MONDAY MORNING MEMO

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Sustaining Rural CASA Programs: Meeting the Challenge

Rural programs in NYS and across the country face unique challenges but also have significant community strengths that can help to sustain and grow CASA in those areas. This was the message at a workshop at last month's National CASA conference in Washington, DC. which featured roundtable discussions on rural issues. It was also the theme from New York's rural CASA programs during the annual narrative reports for UCS CASA Contracts.

Key challenges experienced by rural programs include recruitment and fundraising. According to the NYS Association of Counties (NYSAC), many of New York's rural counties, particularly in northern and

Western New York, are showing unemployment rates higher than the national average (www.nysac.org) NYSAC
President Lucille M. McNight categorizes this year as "a perfect storm" of unemployment, lagging population and economic growth, a declining property tax base and higher cost of living.

Unanimously, rural programs report increased gasoline prices as a major concern in areas with a lack of public transportation. Some strategies programs have explored to cope with this include:



- Geographic volunteer assignments: Assigning
 CASA volunteers to cases involving children whose home or foster care placements are in close
 proximity. Some programs have had to decline cases where the child is placed out of county
 because of increasing transportation costs.
- *Phone and internet trainings*: Utilizing technology such as webinars to train and communicate with volunteers, and establishing secure listservs and chat rooms for CASA volunteers.
- Stipends from gas companies: Some programs report success in approaching specific gasoline companies for grants. One received \$500 in gift cards from Citgo, for example. Other programs specifically requested gasoline reimbursement funds from other corporate sponsors or casinos in their area, and also went back to regular funders to cover additional mileage costs.
- *RSVP:* Sullivan County CASA in New York has received mileage reimbursement through the county's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) for qualifying volunteers.
- *Free transportation:* Programs at the National CASA conference reported that local cab or chauffeur companies would sometimes donate transportation to CASA volunteers. One even said the county sheriff's department would transport CASA volunteers from home to court or county office buildings.

National CASA offers a guide to rural fundraising, with success stories from programs around the country. To download, go to: www.casanet.org/program-management/resource-dev/rural-fundraising.htm One New York State success story occurs in Jefferson County, where Director Susan Kirkegaard has had success utilizing eBay (www.ebay.com) to sell donated items. The process raises funds and awareness for the local program and its host agency, The Resolution Center of Jefferson & Lewis Counties, without adding to travel costs for staff, volunteers or donors.

One long-range fundraising strategy for rural programs that was shared at the National CASA workshop is seeking land donations. Families who may not have liquid assets to donate can deed land to the CASA program, which can be held or sold depending on the family's stipulation and the program's needs. One program was utilizing this mechanism to build an endowment.

New York State's representative to the National CASA Rural Initiative is:

Amy Miller, Executive Director, CASA of the Southern Tier, Inc. Phone: 607-936-CASA (2272) Email: casasoutherntier@aol.com

The Rural Initiative provides guidance and support to ensure the continued growth of CASA programs in the nation's rural areas. Funding for the initiative has expired, but the network of representatives continues to advocate for solutions to rural challenges with staff support from National CASA. Feel free to contact Amy with concerns and suggestions.

Prisons, often located in rural communities, can provide printing services from the prison print shop to local not for profits. One prison which had a furniture-making industry donated furniture to the local CASA program, which they then raffled off to raise funds for the organization.

Creative volunteer recruitment is also called for in rural communities. With high unemployment rates, taking time away from job hunting or training programs to volunteer for CASA can be a tough sell. One director found it useful to market CASA volunteering as an opportunity to network and develop skill sets, to add to your resume while helping children in need.

Some programs have found faith-based organizations to be a helpful resource. One church earmarked the an article about a community organization that worked with children at risk, as well as parenting tips.last Sunday of every month as "Blue Sunday," devoted to preventing child abuse. The bulletin featured

Rural programs also can benefit from online social networking to recruit volunteers. Programs reached out to sites addressing social justice issues and child welfare, and requested they link to their website. Volunteers also were recruited through MySpace and FaceBook. CASA volunteers and board members with appropriate personal or professional online profiles mentioned the rewards of their involvement with the CASA program and linked to the local program site. Bill Lamb, Director of the Ontario County CASA program, has posted volunteer recruitment information on Craig's List (www.craigslist.org)

Other options for volunteer recruitment included community colleges, special interest groups such as knitting clubs or Red Hat Societies, trailers at local movie houses, and Parent Teacher Organizations.

Some web resources for rural programs in NYS include:*

<u>www.rurallawcenter.org</u> The Rural Law Center of New York is dedicated to addressing the legal issues unique to low-income, rural New Yorkers by providing access to justice for youth and seniors in 44 rural counties, training programs, legislative advocacy, and acting as a facilitator in rural coalition building.

www.ruralhousing.org The NYS Rural Housing Coalition, Inc. is a network of rural housing professionals who work toward a common goal: to design, develop, finance, build and manage affordable housing to meet the diverse needs of rural New Yorkers. The network includes government leaders and agency staff, housing and community developers, financial planners, architects, attorneys, regional planners, health and human services professionals, and others.

www.ruralinc.org/English/index.html Rural Opportunities, Inc. (ROI) is a private, not-for-profit regional community development and human service organization providing services to farm workers, low-income families and economically depressed communities throughout New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana and Puerto Rico. ROI creates and provides opportunities for farmworkers and other disenfranchised people to confront and overcome barriers that systematically prevent them from gaining access to economic, educational, social and political resources.

<u>www.nysarh.org/index.html</u> New York State Association for Rural Health addresses issues that affect the health, welfare, and well being of rural New York residents, including children's health. The site contains an interesting overview of the Statewide Tele-psychiatry initiative.

*(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.)

eee Save the Dates eee

Collaborative Advocacy Trainings
August 1st ~ Utica, NY
September 15 ~ Batavia, NY

These trainings by Duke Fisher and Linya Bell will pilot the 7-hour Collaborative Advocacy Training for CASA staff and volunteers, the same training previewed at the spring CASA Program Directors' meeting. Participants at each site unfortunately will be limited to 30 with priority to the local program. Details coming soon to an email near you....

Resource Development Seminar Series Continues September 17-18 ~ Albany, NY

This year's training will focus on special events planning on Day 1 of the training, featuring presenter Burke Keegan. Day 2 will address writing for fundraising. The seminars are for staff and board members of local CASA, Community Dispute Resolution Centers, Children's Centers and Parent Education Programs. Details coming soon....

🛹 NYS UCS Court Rules and Contract Primer 🦠

Maintaining an Accounting Procedure Manual

In your CASA Program Manual, *How CASA Works in New York State*: *Solving the Program Proficiency Puzzle*, Chapter 7 "NYS UCS Contract Requirements" outlines accounting procedures that UCS contract agencies must implement. In addition to the general requirement that a contract agency maintain bookkeeping practices that comply with generally accepted accounting principals, the chapter discusses requirements specific to CASA contracts.

This section includes the requirement that the contract agency maintain an accounting procedure manual, a "record of the policies and procedures for handling financial transactions. The manual can simply contain a description of how financial functions are handled (e.g., paying bills, depositing cash and transferring money between funds) and who is responsible for each duty." This manual is particularly helpful when staff and board transitions occur.

The manual must include the following:

- 1. Internal control policy regarding disbursements including a check signing policy;
- 2. Purchasing procedures, including bidding procedures;
- 3. Petty cash policy; and
- 4. Equipment inventory procedures.

Work continues by the State Association, UCS CASA Assistance Program, and local CASA program representatives Linda Burns, Bill Lamb, and Grace Thompson on the remaining chapters of the program manual which will address such topics as child well-being, data management and program development. We hope to have most of the chapters completed by the fall Program Directors' Meeting in October. If there are issues you'd like to see addressed or you are interested in contributing to the project, just let us know.

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"The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps - we must step up the stairs."

- Vance Havner

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Court Appointed Special Advocates Assistance Program

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