



# THE CASA CONNECTION



## IN THE BEGINNING . . .

The LaPorte County CASA Program was initiated in June 1990 under the administration of Circuit Court Judge Robert Gettinger. A contract was signed to provide a part-time director for program development, volunteer recruitment and training. At the end of 1991, eleven volunteers were sworn in as Court Appointed Special Advocates.



**HAPPY 20TH ANNIVERSARY  
LA PORTE COUNTY CASA PROGRAM**

**We have MANY events planned for this year. Please stay tuned.**

## IN THE YEAR 1990 . . .

~ George Bush was the President of the United States ~ The population of the US was 249,438,712 ~ The median household income was \$29,943 ~ The cost of a first-class stamp was \$0.25 ~ Iraqi troops invade Kuwait setting off the Persian Gulf War ~ South Africa frees Nelson Mandela after being imprisoned for 27 1/2 years ~ US Appeals Court overturns Oliver North's Iran-Contra conviction ~ The San Francisco 49ers defeated the Denver Broncos 55—10 in the Super Bowl ~ UNLV defeated Duke 103—73 in the NCAA Basketball Championship ~ *The Simpsons* debuts on Fox and becomes an instant hit ~ *Seinfeld* debuts on NBC ~ The Academy Award for Best Picture went to *Driving Miss Daisy* ~ Song of the Year was "Wind Beneath My Wings" ~ The Hubble Space Telescope was launched ~



**NEW AGENCY WEBSITE COMING SOON -**  
This site will contain a private volunteer section for training, a lending library and important documents and court report forms right at your fingertips. We will let you know when it has been launched. We are anticipating completion some time in February.

## CASA CASE REVIEWS

### Thursday Evenings

5:30—6:30 pm

Harmony House/CASA

office located at -

1005 Michigan Avenue  
LaPorte, IN

Need help with your case? Need to talk to a staff member or need advice from another CASA volunteer? Do you have questions about writing your report? Would you like for someone to proof-read your report that is due?

That is what Thursday evenings at the Harmony House/CASA office is available for now.



Questions?  
Call 219-324-3385  
Or email Pam at  
pbergren@lpcasa.com

**No need to RSVP—just come to the office during these designated nights and time and we will be waiting to help.**

Beginning on February 4, 2010

## UNDERSTANDING INCARCERATED PARENTS

Our ability to establish and maintain a relationship with the parents of the children we serve is critical. If we know and understand the parents, if we can communicate with them, if there is some degree of trust between us, then assessing safety, moving toward permanence and helping the child flourish are all much easier.

Of course building a relationship with parents can be difficult when the parent lives at home. But what do you do when the parent lives in jail?

Unfortunately we are facing these challenges. According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics report approximately 10% of the mothers and 2% of the fathers incarcerated had at least one child in some form of out-of-home care. A great many of the people serving jail time in the United States are parents. There are over one million prisoners in the custody of state and local prisons. Of those, approximately 56% were the parents to minor children. If this rate of parenthood holds true for the inmates in local jails, then it is safe to say that their children accounted for between 2–3% of the children in the country.

Given the trend toward larger prison populations it seems likely that if you have not worked with a child who has an incarcerated parent, you soon will.

On the national level there has been a recent surge of interest in parents in prison and the way parental incarceration affects children, families and communities. Due to the increased interest we know the following about incarcerated parents:

1. **The prison population is growing.** The growth rates have been higher for women than for men. Since mothers are much more likely to be the sole caregiver for their children, the incarceration of a mother is much more likely to result in her children entering foster care.
2. **There are significant racial disparities in the prison population.** As a result, black children are nearly 9 times more likely to have a parent in prison than white children. Hispanic children are 3 times more likely as white children to have an incarcerated parent.
3. **Mothers and fathers tend to be incarcerated for different offenses.** 45% of fathers in state prison were violent offenders, compared to 26% of mothers. Mothers were more likely to be sentenced for drug offenses and fraud.
4. **Sentences tend to be long.** Fathers in state prison reported serving sentences that were, on average, 5 years longer than those of mothers. Because they tended to commit less serious offenses than fathers, nearly half of mothers in state and federal prisons were serving sentences of less than five years.
5. **Substance abuse is a major problem.** More than 85% in state prison reported some type of past drug use and 58% said that they were using drugs in the month before their current offense. Drug use is particularly serious among mothers—one in three incarcerated mothers committed her crime to get drugs or money for drugs.
6. **Mental illness and poverty are also a concern.** Among the parents in state prison, 23% of mothers and 13% of fathers reported an indication of mental illness. More than half of the parent inmates reported income of less than \$1000 in the month prior to their arrest.

These statistics may give you a better sense of the parents behind bars, but numbers can only take a person so far. They cannot describe the guilt and remorse felt by most parents who must leave their children to serve time. They cannot tell us what decisions a particular parent will make about his or her child's future. They cannot tell us if he will change for the better.

To find this out, someone must meet and build a relationship with each individual parent behind bars. When there is a child in foster care involved that person will be you. In this way, working with incarcerated parents is no different from working with non-inmate parents—both require us to join with parents and families to overcome obstacles and both offer the same reward for success—a secure future for children and their families.



Mumola, C.J. *Bureau of Justice Statistics special report: Incarcerated parents and their children.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice (August 2000, NCJ 182335).

N.C. Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program. *Children Services Practice Notes. Understanding Parents in Prison.* (Vol. 7, No. 1, January 2002).

## NEW CASA VOLUNTEERS SWORN IN

On November 18, 2009 our program officially welcomed 8 new CASA volunteers into our organizational family. They were sworn in as officers of the court by Circuit Court Judge Thomas Alevizos.

### ~WELCOME~

Samantha Bagwell

Stacie Hynek

Alicia Ketchem

Karen Klosinski

Denise O'Neal

Carissa Sherwood

Diane Spoljoric

Debra Strieter



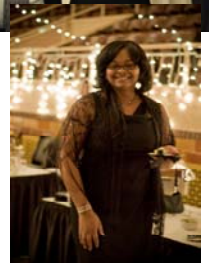
The 15th Annual Wine and Food Tasting Event was a huge success. The event was held to benefit our program and the LCSD children's chorus. Appetizers were served by area eateries, Great Lakes Catering, Harbor Grill, Ivy Tech Culinary School, Rodini's Restaurant, Shoreline Brewery, Maple City Coffee Roasters, Café Elite, Backroad Brewery, Bubbles Ice Cream, as well as others.

The raffle basket included such items as Michigan City Zoo family membership, LCSD membership, Peeper Specs, Mumm's champagne- only available in the UK, Joy of Flowers gift certificate, a private wine tasting for eight people at Shady Creek and autographed items from LaPorte's own NASCAR driver- Tony Raines.

Plans are already underway for this year's event scheduled for October 1st.



**TEAMWORK ~**  
*Working together in harmony keeps us moving forward.*



Photos taken by Michelle Lange

The LaPorte County CASA Program was awarded certification by the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association.

This certification recognizes that the LaPorte County CASA Program is in compliance with National CASA's high standard for quality child advocate.

"The National CASA quality assurance process is very rigorous, and reflects our commitment to ensure every child we serve has the most powerful volunteer advocate working on their behalf," said Michael Piraino, CEO of the National CASA Association.

This certification says LaPorte County CASA has demonstrated a strong capacity to provide excellent services to the abused and neglected children within our community.



"LaPorte County is fortunate to have a CASA program that meets the standards required for National CASA certification and I congratulate the director, staff and volunteers on this accomplishment," said Juvenile Magistrate, Nancy Gettinger. "The Court relies on the insight and the input of the volunteers. They speak for and from the perspective of the child. CASA volunteers give a voice to the person in the courtroom who arguably has the most at stake and yet might not be heard but for the volunteer."

Michigan City News-Dispatch, September 21, 2009.

Harmony House/CASA Program  
of LaPorte County, INC.

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LaPorte, IN 46350

219-324-3385 - phone

219-362-9114 - fax

The next training session should begin in early spring. Please let anyone you know that is interested in volunteering to contact the office as soon as possible.

## HOUSE BILL No. 1157



Indiana House Representative Dennis T. Avery (D) from Evansville introduced House Bill No. 1157 (HB 1157) on January 7, 2010 to the committee of Family, Children and Human Affairs.

If the bill were to pass the commission would establish a select joint commission on child welfare services oversight.

For more information and to contact any of the committee members please go to: [www.in.gov/legislative](http://www.in.gov/legislative).

When more information becomes available regarding the status of this bill we will let you know.



### Happy Birthday—

Samantha Bagwell—February 2

Jane Glynn—February 5

Dava Buell—February 13

Pam Bergren—February 25

Barb Walker—March 1

Pam Kukla—March 5

Chuck Gambrel—March 7

Larry Hamann—March 19

Jim Bowers—March 26

Dorothy Kelly—March 29

Sara Veldhuizen—March 30

### CASA VOLUNTEER ANNIVERSARY DATE

Joann Engquist—February 2001