CASA Association.



300
CASA
volunteers

5 months
less time
time spent in
foster care



\$2,200
per month

\$25M
SAVINGS

The Fostering Futures program engages CASA/GAL volunteers as advocates for and advisors to foster youth ages 14 – 21. The program is built around the framework of the Fostering Connections to Success Act, to help youth identify supportive, lifelong adult connections, and to develop specific plans for their transition to become independent, successful adults. A key principle of the training and work with older youth is the “possible selves” model, based on research out of the University of Michigan, to help young people achieve their full potential.

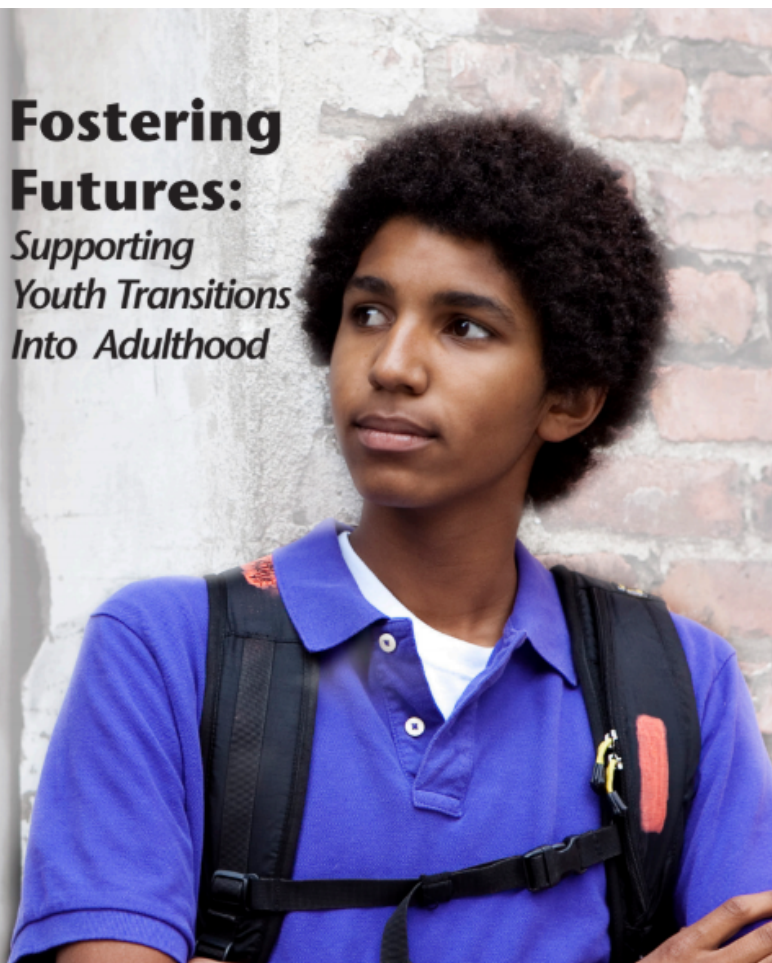
Fostering Futures: Supporting Youth Transitions Into Adulthood

Tools for the Advocate:

- *An Older Youth Needs assessment, focusing on education, employment, housing, life skills, mental/physical health needs, and relationships*
- *A goal-setting packet, based on the “possible selves” concept from the University of Michigan Institute of Social Research*

Goals for the Youth:

- *A sense of permanence by connecting to at least one caring, committed adult who will be a long-term support*
- *Empowered to plan for their future and make choices that will positively impact their future years*
- *Confidence that their CASA/GAL volunteer will be a tenacious advocate to obtain needed services, and a trusted guide to help them navigate through important decisions*



We are Fostering Futures

CASA-EP is excited to announce a new program focused on supporting the development of independence in teens and young adults. Please join us in June for this training program for new and current advocates. The Fostering Futures program is funded by local grants from the Seely Foundation, United Way of the Eastern Panhandle, and the Berkeley County Council. A Walmart Foundation grant supported the development of the Fostering Futures in conjunction with National CASA Association.

PART I: MONDAY, JUNE 22 - 1:30 - 4:30PM

PART II: MONDAY, JUNE 29 - 1:30 - 4:30PM

Must be a current Advocate to participate.

Training sessions will be held on Zoom.

Contact Cari to register or for questions: cari@mycasaep.org



2020 DATES TO REMEMBER

ADVOCATE CHAT & CHEW

10 a.m.
1st Saturday
of every month
via Zoom

12 p.m.
2nd Wednesday
of every month
via Zoom

LUNCH BUNCH

CASA-EP BOOK CLUB

NEW

Having a hard time getting continuing education hours?
Join our first-ever CASA-EP Book Club!
The deadline to sign up is Friday, June 5. The first group discussion will be Friday, June 12 at 10 a.m. via Zoom.
The first book will be Three Little Words, by Ashley Rhodes-Courter. Books will be provided by CASAEP. Group size is limited to 10 people due to the number of books on hand.

Email cari@mycasaep.org for more info or to register.

ADVOCATE TRAINING

July 13-16 and 20-23
VIRTUAL BOOTCAMP

(M-Th 3.5-hour afternoon sessions, all online)

October - TBD

SELF-PACED TRAINING
COMING FALL 2020!

INSERVICES

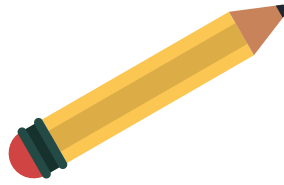
Advocate Continuing Education
(12-hour annual requirement)

Saturday, June 10 @ 10:30 a.m.
ONLINE

Tuesday, September 15: 5 - 8 p.m.
Saturday, December 12: 9 a.m. - noon

*All events are virtual unless otherwise stated.
Contact Del or Cari for more info.*

OPTIMA OPEN HOURS



Assistance is available **every Wednesday** for support or training in the Optima case management system. Contact Brian Truman at Brian@mycasaep.org or call CASAEP anytime from 9am to 12pm on any Wednesday. Support is available telephonically, in person or via Zoom. We're here to help YOU!

EVERY WEDS FROM 9 A.M. - NOON



WE APPRECIATE OUR VOLUNTEERS

Thank you to all of our awesome CASA volunteers for the incredible work of these past months - for supporting each other, adapting and remaining connected. You are amazing!



VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE

June 23 @ 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

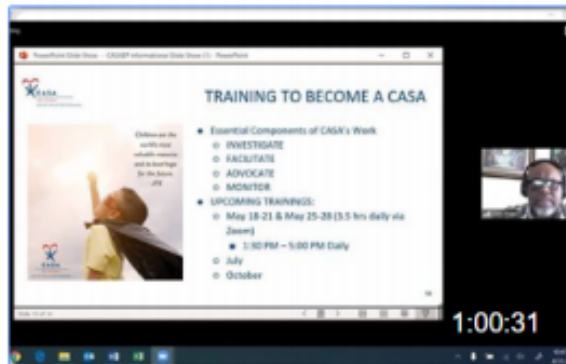
Tell your neighbor! Invite a friend!!

Register on Facebook or email volunteer@mycasaep.org.

Our work is and MUST continue as our nation and region continue to deal with social-distancing measures. This session offers a chance to learn more about CASA advocacy before our next training cycle begins on July 13th, 2020. CASA-EP staff and advocates will discuss the program, answer questions, and share real stories from our volunteers. We'll also be discussing how CASA-EP is continuing important work under social distancing.

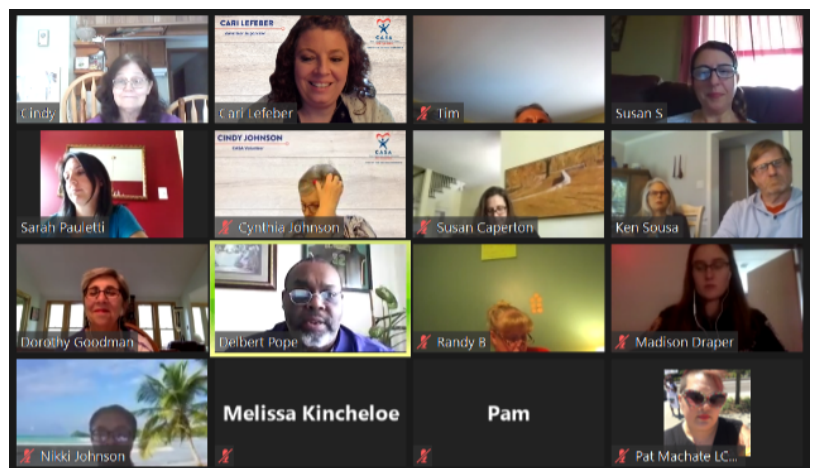
CASA programs play a critical role in ensuring that children who have experienced abuse or neglect find safe, permanent placements or are reunified with their biological family whenever possible. The work of highly trained advocates—appointed by judges to work one-on-one with our most vulnerable children and youth—are needed now more than ever. Research has shown that children who have the support of a CASA volunteer spend less time in out-of-home or foster care, are less likely to reenter the foster care system, and do better in school.

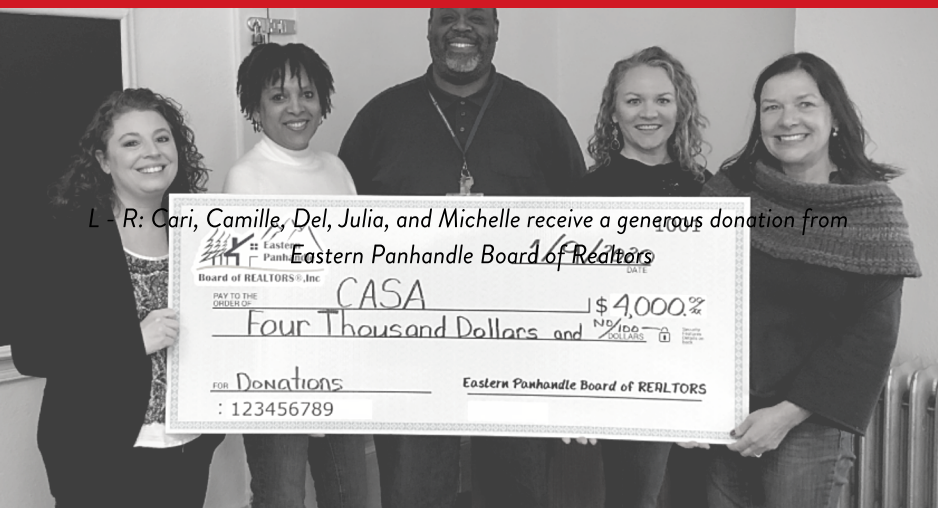
YOU CAN CHANGE A CHILD'S STORY BY BECOMING A CASA VOLUNTEER!



Two Virtual Open Houses hosted in June 2020 led to CASA-EP's largest trainee class in its 17-year history!

Eighteen new recruits will improve outcomes and impact the lives of 54 children who would otherwise face trauma and tremendous uncertainty alone. Thank you to all of our trainees for their time and commitment to changing the lives of children in this community in 2020!





YOUR CASA-EP TEAM

Michelle Sudduth, executive director
Del Pope, director of training and development

Cari Lefebber, volunteer supervisor

Camille Knox, office manager

Brian Truman, office volunteer

Julia Yuhasz, outreach consultant

Nikki Johnson, program coordinator

Introducing...Nikki Johnson

CASA-EP is excited to welcome Nikiala "Nikki" Johnson this month as a program coordinator. Nikki graduated from Shepherd University in May 2019 and has a background in higher education doing program and event planning within the offices of Involvement and Inclusion. Though a recent graduate, she has held a number of jobs that frame a skill set ranging from marketing to conflict management. She fell in love with the mission-driven work of nonprofits after a brief stint in NPO work and made it a goal to join an area nonprofit.

In addition to program coordination, Nikki will be working closely with staff on diversity and inclusive volunteer recruitment. She can be reached at Nikki@mycasaep.org.



OUR MISSION

CASA-EP is a 501c(3) committed to providing and promoting court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that children who have faced abuse or neglect can have the opportunity to thrive in a safe, nurturing, permanent home and when possible be reunited with their family of origin.

SOCIAL MEDIA - OR - ONLINE: WWW.MYCASAEP.ORG



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