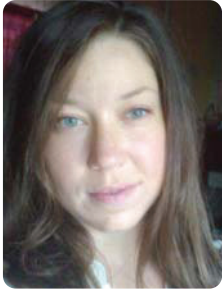


SHANNON THOMAS, CASA VOLUNTEER

Although Shannon Thomas is one of Henrico CASA's newest and youngest volunteers, she is also emerging as one with a natural talent for this work. Her secret? You have to have a sense of humor.



During the February 2011 pre-service training class, Shannon Thomas sat quietly, awaiting her turn to introduce herself to the staff and her colleagues. When it was her turn, she began with, "My name is Shannon. I have the better part of a social work degree. Some, however, may argue about whether it is the better part, since I did not actually get the degree." Flashing her big smile, the class all laughed.

Sitting on the picnic table outside the CASA office, we shared lunch and laughter, allowing an easy opportunity to chat with Shannon about why she chose CASA, her experience here, and what it means to her to volunteer. "Isn't it obvious?" she laughs and points to the table. "The free crackers, granola bars, and water – why else?" Smiling, she waits for me to finish laughing and shaking my head. "It's like people-watching, times a million. You go out there and investigate. Find out who is telling the truth and who isn't, and for such an important cause. It's all to protect the children."

Shannon says that she has always tried to volunteer in the community. When Shannon saw an advertisement for CASA, it seemed a natural fit. "I've always loved children, and this seemed similar to what I studied in school. When I called the office to find out more, I was so excited, because it sounded like the perfect opportunity for me."

As most CASA volunteers know, there are some cases that are especially trying. "It was incredibly sad to see and hear about what things kids go through. In one case, the children's mother had died. They began living with the biological father to one of the children, and he adopted the other child. To watch a father treat the children so differently was heartbreaking."

Shannon explained that one difficulty she faced was that the children's records were in another state. While going over the minutes on her cell phone, with calls back and forth to another state, the real story began to unfold. "It was horrifying reading the details of the abuse and talking to those who witnessed what was happening. The children's father actually collected cash from those watching the abuse. The father did not feed or properly clothe the child who was adopted, so he was vastly underweight and his skin was gray."

So how did Shannon deal with these heartbreaking stories? "I focused on the positive and found time to laugh with the children. The children were moved to their grandmother's home and are now safe and thriving. I viewed my role as ensuring that the father couldn't hurt them anymore."

With all the information that was gathered, Shannon explained that writing the report was challenging. Taking a deep breath, she said she knew she had to tell their story, and the whole story, to ensure that the children stayed with their grandmother. "I approach report writing as if the Judge does not know anything about the case – and that is where CASA comes in to play. It's also important to me to be concise, while also being informative."

Shannon's reports, however, are never dry, and her descriptions of the children make you feel as if you also know them. "I try to have a little fun with the report. Although you have to ensure that all the facts and information are present, children are always entertaining. Bringing to light those little details about the children and their personalities keeps the overall report from being

too dry and boring. In this way, the report becomes a kind of artistic process for me."

How does Shannon find these tidbits of information to share in her report? By interacting with the children on a consistent basis, in different settings. But be warned: there is no scientific approach or mathematical formula. "I simply try to get to know the children first with various activities. I play with Lego's, play with Barbie's, draw pictures, you name it. With the tough case, I helped the children plant a garden at their grandmother's house." But does all the "playing" really reward her in the end?

"It is important to keep it light and fun to build a relationship. I never question the children about anything difficult or serious until I have established a good relationship with them. Even then, I don't always bring up difficult topics, because other people have been asking the same questions. If I know the children well enough, I will know if something is wrong." In the event Shannon does ask a difficult question, "I seem to be able to get a more genuine answer if I have a bond or relationship based on trust with the child."

When not getting to know her CASA kids, Shannon tries to just have fun. "It's funny, though, as much as I end up working on these cases, I have a great time seeing the children. It doesn't even seem like I'm working." But where would you find Shannon when she is taking time off from her cases? "In the hammock or maybe the garden. I like to bake and spend time with the dogs."

But her real secret ingredient? A strong helping of humor. "You have to have a sense of humor in this work, or you will go crazy. Just remember that there is plenty to laugh about – think about all of the ridiculous things you hear on a day-to-day basis." And Shannon may be on to something. Having a sense of humor certainly makes life more livable, and makes the rough spots bearable. What is in Shannon's future? Laughing once again, she says, "I've decided that I want that 'better part' of my degree. I'll be going back to school in the fall at VCU to finish my degree in social work."

In most ways, Shannon is the epitome of a CASA volunteer. Her reports are well-written and timely. Her relationships with the families and children are real. She genuinely cares about the outcome of the case to ensure a safe place for the children. She has a wonderful sense of humor that makes her a delight to work with. We are so glad her CASA children get to enjoy her too.





Donna Campagna - Cass English - Donna McWalters - Diane Moeller
Jeannine Panzera - Denise Ramon - Rupa Singh - Jennifer Spann

OCTOBER 2010



Karen Barnes
Kenneth Bradford
Katy Clements
Richard Davis
Stephanie Gump

Iris Johnson-Young
Stephen Kirschner
Carole Olsen
Almira Selimovic
Shannon Thomas

FEBRUARY 2011



Peggy Bernard
Joanne Foster
Craig Johnson
Susan Johnston
Blanche Murphy

Eric Olsen
Rena Sannuti
Susan Sims
Paula Smith
Linda Williams-Steed

MAY 2011

During the 2010-2011 fiscal year, Henrico CASA trained 28 amazing volunteers! Our newest advocates have been a voice for over 60 children!

Do you know someone that would be a great CASA?

Henrico CASA has children waiting for a voice.

Our next pre-service training season will begin on **September 12, 2011**. The twelve sessions, presented by staff and area professionals, will be held Monday and Wednesday nights from 6:00-9:00 pm at the Henrico CASA office. Contact Jeannine Panzera at 501-1673 for further information or you can also apply online at www.henricocasa.org.

A NEW FACE & VOICE

In January 2011, Henrico CASA staff welcomed aboard *Stephanie Gump* (a graduate of our February 2011 class), an intern from VCU's School of Social Work. This coming fall, Stephanie will be entering her senior year, and will complete her Bachelor's degree in Social Work in May 2012.

The School of Social Work created a new program for undergraduates, placing students in an internship for three semesters. Through the internship program, Stephanie works approximately fifteen hours per week in the CASA office. She has been a wonderful addition to our team, eagerly taking on three CASA cases.

Helping families and children has always been a passion for Stephanie. "Since high school, I can remember wanting to advocate for a few of my close friends that struggled within their chaotic family lives," stated Stephanie. Stephanie recalled a specific time in high school where she helped advocate for a friend who was in an abusive home environment. "I would not accept the 'no other alternative' theory that the counselor gave. In the end, my persistence, big mouth, and my friend's trust in me helped her regain some control of her life. We are still great friends today and I am proud that I showed her she had power and a voice that should be heard."

Stephanie stated that she was thrilled to be placed at Henrico CASA. She has a very warm heart, enjoys helping families, and loves working with children. "Today, I am blessed with being a volunteer and intern under the leadership and guidance of a wonderful group of women through Henrico CASA. It is an awesome feeling to be connected with others that also have a passion for helping children."

Stephanie explains that she enjoys the research process in locating available resources which can provide needed services to children and their families. Throughout the internship, Stephanie hopes to take what she has learned in her classes to her everyday CASA cases and families. "I have learned that there are many ways of putting my focus and energy into helping children and their families face circumstances together in a positive way."

Most importantly, however, Stephanie explains that she loves feeling empowered through helping children. "I love not being a silent observer of injustices that seem to persist among children. I am their voice, and I share in their desire to have their words be heard."

Henrico CASA is very happy that Stephanie will be here next year to give her voice to the children we serve. So be on the lookout – Stephanie may be helping to supervise volunteers, assisting with training, and answering questions when volunteers stop by the office! Don't forget to give her a warm hello!

by: Jeannine Panzera, Volunteer Coordinator

CASA BOOK CLUB

In June, Henrico CASA announced its first ever book club selection, **Back Roads by Tawni O'Dell**.

Have you started reading?

We asked that while you read the book, consider what you would do if you were the CASA for Amber, Misty and Jody. Join us on **September 8, 2011** for a pot luck dinner and, what is sure to be, a lively discussion of the book. Happy Reading!

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

On April 1, 2011, Henrico CASA staff, board members, and volunteers had an evening of amazing hors d'oeuvres, desserts, and signature 'mock'tails at the home of Henrico CASA's Director, Barbara Herzog. The evening was envisioned and orchestrated by CASA staff to celebrate the many accomplishments of our wonderful volunteers. We are thankful every day for your continued support, service, and dedication.



Recognition and awards:

CASA Superhero = Joanne Sinnenberg
Volunteer of the Year = Harvey Gutkin
Rookie of the Year = Betsy Beasley
Gold Pen = Janet Weaver



Clara Johnson was honored as she retired after more than ten years of service to thirty children. Barbara Herzog commented that, "Clara is an inspiring volunteer who gives of her heart and soul when speaking up for a child!"

VCU WORK STUDY

During my spring semester at VCU, I needed a work-study job. I wanted to perform this service for an agency I know firsthand. Unfortunately, Henrico CASA wasn't listed as a potential work-study option.



After sorting out the requirements, the Director graciously agreed to help make CASA an option for me. My experience as a CASA volunteer, in addition to becoming a work-study student, gave me a greater appreciation for the volunteer supervisors at CASA.

Each staff member works very hard at proofreading the volunteers' reports, recruiting volunteers, seeking funding, attending court, and facilitating the volunteer pre-service training. Today, I have a greater respect for Barbara, Rupa, Cass, Jeannine, Kathy, and Dayle because I was able to witness the hard work and hours they are willing to sacrifice in order to help save a child.

by: Shameka White, CASA Volunteer

COLLABORATION, 1+1=3

We've all heard the expression, "It takes a village to raise a child." When we work collaboratively, we are the village! The most significant benefit of collaboration is a more comprehensive assessment of the child's situation which leads to better outcomes for the children we serve.

The people whom CASA volunteers want to establish collaborative relationships with are the parents, grandparents (if applicable), GAL, DSS caseworkers, educators (school social workers and teachers), in-home workers and counselors or other medical professionals. Each of these people brings a unique and extremely relevant perspective to the discussion.

As any handyman will tell you, one of the crucial elements to doing a great job is to use the right tools. The two best tools for collaboration are the telephone and email. Telephone conversations are more dynamic: they inherently foster a forum for open dialogue. Email is the go-to tool when you need to make arrangements or need to share information with more than one person.

Once you are assigned a case, reach out immediately to all the people listed as resources. As you gather information, always listen for new names. Ask who they are and how they fit into the picture. If you think they might be helpful, get them involved and make the other "team" members aware of who they are and what they have to offer.

One of the most obvious forums to collaborate in is the Family Partnership Meeting. Use this as an opportunity to network with the other professionals who are working this case as well. Ask for business cards and also ask how each person prefers to be contacted. Based on experience, the majority of GALs prefer to be contacted and kept current via email. If you don't have a GAL's email, contact your volunteer coordinator.

Another great strategy is arranging to team up for home visits with the GAL and the DSS caseworker because each participant brings her/his expertise to the situation. Once the visit is concluded, you and the GAL or DSS worker can discuss the visit then and there while it's still fresh in both your minds. Another benefit is that the GAL or caseworker may have heard or seen something during the visit that you didn't catch or perceived differently.

CASE STUDY

The nexus for this article was watching how skillfully my volunteer, Brenda Putney, put together a phenomenally productive working group. The case began when the school social worker filed a CHINS petition with the court because the girls were missing school (Poof – element number one – someone from school is involved). Then the Court appointed Donna Berkeley as the Guardian ad litem (Poof - element number two – not only a good GAL but a great GAL) and, shortly thereafter, CASA.

As Brenda began doing her initial investigation, she quickly realized that there was much more going on than just truancy: the mother was facing imminent eviction. At the next hearing, the mother failed a drug test, the girls and their younger sister were placed with relatives and DSS was assigned (Poof – element number three). Brenda has kept in constant communication with all the significant players involved with these children. She's brainstormed with the DSS caseworker, she's smoothed ruffled feathers between the parties and been key in keeping the case moving forward.

Working collaboratively starts with a great team of committed professionals. While some teams are better than others; think New England Patriots and Carolina Panthers, the goal remains the same, to work together to provide the children we serve with the best possible outcome.

by: Cass English, Volunteer Coordinator

"I believe in every community there is work to be done, so I chose to be a Henrico CASA volunteer to help abused and neglected children. I believe that I am a better person for sharing, caring and helping children."

-Claudette G. Moore-Dale, CASA Volunteer



"I enjoy working with people who are committed to helping these children have better lives. Their dedication and determination inspire me to do the best I can for the children. There is great satisfaction when the judge follows my recommendations and commends my efforts."

- Harvey Gutkin, CASA Volunteer

OUR VOLUNTEERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT 7.1.10 - 6.30.11

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Bryan Jenkins at Race It for putting CASA first!
Richmond Road Runners for making timing so easy!
Autumn White, CASA's Wonder Woman, supports all that we do!
Richmond Alumnae Chapter of Kappa Alpha Theta!
Craig Hedley and St. Joseph's Villa for building a strong partnership!
The amazing ladies of University of Richmond's Kappa Alpha Thetas!
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The Richmond Folk Festival!
Tammy Knight for the amazing array of art supplies for CASA's kids!
And **YOU** - our many unsung heroes who, year after year, help CASA serve all referred children!

Henrico CASA participates in the following workplace Campaigns. Thank you to those donors that gave through these Campaigns! Please use the codes provided to allocate your United Way and CVC funds contributions directly to Henrico CASA. Your support will help us reach our goal of serving all abused children who are referred for advocacy.



Combined Federal Campaign
Agency Code #76476



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CASA NUMBERS-ENSURING CHILDREN ARE SAFE 365 DAYS A YEAR

H E N R I C O

Total children served	302
Total advocacy hours provided to children served	12,317
Approximate cost per child to provide CASA services	\$1,000
Henrico CASA expenses	\$254,489
Length of time Henrico CASA has been serving the community	17 years

V I R G I N I A

Number of children who died of abuse and neglect in 2010	44
Children with the highest rate of abuse and neglect deaths	4-11 years old
Children younger than four who were abused and neglected	31%
Frequency of child abuse	84 minutes
Number of CASA programs	27

N A T I O N A L

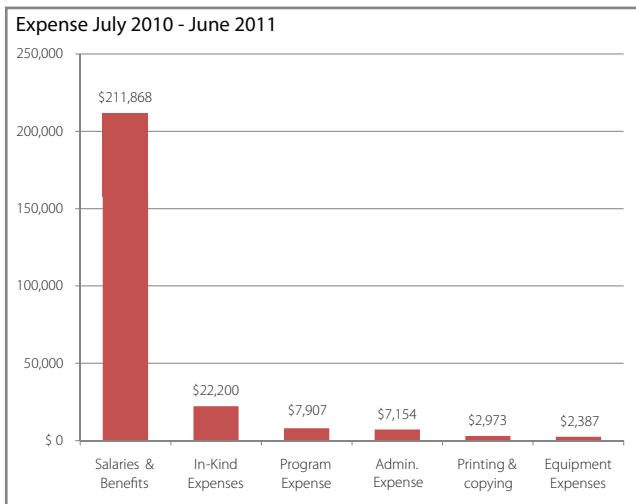
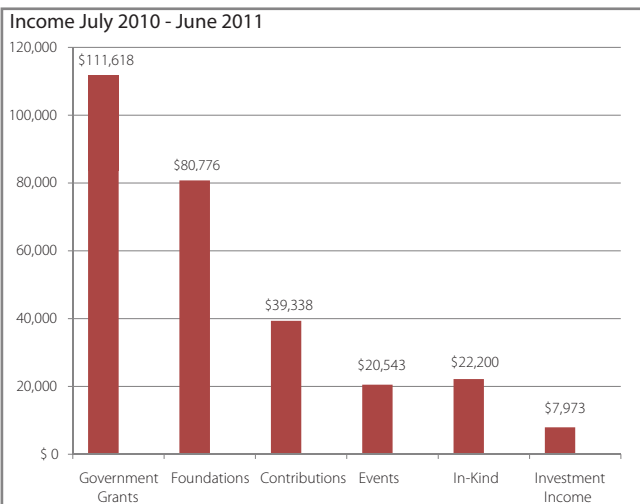
Total number of volunteers	75,087
Total number of service hours	5.8 million
Value of volunteer hours	\$290 million

C A S E S

Average length of time a CASA is assigned to a case	1 year
Average number of case hours the CASA volunteer contributed	82
Average number of direct case contacts the CASA volunteer made	94
Percentage of CASA volunteers' recommendations incorporated into court orders	79%
Percentage of children re-abused while assigned to CASA	0%

V O L U N T E E R S

Number of CASA volunteer advocates	132
Number of new volunteers recruited, trained, and active	28
Number of continuing education hours a CASA volunteer must complete yearly	12
The length of training for a new CASA volunteer	32 hours
Average length a volunteer stays with the program	2.5 years



PROGRAM SUPPORT NEEDED!

Visit our office to give time as an occasional **Development Assistant** supporting our fundraising events, as a **Public Relations Assistant** helping with publicity for our events and the program, or maybe you prefer to **Host** your own fundraising or public awareness event benefiting CASA. Contact Barbara at 501-1671.

JOIN OUR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS!

Did you like what you read? Join the volunteer group of young professionals who support our mission through assistance with event planning, implementation and resources. Contact Barbara at 501-1671.

CHARLES QUAGLIATO, BOARD CHAIR

As Henrico CASA enters a new year of service, we should be mindful of the continued need to help the children of our community. Unlike other crime statistics which are in decline, the reports of abused and neglected children continue to increase and the costs associated with this abuse are phenomenal. According to a study by Prevent Child Abuse America, child abuse and neglect costs the United States an estimated \$258 million per day. The National Institute of Justice estimates that child abuse costs this country approximately \$56 billion annually. Yet, these fiscal costs do not measure the long-term effects child abuse has on our community as a whole. Undoubtedly, the human loss is incalculably greater. This year, Henrico CASA re-commits to its mission of advocating for the best interests of children involved in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court process and reducing the number of abused and neglected children in our community.

The 2010-2011 Board recognizes its retiring members and thanks them for their service and significant contributions to HCASA: Chris Busse, Rhonda Childs, Pat Hackler, Toby Long and Katie Pinkard Fallen. Several retiring members will continue to serve HCASA as advisors and task-force consultants. As Board president, I thank my fellow Board members, advisory members, task force members and HCASA staff. I also thank the members of the community who supported HCASA over the years. Lastly, and most importantly, I thank the HCASA volunteers who ensure no child will be lost in the court system or be placed in an inappropriate foster or group home setting.

Charles

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