



Board Members and Donors: Crucial to the Success of CASA

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Thirty-five years ago, just out of undergraduate school, I worked for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare as a program analyst. I spent three years traveling through impoverished areas in the South, conducting interviews with public assistance recipients. All of the cases involved children, and many of them had been neglected or abused in some way. I was not a social worker, so it was relatively easy to be a detached observer. I spent a few hours with the family, wrote up my findings, and moved on to the next case.

Five years ago, I decided it was time to get involved. I learned about Georgia CASA and its work as a voice for the kind of children I saw daily all those years ago. I became a member of the Georgia CASA Board of Directors and have willingly given my time and money to its cause. I have been Vice Chair of the Board for the past two years, and beginning in July, I will serve as Chair for the next two years. In my work on the Board, I completely agree with what fellow board member Kristin Sickling with Coastal Plain CASA (Tifton, Georgia) says, "Through my work with CASA, I know that I am making a difference in the lives of children! If even one child is protected from abuse or neglect, the work I do and the money I donate will be well worth it."

A nonprofit organization cannot fulfill its mission to meet the needs of the community it serves without board members and donors who are willing to be involved, both actively and financially. Board members provide important leadership roles in establishing the goals and objectives of the nonprofit as well as offering a diversity of opinion that helps formulate sound policy decisions. They also lead and participate in special events and help with fundraising, whether directly or indirectly, through established community contacts. Donors can include individuals, foundations, corporations, and government entities, as well as in-kind donors. They provide the financial life blood that a nonprofit needs in order to keep operating. Donors are essentially the safety net that allows most nonprofits to meet their operating budgets each year.

Georgia CASA was founded by Karen N. Sibley in 1988, along with co-founders Kathie Gannon and Nicki Vaughan. All three of these women were pivotal to the success of the CASA organization in Georgia through their involvement as founders and later as members of the Board of Directors of Georgia CASA. They still support CASA today as donors. Karen Sibley and Nicki Vaughan are now Life Board Members, as are six other individuals. There have been many other Board members who have been instrumental to CASA, not only at Georgia CASA, but also statewide. Throughout the state, over 500 people currently serve as board members of the CASA organizations in their communities.

Also pivotal to CASA's success in Georgia have been major donors of Georgia CASA throughout the years. Some of the largest foundational and governmental donors in Georgia CASA's history have included the Georgia Bar Foundation, Georgia Department of Human Resources, Goizueta Foundation, Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation, and other anonymous foundations and donors.

For Georgia CASA, its donors enable the organization to continue the expansion of CASA across the state and provide needed services to its affiliate programs. These services give affiliates tools to enable them to provide the highest quality of advocacy possible to the children served. As stakeholders in the CASA organization, we should all be working together toward a shared vision for each abused or neglected child involved in juvenile court proceedings to have a CASA volunteer to advocate for his/her best interests and be placed in a safe, permanent home where he/she can thrive.

Board members and donors give of their time and money because they believe the cause is worthy. They like to feel that their contributions make a difference in the lives of others. It is important that CASA's financial supporters know their donations have a direct effect on the children that need their help. Georgia CASA's most recent financial audit indicated that 90% of the funds received are passed through to the affiliates as they work to provide CASA volunteers for the children in their communities.

The world, as we as we once knew it, has changed dramatically over the past six months. We face a more uncertain future. Government budgets everywhere are in deficit and many services available to the most vulnerable members of our society are being reduced. The children CASA serves will continue to need strong advocacy both in and out of the courtroom. As Priscilla Olson, Board Chair of Mountain Circuit CASA, (Toccoa, Georgia) shares, "While the circumstances of the children we serve are often overwhelming, I am proud of the work done by CASA volunteers in their efforts to be a child's voice in court. I am further encouraged by the compassion and generosity that exists in my community and the willingness of neighbors to support these efforts." The efforts of CASA's board members and donors will be more important than ever if CASA is to fulfill its shared vision for a safe and permanent home for each child in need. ❖

Article written by Frank Inman, Vice Chair, Georgia CASA Board of Directors