

**South Dakota CASA Commission  
Annual Meeting Minutes  
May 3, 2011**

Room 464  
S.D. State Capitol Building

**Attendance**

Commissioners: Judge Kathleen Trandahl, Circuit Judge; Kristie Fiegen, Junior Achievement; Jaime Reiff, Child Protection Services; Lisa Thompson, Wiconi Wawokiya, Inc.; and Kim Max, Court Services Officer.

CIP Committee Members: Tony Benning, Circuit Administrator; Scott Myren, Circuit Judge

SCAO Staff: Sara Kelly, CIP Coordinator, and Gloria Guericke, Administrative Assistant.

CASA Directors: 1<sup>st</sup> Circuit: Jackie Horton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit: Amy Benda, 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit: Julie Wermers, 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit: Gypsy Petz, 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit: Chad Catron, State Association: Jessie Kuechenmeister

Chairperson Kathleen Trandahl called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Committee members introduced themselves. Judge Trandahl announced that there is \$245,000 to be awarded this year.

**2010 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Reiff and Ms. Max moved and seconded approval of the 2010 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Ms. Fiegen and Ms. Thompson moved for the Commission to go into executive session. The motion passed by voice vote.

**Presentations**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit – Julie Wermers**

Ms. Wermers thanked the committee for the opportunity to present their program. The goals set for the past year continue to be the same – an advocate for every child. They had a good year in providing advocacy. After the last meeting, she

visited with the board as to where they could be most effective. They decided to switch their focus from Watertown to Huron (Beadle Co.) this year. Judge Foley contacted them last winter and asked for their help in a case. It went well.

They've been in contact with people in the new area regarding assistance and funds. They recruited five new volunteers last year and have a three signed up for an upcoming training. They do their large fund-raising event annually and had the largest turnout yet this past year. In the past they did a golf tournament, which wasn't a money maker for them, but was more of a friend raiser. They continue to offer training opportunities for volunteers and work on making the trainings creative. Their volunteer coordinator retired in December and the replacement is doing a phenomenal job. With expansion, they plan to hire another person for Huron. Services will be on an as-needed basis there until the new volunteers get trained.

The Fire and Ice fundraiser grossed \$41,000. They may do a fun run, triathlon, or reintroduce the golf tournament this year; whatever might work best for the community.

### Questions

Ms. Fiegen asked how she juggles her time on fundraisers versus work. Ms. Wermers replied that she and the accountant studied this and determined the time was well spent. Ms. Fiegen asked how much was requested from the federal CASA grant and Ms. Wermers stated that they requested \$35,000.

Judge Trandahl commented that she felt the application was easy to read and the information we usually question you on was provided.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Circuit – Gypsy Petz,**

Ms. Petz thanked the committee for the opportunity to share their progress. She stated that they served 134 kids last year. They work hard to secure city and county funding, which was something they could depend on in the past, but this was cut from one community budget this year and the program took an \$11,000 hit. Board members from that community are meeting with the council to see what can be done about the cut and re-establish the fund. Ms. Petz said that they do 3 fundraisers throughout the year. They do this because they are in a rural area and the fundraisers have been successful. They boosted their recruiting efforts this year because a couple kids didn't get served. They recruited four men who took the training and are now doing advocacy. Having positive male role models in these kids' lives has been phenomenal.

They looked at buying a house but haven't yet as it is difficult to make a selection when ten people are involved in the decision. They are looking for the perfect site.

Questions:

Ms. Fiegen commented that they have a strong financial statement and are always building up their reserves. She stated that it was exhausting to read all you've done all year as you do a lot.

**1<sup>st</sup> Circuit – Jackie Horton,**

Ms. Horton introduced herself and thanked the Commission for their past support. Ms. Horton stated that she has been the new director since January and that she has 13 years of non-profit experience. They have had a complete turnover of staff. The board looked hard at what was needed to be done to serve the kids in their five-county jurisdiction. The past waiting list was unacceptable to her and also the financial situation. They needed to do some hard decisions if they wanted to keep their door open.

Services were provided to 66 kids last year by 13 volunteers. Four new volunteers were trained and sworn in to the program. Ms. Horton distributed a document which told about their program and some of the fundraisers they've done. Since January, public service announcements (PSAs) were sent to seven papers and Ms. Horton did five radio shows. They have done a number of fundraisers and many more are planned.

Several of the fundraisers and program awareness opportunities are noted below and a full listing is filed with the master copy of these minutes. In March they launched their first direct mail campaign. 1200 pieces were mailed and they raised \$4,900. At their Popcorn Ball fundraiser they sold over 2300, surpassing their 1500 goal and netting \$2,279. Jimmy Weber, a South Dakota-born singer/writer/entertainer, agreed to be a spokesman for CASA and put on a benefit for them in Mitchell. Various celebrities donated items for the silent auction held in connection with the concert. The theater seated 400 and they sold almost 300 tickets, which she felt wasn't bad for a last-minute fundraiser. In June, the Greg Warner memorial walk is scheduled. In July they'll be at the Corn Palace Stampede and in November is Tea with Mrs. Claus. Direct mail requests will be done in June and November. Volunteer training is set up for June and July. They have board membership from all 5 counties they serve.

Ms. Horton thanked Amy Benda and LaRae Oberloh, Sioux Falls CASA, for their assistance and support during the transition from the former director to Ms. Horton.

## Questions

Ms. Fiegen asked Ms. Horton to go through her handout. Ms. Horton discussed the fundraisers noted in the handout. She said that public awareness is a big priority as a lot of people do not understand what is meant by CASA.

Ms. Fiegen noted the special events and time involved and asked how her board felt about having 1-2 major events versus so many events. Ms. Horton stated that, right now, they want to get the word out. She has a lot of volunteers, such as those from the Retired and Senior Volunteers Program (RSVP), doing the fundraiser work.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Circuit – Chad Catron**

Mr. Catron thanked the committee for their support and for allowing the CASA funds to pay director's salaries, as this is not allowed in most grants. He noted that the total number of children needing services dropped prominently and the reason for this is the way they are counting has changed. They now count when a formal petition has been filed rather than when kids first enter the program. This process started in May.

They continue to work on financials and the board has taken a broader stance as they now receive more information and have stepped up on input.

The second annual Forgotten Children campaign was held this year utilizing the child cutouts. They had them in the Gap and also partnered with approximately 50 businesses in the community and had the 80 cutouts in these areas.

They are splitting the training into 2 different classes. He noted that they will be losing their Board chair due to retirement and relocating south.

## Questions

Ms. Thompson commented that she liked his strategic plan and some of the projects he has completed. Ms. Fiegen added that she appreciated the detailed plan and asked if they do modified accrual accounting. Mr. Catron replied that they do cash accounting. Ms. Fiegen questioned the other programs and they all indicated they had cash accounting. Ms. Fiegen commented that she was impressed with all that had been accomplished in his program.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit – Amy Benda**

Ms. Benda thanked the committee for their past support and for the opportunity to be here today. She shared a short story about how she met with a prospective volunteer last week who didn't know if they wanted to be an advocate or an office worker. The reason the volunteer was joining the program was because seven

years ago the kids in the apartment adjacent to hers were removed and she was contacted by the advocate for information, and she was very impressed with the advocate's work.

Ms. Benda stated that they have four focus areas and have made headway in several of them. They are reevaluating their fundraiser events regarding time and the amount of money brought in. She noted that they have several major donors who will also help them pull in more donors. She reported that only 15 volunteers were sworn in last year and the reason stated was that people couldn't do the weekends planned for training. Their retention continues to remain positive. They do exit interviews to maintain quality control and to hopefully keep the person active in the program in a different manner. They increased a part-time staff person to full time.

Ms. Benda stated MidContinent Cable ran PSA's on local cable TV channels from July 10 to December 10. The PSA's were tagged with local CASA program information. Ms. Benda reported she shared this opportunity with the other CASA programs.

Ms. Benda reported a \$10,000 profit from the Pro-Am golf tournament.

The Endowment balance is up a bit from the time the CASA Commission grant was written.

The program is one of three programs to be featured in the United Way video.

### Questions

Ms. Reiff commented that she liked the chart provided and liked the exit interview idea to help maintain the quality of the program. Ms. Thompson stated that it amazes her how Ms. Benda always finds time to help out Mitchell and other areas. Ms. Benda replied that her goal is to keep every child safe and served.

Ms. Fiegen asked how the Action Committees worked. Ms. Benda gave the example that the Strategic Plan committee's goal involves infrastructure – updating the donor database. She explained that every board member is on at least one committee. People in the community are also on the committees and are being groomed to maybe someday be on the board.

Judge Trandahl commented that the strategic plan was complete and comprehensive.

Ms. Thompson commended Ms. Benda and her staff for reaching out to other programs and supporting them.

Ms. Fiegen asked directors to explain the difference between independent study and in-person training. Brookings has independent study and Ms. Wermers replied that they do since they have small groups. A portion of the training is on their time and they also work with staff for the additional training. She noted that they're careful who they allow to do the independent study because they are concerned about a person not being a good fit. Ms. Benda added that you can tell who was an independent study versus who wasn't. Ms. Benda stated that they bring in speakers as part of their inservice.

### **Jessie Kuechenmeister – SD State CASA Association**

Ms. Kuechenmeister thanked the committee for their support. She reported that a lot of great things are going on across the state. The goals remain the same as in past years. They had a four-hour board meeting yesterday, resulting in work groups and committees being formed. They have a group of board members who want to be involved and will do strategic planning over the next couple months. The board discussed a visioning retreat in October to identify needs of the network. The Program Directors will indicate their needs and the board will work from these needs in the planning.

A new program is being set up in 1<sup>st</sup> Circuit. They have a one year provisional membership from National CASA to set up their policies and procedures. Two programs closed and they are working to get the Pierre and Aberdeen programs reestablished. The Pierre community still has an active board of directors. Ms. Kuechenmeister stated the budget request is double from last year for new program development; no concrete plans are in place.

### Questions

Ms. Fiegen asked why Ms. Kuechenmeister wasn't able to visit all the programs and she replied that she had scheduling conflicts.

Ms. Fiegen commented that she understands having trouble "getting your arms around a state organization" since she runs one. However, her board would have "had her head" if two organizations were lost in one year as Ms. Fiegen is personally responsible for maintaining the motivation and assisting her organizations when help is needed. She commented that your mission isn't reflecting what is occurring as you knew that both the Pierre and Aberdeen programs were struggling. She asked how Ms. Kuechenmeister supported them. Ms. Kuechenmeister replied that her board tried to meet with Aberdeen's board, but they declined the meeting. She went to the Aberdeen office and the meeting was diverted to other issues rather than how to get them back into compliance.

Ms. Fiegen said that she understands this as you are the big state organization. She noted that you could work around this by developing trainings and by getting

in touch with others, (Al Kurtenbach was used as an example), to be the mediator.

Judge Trandahl noted that when you left the meeting last year, you knew Pierre and Aberdeen were in trouble. She asked how Ms. Kuechenmeister helped them prior to the meeting as nothing about this was reflected in the information provided. Ms. Kuechenmeister replied that National CASA told them that there was nothing she could have done; it was out of her control. She spent time in Pine Ridge developing volunteer training.

Ms. Fiegen asked her to discuss site visits and to tell what is done regarding training, how you help them develop and to work with the community. Ms. Kuechenmeister replied that there is no formalized site visit agenda as her board decided one wasn't needed since the state conducts CASA visits. She tries to time her visits to coincide with community events and asks them what services they need from her. Ms. Fiegen noted that the needs could be asked via phone and then you could address this at the actual visit.

Ms. Max asked if she was communicating with the state board and Ms. Kuechenmeister replied affirmatively. She added that they also notify her regarding needs in their areas. Ms. Kuechenmeister stated the board chair mainly kept the information regarding the problems to the executive committee but has realized the full board needs to know the information about programs that are failing.

Ms. Thompson asked about National CASA contacting Ms. Kuechenmeister regarding the two failed programs. Ms. Kuechenmeister explained that there are 13 different standards and indicators of compliance that need addressed and submitted. One indicator was not submitted by the Aberdeen program and National CASA finally gave up after numerous notifications to the program. The other program needed to submit numerous indicators.

Ms. Thompson explained the process she would go through if it was known that a program needed help. She felt that if a program was on the verge of shutting down, someone should offer the help. Ms. Kuechenmeister agreed completely but added that if the help is resisted, there's not much you can do. They will handle this differently in the future, but noted that you need the board's help to be able to take these steps to step in.

Ms. Fiegen commented that you need board development training. She added that you need both strong staff and a strong board. You also need to have a strong backbone to know what's right and to stand up for it, and you need to keep this balance.

Judge Trandahl asked what State CASA was doing to promote statewide awareness of CASA. Ms. Kuechenmeister replied that they ran statewide PSAs.

In addition, they had a booth at the the Attorney General's conference in Rapid City. They offered two trainings in the past two years. They had a booth at the State Fair. They will continue pursuing in-kind PSAs. If the feedback is public awareness, this is what they'll do. They need to find their priorities and then refocus.

Judge Trandahl asked who did the strategic planning. Ms. Kuechenmeister replied that she did and the plan was shared with the board, however they didn't vote on it. They will be involved in the future.

Judge Trandahl asked for details regarding paragraph 9 on page 7 of the application. Ms. Kuechenmeister explained that these are two new requests for this year. An example of use would be for Yankton, as they didn't have money to apply for a certification. This money would be available for the Pierre and Aberdeen programs too.

Judge Trandahl reminded Ms. Kuechenmeister that in order to obtain CASA funding you have to be administering a CASA program. This would circumvent our rules and is in direct violation of state law. Ms. Kuechenmeister replied that you can remove this request.

Judge Trandahl asked what the feedback tool would look like that is referenced on page 8 in the first full paragraph. Ms. Kuechenmeister explained that this was suggested by a board member who has since resigned, and that the tool would possibly be an online survey.

### **Discussion and Determination of Funding Disbursement**

**Ms. Fiegen moved the following funding recommendation:**

- \$24,000 to Mitchell**
- \$79,000 to Sioux Falls**
- \$26,000 to East Central**
- \$46,000 to the Northern Hills**
- \$70,000 to Rapid City**
- 0- to the State Association**

Ms. Max addressed the Program Directors and discussed direct service to children and how important this is, and that she got a sense in the applications that you've been cultivating relationships with their boards and recruiting volunteers. She noted that this has been improving over the years. She endorsed utilizing volunteers in the community such as the RSVP program.

**Ms. Thompson seconded Ms. Fiegen's recommended distribution.**

Ms. Fiegen noted that there are so many different areas to look at when determining the funding the distribution; for example, how they use the

volunteers. She looked at a number of different areas before determining the funding amounts.

Ms. Max pointed out that the First Circuit is more rural than Sioux Falls, and some areas have more fundraising opportunities than other areas. Another determining factor is demographics. Ms. Rieff pointed out that Sioux Falls went to another area to help out, which takes time.

**The pending motion passed unanimously by voice vote.**

### **Other Business**

Judge Trandahl asked the Commissioners if there was anything they liked or disliked about the application process. Ms. Max stated that she felt this was the easiest year due to the application format. Judge Trandahl commented that she liked the month-by-month update done by Ms. Petz.

No changes were requested by the Commissioners.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting date is May 1, with a backup date of May 8, 2012.

**Ms. Max moved and Ms. Fiegen seconded the motion to adjourn.**

The meeting ended at 9:55 a.m.