



MONDAY MORNING MEMO

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Where Is That Good Board Member Tree?

Nearly every board nominating committee at some point has wished there were some magic tree that sprouted new board members who would bring experience, talent, energy, diversity and of course lots of cash and contacts to the organization. CASA directors tackled the topic of board recruitment at their recent regional meetings.

Some suggestions included:

- Make sure each board member feels valued and useful, and is able to use his/her skills and experience. The maxim is that you have three months with a new board member to engage them, and if you fail to do so, it's very hard to keep them active and involved after that time.
- Publicize board appointments and accomplishments. Some individuals are drawn to board membership because of prestige, and small not-for-profit working boards don't always offer that. Looking for ways to generate more of a spotlight can help attract more community movers and shakers.
- Have a clear board recruitment process. You would not bring on staff or volunteers without this strategy, and the board makeup is equally critical to the success of your organization. Identify gaps in board skill sets and contacts, and recruit multiple candidates bringing those qualities for each board position. Each candidate should fill out a formal board application, go through an interview and orientation, and then be selected only if they are the best applicant for each director position on the board. Once selected, they should receive a board member description, and sign a board membership contract.
- Consider creating a "junior" board and asking off-board members to serve on board committees. These individuals can lend a hand to projects and prevent board burnout. It's also an opportunity to see individuals in action, and can be a feeding ground for future board members.
- Create the expectation that every board member recruits new board members.
- Plan some social events for your board. Those personal connections help make the work more fun and build loyalty, and can also be an opportunity to invite new potential members.
- Think of potential board members while you are out in the community recruiting volunteers.

"Whenever we do board development work, we start by asking the group what they are looking for in a board member. And without fail and only half in jest, each time we get the same response: Warm blood and a pulse."

--Help4NonProfits.com



- Make your interest in new board members known in your newsletter. Ask if you can write up a request for board members for the newsletters of local businesses and organizations.
- Look at why diversity is such a challenge. Is it not just a challenge on your board but throughout the organization? Are you working for your community or with it, engaging local groups in your strategic planning? If this has been a struggle, there's an excellent article on this online at http://www.help4nonprofits.com/NP_Bd_Diversity_Art.htm.
- Use outside resources. Some suggestions include www.casanet.org, National CASA's technical assistance website for CASA programs; www.Help4NonProfits.com, the Community Driven Institute's board help site; and www.ccsnys.org, the Council of Community Services of NYS, Inc., which is available to do board training and consultation. The NYS UCS CASA Assistance Program also is always happy to assist local programs with board-related issues, and to meet with boards or facilitate trainings.

Many of the above suggestions are most applicable to Boards of Directors, but also can apply to CASA programs within administering agencies that have Advisory Boards. Key to successful Advisory Boards is having a clear purpose and specific activities in which the members can participate, such as reviewing public relations materials or providing assistance on a project. CASA directors requested a follow-up conference call specifically on Advisory Boards to share ideas of developing and engaging these groups.

The Meaning and Import of Engaging Families

“Our children require no less of us,” according to Gladys Carrion, commissioner of the New York State Office of children and Family Services, on the subject of empowering and engaging families. Ms. Carrion authored the cover article of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) winter newsletter.

Ms. Carrion describes the terror most families feel at learning a child protective report has been made on them. “Rather than experiencing the arrival of the caseworker as a potential doorway to help, the family is more likely to withdraw for self-protection, dissemble regarding information being sought for the investigation, and refuse services,” she writes.

Suggested strategies for engaging families include:

- Developing service plans with, not just for, families;
- Conducting family meetings early in the investigative process; and
- Utilizing parent consultants.

The article acknowledges that “effective family engagement takes time,” and advocates manageable workloads and training for all involved in the important work of child protection. SCAA's newsletter is available online at www.scaany.org.



Keeping Siblings Together in Foster Care

According to a report last week in *The New York Law Journal*, maintaining sibling bonds in foster care “can greatly reduce the trauma of the potentially overwhelming changes that threaten a child’s emotional stability when placed in care.” This isn’t news to CASA volunteers around the state, who often have been instrumental in facilitating sibling placements and visits, and who have an opportunity to see first-hand the benefits of this for the children.

The article focused on New York City, where well over a third of siblings placed in care are separated, particularly those who come into care at different times. The *Journal* reviews legislative and regulatory mandates that siblings be placed together, and the article urges challenges in court when siblings are separated. Other suggested policy strategies in the article include studying the primary causes of sibling separation; providing incentives to foster parents to accept larger sibling groups; reviewing other policies that may make sibling placements difficult, such as foster home requirements relative to number of bedrooms; rewarding foster care agencies that prioritize sibling placements; and, when siblings can’t be placed together, thinking creatively about how to keep them in close contact.

If you have stories showing CASA’s advocacy for sibling placements and visits, please drop an email to daward@courts.state.ny.us; we’d love to collect some of these successes.

The New York Law Journal can be found online at www.law.com/jsp/nylj/index.jsp. A free trial subscription is available.

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Training on Individual Donations Being Planned

Planning has begun for the second in a series of resource development trainings sponsored by NYS UCS for CASA programs, Children’s Centers, and Community Dispute Resolution Centers. Last fall we tackled grantwriting, and at that training, participants identified individual donations as a key challenge their agencies were experiencing.

The rule of thumb is that individual donations should account for 80% of your annual budget, and grants, special events and other donations only 20%; but most organizations have those percentages reversed. What we hope to accomplish this fall is to help agencies develop strategies for identifying and reaching individual donors, and methods of cultivating those donors for long-term agency support.

This fall’s training will be open to staff, board members and volunteers, and we welcome your thoughts and suggestions. An online survey will be sent to local CASA directors in the next few weeks, but also feel free to Contact Darlene Ward at daward@courts.state.ny.us with your ideas. More information including training dates will be distributed as plans are finalized.



CASA ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

OFFICE OF ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND COURT IMPROVEMENT

RESOURCES

Methamphetamine Resource Center Available Online

Methamphetamine – also known as meth, crank, crystal, and speed – is a stimulant that affects the nervous system, and is widely believed to be one of the most addictive drugs on the street. Compounding the problem is that the drug can be manufactured at home, in a process that can be toxic and explosive. New York State is still fortunate in not having the influx of methamphetamine that some other states have seen – although often cited as a cause for that delay is the ease of access to cocaine and heroin particularly in New York’s major cities, and drug sale “monopolies” here. Still, it remains a growing problem in this state as elsewhere.

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America has a very thorough Meth Information and Resource Center online at <http://www.drugfree.org/Portal/DrugIssue/MethResources/default.html>.

Co-occurring Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

A number of publications dealing with research and treatment strategies for individuals dually diagnosed with mental illness and substance abuse disorders are available on the website for the National GAINS Center, <http://www.gainscenter.samhsa.gov/html/resources/publications.asp>. The Center for Mental Health Services site contains also contains a number of resources focused on youth involved in the criminal justice system.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

From a note to Capital District CASA, reprinted with permission:

"I deeply appreciate everything you and the volunteers do to inform and educate all of us in the system. I only wish we could have a CASA in each and every case we have."

Hon. Linda C. Griffin, Rensselaer County Family Court Judge

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