



MONDAY MORNING MEMO

Monday, December 14, 2009 ☞ Volume 4, Issue 5

CASA Programs Complete First Statewide RFP Process

CASA Programs around the state participated in the first Request for Proposals for state court funding this year. The applications reflected a great deal of work on the part of local directors and boards, and provided comprehensive information about the agencies providing CASA services. It is always inspiring to see how much the local programs and their volunteers do, often with such limited resources.

The RFP was posted at the end of July, with applications due September 10th. All decisions on awards were made by the end of October, and contracts commencing January 1st. There was no competition for awards around the state, but a minimum score was required in order for a grant to be awarded.

There will be few changes around the state regarding CASA contracts. One program, serving Albany and Rensselaer Counties, will be transferred to a new administering agency, the Center for Community Justice, which now provides CASA services in Schenectady County. Mediation Matters in Albany has provided a supportive home for CASA since 1990, and quality services to the courts. The program was expanded in 2004 to serve Rensselaer County. Mediation Matters opted to not apply for continued funding from NYS UCS in this application process. ***Special thanks to Mediation Matters' talented staff for all they have done on behalf of Capital District children over the years.***

Some trends emerged in the RFP's, such as the need to clarify the role of advisory committees, provide more opportunities for in-services in cultural competence, and explore new methods of board development. We will be meeting with local programs over the next few months to provide support and technical assistance in any areas identified in local grants, and to finalize contract deliverables moving forward.

Monday Morning Memo Resumes Publication

We took a break from the *Monday Morning Memo* during the CASA RFP Process, but hope to resume regular publication in the New Year. In between newsletters, we will continue the one-page *Topic Talk* bulletins, which are summaries of answers to questions posed by local directors. For both publications, contributions and suggestions for issues to be covered are always appreciated.

Supporting and Cultivating Donors: Ask Well, Thank Much

As many local CASA programs complete their annual appeals to individual donors, it's a good time to review the importance of how you subsequently connect with those who contribute to your program. It's always easier to keep your current donors than to find new ones, so this outreach is key. According to Adrian Sargeant in *Managing Donor Defection* (www.campbellrinker.com), "small increases in donor loyalty can have a dramatic impact on an organization's future revenue streams." If revenue continues to be expended to recruit new donors who then fall by the wayside, then a program is working very hard to merely break even. The solution is to encourage current donors to make second and future gifts.

Non-profits in general don't have a great track record in this area. In the year following an initial donation, a typical non-profit will lose between 40 and 50% of its new cash donor, and an additional 30% each year following. In Sargeant's study, 13% of donors stopped giving because the organization did not acknowledge their gift. A total of 8% reported that they were never informed how their money was used.



While 54% of donors stated they could no longer afford to support a particular organization, 36% reported they found other causes more deserving.

So to reverse those numbers, the focus needs to be on relationships not transactions. In *The Number One Reason Donors Stop Giving* by Rebecca Ruby, (www.fundraising123.org), donors say too much attention or too little is cause to stop their connection to the agency. Ruby states that donors need a thank you note, promptly, that communicates the idea that they matter, and that you would like to begin or continue a conversation with them about the good work that you do.

Thank your donors three times as often as you appeal for donations.

Ideally, Ruby says, thank your donors three times as often as you appeal for donations. Highlight a program, person or other aspect of your organization that their donation supported. Make the thank you personal: donors can tell the difference between a canned thank you letter and something designed for them alone. One former Executive Director I worked with swore by hand-written notes, and had the success record to prove that worked. Ideally, communicate throughout the year, if possible, giving donors the choice of frequency and of their preferred form communication.

To offset some of the concerns donors have about charities, be transparent and accountable, letting donors know how you spend their money. Especially in a tight economy, donors are even more mindful that their donations are going to good use. Show them that you are using funds wisely, even that you have tightened belts to maximize the amount of their donation that goes directly to service.

In the end, it comes down to mother's advice: the first thing you do when you get a gift is write the thank you note.

CASA Performance Measures to be Piloted in 2010

A Statewide Data Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from NYS UCS, local CASA programs, and the State Association has developed draft Performance Measures to standardize and quantify CASA's work around the state. The measures were distributed to local CASA programs at the fall Program Directors' meeting, and two webinars held following that meeting to review progress on data collection efforts. In 2010, New York City CASA and CASA of Westchester County, and an Upstate program to be identified, will begin piloting the measures and bring feedback to the Committee for possible revisions. The goal is to adopt consistent measurement across the state by year's end.

In crafting the draft measures, the Committee reviewed those developed by other state CASA programs, National CASA, and federal and state court and child welfare entities, as well as other funders such as United Way. Committee members felt that as a collaborative player in the child welfare system, CASA should focus its data collection on the efforts CASA programs specifically put forth on cases to which they are assigned. So while the measures focus more on activities rather than the ultimate outcome of the case, they will provide valuable data on how CASA resources are used.

The draft measures include service advocacy, submission of court reports, and attendance at hearings, service plan reviews, Family Treatment Court team meetings, and other meetings with schools or service providers. Measures explore how CASA assists in maintaining a focus on the child, including how CASA helps with well-being issues such as education, health, and mental health. Data will be tracked on specificity of case assignment, such as whether CASA was asked to focus on Interstate Compact or aging-out issues. For a copy of the proposed measures, email daward@courts.state.ny.us.



The development of the measures is part of the overall mission of the Committee to standardize data collection around the state, and eventually to move toward a web-based data collection system. Currently, most programs in the state track case, program and volunteer information on COMET (CASA Outcomes Management and Evaluation Tool), the desk-top data collection system developed by National CASA. Last year, the Committee put forward standardized List Maintenance Tables for COMET in an attempt to create uniform terminology in fields. This consistency will be critical in moving to a web-based system in the future.

Continued feedback from local programs and other stakeholders on the measures and data collection process is welcomed.

Save the Dates

January 22: Indian Child Welfare Act Training in Batavia

A video on "Achieving Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Competence for Child Welfare Matters" will be presented at the Genesee County Family Court on January 22nd. A recording of an earlier training in Niagara County, the presentation features Margaret Burt, Esq, Jamie Gilbert, and Kim Thomas. The training is co-sponsored by Genesee County Family Court and the NYS Child Welfare Court Improvement Project. For more information, contact Aimee Neri at aneri@courts.state.ny.us.

Regional Resource Development Planning Seminars Offered

Raising money in today's economic climate requires more coordination and better planning than ever before. Effective resource development plans provide a framework for board and staff members for the maintenance and development of all programs within an agency.

To support that goal, NYS UCS is offering regional one-day trainings on "Developing and Implementing an Effective Resource Development Plan." Trainings will be from 8:30 to 5 p.m. each day on:

- **February 26, 2010 in White Plains**
- **March 23, 2010 in Albany**
- **April 30, 2010 in Rochester**

The agenda for the seminars, open to CASA programs, Community Dispute Resolution Centers, and Children's Centers, will be the same at each location. Trainers Dan Kos and Darlene Ward from the NYS UCS Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution and Court Improvement Programs will cover the elements of an effective resource development plan, avoiding common pitfalls, implementing a plan, and measuring success. Details and registration information will be coming to an email box near you.

Developing an effective plan requires input from all levels of the agency from board members to program staff. Particularly if creating and sustaining solid and effective RD plans has been a challenge for your agency, we strongly encourage you to assemble a team of Board members and staff to attend one of the regional trainings.



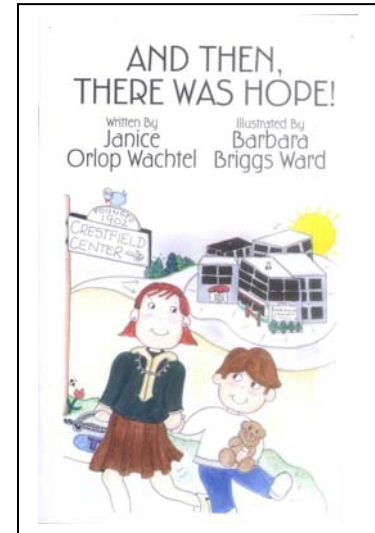
Resources

(Please note: Links to third party sites do not imply any affiliation between the UCS CASA Assistance Program and the site owner, or an endorsement, approval, or verification of any content available on such third party sites.)

Booklet for Children with Mental Health Needs

Written by Janice Orlop Wachtel, the booklet “And Then, There Was Hope!” was created by the NYS Office of Mental Health (NYS OMH) specifically for children entering NYS-run psychiatric centers.

Its message and illustrations by Barbara Briggs Ward help create an accessible message for all children struggling with mental health issues. To request copies, contact the Director of Community Outreach and Public Education at NYS OMH at 518-474-2338.



Structural Strategies to Help Nonprofits in a Tight Economy

This article addresses some of the organizational changes that can assist nonprofits cope with restricted revenue, such as analyzing efficiency, reviewing mission fit, and, somewhat ironically, thinking bigger. Go to: www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/tools_you_can_use/05-06-09_structural_strategies.cfm

Children of Incarcerated Parents: An Action Plan for Federal Policymakers

This action plan reviews both federal and state barriers to identifying and serving children of incarcerated parents, and offers policy recommendations for the U.S. Congress and the Administration. The action plan is designed to help federal leaders improve policies for children of incarcerated parents, but also includes recommendations of value to states and local governments that can facilitate and complement federal initiatives and result in better responses to this population. For the full report, go to: www.reentrypolicy.org/jc_publications/federa_action_plan_version_id=55173&return_url=/admin/jc_publications/36

Report Details Strengths of Families Living in Poverty

To many, poor families equal problem families, and they fail to recognize both the strengths that many poor families have and the characteristics that they may share with more affluent families. This *Research Brief* by Child Trends highlights data for more than 100,000 families. To read the study, go to: www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2009_5_14_RB_poorfamstrengths.pdf

Literature Review of Grandparents Raising their Grandchildren

An increasingly prevalent family constellation is a home headed by a grandparent who is raising grandchildren. A review of the literature, published in the *Gerontology Journal*, explores the knowledge base in this area and its implications for service providers and researchers. Go to: <http://gerontologist.gerontologyjournals.org/cgi/content/full/45/2/262>



Particularly in what has been a challenging year for many of you, we extend our appreciation for all the good work you do – the services you provide to the family courts of this state and the support and hope you offer to abused, neglected and at-risk children.

Happy Holidays, and every wish for a New Year filled with peace and prosperity.

~~~~~ Quotable ~~~~~

"Each one has to find peace from within. And peace – to be real – must be unaffected by outside circumstances."

- Mahatma Gandhi

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For further information, contact:

Darlene Ward, Statewide Program Manager

98 Niver Street, Cohoes, New York 12047

Phone: (518) 238-4360; Fax: (518) 238-2951

Email: daward@courts.state.ny.us / Website: www.nycourts.gov/ip/casa/