

2005 Annual Report

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Inc. of Larimer County

A constant in a world that seems to have no stability...an ear for a child that feels he isn't heard...the voice for a child who can't speak for herself. These are the things that a CASA volunteer is.

CASA of Larimer County, established in 1984, is a non-profit organization that trains and supervises community volunteers who advocate for children who are the victims of abuse and/or neglect. They get to know these children and the intricacies of their cases. They listen to the child and help them understand the complicated and sometimes frightening child welfare system. They document their findings and report to the Court, making sure the child's best interests are represented. And often, they are the only one who stays with them until they have a permanent home. Children often find themselves with various caseworkers, in multiple foster homes and schools and separated from their siblings, friends, pets and almost everything that is familiar to them. The CASA volunteer stays with them throughout all these changes, most typically for 12-18 months, but sometimes longer, until they have a stable, safe and loving home.

CASA also provides services through the two Harmony House locations in Loveland and Fort Collins. In this safe, comfortable environment children can interact with their non-custodial family members. These children may be in foster care due to abuse and neglect or their parents may be going through a contentious divorce and need a safe, neutral place for custody exchanges. All visits and exchanges are supervised by volunteers and/ or staff, factually documenting interactions and ensuring the child's comfort and safety. This documentation is utilized by the Court in making placement and custody decisions that are in the best interest of the child.

The CASA Board of Directors is a diverse and active group, representing a cross section of the community and meeting every third Monday of the month at the Fort Collins Harmony House location at 11:30 A.M. Board members serve three year terms, renewable for additional terms, providing both stability and fresh insight.

Services Provided in 2005

16 new CASA volunteers were sworn in by Chief District Judge James Hiatt during 2005. These volunteers spent over 30 hours of intensive training in all aspects of child abuse related issues to become effective advocates for abused and neglected children. Fifty CASA volunteers were the voice for 142 children this year, giving over 3,900 hours to this important and often difficult volunteer work.

The Harmony House Visitation Centers continue to strive to provide children and families a homelike environment where they can interact in healthy, positive ways under the supervision of trained volunteers who ensure the children's safety from further trauma that results from abuse, neglect or difficult divorce situations. In 2005 29 volunteers joined our team and helped the Harmony Houses provide 218 children from 137 families with over 4,400 visitations and custody exchanges.

While substance abuse, particularly methamphetamine, continues to be a pervasive problem in Larimer County, we are grateful for the support of our volunteers and the community so we can reach the innocent victims whose lives are so deeply affected by this and other family stressors. Grants and donations from V.A.L. E., the Bohemian Foundation, United Way, the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado, A.V. Hunter Trust, Sertoma and the Fort Collins Newcomers Alumni Association along with many very generous individuals, businesses and organizations help ensure that these children continue to have a voice when they are unable to speak for themselves.