

We are on the Web!
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A Powerful Voice in a Child's Life

Recruiting CASA Volunteers

Please let your family, friends, and colleagues know that we are currently recruiting new volunteers for our next training classes beginning on January 12, 2018. One of the best ways for us to get the word out to the public is through you! You can help spread the word and provide first hand descriptions of what being a CASA means to you and the children we serve.

Recruit EVERYDAY HEROES!!! You still have time to win the gift certificate for referring the most new volunteers for our January class. So get out there, share your stories, and let others know how they can be an Everyday Hero for a child!

Another great opportunity for us to let others know about CASA is through organizations you may be associated with. We are available to speak to groups of all sizes about CASA and the need for more volunteers to become the voice of a child!

For more information, please contact Advocacy and Training Manager Gina Bennett at 706-515-2700 or advocacy@appalachiancasa.com. All of our training dates for 2018 are listed at gacasa.org.

"The heart of a volunteer is not measured in size, but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others." -- DeAnn Hollis



Volume IX, Issue 1
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The Circuit

The quarterly newsletter of CASA of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit

Court Update

by Honorable Jan Wheeler

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Upcoming Events:

- January Fun Facts Friday 1/12/18 1 pm to 3 pm
- CASA Day at the Capitol February 14, 2018
- February Fun Facts Friday 2/9/18 1 pm to 3pm
- March Fun Facts Friday March 9, 2018 1pm to 3 pm
- National CASA Conference - Boston March 9 - 13
- Stakeholders (Tentatively) March 16, 2018

COURT UPDATE

Happy New Year! As we begin 2018, I wanted to inform you of some changes in juvenile court.

As you will have heard by now, our beloved executive director, Dianne Scoggins, retired the end of 2017. Congratulations to Dianne on what I'm sure will be a very active and exciting retirement. We miss you already.

I have appointed Melanie Davis as interim director until Dianne's position can be filled. We are working to schedule a celebration for Dianne in late February to early March and we will make sure you are informed of the date.

Congratulations to Sherry Dougherty, Volunteer of the Year! Ms. Dougherty is so deserving of this award. Not many people (even trained law enforcement) would travel out of state and put themselves in the middle of a family brawl to take a young girl to her mother's funeral. Your kindness will be something this child remembers the rest of her life.

We have a new full-time child/parent attorney in Pickens County beginning January 1. Glenna Stone, who until recently operated the Appalachian Family Law Information Center, is joining our team and we are so pleased to have her. Glenna has a wealth of experience to draw on and we couldn't find a better candidate. Please welcome her when you are in Pickens County.

Many of our stakeholders met December 28 to share ideas about ways to make our court run more smoothly. One of the suggestions we will be implementing is to schedule additional court dates in Pickens County. As Pickens has our largest caseload, I am hopeful that this will make court dates there more manageable. Due to an already full juvenile and superior court calendar we were only able to add four dates for this year: February 26, May 31, August 16 and October 1. If this is effective, we will add more dates when we put together our 2019 calendar.

I know that many of you are aware of the difficulties with terminations over the past two years. The Georgia Court of Appeal has been reversing 70% of the termination cases which are appealed. As a result we are seeing an increased number of trials and, if termination is granted, many more appeals. The effect of this is that most, if not all, of our termination cases have to be specially set. In an effort to have the TPR cases resolved in a timely manner, we are referring many termination cases to mediation prior to setting a trial date. We had our first termination mediation the end of November and it was successful. Marlene DeFrancesco was the assigned CASA and participated in the mediation. The mediations are conducted by trained mediators assigned by

the 9th Judicial District Office of Dispute Resolution. Mediations are conducted at the courthouses in the county where the case is heard. All parties to the case are invited to the mediation as well as the foster parents. CASAs are always included in this process. I am hopeful that the use of mediation will result in a more timely resolution of termination cases.

Save the date, we are planning our next Stakeholder's meeting for March 16. I hope to have one of the juvenile court mediators present to explain how the process works in dependency cases.

Finally, I want to thank you all for the work that you do for the children and families in our circuit. In my opinion, our CASA program is one of the best in the state. You provide valuable information to me through your reports and court appearances that I don't receive from other sources. You are that caring and consistent presence for the children you represent, many of whom don't have an adult in their lives to fill this role. I can't overstate your importance to the process and to insuring that our children have a voice in court.

Thank you. Your work is important and appreciated more than I can express

Swearing In of New CASA Volunteers

By *Melanie Davis*



Welcome to our CASA Family!

Please join Appalachian CASA in welcoming five new CASA volunteers sworn in as officers of the court on October 20, 2017.

Pictured from left to right: Honorable Judge Marybeth Priest, Honorable Judge John Worcester, Dianne Scoggins, Executive Director, Robert Kenyon, Joe Cano, Hettie Elm, Gina Bennett, and Peggy Bussert.

WHEN THANK YOU IS NOT ENOUGH

By *Honorable Jan Wheeler*

By now I'm sure you've heard that Dianne Scoggins has retired. It's impossible to enumerate all the many ways Dianne has positively impacted our community. How do you thank someone who has devoted 22 years of her life to the service of others? Dianne took a fledgling CASA program and turned it into one of the premier program in the state. In addition to her normal hours, she has devoted countless nights and weekends to ensuring that the children in our circuit get the advocates they deserve. Dianne is the finest example of a public servant and a community leader. She has instituted many innovative programs over the years and is well known and respected state wide. Dianne is always willing to step up and take on any job that needs doing. She has worked tirelessly to improve the juvenile court. On a personal note, Dianne has been a huge support for me. I will miss her tremendously. There is no adequate way to thank her for all she has done over the years. Her position will be filled but no one can take her place.

CASA Day at the Capitol - Invite a Legislator to Lunch

By *Kerri Henderson*

CASA Day at the Capitol will be February 14th this year. This is an opportunity for CASA volunteers, staff, and board members from all over the state to unite at the Capitol and demonstrate our value as an organization to our state government.

We will provide transportation to the Capitol with pickup locations in Ellijay and Jasper, just be sure to RSVP by February 9, 2017 to:

advocacy@appalachiancasa.com/
706-276-2272

We would also like for you to contact our representatives and invite them to join us for lunch that day.

We had a lovely time meeting with Speaker Ralston and Senator Gooch who joined us for lunch last year.

The contact information for our representatives is below.

Speaker David Ralston:

404-656-5020

david.ralston@house.ga.gov

Senator Steve Gooch:

404-656-9221

steve.gooch@senate.ga.gov

Representative Rick Jasperse:

404-656-7857

rick.jasperse@house.ga.gov

Wear a splash of red and help us turn the Capitol into a sea of red CASA Volunteers!

In the Beginning...



Twenty-two years ago, under the leadership of The Honorable Brenda Weaver, CASA of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit was restructured as a court-sponsored program. Below is the steering committee, first advisory board members and newly appointed director.

Seated left to right: Ann Barrett, Georgia CASA; Judge Brenda Weaver, Superior Court Judge; Dianne Scoggins, Executive Director; person unidentified; Lori Lovingood Bramlett, Juvenile Court Administrator. Standing left to right: Lynda Chastain, Fannin County; unidentified; Lynn Weaver-New, Pickens County; Brenda Crawford, Fannin County; Dr. Paul Vail, Gilmer County; Dr. Bill Huff; John Worcester; Bill Reilly, Juvenile Court Judge; Bobby Milam, Superior Court Judge, and Bobbie Rucker, Fannin County."

Director's Corner: My New Year's Resolution

By *Dianne Scoggins*

How many of you made New Year's resolutions this year? I did!

My list has not changed in way-too-many years to remember, but (hopefully) I will be more successful this time than in the past. It's the usual things....be a better wife, mother, sister and friend; be more patient and kind, clean closets and digitize my photo albums (plus the pictures that never made it to an album); and the dreaded one...lose 30 pounds!

It's doable in 2018 as I have joined a new club called RETIREES! Yes, I am officially retired as the Executive Director for CASA of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit. As some of you know, this is a transition we have been working towards for several months. Our CASA staff had a re-

you...our awesome, dedicated CASA Program Operations Director, Jennifer King. It was important to me

that our CASAs and grant purveyors were not affected by the changes to our program; and the transition be as seamless as possible.

With Judge Wheeler at the helm, steps have already been taken to move CASA forward! Melanie Davis is serving as the interim director and Gina Bennett will join CASA staff on January 8th to fill Melanie's duties on the front line. Lisa Salman and Kerri Henderson will continue as Volunteer Supervisors aka CASA Super Women!

You all know I have a passion for the work we do as Child Advocates. That passion has not diminished, nor my love and admiration for each of

Please, always remember the three things I asked each of you to do when you became a CASA: 1) Take care of your family first, 2) Be your best self, and 3) Reach out to your CASA staff when you need direction or encouragement.

Many thanks to everyone for your love and support these past twenty-two years! Stay CASA strong. I hope to see many of you at CASA Day at the Capitol.

Sincerely,