



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CASA OF MORRIS AND
SUSSEX COUNTIES, INC.

ANNUAL REPORT
CASA OF MORRIS AND SUSSEX COUNTIES

2014

Our mission is to speak up for the best interests of children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. We recruit, train and supervise community volunteers who provide a voice in court to assure each child a safe, permanent and nurturing home.



Continuing to make a difference



A message from Our Executive Director

On any given day in Morris and Sussex Counties there are over 450 children in the foster care system. These children are shuffled from placement to placement, constantly having to adjust to new surroundings, new caregivers and many times to new schools.

This year 404 of these children had a CASA volunteer to be their voice, make sure they had the appropriate educational and medical resources they required, and hold their hands to guide them through the cavernous foster care system into the light of a safe, permanent, nurturing home.

CASA volunteers worked to see 151 children reach a place of permanency and enjoy better tomorrows. The stories and accomplishments of our CASA volunteers are what keep me going when I am at my desk working behind-the-scenes at CASA.

When a judge quotes from a CASA volunteer's court report and makes her decision for the case based on a CASA volunteer's recommendations, CASA has truly made a difference.

When a teen who has run away and doesn't know where to turn reaches out and calls her CASA volunteer, CASA has truly made a difference.

When a foster parent calls the CASA office to tell me that due to the support and dedication of a CASA volunteer, he has decided to adopt his foster child, CASA has truly made a difference.

When a birth mother tells me that she was able to concentrate on her difficult road to sobriety because she had the support of a CASA volunteer and because she knew the volunteer was watching out for her child, CASA has truly made a difference.

Our CASA volunteers are making a difference, in small and in heroic ways – all adding up to better tomorrows for vulnerable children.

I am so grateful for the continued support of our CASA volunteers and our donors. Our work together is just beginning.

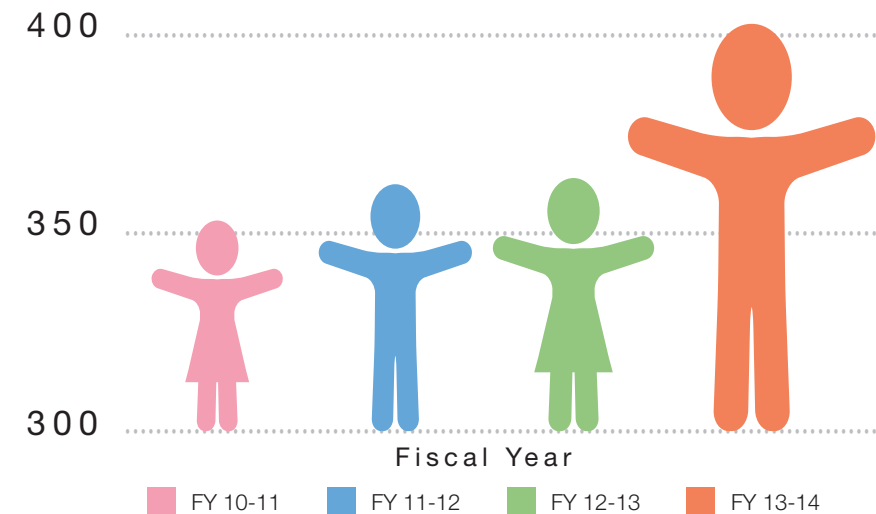
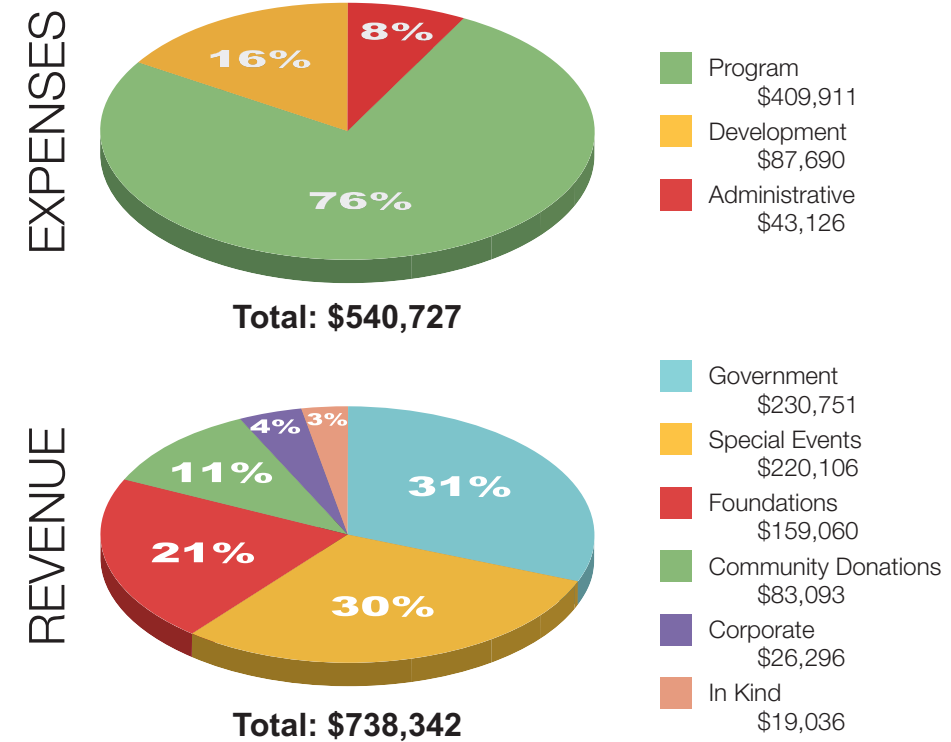
Lisa Barsky Firkser

Lisa Barsky Firkser, Ph.D.
Executive Director



Highlights of Fiscal Year 2014

July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2014



This past year...

404 Children have been served – our largest yearly number ever
151 Children have found safe, loving homes
167 Active Volunteers have been involved
8,399 Hours of Services have been provided by volunteers
69,544 Miles Have Been Driven in New Jersey by volunteers
\$212,747 of Child Advocacy Services Have Been Provided based on an hourly dollar value of \$25.33 in 2013, as calculated by the Independent Sector.

Look into the eyes of a child you love and think about what you hope they will experience in life. Then, think of a child in placement who truly knows what fear, loneliness, pain, sadness and despair are. Doesn't he/she deserve a chance to achieve at least a few of those same good experiences? These children are so very fragile. We have to care and help wherever we can!

– L. Straub, CASA Volunteer

The CASA provides a degree of stability in the child's life. Particularly in a situation where the child is subjected to multiple placements, the CASA is a constant presence.

– L. Gibson, CASA Volunteer

There is a need in our world for kindness and understanding. Children should not have to bear the burden of being raised in major dysfunction. Whatever we can do to make even one child's life better will pay dividends down the road.

– CASA Volunteer

I like being that bridge that makes sure that a child is getting all of the services they need – being that consistent person.

– C. Gildersleeve, CASA Volunteer

As a former Marine, my ambition in life as a young teen was to serve and protect my country, and I really enjoy the fact that I am still serving my country in a new light by protecting and serving children as a CASA volunteer.

– D. Balaguer, CASA Volunteer

Highlights of 2014

CASA Initiates Fostering Futures to Transition Youth from Foster Care to Adulthood

Fostering Futures prepares youth in foster care for adulthood before they age-out of the system and no longer receive the resources and supervision mandated by federal law for foster children. Most of these teens struggle toward independence and are at high risk of becoming homeless, pregnant or incarcerated.

They also face challenges in school, employment, housing stability, and maintaining positive relationships with caring adults.

Currently 20 youth are assigned to CASA volunteer mentors and are already showing positive outcomes in the areas of education, employment, housing, life skills and physical/behavioral health.

CASA must take on the role to reverse negative outcomes, and guide and empower youth to become their own advocates. The Fostering Futures program will prepare them to achieve their full potential beyond foster care.

For as long as he could remember, Joseph lived a transient life with his mother. One morning he woke up and found that his mother had left town, leaving him to fend for himself. Joseph was completely alone at age 16 and unprepared to be self-sufficient. He entered the foster-care system, and was urgently assigned a CASA volunteer. This volunteer helped him navigate the child-welfare system, and is now acting as a mentor through our new Fostering Futures program to prepare Joseph for independent living.



Lisa Firkser, First Lady of New Jersey Mary Pat Christie, and Christina Baker Kline



Mindy Beck, Ron Olerenshaw, and Aimee Ross



CASA Volunteers who Weave Lives Together

Over 200 People Come Out to Give A Child A Voice

On May 8th, we held our *Give a Child a Voice* annual fundraising gala honoring longtime CASA ambassador and child advocate Mindy Beck, who has been a CASA volunteer since 1997, and has advocated for 10 children over the last 17 years.

It was in Mindy Beck's home that the National Council of Jewish Women voted to start a CASA chapter in Morris County back in 1986. Mindy currently serves on our Board of Trustees. The first foster child for whom she advocated attended the gala and spoke about the positive impact she had on his life.

At the event, *New York Times* Best Selling author Christina Baker Kline presented her newest book, *Orphan Train*, whose main characters mirror the youth served by CASA. Their uncertain futures and yearnings to belong are typical of many children in the foster care system.

First Lady of New Jersey, Mary Pat Christie, attended the gala to show her support for CASA and learn more about our mission and the plight of foster children in Morris and Sussex Counties.

No Matter the Weather – the Community Supports CASA

A deluge of rain did not deter the dedicated runners and walkers who participated in the Tenth Annual Lawyers for Kids 5K Run event on July 10th. This run is a partnership between the Morris County Bar Foundation and CASA of Morris and Sussex Counties.

The Honorable Michael Wright sang "America the Beautiful," and the Honorable Thomas Weisenbeck signaled runners to start. The total registration of runners, walkers and children for the kids gallop was 526, which was very impressive for such a rainy evening.

"The Morris County Bar Foundation has been a special friend and strong supporter of CASA for over ten years. They are a group of lawyers dedicated to giving back to the community," says Lisa Firkser, Executive Director.



CASA Volunteer, Dot Walek adds to the weaving

At CASA, We Weave Lives Together

Over 75 people came together to enjoy food, live music and fellowship as we recognized our volunteers for their dedication and years of service. Staff, Board Members and Volunteers all participated in the activity to literally weave strands of hand-dyed yarn and ribbons onto a 100 year old spinning wheel. The event was made possible by the collaboration and support of Lynn Devereux of the Page Hill Foundation and Susie Schub, President of Caring Capital™, an arts consulting firm that designs and leads philanthropic arts events. Monica Litvany, a local artist, guided guests as they added to the weaving.

We are all part of this fabric that is called humanity and CASA helps to keep that fabric together by being a strong and supportive system for children in foster care. CASA helps to make sure that children have the happiest endings possible. I have been fortunate through my work as a CASA to see so many happy endings.

L. Specter, CASA volunteer

The Morris School District Supports CASA with Coins for a Cause

CASA of Morris and Sussex Counties was the top vote-getter in the Morris School District's 2014 *Coins for a Cause* charity fundraiser. As the winning charity, CASA was awarded \$12,000, from students' coin collections and an additional \$1,000 which was contributed by Provident Bank, *Coins for a Cause* partner.

Coins for a Cause is part of the Morris School District's innovative civics and character education curriculum which strives to make clear the connection between casting an informed vote and the outcome of an election.

The Morris School District is to be commended for its commitment to teaching children the importance of voting and giving back to the community in such a tangible and meaningful way.



Students and Faculty representing the Morris School District



Wells Fargo Employees Go Blue for CASA

Morris and Sussex Counties Go Blue for CASA

To raise awareness for children who are victims of abuse and neglect during April's National Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month, New Jersey's Governor Chris Christie designated Friday, April 4th, as "CASA Child Advocate Day." CASA of Morris and Sussex Counties recognized this day by engaging the community to "Go Blue" by wearing denim to school or work. Each participant donated \$5 to CASA. The goal of this event was not only to raise funds, but also to heighten awareness of the plight of the most vulnerable children in the community. Law firms, businesses and schools participated to raise over \$15,000.



Employees at Lakeland Bank enjoy Going Blue

Thank You to Our Supporters this Fiscal Year

It takes a Community to fund CASA of Morris and Sussex Counties. Thank you to the Businesses, Community Groups, Corporations, Foundations, and Schools who supported us this year. Our donors are all very important to us. To protect the privacy of our individual donors, we have not listed their names.

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