



## MONDAY MORNING MEMO

Monday, October 22, 2007 ☺ Volume 2, Issue 15

### ***CASA Presentation Made to Family Court Judges Association in Saratoga***

Talking about the strengths of the CASA program was on the agenda of this fall's Family Court Judges Association meeting Oct. 11 in Saratoga Springs.

Presenting on CASA were Robin Robinson, Executive Director of CASA: Advocates for Children of NYS (CASANYS); Minna Buck, retired Family Court Judge from Onondaga County and CASANYS Board Member; and Darlene Ward from the NYS UCS CASA Assistance Program.

Panelists discussed the history of CASA in NYS, case assignments involving abuse and neglect, and program startup. Questions and comments included CASA's role working in collaboration with parties on Family Court cases, and CASA's priority for diversifying staff and volunteers.

The morning's agenda included a presentation on "Bullying in Our Schools" by Susan Pollet, counsel and director of the NYS Parent Education and Awareness Program. Also presenting were Greg Owens from the NYS Office of Children and Family Services and Kenneth Braswell from the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), discussing "Programmatic Innovations in Responsible Fatherhood in NYS." More about that initiative can be found at [www.dads.ny.gov](http://www.dads.ny.gov).

At the meeting, Judge David M. Brockway from Chemung Family Court was elected as the Association's president, succeeding Judge Mark Meddaugh from Sullivan County, who said he was confident Judge Brockway "would carry the mantle for the Association in the coming year" on the issue of judicial pay raises.

### ***In Memoriam: Catherine Walber 1924 - 2007***

This month saw the passing of long-time CASA advocate, director and board member Catherine "Kay" Walber. Kay was known for her passion for children, her determined advocacy, and her love of the written word. Her colleagues in the CASA network will long remember her bright smile and continual willingness to be of service to children and help to her peers.

Kay served since 1998 as Executive Director of CASA of Rockland County, a program involved in both Family Court and Family Treatment Court in that county. The not for profit served not only CASA abuse and neglect cases, but oversaw programs of supervised visitation as well. She formerly served as a CASA volunteer, board member and board president of the local program, as well as offering her services to support the State Association as both a board member and active committee member. In 2006, she received the Father Peter F. Malet Service to Youth Award in Rockland County for her outstanding work with CASA.

"She got great joy out of helping people," according to her daughter, Catherine Walber Wing. "It gave her a sense of real purpose and deeper meaning."

Her other community activities included elder advocacy, literacy volunteers, and serving on the board of Cornell Cooperative Extension. She formerly taught English at Nanuet High School, co-authored several textbooks on writing, and was a fellow at the National Writing Project. A memorial service will be held later this year.



## ***Judge Weinstein Honored for Protecting Women, Children***

Judge Jack B. Weinstein, 86, recently was presented the Abely Award by Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye for “Leading Women and Children to Safety.” His substantial body of opinions includes the matter of *Nicholson v. Williams*, seen as a victory for battered mothers who challenged New York City's Administration for Children Services' practice of bringing child neglect proceedings on the basis of women having "allowed" youngsters to witness violence against them.

***“To you belongs the great work of ensuring that the rule of law becomes a rule of life.”***

Judge Weinstein said to his audience of public interest and pro bono lawyers, "We should be presenting the award to you. Judges can merely define the law. ...It is you who deal daily with endemic real world abuses. ...To you belongs the great work of ensuring that the rule of law becomes a rule of life: that internalized in the heart and soul of each of us is an absolute inhibition on hurting, on battering women or children."

The late Maryellen Abely, an alumna of Columbia Law and a Davis Polk associate who represented battered women pro bono, is the award's namesake.

## **❧❧❧ NYS UCS Court Rules and Contract Primer ❧❧❧**

### ***CASA Boards Required to Conduct Strategic Planning***

In §117.2 **Program Requirements of the Rules of the Chief Administrator**, it states that “The board...shall implement a strategic plan to further its mission.” While the process can be time-consuming, it helps keep the program focused and able to best utilize its resources.

Strategic planning generally includes a “SWOT” analysis to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats facing the organization. A SWOT analysis needs to be very specific, addressing both internal and external factors. An environmental scan including interviews with key stakeholders often helps frame the strategic plan in the context of community need.

According to the Rensselaerville Institute, you know your strategic planning process is in trouble when (a) the plan consists of what others can do to solve problems; (b) the focus is on wordsmithing a document; and (c) when most people can't think of one thing they should do differently as a result of having a plan. They state, “No one needs a strategy to keep doing what they have been doing. Strategy is an intervention into past practice.”

Suggestions for success include asking everyone involved to make a personal commitment to changing behavior, and using early actions to capture the energy. Goals should be set with clearly defined expectations of intended outcomes, with specific activities assigned to individuals. What is excluded from a strategic plan is often more important than what is included; carefully assess available resources.



Examples can be found on the National CASA technical assistance website, [www.casenet.org](http://www.casenet.org). Facilitators are available through the Council of Community Services in NYS, [www.ccsnys.org](http://www.ccsnys.org). Feel free also to contact our office for resources as you undertake strategic planning in your agency.

## Resources

### ***Challenges Faced by Incarcerated Mothers Explored***

The topic of incarcerated mothers was addressed at two “Sharing Success” conferences last week, held in New York City and Albany. The conferences, now in their fifth year, bring together child welfare and family court teams from around the state to work in collaboration to address the needs of children and families involved in both systems. This year’s conferences focused on issues related to substance abuse.

Of the more than 2,800 women in state custody, almost 75% are mothers, with many more incarcerated in county facilities. More than two-thirds of men and women currently incarcerated in state facilities are parents, with many more on probation. It is estimated that 11,000 of New York’s children have a mother serving a prison sentence, with sentences averaging 36 months – a time frame that obviously does not match the Adoption and Safe Families permanency timelines.

In New York City, a panel of mothers and adolescents discussed their experiences with the child welfare, family court and corrections systems, stressing the importance of frequent visits and being honest with children about their parents’ circumstances. They talked about how critical it is for children and parents to know their rights, and to connect with others in similar situations. Asked what helped him find his voice, one youth said “Knowing that I wasn’t alone, that there were other kids like me.”

In Albany, those gathered were able to view a live feed from Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, the state’s only maximum security prison for women, located in Westchester County. Four incarcerated mothers discussed their experiences, focusing on the challenges of getting information about their own court cases, getting to court proceedings, and obtaining regular visits. “We love our children,” one mother said, suggesting the most helpful societal and policy change would be the removal of the stigma against incarcerated mothers.

The facilitator of both sessions, Tanya Krupat, Program Director for the New York City Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents/Family Works RIDE, stressed that there is no regulation allowing the state to not conduct visits with parents incarcerated more than 50 miles from their families. “That is just a myth,” she said.

A report by The Women in Prison Project through the Correctional Association of New York titled “When ‘Free’ Means Losing Your Mother: The Collision of Child Welfare and the Incarceration of Women in New York State” explores the policies that impact on these mothers and their children, including the Adoption and Safe Families Act, drug laws, and visitation policies. The 73-page report includes recommendations for change across systems. A copy may be ordered from the Correctional Association, [www.correctionalassociation.org](http://www.correctionalassociation.org), or feel free to request a PDF by contacting [daward@courts.state.ny.us](mailto:daward@courts.state.ny.us).



**The A-Train**

**2007-08 Babies Can't Wait - Teens Won't Wait Series Begins**

A monthly education series focusing on the well-being of infants, children and youth in the child welfare system will be held in Rochester beginning November 8th. The theme of the 2007-08 series, sponsored by the Child Welfare Court Improvement Project, Family Court Children's Center, and Babies Can't Wait Advisory Panel, is "10 Questions You Need to Know."

Topics will include education, teenage substance abuse, permanency best practices, kinship care, and mental health and medications in youth. Trainings are held from 12:30 to 2 p.m. at the Hall of Justice in Rochester. A schedule of dates and topics is attached. CLE hours are offered. For information, call 585-428-4068.

**CASA New Directors' Training Nov. 8-9**

New CASA staff – directors and volunteer coordinators – are invited to attend a two-day training Thursday and Friday, Nov. 8-9. A collaborative effort of the NYS UCS CASA Assistance Program and CASA: Advocates for Children of NYS, the program will be held at the Holiday Inn, Binghamton, NY. Volunteers and members of program advisory boards and boards of directors are also welcome.

The program will begin Thursday at 10:30 a.m. and end Friday at 3 p.m. Topics will include the basics of CASA program management, report writing, board development, talking with children, and a mock trial.

Registration is due by November 1<sup>st</sup>. Contact Lisa DeMerchant at NYS UCS ([ldemerch@courts.state.ny.us](mailto:ldemerch@courts.state.ny.us)) for registration, and contact Barbara Backus at CASANYS ([backus@casanys.org](mailto:backus@casanys.org)) for hotel reservations.

**Quote of the Week**

"We may go to the moon, but that's not very far. The greatest distance we have to cover still lies within us."

*- Charles De Gaulle*

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**Court Appointed Special Advocates Assistance Program**  
*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](mailto:daward@courts.state.ny.us) / Website: [www.nycourts.gov/ip/casa/](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/casa/)**