



MONDAY MORNING MEMO

Monday, July 9, 2007 ☞ Volume 2, Issue 10

Ethical Issues in CASA Cases for Volunteers and Judges

At last month's National CASA Conference, **The Hon. Douglas F. Johnson**, Juvenile Court Judge in Douglas County, Nebraska and **Nancy Wilson**, Executive Director of CASA of Douglas County, presented a workshop titled "Ethical and Evidentiary Issues in Abuse and Neglect Cases for CASA Volunteers and Judges." The workshop included a review of attitudes and values incorporated in the National CASA training manual, and discussed specific case studies in which ethical concerns had arisen.

An interesting resource on this is the American Bar Association's Model Code of Judicial Conduct, which can be found at: www.abanet.org/judicialethics/2004_CodeofJudicial_Conduct.pdf

For rulings in New York State, visit: The New York State Bar Association website, Ethics Opinions, at: www.nysba.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Attorney_Resources/Ethics_Opinions/Ethics_Opinions.htm and the New York State Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics website, ethics opinions at: www.nycourts.gov/search/ethics_opinions.asp. The NYS Ethics Commission Report can be downloaded at: <http://www.courts.state.ny.us/ip/ethics/AnnualReport.pdf>

We're interested in hearing from local CASA programs what kinds of ethical issues they often deal with, and what procedures they follow to get them resolved. Many of the issues over the years have involved conflicts of interest, judges participating on boards or in fundraising activities, and volunteer and staff management concerns. Please contact your local CASA program director with any examples, and they can pass along to daward@courts.state.ny.us.

The workshop also included the attached handout, "On Being a Good Witness." The handout details witness "Common Sense," the Top Ten Rules for Testifying, and common questions to expect on cross-examination.

Information on all of the workshops at the National CASA Conference will be posted soon on www.casanet.org.

☞☞☞ Resources ☞☞☞☞☞☞

"Talking Together About Family Court" Booklet Produced

Voices for Children, the CASA Program serving Broome and Tioga Counties housed in ACCORD, Inc., has produced a booklet titled ***Talking Together About Family Court***. The publication features pictures and easily-understood descriptions of the court process, key players, and of course information about the CASA Volunteer. For more information, contact **Kacey Ellsworth** at kaceye@accordny.com.



CASA Program Directors' Manual Being Developed

“I need something that says *Read Me First*,” said Bill Lamb, director of the new Ontario County CASA Program, housed within Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes. Directors are given a variety of resources for reference: National CASA’s *Achieving Our Mission*, training manual and facilitator’s manual, and all the materials on CASANET; the State Association’s *VOICE* and Affiliate Resources section on www.casanys.org; and the sections of the UCS CASA Program Manual distributed last fall.

But Bill’s plea has been echoed over the years as all of that great material can sometimes be overwhelming or confusing. Where do those manuals overlap, agree or disagree? What is the highest priority when starting out or training new staff? Where do New York State laws, rules or procedures alter recommendations in national materials? Where does one look for more information on various subjects?

To address those concerns, CASA: Advocates for Children of NYS and the UCS CASA Assistance Program are working together to develop a *Read Me First Manual* outlining critical issues such as compliance with court rules, national and state standards; financial management and contract procedures; data collection; court and child welfare procedures and timelines; diversity and child well-being. The Manual will provide links to other online resources and lists of print publications available to support individual topics. The Manual will also incorporate some of the work the State Association had begun several years ago on a Program Director’s Manual, as well as revisions of chapters previously distributed of the UCS Program Manual.

Much thanks to **Robin Robinson, Grace Thompson, Bill Lamb, and Linda Burns** for their willingness to work on this project. Our hope is to have a draft for review by the directors at the September Program Directors’ Meeting. Comments and questions are welcome.

Court Rules Primer to be Included in Monday Morning Memo

Part of our discussion around the new Program Directors’ manual included an interest in periodically highlighting pieces of the NYS UCS Court Rules governing CASA, as well as the state and national standards that they reference, both in UCS and CASANYS publications and at program directors’ meetings.

In this issue, we will highlight **§43.1: Use of CASA Programs** from the rules of the Chief Judge. This section of the rules states that a CASA program “may be appointed by Family Court in its discretion to perform tasks delineated in a written court order regarding children in or at risk of placement in a child protective or foster care proceeding.”

This is a slightly narrower description of appropriate CASA case assignments than in the National CASA standards, which state that CASA programs accept cases involving “children who come into the court system as a result of abuse or neglect.” Cases meeting the definition in court rules generally would already have the involvement of the local Department of Social Services.

CASA programs accepting other kinds of cases such as private custody, PINS, Juvenile Delinquency, or supervised visitation generally do so under an umbrella of a broader program, and call that by a different



name. The National CASA Training Curriculum does not cover those types of case assignments, which means that additional training should occur if CASA volunteers are assigned.

~~~~~ **The A-Train** ~~~~~

NYPWA Summer Conference to be Held July 15-18

The New York Public Welfare Association's (NYPWA) 138th Annual Summer Conference will be held July 15-18 in Saratoga Springs. Titled "Refocusing the Lens on Social Services Policies," the conference will feature a plenary address by Ken Miller, founder of the Change and Innovation Agency and author of *We Don't Make Widgets*, who will discuss proven techniques that lead to customer-centered results.

NYPWA is the State Association for local social services districts. For more information about the conference and to register, go to www.nypwa.com.

Training on Infant Advocacy to be Held in September

CASA of the Southern Tier will be holding a conference on "Healthy Beginnings: Creating Positive Attachments in Children" on September 27 and 28 in Painted Post, NY. Co-sponsored by the NYS Unified Court System, the training will feature speakers Dr. Steven Blatt and Dr. Art Becker-Weidman.

More information is available from the program at 888-936-CASA.

LGBTQ In-Service for CASA Volunteers Available

Rob Conlon, Statewide Program Manager for Children's Centers, and Darlene Ward presented a in-service on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth for the Fulton/Montgomery CASA Program in June. The pilot training discussed general awareness of LGBTQ issues, the challenges LGBTQ youth face in foster care, and the experiences of biological and foster parents. Much thanks to Linda Burns, CASA Director, for coordinating the training and to the receptive CASA volunteers of Fulton/Montgomery County.

The training included statistics and case examples, methods of creating a safe space for LGBTQ youth, basic terms and definitions, and community supports. Evaluations were very positive: "This changed my way of thinking," wrote one participant.

We will be offering both beginner's and advanced in-services on this topic to CASA programs around the state, as schedules permit. If you are interested in scheduling a training for your volunteers, staff or board, please contact Darlene Ward at daward@courts.state.ny.us.



Hon. Linda C. Griffin Receives Bridge Builder Award



The Honorable Linda C. Griffin, Rensselaer County Family Court Judge (pictured at left with her husband, Freling Smith) received the **Anthony V. Cardona** Bridge Builder Award this spring from Mediation Matters in Albany, the administering agency for Capital District CASA. The award is presented each year to an individual who builds bridges to foster collaboration and strengthen communities.

Judge Griffin was instrumental in the startup of the CASA program in Rensselaer County. **The Honorable Anthony V. Cardona** attended the event, and offered his personal congratulations to Judge Griffin.

~~~~~ **Next Issue** ~~~~~

The next issue of the Monday Morning Memo will be published on Monday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Past issues are available on the CASA Assistance Program Website, [www.nycourts.gov/ip/casa/](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/casa/)

~~~~~ **Quote of the Week** ~~~~~

"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

- Goethe

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