

## CASA COMMISSION MINUTES

Tuesday, May 23, 2006

Room 413, State Capitol

Present: Judge Gors, Kristie Fiegen, Kimberly Max, Mary Livermont, Alecia Thompson

Also present for all or parts of the meeting were Jill Gusso and Dan Schenk

### Welcome / Max Gors

Judge Gors welcomed the commission, and introductions were made.

### Funding Process / Dan Schenk

Although the instructions for the grant application ask for the quarterly or annual report, what the commission would find most helpful would be the most recent annual report. That way, the numbers being compared would be the same.

Dan advised that the committee has \$270,000 available to award this year.

### Approval of the Minutes

**Kimberly Max moved approval of the May 2005 minutes. Motion was seconded by Alecia Thompson and passed.**

### Discussion

Kristie asked for clarification of the term "children served" – is that children served by volunteers or children served by staff. The answer seemed to vary between CASA programs. In some instances, staff monitor cases and are not "out in the trenches." In other cases, paid staff sometimes take cases but not on a routine basis and not one case at a time. The Seventh Circuit CASA does not allow staff to take cases.

Kim indicated that her understanding was that CASA was originally designed to have one CASA for one case. The directors said that most times that is true, but it depends on the CASA volunteer; some volunteers handle more than one case at a time. When a CASA monitors a case, there is no limit on the number of they can handle.

Judge Gors asked the directors if they see a lot of cases that last longer than a year, and the directors said they did. Gypsy said she sees a lot of cases that are long-term involving treatment for kids who don't have anyone else and generally they are methamphetamine cases. She said Northern Hills does not receive final disposition in twelve months. Judge Gors inquired as to the reason for the time lag, and Gypsy said the parents are sometimes incarcerated or in treatment. The judge then asked where the breakdown is in the system occurs – what is it that prevents children being permanently placed within twelve months? What is that prevents adjudications from taking place within thirty days? Amy said in Lincoln County, the delays are often due

to court calendars. Shirley said in Aberdeen, her program does not get the children adjudicated quickly enough often because they stack cases. When one case gets heard, the others have to be rescheduled.

Judge Gors advised that he is updating the green book (South Dakota Guidelines for Judicial Process in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases), and he would like any suggestions the directors might have on how to fix the problems.

## **Grant Review**

### **1. SD CASA Association / Sara Kelly, Executive Director**

Sara advised that the SD CASA Association has a website at [www.sdCasa.org](http://www.sdCasa.org). She said the PSAs they ran in March and April generated a lot of phone calls, and they plan to run it again this fall. She reviewed the activities the association was involved with over the past year, including a booth at State Fair and a Christmas tree at the Capitol.

Lisa asked if Sara provides technical training for other CASAs, and Sara said either she does it herself or she finds someone who can, including local CASA directors.

### **2. Seventh Circuit CASA / Sheila Troxel Snyder**

Seventh Circuit CASA celebrates 20 years this year. Sheila explained that the number of children served on her application includes all children, not just those served by a volunteer because in her circuit, every child that comes to court is a CASA child.

Sheila is working on a recruiting plan. She currently has more children waiting to be served (350) than those being served. Sheila reviewed the events the CASA held the past year and those proposed for the coming year.

Kristie asked whether the National CASA set standards for counting volunteers for the reports, but the directors agreed there were none.

### **3. Sioux Falls Area CASA / Amy Benda**

Amy said they had a lot of trouble getting volunteers last year, but their referral program – current volunteers referring other potential volunteers – has been beneficial. They have a new project called targeted businesses, where the business is committing money and doing volunteer recruitment from within.

Jill asked about screening volunteers, and Amy said they do a central registry check within SD, DCI background check also. Their program has a standing order from a judge allowing regional child protection to check all volunteers.

4. CASA of Aberdeen / *Shirley Schwab*

5. Northern Hills CASA / *Gypsy Petz*

Served 132 last year; so far at 114 this year. 106 were served by volunteers.

6. Civic CASA / *Mary Gales-Askren*

Received \$10,000 grant Jewelers for Children, got some from Zonta, golf tournament, Casa blanca, etc. is revenue coming in but not listed in budget.

7. First Circuit CASA / *Brenda Schulte*

In November, her program specialist resigned leaving her as the only staff member. The board restructured and combined her position with that of program specialist; she relinquished some of her duties to office assistant.

They did get MOUs to expand into four counties. Her request is for salary.

Jill asked about screening checks for volunteers. Brenda sends her request to DSS for central registry check for A&Ns and they also do NCIC checks.

8. East Central CASA / *Callie Lee*

Have existed since 2002. Concentrating efforts on Santee Sioux Tribe- Judge Sherman Marshall. Trying to get a handle on system and ascertain needs. Judge Marshall has asked them to become involved with CHINS cases, at least in an advisory capacity. Children there do not have a lawyer appointed to them. 18 cases with 41 children already this year.

9. Oglala Lakota CASA / *Arlana Bettelyoun*

Her program began nine years ago. They currently serve 138 kids, and have 647 children on their waiting list. They are all A&N; her program does not work with CHINS or delinquents. Very grant driven and didn't need the funds until now. Arlana said fundraising on the Pine Ridge is not an option. She explained trauma investigator position.

Funding Process

Mary moved, Kristie seconded, awarding the funds as follows:

SD CASA	\$ 12,500.00
Seventh Circuit CASA	\$ 58,500.00
Sioux Falls Area CASA	\$ 58,500.00
CASA of Aberdeen	\$ 28,750.00
Northern Hills CASA	\$ 32,500.00
Civic CASA	\$ 23,750.00
First Circuit CASA	\$ 18,750.00
East Central CASA	\$ 18,750.00
Oglala Lakota CASA	\$ 18,000.00
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	\$270,000.00

Lisa questioned the amount the Oglala CASA would receive when they serve so many children. Mary indicated her reason for setting that amount was because the Tribe has no history with the commission. Lisa indicated she doesn't think it is fair to penalize Oglala CASA for not applying in the past. Kristie said her reason for the amount was that the focus of CASA is matching a volunteer with a child. Kim added that a CASA is a court-appointed advocate who is actively involved with the child, and she is concerned about the differentiation between the number of kids actually served by an advocate and those served by a paid staff member. Kim said she respects the fact that volunteerism is difficult on the reservation, but she is concerned about the program's use of paid investigators rather than volunteer advocates. Judge Gors commented that in a place where people have a really hard time just making it day to day, sometimes you need to pay advocates to get them. The judge acknowledged the problem with getting volunteers on the reservation, and said while it doesn't seem fair to treat the CASA on the reservation differently, you have to recognize the differences in ways of life because of the difficulties in living there. However, he also pointed out that for a first time applicant, Oglala's funding is similar or equal to that received by First Circuit and Civic CASA.

Arlana reiterated that she did not apply for these funds before because they did not need the money as they had plenty of other federal funding. She chose to leave the CASA funds open for others. Arlana assured the commission that CASA funds would not be used to pay for the Child Abuse Investigation position, but rather would be used for training volunteers. Kristie expressed appreciation that when they didn't need the money, the Oglala CASA did not apply, and said she hoped receiving a CASA grant would help them get more matching federal money.

**The motion passed; Ms. Thompson voted nay.**

### **Grant Application Forms**

Kristie suggested streamlining the application process so that directors can focus their time on serving the children and not on paperwork. Sara said she had talked with some of the directors, and they would like to develop a grid that would help Sara collect the same information from each program.

**Kristie moved that the state director be appointed to develop a standardized, streamlined application and submit it to Dan Schenk by September 1, 2006. Mary seconded. Motion passed.**

### **Policy Matter**

Judge Gors indicated that as whether there are minority members on the CASA boards always comes up during the commission's discussion, one thing that could be considered is awarding an incentive grant based on the number of minorities serving on the board. The group discussed the idea, and the judge asked the commission members to return next year ready to discuss this and any other ideas they may have relative to encouraging more minority representation in CASA programs.

### **Court Improvement Grants**

Jill Gusso explained that although she has the recommendations from Judge Gors, court improvement grants have been delayed due to a death in SCA Hanson's family. She assured the group that the awards will be mailed this week.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the committee will be Tuesday, May 15, 2007.

### **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri Adams