



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CASA OF TRAVIS COUNTY, INC.

Annual Report 2008

CASA of Travis County, Inc. recruits, screens, trains and supervises volunteers to provide "guardian ad litem" representation for abused and neglected children to help them reach a safe and permanent home.

Letter from the Executive Director

In 2008, we at CASA of Travis County were deeply gratified to see an unprecedented focus on the needs of children in the Child Protective Services (CPS) system in our community. Such exceptional recognition for our cause will hopefully deliver the support we need in 2009 as our country moves deeper into these rocky financial times.

The Austin American-Statesman published a groundbreaking series of articles in September 2008 to explain exactly how “the system” works, following the experiences of children, their families, and all the other parties through CPS cases. CASA received special attention including an interview with volunteer advocate, Carolyn Nicewarner, and thorough explanations of the crucial role we play in the courtroom: “After [Judge] Byrne calls each case, a rough semicircle forms before her bench... At the end of the arc stand two of the most influential people in the courtroom — the children’s lawyer and the CASA, or court-appointed special advocate, a volunteer charged with watching for the child’s best interest. Judges rely heavily on both when deciding where to place children in foster care and whether to return a child home.” This series of articles and the even more comprehensive web series that accompanied it may have been the very first exposure that many people in Austin had to a side of life that they might rather assume did not exist.

In October, a powerful and pervasive series of paid advertisements funded by Casey Family Programs provided an even more compelling message impossible to ignore. The Raise Me Up Campaign, of which CASA of Travis County was honored to be a part, began with television ads and a press conference, and expanded to include radio, print and bus ads. Casey Family Programs piloted this campaign here and estimated that 95% of the Austin media market was exposed to the campaign at least two dozen times. CASA and other partners noticed an increase in web traffic and in inquiries from prospective volunteers, and Casey’s before-and-after testing found significantly increased awareness of the needs of foster children among citizens of Travis County.



Awareness is the first step toward action. Becoming a CASA volunteer or supporting CASA through financial contributions are two critically important ways to make a difference in the lives of abused and neglected children. National CASA CEO, Michael Piraino, recently stated that, “Reports suggest that the economic collapse is already contributing to an increase in child maltreatment. Many families are now stressed beyond their ability to cope. In times like this, more is demanded of us.” While many are struggling, it is important to realize that children are often feeling the greatest negative impact of these tough economic times. Consider what you may be able to do to help. You can make a difference.

Sincerely,

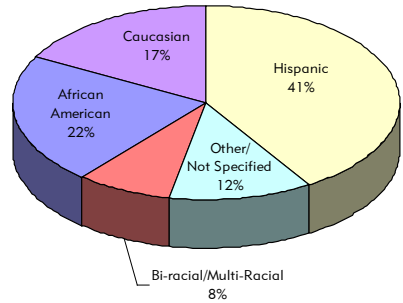
Handwritten signature of Laura D. Wolf in cursive script.

Laura D. Wolf, Executive Director

2008 Program Report

- CASA served 1,156 child victims of abuse and neglect.
- Judges appointed CASA to cases for 420 new children.
- CASA advocated at 2,411 court hearings, submitted 1,361 court reports and attended 1,170 meetings on behalf of children.

Child Ethnicity



CASA kids enjoyed a fun afternoon in April hosted by Alpha Kappa Alpha including an egg hunt and other activities.

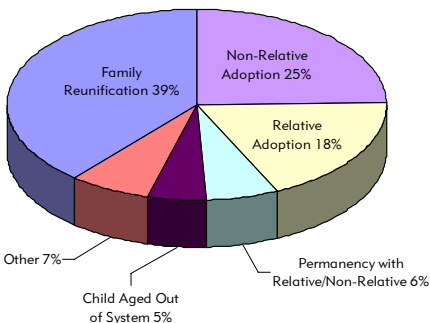
- CASA served 75% of the total number of children in need of a CASA advocate in Travis County in 2008.
- 80% of the children served had a volunteer assigned to their case.
- CASA has retained 52% of volunteers since 2007.

- CASA supported 388 volunteers assigned to cases and working with children.
- 155 new volunteers began CASA training to become advocates; 80 volunteers finished training to become advocates.
- CASA volunteers donated more than 30,500 hours and travelled more than 184,000 miles in service to children last year.



CASA volunteers Ferd and Nita Stehling at the Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event in April.

Child Case Closures



- CASA helped close cases for 449 children last year.
- 88% of children whose cases closed were placed in a permanent placement, including family reunification, adoption or permanent managing conservatorship with a safe family or relative.

Major Accomplishments in 2008

Drug Court

CASA of Travis County partnered with the Travis County courts and several other local service providers to begin planning for Drug Court in 2007. Judge Darlene Byrne led the project and involved CASA from the start to protect the best interests of children in this new endeavor. In 2008, we accepted our first case.

Drug Court is an innovative program serving families with drug abuse and addiction problems. Once admitted into Drug Court, parents agree to participate in in- and out-patient services, attend weekly meetings and hearings and fully engage in their service plan. During the case, CASA ensures that the children are safe and that their needs are met. Because of the all-encompassing nature of the program, we are able to provide unparalleled wrap-around services with other organizations to help ensure the most positive case outcome possible.



Executive Director Laura Wolf with The Honorable Darlene Byrne after she accepted the Texas CASA Judge of the Year Award (nominated by CASA of Travis County).

Model Court

In part because of the innovative approach of Drug Court, the Travis County courts have been selected by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to serve as a Model Court. Model Courts throughout the nation are tasked to “identify impediments to the timeliness of court events and delivery of services for families with children in care, and then design and implement court- and agency-based changes to address these barriers” (www.NCJFCJ.org). CASA of Travis County is very pleased to be able to be a part of this process to protect and advocate for the best interests of children. We feel we are able to offer a unique and special insight into these cases so that the judge and other collaborators have a deeper understanding of the needs of the children. Our Executive Director, Laura Wolf, is a member of the Travis County Model Court Executive Committee with other leaders, including Judges Darlene Byrne, John Hathaway and Bill King and CPS Region 7 Director Shelia Brown.

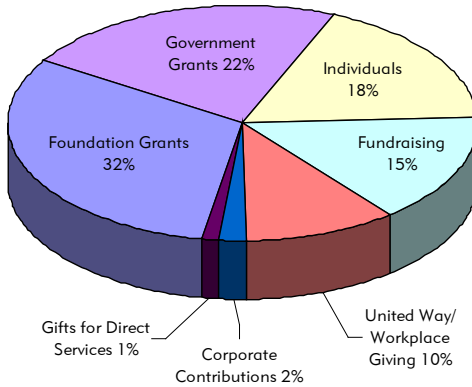
Disproportionality

CASA is involved in the Travis County Disproportionality Advisory Group and is examining the issues surrounding the over-representation of African-American and Hispanic children in foster care. Several of our staff members and volunteers have participated in “Knowing Who You Are” trainings and “Undoing Racism” workshops offered by CPS to train professionals and others in these issues. Two CASA of Travis County staff, Lydia Garcia and Sonia Kotecha, are certified “Knowing Who You Are” trainers. In the next year, we expect to continue working on providing better outcomes for African-American and Hispanic children in the child welfare system in Texas.

Fiscal Year Report

Revenue Sources

2008 Audited Revenues: \$1,906,390

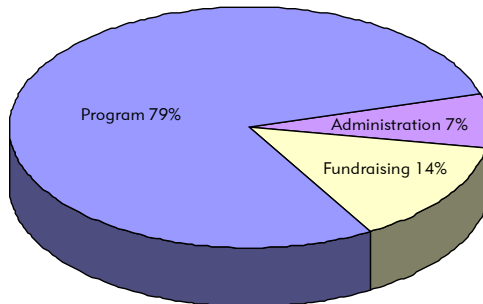


“To me CASA means that our children have a chance. The children I see that have CASAs have a greater chance of leading normal, happy, healthy lives. CASAs make a difference in a way that words can never express. We hope as time progresses that we will have a CASA for every child and every family. That’s a dream right now, and hopefully it will become a reality.”

Retired Judge W. Jeanne Meurer

Organization Expenditures

2008 Audited Expenses: \$1,665,848



Our Major Donors

Thank you to our major donors of \$1,000 or more in 2008! Your support helped CASA serve new children who entered the child welfare system alone and frightened.

Individual Donors

Kathleen & David Allen

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