

MONTANA ADVOCATE



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CASA of Montana

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2008 Calendar of Events

Jan. 12-13 The 5th Judicial Voices of Hope offers Volunteer Training at Twin Bridges High School. For information call 406-925-1405

Jan. 17 Diversity, ICWA training videoconference 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Call 866 863 2272 for more information

Jan. 18 CASA State Board meeting in Helena 9 am to 1 p.m.

Feb. 8 CASA of Missoula's Light of Hope Banquet at the Holiday Inn Downtown at the Park. For more information call 406-542-1208.

April 22-24 Prevent Child Abuse Conference in Missoula.

June 7-10 National CASA conference in Washington, D.C.

CASA Makes a Difference at Christmas

Nearly 350 people attended the 2nd Annual Foster/Adoptive Families Christmas Party December 10, 2007 at the Red Lion Inn in Kalispell. Santa posed for photos with children and gave out nearly 200 goodie bags to the eagerly awaiting children.

The bags were funded entirely with community donations. The foster parent recruitment and retention committee (consisting of Marcia Tharp, Family Concepts; Berni McDonald, Glacier Center for Families; Diana Lamers, CFSD and Jamie Campbell, CASA for Kids) collaborated to host this event.

Throughout the year these programs partner to provide training and fun events for these families. This is the second year for this big event but plans are already in the works for next year.

"We want to demonstrate our support and appreciation for the foster/adoptive families of our community and to provide a fun night out for these families at no cost to them," said Jamie Campbell, Program Director of CASA for Kids.

Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained volunteers who speak out for the best interest of abused and neglected children in the courts. CASAs are appointed by judges in dependency and neglect cases.

CASA volunteers were on hand to take photos, set up decorations and provide clean up after the party. Many CASAs got the opportunity to join the foster families for the evening and several social workers turned out to participate in the festivities, too. This year's event included Sue Cates, Intervention; Lori Schlenz, Diana Lamers, Janie Perkins – all Resource Family Support; Pat Silvia, Intake Supervisor; Cindy Char, Intake.

Burch's Studio developed all the Santa photos for the children. Decorations were provided by the United Way.

In Helena, a special thank you goes to volunteer Tammy Laib who brought in enough Christmas presents to benefit 14 CASA children. Gifts included sleeper pajamas, socks, coats, outfits, hot wheels, racket balls and much more.

"I just like to shop for kids," Tammy said.



Russell visits with Santa at a Kalispell Christmas party for foster and adoptive families.

NEWS BRIEFS

CASA Offers Jan. 17 Diversity and ICWA Training

Two trainers will focus on diversity and the Indian Child Welfare Act at the January CASA training. The quarterly training for CASA program directors, staff and volunteers has been set for 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 17 in Helena and various videoconference sites. A CASA director's meeting will precede the training from 10:30 to 11:00 a.m.

Angela Whitecrane Widdicombe is a chemical dependency counselor with the Missoula Indian Center and a board member with CASA of Missoula. She was a social worker and diversity coordinator with the Casey Family Programs for five years. She is a Native American woman with over 15 years of experience working with children and families.

Bob Raymond is the ICWA specialist with the Child and Family Services Division and provides information and support to CFSD social workers on ICWA cases. Bob also serves as a liaison with tribal social services program. A former Casey Family social worker and supervisor, he is married to a Native American woman.

Both Angela and Bob invite questions from CASA directors and volunteers before the event. All programs may participate either through attending the Helena main site or the regional videoconference sites in Billings, Great Falls, Kalispell or Missoula. Call CASA of Montana at 866 863 2272.

More than 60 CASA volunteers have been trained through local CASA programs this fall. They join the nearly 400 volunteers already advocating for almost 1,000 children in Montana. Judges depend on CASA reports in making their decisions on whether children return home to families or stay in foster care. District Judge Thomas Honzel of Helena recently met with new volunteers to talk about writing reports. He told them how much he appreciates CASA's work on behalf of children.

Park-2-Park Raises \$42,000

CASA's signature bike ride across Montana raised \$42,000 this year, twice as much as the previous year. More than 40 riders rode almost 400 miles each for a total of 16,000 miles. The top fundraisers were Betsy Bayne of Whitefish (\$3,291) and Troy Charbonneau of Billings, MT (\$2,700). Ten riders from the Flathead valley and RV driver Dr. Phil Cardan raised more than \$15,000.

The funds will be used to support local CASA programs and to extend CASA into new areas. The funds will also help on education, public awareness and staff retention. Nearly 400 volunteers are serving almost 1,000 children in the Big Sky state.

CASA will return \$21,000 to local programs this year, helping them to expand to reach more children and to add some benefits to retain staff members.

Butte rider Janet Axelson has produced a DVD and slideshow with photos contributed from the riders. Thanks to Janet for doing a

great job of showcasing the ride and thanks to all Park-2-Park Montana riders.

CASA Programs to Receive Court Assessment Grants

Nine CASA programs, including CASA of Montana, received \$40,000 in federal grant funding from the Court Assessment Program of the Supreme Court.

The biggest award, \$14,700, went to the Gallatin County CASA/GAL program which suddenly lost nearly two thirds of its funding in fall 2007. A community block grant from Violence Against Women's Act grant was not renewed, leaving the program concerned about how to survive. United Way of Bozeman stepped forward with a generous award.

Bike rider Mary Ann Rangitsch of the Bozeman Police Department joined the Gallatin board and worked on new funding and grants.

CASA of Montana received a \$4,000 grant to study expansion into Lincoln County and to begin Community Development there. Lea Pedro, former CASA Executive Director in Columbia County, Ore. will start in January as a part-time program development staff member. Lea will be located in a remote office near Kalispell. The training and outreach position will be funded through a new grant.

Other CAP grant awards ranging from \$2,000 to \$4,400 went to CASA programs in Anaconda, the Bitterroot, Eastern Montana, Missoula, Hill County, Malta and the 5th Judicial District.

New board members join CASA state board at January meeting

The CASA State Board meets Friday, Jan. 18 at the Lewis and Clark Library in Helena. The meeting is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Several board members are retiring after serving more than three years on the board. They include legislator and educator Gary Branae from Billings, KMTX radio account executive Barry McNamara and Yellowstone CASA Executive Director Shirley Folkwein. Thanks to all of them for a job well done.

Secretary Vivian Taylor, Philips County School Superintendent, and member Connie Leistikko, past president of the advisory council for the Kalispell CASA for Kids program, will stay on to help the board transition to a new secretary and new committee heads. Both have served more than three years on the board from the time CASA of Montana became a new non-profit.

Four new members will join the state board in January. Deputy Police Chief Joe Bryce of Billings has ridden the Park-2-Park Montana bike ride the last two years. Cherie LeBlanc is executive direc-

tor of Eastern Montana CASA/GAL in Miles City. The program covers 12 counties in Eastern Montana. Vivian Manuel of Helena owns a consulting company and has worked in state government and in New York City on public relations, fundraising and legislative advocacy. Joyce Funda is a CASA volunteer and attorney in Lake County and serves on the county planning board there.

The 14-member state board includes three local CASA program directors as well as members who represent different skills and regions in Montana. President Ann Gilkey of Helena is the Equal Justice Coordinator for the Montana State Bar. Other board members include John Morrison, state insurance commissioner and P2P rider, and Schylar Canfield, a college student and former foster child who now serves in the FosterChild All-Stars mentoring other foster children.

The state board sets policy and long range planning and helps to raise funds and awareness for CASA statewide.

New Faces

CASA WELCOMES NEW EMPLOYEES AND VISTA MEMBERS

Here's a look at the new faces in the CASA network. For details on each of the 15 program, see the local program directory at www.casagal.org. Please contact local programs if you are interested in volunteering.

CASA for Kids— Kalispell

Becky Langley is one of seven sisters, a mother of two grown daughters, and grandmother to four grandchildren. After many years of chipping away at the education block she achieved a masters degree in social work and is now a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She enjoyed a private practice in Washington state, and decided to set aside this year to serve as the VISTA for Kalispell's CASA for Kids.

"The VISTA work is interesting and challenging because I am much more comfortable with one-on-one direct service and so much of the VISTA work is to indirectly enhance the service of others," Becky said. "It has been a privilege to meet the many CASA volunteers who work tirelessly for the welfare of our children."

Theresa Magers is the new CASA Volunteer Coordinator for the Flathead County CASA program. She was born and raised in

Montana. Theresa is a fulltime student and mother; she has a blended family of seven children ranging in age from 8 to 21 years old. She and her family like to ski, camp, hunt, and fish as well as do many other outdoor activities. She started looking for volunteer work in 2004, and chose CASA because of her desire to help children, she said, "I felt that I would be able to relate to the kids because of my experience in foster care. It is this continued desire to help children and families that led to my applying for, and accepting the position of Volunteer Coordinator in July of 2007."

CASA of Montana

AmeriCorps VISTA **Santella Baglivo** will finish her year in Helena in January, working with Helena Advocates for Kids and CASA of Montana. She provided great assistance in moving the CASA office through the transition when Melanie Dayton left last January and has helped on the operation of the office.

Sandy has coordinated newsletters, website updates, outreach to new areas, and she even learned to drive a U-Haul truck for the Park-2-Park Montana ride. She and Alexis Johnson were up early every day loading the

U-Haul with rider luggage.

Sandy will return to Levittown, Long Island to see her family in February. She'll come back to Helena in March to work with the Montana Conservation Corp. until August. She's not sure of her plans after that stint. We will miss her in the office, but we're glad she won't leave Montana yet. Thank you, Sandy, for your hard work.

Meanwhile, our new VISTA **Rebecca Harbage** will start in January after new VISTA training Jan. 14-17. She is a 2007 graduate of Barnard College of New York City and will drive from her home in Norway, Maine across the country to Helena.

"When I was looking for AmeriCorps programs, I knew I wanted to work with a demographic that might be similar to where I grew up, in Maine, but I was eager to live in a new part of the country," Rebecca said. "I am awestruck by nature and love to be surrounded by it, especially mountains. Also, as shocking as it is to many people, I actually enjoy living in cold climates."

Donations may be sent to CASA of Montana, P.O. Box 1046, Helena, MT 59624 or made online at www.casagal.org.

Program Spotlight

Yellowstone CASA part of Empowering Youth Project

Yellowstone CASA is one of eight nonprofit organizations participating in a three-year Yellowstone County Empowering Youth Project. The collaborating agencies partner with the lead agency, Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch. The Project is designed to help community and faith-based organizations serving at-risk children and families improve their capacity to serve their constituents. Mary Hernandez is the executive director of the \$750,000 Compassion Capital Fund Empowering Youth grant. The Project is in the second year of funding.

Yellowstone CASA is the recipient of a \$10,000 donation from Nance Petroleum of Billings. Thank you to this Billings area business who has generously donated to Yellowstone CASA for the past four years.

CASA of Missoula Moves to Bigger Office

A new office for CASA of Missoula is perfect for adding additional employees, interns/practicum's, and will offer more opportunities in the future for further expansion. The new address is 127 E Main, Ste 217, Missoula MT 59802. The phone, email, fax, and mailing address will remain the same.

CASA of Missoula hopes to build the office staff to three or four employees. Right now the office includes Executive Director Dave McAlpin, Volunteer Coordinator Julie Skillicorn and a part-time office administrator. In January, they plan to add a student social worker who will do a MSW practicum on Family Court committee and other projects. The new office is now handicap accessible with an elevator. The office is close to the Childcare Resources Center, which has offered CASA the use of their conference room on the third floor. This space will allow for on-site volunteer training and continuing education for CASAs.

Sixth Judicial's Park 2 Park Cheese Wafers

- 2 cups (8 Oz.) shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 cup butter or margarine, softened
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon ground red pepper (cayenne)
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups Rice Crispies

Beat first 6 ingredients at medium speed with an electric mixer until blended. Knead in cereal. Shape into 1-inch balls; arrange on baking sheets. Flatten each ball with a fork.

Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes or until very lightly browned.

(Recipe requested by hungry Park-2-Park bike riders enjoying good food in Livingston.)



**CASA OF
MONTANA**
131 Reeder's Alley
Helena, MT 59601

**[We're on the Web!
www.casagal.org]**

Town Pump Helps CASA Grow

Every year Town Pump hosts a Charity Golf Event that benefits three Montana charities. This is the third year that CASA of Montana, Inc. has received a check from that event, totaling nearly \$10,000.

Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained volunteers appointed by judges to speak out for the best interest of a child who has been removed from their home through no fault of their own. These children, who have suffered abuse or neglect, are usually in foster and group homes. About 400 CASA volunteers are advocating for nearly 1,000 children through 15 local CASA programs.

Our mission is to provide a CASA for every child who needs one in Montana. We want every child to have a safe, nurturing home. This fall, more than 60 volunteers were trained in local programs across the state. Town Pump helps CASA to reach more children, by educating Montanans about CASA and helping local programs recruit and train new volunteers.

CASA volunteers get to know the child, the parents and other adults in that child's life. They write a report for the judge that's influential on whether the child returns home or finds an adoptive or foster home. To find out more information on CASA programs or how to volunteer or donate, please see our website at www.casagal.org or call 866 863 2272.

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