

# LEGACY FOR OUR MISSION:

*For Our Children and the Future*

## CHILDREN HAVE A VOICE IN COURT THROUGH CASA

WITH THE HELP OF COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES (CASA), A VITAL YOUTH-SERVING PROGRAM OF CATHOLIC CHARITIES NEW ALBANY, EVERY CHILD WHO HAS BEEN ABANDONED, ABUSED OR NEGLECTED HAS A VOICE. The CASA volunteers have big hearts and a powerful, positive impact on the lives of children.

And that's the whole idea of CASA, giving a voice in court to those who can't speak for themselves.

Due to the 529 Indiana Senate Bill passed on July 1, it is now required for a judge to appoint a CASA volunteer in all Children In Need of Services (CHINS) cases, which can involve infants to 18-year-olds. Each year, 300,000 abused, neglected and abandoned children are involved in the U.S. court system.

"There's no season or reason for child abuse. We need volunteers now more than ever in the history I've been with this program for 11 years," said Kim Grantz, program director of CASA. "The senate bill has put a crunch on us, and we want to be able to serve all the children who need a voice."

For each case assigned by a judge, one CASA volunteer works with the child, researches his or her background, and writes a report in the child's best interest that is presented to the judge.

"If we don't have the volunteers, we can't serve the children. You don't have to have a Ph.D. or early child development training," Grantz said. "You basically need to have a kind, caring and empathic heart and be willing to devote some time."

Training for volunteers includes 30 hours of pre-service training before being assigned to a case, as well as 12 annual in-service



*(From left to right) Volunteer Annette Berger, CASA Program Director Kim Grantz, Advisory Board Member Nancy Roberts and Carla Dolan, director of Social Services, St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities, attended the Indiana CASA State Conference in October.*

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hours in order to inform volunteers about any changes in the law or child welfare trends. The training is held in group settings.

Grantz was in college when she first heard about the CASA program from a poster she saw. "I knew right off the bat that it was something I wanted to do," she said. "I worked full time at a law firm during the day and was a full-time student at night, and then I found time to volunteer."

As Grantz experienced, a majority of the work, such as home visits and phone calls, can be done on one's own time, making it easier for busier people to get involved. The CASA program asks for a one-year commitment from its volunteers, but volunteers don't handle more than two cases within a year.

"The children served get really attached to their volunteers, because they are a constant in their lives," Grantz said. "We want that CASA volunteer to be that one person that always there."

And while working with the children, the volunteers develop relationships among one another. "(The volunteers) are awesome. We develop really good friendships, and I just cherish them and treasure them." Grantz said. "Due to the confidentiality, they can't go home and talk about their cases. They have to debrief and unload on either me or to other volunteers, and as a result you really form some strong bonds."

With the increase of cases assigned from judges, the CASA program needs more volunteers. But their need in help doesn't stop them from helping God's children, one case at a time.

"My personal philosophy is that every time we have the privilege of working with some of these troubled children, it's a success story, because we're there for them every time," Grantz said.

*Legacy for Our Mission, the archdiocese's ongoing capital campaign, is guided by the principles of Christian stewardship and addresses the needs of archdiocesan ministries such as Catholic Charities. By contributing to Legacy for Our Mission through your local parish, a portion of your gift will be allocated to organizations such as Court Appointed Special Advocate, part of Catholic Charities in New Albany.*