



## Anniversary Celebration!

# The Long-term Partnership Between the NCJFCJ and National CASA/GAL

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The decade between 1974 and 1984 saw enormous changes in child welfare services, including a more active leadership role by the federal government. Many were concerned that there were too many children being placed in foster care unnecessarily while other children were remaining in foster care placements longer than necessary. In 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was enacted and contained one of the first federal legislative measures to address the importance of representation for children in abuse and neglect court proceedings. In order for a state to qualify for assistance under the Act, the state was required to “provide that in every case involving an abused or neglected child which results in a judicial proceeding a guardian ad litem (GAL) shall be appointed to represent the child in such proceedings.”

That same year, the National Council of Juvenile Court Judges initiated the Concern for Children in Placement Project (CIP). Funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (Clark Foundation), with leadership by Judge John P. Steketee, Kent County Juvenile Court, MI, and Peter W. Forsythe, vice president of the Clark Foundation, CIP focused on improving court practice in child abuse and neglect cases and advocating for laws and practices to ensure permanence.

In 1976 Judge David Soukup, King County Superior Court, WA, conceived the idea of using carefully screened and trained community volunteers to speak for the best interests of children in court. He was concerned about making decisions relating to the lives of abused and neglected children without sufficient information, and in January 1977 the King County GAL Program was established with Carmen Ray- Bettineski as founding director. Similar programs began developing around the country.

Also in 1977, the National Council of Juvenile Court Judges (originally established as the Association of Juvenile Court Judges of America in 1937 and renamed in 1942) changed its name to the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ).

That same year Judge Steketee published an article entitled CIP Story in the NCJFCJ *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* and states:

The leadership role of the judge in a CIP program is both philosophical and practical. Strong advocacy by the judge for the goals and objectives of CIP ensures that all involved in the program – court staff, social service agencies, volunteers, and the community at large – will develop a commitment to the program, necessary for its smooth operation. Basically, CIP goals are to:

\*Establish a means by which the court, child welfare agencies, and citizens of the community can work together to better serve the children in placement;

\*Ensure that each child has the right to a court hearing at least once a year during the period that the child remains under court jurisdiction; and

\*Create public awareness of the nature of the problem and approaches to solving it.

And, in October 1977, the NCJFCJ's CIP Committee, chaired by Judge Steketee, met to develop guidelines for court oversight in dependency court proceedings. Carmen Ray-Bettineski presented information on the King County GAL Program (Seattle) and CIP voted to endorse the volunteer guardian ad litem program as a model for safeguarding a child's rights to a safe and permanent family.

At a 1978 CIP meeting, Committee Member Judge John F. Mendoza, Clark County District Court, Las Vegas, NV, suggested the term Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) to designate the lay court-appointed volunteers. Other participants at that meeting included Judge Steketee, Peter Forsythe, Carmen Ray-Bettineski, and Pamela Day, Child Welfare League of America.

Also in 1978, the federal government enacted the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) to address concerns over the removal of Native American (Indian) children from their families. ICWA established standards for the placement of Indian children in foster and adoptive homes and enabled tribes and families to be involved in child welfare cases.

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act was enacted in June 1980. This federal legislation was designed to encourage permanency planning in state child welfare systems by requiring that states, in order to be eligible for federal child welfare funds, show evidence that "reasonable efforts" are made to keep a family together before a child is removed from the home and at each stage of the state's intervention. With a grant from the Clark Foundation, CASA directors met in Chicago in July 1980 to exchange information and discuss the development of national standards. In 1981, with another grant from the Clark Foundation, the NCJFCJ's CIP was expanded to become the Permanency Planning for Children Project.

Funded by the Clark Foundation, the first annual CASA Conference was held in Reno at the University of Nevada, in April 1982. Representatives from 25 states and the District of Columbia attended. The participants voted to establish the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (National CASA) Association to provide a network and unified voice for CASA programs around the country. Carmen Ray-Bettineski became the first president of National CASA.

In 1984 the National CASA headquarters opened in Seattle and staff were hired. In the same year, the NCJFCJ received a federal grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to provide training and technical assistance to all 50 states and territories, thus allowing for the creation of the NCJFCJ Permanent Families Project/Department. Included in the OJJDP grant to the NCJFCJ was a designated amount to fund National CASA, some of which went to local CASA programs across the country. National CASA later received federal funding directly from OJJDP and in 1991 was authorized in the Victims of Child Abuse Act to receive funding going

forward.

Over the decades, the NCJFCJ leadership and the NCJFCJ's network of judges nationwide, along with National CASA and the national network of CASA/GAL programs, have collaborated to expand the programs to serve more children and families in need.

In 2019 National CASA Association changed its name to National CASA/GAL Association to better reflect the inclusive work of the organization. As with the first program started in 1977 and with the nearly 1,000 programs started since, judges have always been essential to the success of CASA/GAL volunteer programs. Not only can there be no program without judicial support, but a program also cannot achieve the full benefit for the children served without strong judicial support. CASA and volunteer GAL programs have benefited tremendously from the support of countless judicial leaders across the country who have replicated the model conceived by Judge Soukup. At all times, the focus of this evolution has been the children.

Currently there are nearly 93,225 trained community volunteers. They work in thousands of courtrooms and communities across 49 states and the District of Columbia and annually serve more than 242,236 of America's most vulnerable children. The court-appointed volunteers are recruited, trained, and supported by nearly 1,000 CASA and GAL programs.

National CASA/GAL has grown to lead a significant national movement and offers training, technical assistance, and competitive grants to state and local affiliates. The organization has standards to which state organizations and local programs adhere, holds an annual conference, engages in national public policy efforts, promotes volunteer advocacy through public awareness efforts, offers consultation and resources to help start CASA/GAL programs, and provides vital assistance to build the capacity of established programs.

Celebrating its 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, the NCJFCJ remains committed to its longstanding mission, vision and values of compassion, leadership, education and community. The partnerships and collaborations NCJFCJ has developed and participated in during its existence continue to benefit the 30,000+ professionals in juvenile and family courts and most importantly the children and families we serve.

The partnership continues with National CASA/GAL CEO, Tara Perry, and NCJFCJ CEO, Joey Orduna Hastings. We are grateful to those trail blazers who came before us.

For further information, please visit the NCJFCJ website at <https://www.ncjfcj.org/> or National CASA/GAL Association at <https://nationalcasagal.org/>.

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