

MONTANA ADVOCATE



CASA Celebrates Light of Hope

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CASA programs around the state will celebrate Light of Hope events in April to draw attention to the needs of abused and neglected children. From dinners to walks, these events are planned to spotlight local programs and raise funds to support their activities.

Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained volunteers who advocate for children who have been removed from their homes because of alleged abuse and neglect and no fault of their own. Nearly 400 volunteers in 15 local CASA programs are advocating for almost 1,000 children in Montana. These volunteers serve as the “eyes and ears” of the judge.

In Flathead County, Judge Ted Lympus will kick off the CASA for Kids event at 7:30 a.m. April 12 at the Hampton Inn. The Kalispell program will honor volunteers and local dignitaries, while a local children’s choir provides entertainment.

In Billings, Yellowstone CASA joins with seven other child prevention organizations to host a celebration of children on Tuesday, April 17 at 5:15 p.m. on the County Courthouse lawn. The groups stand in support of child abuse prevention and light candles of hope for 350 abused and neglected children in foster care in Yellowstone County. A short walk in downtown Billings will be followed with a program of speakers, music and candle lighting. A light supper is provided by Chefs and Cooks of Montana.

A volunteer recognition event is planned for April 12 in Billings. Twenty-seven CASA volunteers will be honored for their commitment to their CASA children and the efforts of the local program. Women of Grace United Methodist Church will host the event and provide a light meal. Special entertainment is planned.

Other Billings events include a Garden Party Brunch and Auction at Gainan’s Garden Center on Saturday, April 21 and train-

ing of new volunteers begins on April 24.

The Bitterroot CASA Light of Hope Dinner and Auction is planned for April 13. Special items to be auctioned include a trip by private plane and a special log archway. Call Julie at 406 961 4535 for more information

In Dillon, the 5th Judicial Voices for Children program plans a fundraising dinner April 16 with Papa T’s from 5 pm to 8 pm.

Kalispell will host a fundraising dinner at Capers (previously Café Max) at 6:30 p.m. April 23. Tickets are \$150 and this event sells out each year, so book your tickets early by calling 406 755 7208. A reception and silent auction will be held at 5:30 p.m. at Marshall Noice Gallery, 127 Main. The reception is open to the public.

The CASA-CAN volunteer recognition celebration takes place on April 19 in Great Falls. The volunteer of the year/recipient of the Kaye Johnson Memorial Award will be announced at the celebration.

The Helena community gathers Saturday, April 21 for the 6th Annual CASA Walk/Run. The 5K walk and run begins at Yund Park and concludes with games and activities in Women’s Park. For more information, see www.casagal.org.

Eastern Montana CASA/GAL’s 13th Annual Fundraiser is set for 6 p.m. at the Moose Lodge in Colstrip. The event features a Live and Silent Auction as well as Live Music.

Meanwhile, CASA CAN will celebrate the Fiesta de Niños on May 3 at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls. Lamps are distributed to local well-known artists for decorating and a live auction will be conducted on the night of the Fiesta. CASA CAN and the Children’s Receiving Home will collaborate on this fundraiser. Tickets are \$30.

For more information on local events, call CASA of Montana at 866-863-2272 or visit our website at www.casagal.org.

CASA of Montana

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Website: www.casagal.org

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Did you know? — Nearly 400 CASA volunteers are advocating for 1,000 children in Montana.

ACCOUNTABILITY COURT PILOT BEGINS

BY DON CLARK, CASA OF MONTANA BOARD MEMBER

Editor's Note: *This pilot program grew out of the August 2006 Summit that brought together judges, social worker supervisors, attorneys, CASAs and others involved in the permanency process for the child. The 2007 Montana Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children is planned for August.*

Flathead County District Court initiated an Accountability Court program in January for a select few of its child abuse/neglect cases. The selected cases were picked by a committee involving Child and Family Services Division (CFS), the county attorney's office, the Public Defenders' Office and CASA.

For the initial test cases, two were chosen that were likely to result in termination of parental rights unless a miracle happened. And indeed in one of the cases, dramatic changes have occurred.

This particular case featured parents who initially objected to almost everything asked of them by their social worker. They were aggressively angry, argumentative on almost every detail and threatened law suits at every turn. Both parents admitted to personal anger problems.

At the first accountability court meeting on this case, both parents challenged and accused the state team of violating their rights and making unreasonable demands that intruded on their private lives and even their mutual business.

It was clear that an adversarial relationship had developed between the parents and those working to assure that the child was in a safe environment. It appeared that the parents were confusing what the CFS was doing. They did not realize that by objecting to CFS they were risking loss of reunification.

"This seems nothing short of miraculous! The anger has greatly diminished and the session closed with one of the parents actually complimenting the department on their efforts on their behalf and stated that as painful as this had been they were glad they had gone through this process"

What is so unique about the accountability court process is that the judge heard not only from the social worker and the county attorney's office but from all the care givers to the child and the parents and their attorneys in a very informal atmosphere.

Judge Stewart Sadler was able to show that it was in the parents' best interest to meet as many of the state's requirements for reunification as soon as possible. The judge encouraged the parents to carry out the pro-

posed treatments by suggesting that in doing so they would be able to get their child back sooner rather than later, or never.

Change came with the second meeting of the court. Only mild complaints were offered from either side, and even those were discussed like team members instead of enemies. All of the providers spoke highly of the parent's attitudes and the child's state of happiness and growth.

The session ended with the father revealing that he now considered what had been the worst day of his life - the night of the child's removal - as a life-enriching growth experience.

Jamie Campbell, the executive director of the Kalispell program, is also a supporter of accountability court. "This seems nothing short of miraculous! The anger has greatly diminished and the session closed with one of the parents actually complimenting the department on their efforts on their behalf and stated that as painful as this had been they were glad they had gone through this process. I have a very strong feeling they will get their kids back mid-March. About eight weeks ago I would have bet money that they would lose their kids."

I believe that requiring these parents to meet with a judge in court on a bi-weekly basis, and hearing his repeated admonitions to do what would eventually be required in spite of their reluctance had an enormously sobering impact on them. I have truly become an accountability court advocate.

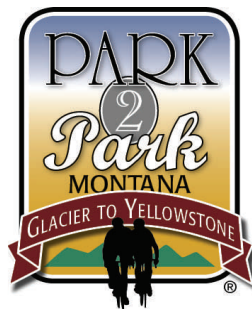
Riders and Sponsors Join 2007 Park-2-Park Montana

Registrations are rolling in for the third annual Park-2-Park Montana ride Sept. 3-7. Cardio Systems of Billings is the first Platinum sponsor and the Neighborhood Office of Helena is the first Silver sponsor. CASA is seeking more sponsors for the ride that benefits advocacy for children in the foster care system.

The multi-day bike ride takes cyclists from St. Mary's KOA on the eastern side of Glacier Park down to Gardiner near Yellowstone Park. It begins Labor Day, Monday Sept. 3 and ends on Friday, Sept. 7 in Gardiner with an afternoon celebration. This 385-mile event is limited to 40 riders, so it's best to sign up early.

Last year, 25 riders raised \$20,000 for CASA of Montana and 15 local CASA programs across the state. The event goes through Dupuyer, Great Falls, and Livingston to reach Gardiner. Local CASA programs along the way help with support of the 385-mile ride that follows Highway 89.

The registration cost for the ride \$400 before Aug. 5, which covers meals, lodging and support. Riders are expected to raise \$250 in pledges beyond the registra-



CASA of MONTANA

tion and riders raising at least \$750 will receive a custom jersey. Sponsors who contribute at least \$500 will have a logo on the ride jersey.

CASA of Montana is seeking a variety of volunteers including one to work on route logistics and an RV and driver that could go from Kalispell to Gardiner and back up again with Kalispell riders.

Ride details, sponsor information and a registration form are available at www.casagal.org. Call 1-866-863-2272 for more information.

New Faces

CASA WELCOMES NEW EMPLOYEES & VISTA MEMBERS

The CASA network is growing and has about 20 staff workers, many of them part time. Here's a look at the new faces in the network. For details on each of the 15 programs, see the directory at www.casagal.org. Please contact local programs if you are interested in volunteering.

Santella Baglivo is a new VISTA member. She is from Levittown, New York. VISTAs (Volunteers in Service to America) are part of a federally-funded AmeriCorps program similar to Peace Corps. They earn a stipend and spend a year working with a program.

Santella has just completed a Masters Degree in School Counseling. She is working for CASA of Montana as well as CASA-Advocates for Kids, where she will have the best of both worlds. Working at the state level she will be traveling to different cities, getting to know the different programs. Her major project for CASA of Montana is to increase awareness and diversity. Her main focus in Helena will be

working to increase volunteer support for CASA-Advocates for Kids. She also made this newsletter.

Chris Polaske is the new CASA-CAN VISTA in Great Falls. She is a Montana native from Cutbank and is very glad she is serving her home community. She just received her teaching degree from Montana State University- Northern in December. As a VISTA her project is to keep the volunteers updated, help with events and fundraisers, research how to recruit volunteers, and to recruit them. She also tracks methamphetamine data.

Deb Cuny begins her second VISTA term with Anaconda Family Resource Center. Deb will be assisting AFRC by designing their outreach mission as well as developing and implementing a strategic plan based upon community need Her efforts will support the 3rd Judicial District Anaconda CASA/GAL program.

Alyssa Suckow has been hired as part time program coordinator at Yellowstone

CASA. She has a degree in psychology and has experience working with victims of domestic violence and children in group settings at Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch in Billings.

Rebekah Roth is the new Yellowstone office assistance and serves as receptionist and office manager.

Pamela Young is CASA of Montana's new part time office manager. Pamela first heard about CASA from a television commercial and has been very excited about working with our program ever since. Pamela was born in Great Falls and moved to Helena with her family in 1997, She has three daughters and is very excited about giving 100 percent of her professional work skills to such a remarkable cause.

Kate Juran joined the 5th Judicial Voices for Children in Dillon January as program director. She has a degree in Social Work and owned a home daycare for 5 1/2 years before moving to Montana.

Upcoming Events Around Montana

April 12 — Yellowstone Volunteer Recognition, Women of Grace United Methodist Church

April 12 — Kalispell Light of Hope Hampton Inn, 7:30 a.m.

April 13 — Bitterroot CASA Light of Hope Benefit. Call Julie at (406) 961-4535 for more information.

April 16 — Dillon, the 5th Judicial Voices for Children program fundraising dinner at Papa T's from 5 pm to 8 pm.

April 17 — Yellowstone CASA Light of Hope, County Courthouse, 5:15 p.m.

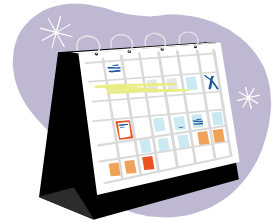
April 21 — Yellowstone CASA Garden Party Brunch and Auction, Gainan's Garden Center. (406) 259 1233.

April 21 — CASA Advocates for Kids 5th Annual CASA Run/Walk (in Helena) Call (406) 457-0797 for more information.

April 28 — Eastern Montana CASA/GAL's 13th Annual Fundraiser 6:00 pm at the Moose Lodge in Colstrip. Featuring a Live and Silent Auction as well as Live Music. Contact Sherri at (406) 665-2866.

May 3 — Fiesta de Niños at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls. Call (406) 454-6738.

May 8-10 — Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect Conference at Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula



Nominations for Judge, Volunteer and Director Due April 13

Do you know a great Judge, Volunteer or CASA Director? Then nominate them for an award to be given in May at the Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect Conference in Missoula. CASA of Montana is seeking nominations for CASA Judge, Director, and Volunteer of the year.

Forms are available at www.casagal.org. The deadline for nominations is April 13.

Awards will be presented at 11 a.m. May 8 in Missoula. The CAN conference is set for May 8 to 10 at the Hilton Garden

Inn in Missoula. Conference information is posted at www.casagal.org.

The conference will showcase national speakers, including Bill Stanton of ICF Consulting-CALIBER on "Children Can't Wait." Stanton, a former foster child, is a noted national consultant involved in improving the foster care system. Other keynote speakers include Kiti Frier of Loma Linda University and Children's Hospital and Scott "Q" Marcus from Eureka, CA on how to improve your

health and reduce stress.

The CASA state board will meet Monday evening, May 7 in Missoula at the Broadway Inn, 1609 West Broadway Missoula, MT 59808. The hotel is located about five minutes from the conference hotel and provides breakfast.

The registration cost for CASA volunteers and board members is waived but forms must be submitted through the state office at 131 Reeder's Alley, Helena, MT 59601.

A Very Special Thanks to all CASA Sponsors

CASA of Montana thanks the Angel Sponsors who have contributed significantly to the success of our programs.

If you're one of the hundreds of people who have seen a CASA commercial, that's because of Bresnan Communications. The cable company has run CASA Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for almost a year now.

Town Pump has included CASA as one of the three beneficiaries of its Charity Golf Tournament for the last two years – contributing \$10,500 in 2006.

There were dozens of companies and hundreds of individuals who helped sponsor Park-2-Park Montana in 2006. Contributions from these business and individuals raised more than \$20,000 to support CASA of Montana and local programs.

We appreciate your support and we couldn't do this work without your help. We are seeking more corporate and business sponsors.

Contributions to CASA of Montana and local programs may be made online with a credit card at www.casagal.org or sent to:

CASA of Montana, PO Box 1046, Helena, MT 59624

*Speak Up
for a
Child*

CASA of Montana is part of a national network of CASA programs spanning the United States. Across the country there are 50,000 volunteers in 900 programs. Learn more at: www.nationalcasa.org



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131 Reeder's Alley
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