

UCHRA CASA Program Expands

By Randy Wilder, Community Outreach and Resource Development Manager

Working under the umbrella of the Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency (UCHRA), the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program has expanded its venue into Overton County. Having two successful programs already in place in Cumberland and Putnam Counties, UCHRA CASA was approached to take over the Overton County program.

The CASA program uses judge appointed volunteers to assist in court cases to help determine the best possible outcome for abused and neglected children on a case by case basis. Despite the state's attempts to help these children, many become trapped in the court and child welfare maze spending their childhood moving from one temporary placement to another. CASA volunteers become a voice for these children.

“Our CASA program has trained volunteers who have a heart for the children in the Upper Cumberland,” stated Phyllis Bennett, UCHRA Executive Director, “Our children are the future and must be cared for and protected. This is what the CASA program is all about.”

Each year hundreds of children are abused and neglected in this region with life changing decisions made for them in the court system. However, with a program that is run using mainly volunteers, the task can be overwhelming at times. All CASA programs, especially Overton County, are in need of people willing to volunteer their time to help make sure these children's best interest are considered.

Overton County Juvenile Court Judge John Officer remarked, “We were fortunate to have had an active CASA program that we lost at the end of last year. I am delighted that UCHRA has stepped up to continue this program. Having CASA volunteers for these children is probably the best thing that could happen for them.”

“Being a CASA Volunteer does not require any special education or background,” Johnnie Wheeler, CASA program supervisor and Putnam County Career Center Coordinator commented, “Volunteers are everyday citizens Judge appointed to advocate for the safety and well-being of children who are victims of abuse and neglect. They stand up for these children and change their lives.”

“It is an exciting opportunity for CASA to serve the children of Overton County. With over 700 children reported abused and neglected in Overton County in 2009, we are ready to continue a much needed work. Our biggest need right now is volunteers.” states Judy Greenwood, Program Manager.

If you or someone you know is interested in volunteering for the CASA program, contact the program nearest you. The contact information is: Cumberland County 931-456-0691 ext 234, Putnam County 931-520-9540 and Overton County 931-823-7479. Tax-deductible donations can be made at www.uchra.com or from www.uchracasa4children.com. Please select CASA in the program box on the donation page.



Looking over the memorandum of understanding between the Court system and CASA to enable CASA volunteers to advocate on behalf of the abused and neglected children in Overton County court system are Judy Greenwood, UCHRA CASA Program Manager and Judge John Officer, Overton County Juvenile Court Judge.