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July 9, 2010– For release immediately

Americorp VISTA rides for CASA and abused children

A Helena youth home VISTA worker will join more than 35 riders signed up for the Sixth Annual Park-2-Park bike ride across Montana for abused and neglected children. The riders include two Washington, D.C. riders, one from Idaho, Florida, and cities and small towns all over Montana. Law enforcement officers in Billings and Bozeman assist them, with the support of the Montana Police Protective Association.

The Sixth Annual Park-2-Park Montana ride is planned for Sept 6-10, 2010. The route will take cyclists from St. Mary – on the eastern side of Glacier National Park – through spectacular scenery down along US 89 through Dupuyer, Choteau, Great Falls, White Sulphur Springs and Livingston and conclude at Gardiner near Yellowstone National Park.

Less than 15 slots are still open on the fully supported ride, but the registration cost goes up from \$495 to \$595 on July 15. The registration cost includes four nights of lodging, all meals and snacks, and support along the way. See www.park2parkMontana.org for more information. Riders are expected to raise at least \$300 in pledges and a custom bike jersey is awarded to those who raise \$800 or more.

John Lewis, a 25-year-old VISTA volunteer and Oregon native will be CASA's sponsored rider this year. An active volunteer leader with Hands On Greater Portland, John attended Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon and graduated in 2007 with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and English. Yearning for a challenge and a chance to dedicate himself to a single project, John joined Americorps as a VISTA and began working with Montana Youth Homes.

John was inspired to bike the 400 miles when CASA directly assisted one of his youths. He was very impressed with the compassion, empathy, and experience by the individual CASA for that particular youth. When he heard about the bike ride he realized that this was a way he could give back to an organization that directly supported the one that he worked for.

“A chance to bike 400 miles across some of the most beautiful country in North America, AND have the effort support the well-being of young people in need? How could anyone say no?”

Some projects that John Lewis is currently working on include coordinating a group of young volunteers from Kingsland Baptist Church in Houston to landscape gardening, painting, and preparing areas for a major tree planting project later this fall. These youth will be working alongside the residents of Montana youth homes, giving both groups an opportunity to share cultural backgrounds and experiences. In



addition, John is also raising a bed project for August, where he and others will be showing our youth how to construct and prepare organic garden beds. The results of these gardens will be a large harvest of fresh fruit and vegetables to be incorporated into the youths daily meals.

Last year 45 riders raised almost \$50,000 for CASA and that's the goal for this year's ride again. Court Appointed Special Advocates are volunteers that speak for nearly 900 children in Montana who are in the court abuse and neglect system through no fault of their own. You can give or watch the donation totals for the event at a special website connected to CASA's website www.Park2ParkMontana.org.

The road bike riders come from across the state, including Dutton, Shelby, Havre, Bozeman, Whitefish, Billings, Kalispell, Missoula, Helena, Great Falls and more. Each rider can set up an individual website for giving attached to the CASA site.

Platinum sponsors of the event include the Lodge Bar and Grill of Rollins, JCT Construction of Ballantine, Jim and Janet Charbonneau, ALPS Insurance, Presidio Medical Reinsurance and the Montana Police Protective Association. Law enforcement officers in Billings and Bozeman are part of the driving force behind this year's volunteer organizing committee. Gold Sponsors are the Helena Bicycle Club, Bruce Swinney, the Townhouse Inn of Great Falls, Alan Nicholson of Great Northern, Big Sky Dental Group, St. Mary's/East Glacier KOA, Lewis, Slovak, Kovacich & Marr, P.C and Hammer Nutrition. Silver sponsors include Billings Police Protective Association, Crane Chiropractic PLLC, Deputy Sheriff Benevolence Association, First Interstate, Morrison-Maierle, Montana Marketing, New West Health Systems, Northwestern Energy, The Spoke Shop, SSI Business Equipment, Valet Today cleaners, Bozeman police, Valley Bank and The Neighborhood Office of Helena.

CASA of Montana is seeking additional sponsors for the ride. It is a great opportunity to showcase support for Montana's children. Sponsor levels are Platinum - \$1,500, Gold - \$750 and Silver - \$300. Businesses also can sponsor a local bike rider.

Daily ride distances are 55-100 miles. The ride begins at the St. Mary's/ East Glacier KOA campground in St. Mary. Local CASA programs, including CASA for Kids (Kalispell), Front Range CASA in Choteau, Great Falls CASA CAN, Gallatin County CASA/GAL and 6th Judicial CASA in Livingston will provide meals, snacks and support services for the riders as they come through their area.

See www.Park2ParkMontana.org or www.casagal.org for more details on CASA of Montana. Call 866 863 2272 or e-mail info@casagal.org.