



## MONDAY MORNING MEMO

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### ***Resiliency in Tough Economic Times: CASA Directors Share Concerns and Creative Strategies***

Creativity, publicity, and advocacy were suggestions shared by local CASA program representatives last week on a conference call discussing “Staying Afloat in Turbulent Waters.” Twenty programs participated in the call, which was moderated by Amy Miller, Executive Director of CASA of the Southern Tier.

Participants reported some current funding cuts, and others that they fear are coming in the future. Programs that receive local Youth Bureau funding are braced for potential cuts if the proposed state block grant funding is implemented, as there will likely be more competition for those dollars. There were reports that private foundation dollars are also in shorter supply, member items are more precarious, and even support from strapped administering agencies has been reduced. Some programs are experiencing challenges retaining volunteers, whose personal circumstances may require returning to work or taking a second job.

Strategies for addressing these cuts included:

- Keeping funders informed of your successes;
- Utilizing board members and volunteers to write letters to funders and local governmental leaders in order to advocate on behalf of continued funding;
- Getting letters of support from key stakeholders;
- Generating news articles and letters to the editor about the program and the impact of proposed cuts.

It is imperative in these tough times to focus more on quality than quantity, one director shared. You may not be able to expand the number of volunteers or cases, but you can enhance the quality of program services, building your reputation with funders and in the community. More than ever, volunteers need to know how critical their work is, that they are vital ambassadors helping to maintain a sense of urgency in moving children to safe and permanent homes.

Programs requested more statewide publicity, building name recognition and sharing stories about the scope and challenge of the work we do. Many cable and radio stations are offering discounted ad prices because of reductions in commercial ad budgets, so these venues may be more affordable to CASA programs.

***“This is a time for hope and courage. Most of all, this is a time for action.”***

***-- Governor David A. Paterson,  
State of the State Address, 2009***

To help balance budgets, directors had looked at cost-savings efforts such as closing satellite offices, cutting back staff hours, and negotiating reductions in office space rental. Some were exploring new products to sell, including neck warmers, products on E-bay, and a book on childhood memories. Programs were conducting new special events including donor open houses, and pursuing funding from new foundations or area service organizations. The importance of reaching out to local faith-based



organizations was stressed; many of those organizations will make donations from their mission budget or collections or even hold fundraisers for CASA.

Programs sought ways to share resources, such as distributing copies of applications to local Walmart, Target, Sam's Club or Stewart's stores. Statewide or regional grants from corporations or foundations were also discussed. (A reminder that other than National CASA grants, which should be coordinated with CASANYS, the Office of ADR/CIP is happy to review drafts of grant applications or other funding requests and provide feedback. Resource development training for staff and board is also available.)

Continuing to care for staff and volunteers is critical in tough times. Directors suggested looking for ways to help manage mileage costs such as applying to gas companies for vouchers. Mediation Matters hosted its first Volunteer Wellness Day last week, offering self-care information about nutrition, meditation and massage. Since CASA work can be isolating, gathering volunteers together for training and social events during difficult times is even more important.

Boards need to "share your pain," directors said, and need to offer 100% support to local programs. Board resources can be expanded by bringing non-board members onto committees and special event work groups, as well as creating a "junior board" just to support public relations and fundraising activities. (See *Monday Morning Memo*, Feb. 5, 2007, for an overview of NYC's Junior Board's activity: [http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/casa/publications/archive\\_publications/mmm\\_02\\_05\\_07.pdf](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/casa/publications/archive_publications/mmm_02_05_07.pdf) )

It is important to take the long view during these times, and more critical than ever to keep the mission in the forefront. CASA volunteers need to know they are making a difference in the world, a world that needs their services more than ever.

### ***State Hearings on Foster Care Oversight Highlight Needed Changes***

"A financial crisis is a terrible thing to waste," Gladys Carrión, Esq., Commissioner of the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (NYS OCFS), reminded legislators in Albany at one of two public hearings held in December on the oversight and quality of foster care services delivered by local social services and contracted voluntary agencies. The hearings were convened by The Assembly Standing Committee on Children and Families and the Subcommittee on Foster Care, and were presided over in Albany by William Scarborough, Chair of the Assembly's Committee on Children and Families.

Commissioner Carrión said we need to think differently in order to institute meaningful oversight. Accountability needs to be proactive and not reactive. She acknowledged challenges with caseloads and multiple layers of oversight, and said all the entities involved need to stress outcomes rather than process. She said NYS OCFS has a renewed focus on family and extended families, and improving the quality of contacts between parents and caseworkers, citing initiatives such as family case conference in NYC. She also cited a need for increased public relations, so that the public better understands what it takes to support children and families.

Michael Wesiberg, a foster parent, testified about how he felt the foster system failed the two boys entrusted to his care. He said the transition back to their mother's care was traumatic, and the case took far too long to resolve. He felt the concurrent planning initiatives were ineffective, and that confusion over funding streams resulted in missed opportunities for vital treatment the children needed. "In the end," he said, "the best interests of the children became irrelevant."

The importance of prevention programs was stressed by Karen Schimke, President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. The investment is small for significant assistance to families



and cost savings to both county and state. She also advocated for quality education for foster care youth, including a tuition assistance program.

Saysha Smith, a youth who had been in care, said it was critical that we all work to dispel negative stereotypes about children in care. She said, “My dreams were brushed off.” She works with Youth In Progress to help others in foster care achieve their goals. “It’s not over until I win, until we all win.”

## 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.)*

### **Child Welfare Resources Available in Spanish on Website**

The Child Welfare Information Gateway has launched its new Resources in Spanish web section at [www.childwelfare.gov/spanish](http://www.childwelfare.gov/spanish). Designed for child welfare professionals who work with Spanish-speaking families, the section includes a glossary of English-to-Spanish and Spanish-to-English child welfare terms, as well as resources on preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect, supporting and preserving families, out of home care and adoption. Resources are available in both Spanish and English, and many can be viewed, downloaded, or ordered for free. For more information, call 800.394.3366 or email [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov).

## Save the Dates

### **“Spring” CASA Program Directors’ Meeting to be Held March 23-24**

CASA Program Directors will gather at the Comfort Inn in Glenmont, NY, near Albany, in March for presentations on topics ranging from educational advocacy to answering case questions to legislative updates. The meeting, coordinated by the UCS CASA Assistance Program in collaboration with CASA: Advocates for Children of NYS, will be held Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 2 to 6 p.m. and continue Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Registration information will be sent later this month.

## Quotable

"Do not judge and you will never be mistaken."

*- Jean Jacques Rousseau*

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