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Murray/Whitfield CASA, Program of Family Support Council, Receives *Innovative Program Award of Excellence* from Georgia CASA

Atlanta, Aug. 28, 2020 – Murray/Whitfield CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), whose sponsoring agency is Family Support Council, has received the 2020 Innovative Program Award of Excellence from Georgia CASA for innovative practices in diversification and growth of funding, advances in volunteer recruitment and training, and enhanced advocacy for children.

Under the Family Support Council, Murray/Whitfield CASA worked to diversity its funding base starting four years ago, and since then, the CASA program's budget and capacity have expanded, allowing for much needed staff training opportunities and marketing possibilities never before seen. The CASA program has become more well-known in the community, and regularly uses a variety of TV, radio, print, outdoor, and digital ads for volunteer recruitment. Additionally, Murray/Whitfield CASA is an active participant in the local chambers of commerce and child welfare collaboratives and participates in ongoing community speaking engagements.

The pre-service training for CASA volunteers has been strengthened and three trainings are now offered each year. Once volunteers are trained, they are fully committed to serve children and recognized for their efforts through a commemorative swearing-in ceremony and reception. The number of new volunteers from previous years has nearly doubled, with the largest number of volunteers ever being reached in 2018.

Murray/Whitfield CASA has employed additional innovative techniques by improving overall advocacy practices and policies, hosting monthly in-service trainings to keep volunteers on the cutting edge of advocacy, conducting annual programmatic evaluations, and publicly appreciating volunteers on a monthly basis. The CASA program has also stewarded strong, supportive relationships with the local Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and foster parents.

Juvenile Court Judge G. Jason Southern stated, "On behalf of Murray County and Whitfield County Juvenile Court, I congratulate our local CASA program for the much-deserved award. Our work with children depends on our partners in the community and our local CASA provides an invaluable service to our community, our juvenile courts, and our children. Our Murray/Whitfield CASA program deserves recognition for the exceptional job they do, information they provide to the Court, and advocacy they provide for our children."

CASA is a nationwide and statewide organization with community volunteers who provide compassionate, one-on-one attention, offering children experiencing foster care hope for a brighter childhood and future that comes from growing up in a healthy, supportive, permanent family and a successful transition to adulthood with supportive connections, educational achievements, and life skills.

Last year, 2,700 CASA volunteers served over 11,000 children in Georgia. Currently, 46 CASA programs are located across Georgia, serving 156 counties. For more information about Murray/Whitfield CASA, visit <http://familysupportcouncil.com/programs/casa.php> or call 706-428-7934. For more information about CASA in Georgia, visit www.gacasa.org or call 404-874-2888.

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