

## CASA JD6 Program History

In 2002 the Honorable Judge Nels Swandal called for the creation of a local CASA/GAL program in the Sixth Judicial District. Local attorneys and community leaders established a board of directors and created this program within the District. Local attorneys supported us financially, enabling us to train our initial ten volunteers.

The Sixth Judicial District serves two counties (Park and Sweet Grass) which cover an area of 4,511 square miles and comprise a population of 19,303. Both counties are considered rural and remote. Both counties lie in one judicial district with a district courthouse in each county. There is one presiding judge, the Honorable Judge Nels Swandal. However, the two counties comprising the 6th Judicial District are served by two different regional social service systems.

We received our 501(c)(3) status in 2002, and established a board of directors which includes community members from both Park and Sweet Grass Counties. We have since compiled our by-laws, articles of Incorporation, board policies and procedures, financial policies and volunteer policies and procedures. We have “errors and omissions” insurance on all board members, officers, and volunteers.

In 2003 we recruited our first wave of volunteers, scheduled trainings, and assembled appropriate paperwork (applications, references, fingerprints, etc.). Going forward, the main responsibilities of board members are to manage the Program Director, support future fundraising endeavors, and to recruit additional volunteers and future board members.

Prior to January 2004, children in abuse-and-neglect proceedings in the Sixth Judicial District were represented by local attorneys assigned by the Court. Under the “No Child Left Behind” Program, the Federal Government mandated that all guardians ad litem receive certified training by June 2004. It is commonly accepted that the National CASA/GAL Program is the standard training program, and the State of Montana will model its training program after the National CASA/GAL Program. In January 2004 we received our first abuse and neglect case. Beginning in that month, our first wave of specially trained CASA/GAL volunteers were assigned cases in the Sixth Judicial District. Historically, Park County serves twenty to thirty cases yearly and Sweet Grass County serves one to five cases yearly.

In 2004, the Program also began seeking various funding sources. Funding included private donations, the State of Montana Court Assessment Program, United Way of the

Greater Gallatin, and State case reimbursement. We were able to acquire free office space and free printing services. The fall of 2004 saw us hiring a part time Program Director.

In 2005, the Program received funding from private donations, both Park and Sweet Grass Counties, United Way of the Greater Gallatin, National CASA and State case reimbursement. We continued to serve 100% of the cases in our district with 20 Volunteers.

In 2006, we were able to continue with the same funding sources and continued to meet 100% of the cases with 25 Volunteers.

In 2007 we lost our free office space and moved the office to 1313 West Park, Suite 21. In February 2007 we hired additional staff, a part time Program Administrator. 2007 saw the program paying for the bulk of its printing expenses. Our funding sources continued to be private donations, Park and Sweet Grass Counties, United Way of the Greater Gallatin, State case reimbursement, and a grant from Jewelers for Children. We noted that 48% of our cases involved parents using methamphetamines. This compared favorably to 68% in 2006 and 60% in 2005. Meth use continues to be slightly higher than the state average. 31 Volunteers served in 100% of the cases.

In 2008, the program continued to have its office at the West Park Street location. We were also fortunate to be able to report that our 2007 funding sources have remained constant. The office continued to operate with two part time staff. We saw a 4% increase (52%) of our cases related to methamphetamine using parents. Thankfully this is still way below our 68% high in 2006. Our volunteer base remains steady at 31, serving 100% of the cases!

In 2008–09, The Honorable Nels Swandal was awarded the CASA JUDGE of the YEAR at the 2009 CASA/CAN conference in Helena at an award luncheon April 21st. Presenting the award was Chief Justice Jim Rice. Over 500 people were in attendance for the presentation. We remain in our same office space. We continue to serve 100% of the Abuse and Neglect cases with 31 volunteers. We operated the office with two part time staff.

In 2009–10, we saw the expansion of our office space at a new location in the Livingston Plaza. This has allowed us to create a volunteer station and a room for us to hold monthly board meetings and private meetings with clients. We established a fresh baked donut booth at the local Farmers Market to attract conversation and increase public

awareness of what the CASA program does. We continued with our Bugle for Kids Event and publicized it at the Farmers Market as well.

This past year the program mailed out and compiled a survey in order to evaluate our Public Awareness campaign over the past four years. Ann Schilling was awarded the PROGRAM DIRECTOR of the YEAR at the annual CASA/CAN conference in Helena. Presenting the award were Chief Justice Jim Rice and Ellen Bush, the State CASA Executive Director. Over 500 people were in attendance. In 2009, the meth component in our cases dropped to 6 of 24 cases. The program continued to handle 100% of the Abuse and Neglect Cases with a steady base of 31 volunteers. The office continued to operate with two part time staff.

In 2010–11, the CASA office saw some minor changes, returning to one halftime and one quartertime employee. Once again we sold fresh homemade donuts at the local county Farmers' Markets in order to promote CASA Program awareness. This year we saw our first–ever major fundraising event, "Treasure to Cherish." The event featured delicious appetizers, a band (Steam Powered AirPlane), and a wonderful array of live and silent auction items. The event was a huge success thanks to the hard work of Katie Kilfoil and our Board of Directors. This year we sent our Program Administrator, Linda Pattengale, to attend the National CASA convention in Atlanta. This fall was our fourth year for the Bugle for Kids fundraising event. Once again two youths, Logan Jorda and Caden Carter enjoyed the HUNT of their LIFE hosted by West Boulder Ranch and Twelve Springs Ranch, both in Sweet Grass County.

We trained seven new volunteers and continued to advocate for 100% of the Abuse and Neglect cases in our District. In March, Ann Schilling, Program Director, Don Gimbel, Boardmember, and Nancy McCracken, Court Administrator, all attended the National Casa convention "Building Hope for Youth" in Chicago through a grant that was awarded to us from the Montana Court Assessment Program. In April the staff and several volunteers attended the Child Abuse and Neglect conference in Helena. Gail McCormick, who has been a volunteer with our program for six years, received the CASA VOLUNTEER of the YEAR award for 2011. Our Program was also invited to attend the Judges' Summit in May in Billings. This conference deals with legal issues facing both judges and attorneys in Abuse and Neglect cases.

2011–2012 has been a very eventful year for us. The CASA office instituted a new tracking system from Social Solutions. Our own valued boardmember, Don Gimbel, joined the National CASA board. In September we sponsored a Community Education Forum showing the film "From Place to Place," documenting the lives and passage of

three youths as they went through the foster system here in Montana. After the showing, we hosted a panel featuring two of the film's youth, Paige Baird from National CASA, Schylar Canfield from the State CASA Board of Directors and several graduates of the local foster care system. This year's Bugle For Kids Fundraiser event netted two trophy bull elk for the 2 lucky youngsters who won: Wyatt Hammersmark from Big Timber who hunted on the West Boulder Ranch, and Hailey Peterson from Livingston on the Twelve Springs Ranch. We welcomed four new Volunteers in November and, by February, each one had a case. During the holidays we held our annual Christmas Appeal, and the Board took volunteers out to lunch in appreciation for all the work they do on behalf of the CASA children.

April is Child Abuse and Awareness Month, and we hosted two Chamber Network Live events in Big Timber and Livingston. About 200 Chamber members attended the reception showcasing who CASA is and what we do. We attended the annual Child Abuse and Neglect Conference (CAN) in Helena where Jacquie Poe, one of our local Child Protective Service workers, was awarded CASA CPS Worker of the Year. TV's Dr. Phil, a spokesperson for National CASA wanted to feature one of our cases and invited the CASA volunteer Michelle Landers and her youth to be on his live show to talk about how CASA can affect a youth's life. The State DPHHS/CPS did not approve this in time for it to take place.

This year the CASA office agreed to help service the White Sulphur Springs area. We will be working with a different judicial district court system but will be working with our Livingston-based DPHHS. (In Big Timber we work under the same judicial court system as Livingston; however the DPHHS CPS district that serves Big Timber is based in Columbus, Montana.) In brief, we will be working with two district courts and two DPHHS offices.