



# Boone County CASA

Volume 3, Issue 3

Fall 2011

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Sarah J. Ponitz, B.S., J.D.

## Case Manager

Shannon E. Marion, B.S.

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## From the Director, Sarah J. Ponitz

### Greetings CASA Friends!

I wanted to update all of you about what has been happening with our program since our last newsletter in the summer.

We had a great turnout for our Celebrity Roast fundraiser on August 18. On behalf of the staff, advocates and board, thank you to everyone who attended and showed your support for our program!

I also wanted to send a special thank you to our Roast Master Curt Tobin and all the Roasters as well as our featured guest, Belvidere District 100 Superintendent Michael Houselog.

I would also like to thank and recognize our event sponsors:

**Alpine Bank**

**Barrick, Switzer, Long,**

**Balsley & Van Evera**

**The Ralph J. Baudhuin Foundation and**

**State Farm**

Thanks again to everyone who attended or made a donation. We hope to see all of you again next year!

Warm regards,  
*Sarah J. Ponitz*



**Thanks for being such a great sport Mike!**

To learn more about the CASA Program, please call (815) 547-6599 or visit our website: [www.boonecountycasa.org](http://www.boonecountycasa.org)

**Thanks for keeping all of us entertained!**

(For more event highlights, please see page three).

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## Upcoming Advocate Training

If you have ever considered volunteering to become a child advocate with CASA, now is the time to complete an application and join our program!

This is a very challenging but rewarding volunteer opportunity to work with the most vulnerable children in our community.



To become an advocate you:

- Must be twenty-one
- Have personal transportation
- Complete an application
- Pass a criminal background check and
- Complete the required thirty hour training course

**Training will begin in late September so call us today!**



**CASA Advocate  
Cheryl Russell-  
Smith**

**“Remember we  
are trying to  
make a child’s  
life better and  
our contact with  
them may be the  
only spark of  
hope they have.”**

**Cheryl Russell-  
Smith**



**CASA Board  
Member  
Marg Gang**

## **Volunteer Feature: Advocate Cheryl Russell-Smith**

### **Please provide some general background information on yourself:**

*I have been a Boone County resident my entire life. I grew up in Capron and graduated from North Boone High School. I have three grown children and seven grandchildren. I own and operate Russell-Smith Insurance Agency and Law Office on Logan Avenue in Belvidere.*

### **Why did you choose to become a CASA advocate?**

*There were times in my own childhood when I was forced to leave my home in the middle of the night for safety reasons. I chose to become a CASA in 1999 because I wanted to make a difference and send a message to the children, “you matter to me and I care about you.”*

### **What has been the most difficult part about being a CASA advocate?**

*The most difficult part is sorting out the facts of a case and determining what the truth is. That is why regular contact with the child and family is so important. I also worry a great deal about what happens to the children once the court case is closed.*

### **What advice would you give other advocates?**

*Trust your instincts and use your own life experiences to help you wade through the tangled webs brought out in each case. Remember we are trying to make a child’s life better and our contact with them may be the only spark of hope they have.*

### **What keeps you motivated?**

*I am motivated by the same thing most advocates strive for: to try to make a difference in the life of a child. As my fellow advocate Bethany Nelson once said, “we can’t save them all but we sure try.”*

## **Board Member Spotlight: Marg Gang**

### **Please provide some general background information on yourself:**

*I moved to Belvidere in 1956 from the Kewanee area. I have four daughters and one grandson.*

### **Why did you choose to become involved with the CASA Program?**

*In the early years of the program, I was invited to join the board by a friend. I also served as board president for many years.*

### **What are some of the rewards of being a CASA Board member?**

*Working with the people on the board is rewarding. It feels good to do something to help the abused and neglected children living in our community. Getting to know some of the advocates has helped me understand the many problems they face as well.*

### **What has been your most difficult challenge as a CASA Board member?**

*I think our board and our executive director are more focused now than in the past and we are moving the program in the right direction.*

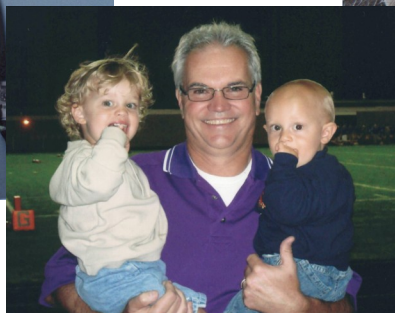
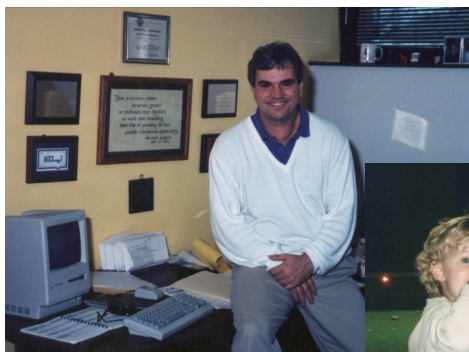
### **What are a few of your goals for the Boone County CASA Program?**

*I would hope to have the continued financial support from the Boone County government and the United Way of Boone County. I think awareness of our mission is also important so that the entire community can support us.*

### Highlights From the Celebrity Roast Fundraiser



**Michael Houselog  
(Senior Year)**



### The Roasters: Their Senior Picture Debut

John Wolf



Denise Balsley



Pat Murphy



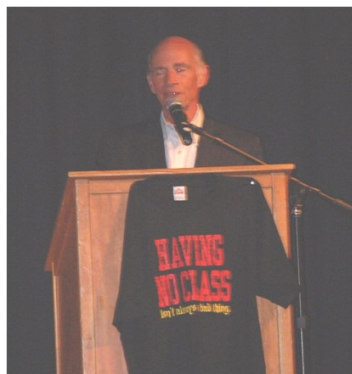
Mark Luthin



Dick Van Evera



Toni Houselog



Roast Master Curt Tobin



**Thanks again  
to everyone  
for supporting  
CASA!**

# BOONE COUNTY CASA

130 S. State Street  
P.O. Box 888  
Belvidere, IL 61008

Phone: 815-547-6599  
Fax: 815-547-6588

E-mail:  
staff@casaboone.comcastbiz.net

We're on the Web!  
[www.boonecountycasa.org](http://www.boonecountycasa.org)

You can also join  
us on Facebook!



Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

## Become a Powerful Voice in a Child's Life....

### From the Case Manager, Shannon E. Marion

On August 25, CASA had another working lunch with staff and advocates. During the lunch, four advocates were honored for their years of service and commitment to the CASA program and the children they serve. Advocate Cheryl Russell-Smith has been with CASA for 12 years, advocate Bethany Nelson has been with CASA for 10 years and advocates Ruth Todt and Susan Brazas have been with CASA for 5 years. It has been a privilege to work with these women and all of the CASA advocates who volunteer for our program. Sarah and I are truly thankful for all of the advocates hard work, for enduring the frustration they experience and for the emotional strength it takes to follow a child's case for years.

**Volunteer hours for the last quarter total 2,556 saving taxpayers \$178,920!**

*The mission of the Boone County Court Appointed Special Advocate Program (CASA), based solely on the health, safety and best interest of children, is to ensure that every abused, neglected and dependent child has a competent, caring volunteer advocate in all judicial proceedings of that nature.*

### CASA Birthdays

Carolyn S.	July 6
Cindy Lou D.	July 14
Ruth T.	August 19
Shannon M.	August 27
Bethany N.	September 1
Laura M.	September 13
Susan B.	September 15

Happy birthday to all of you!

### History of the CASA Program

In 1977, a Seattle judge realized that the children involved in the Juvenile Justice System needed help. He conceived the idea of using trained community volunteers to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children.

Today, the National CASA Program consists of over 900 programs nationwide with over 50,000 volunteers who serve more than 225,000 children annually.

In 1991, Boone County CASA became an active program and our advocates have served as Guardian ad Litem to hundreds of children since that time.

Advocates are appointed by the Court to thoroughly



Boone County  
Courthouse

investigate each child's situation by conducting home visits and by speaking to anyone who could have relevant information about the child's situation.

From there, the advocate prepares recommendations to the court in written report form.

However, before an advocate can take a case, he or she must first complete a background check, an application, a personal interview as well as thirty hours of training. Training gives each advocate the tools they will need to speak for the best interests of these vulnerable children.

If you are interested in becoming an advocate, interpreter or a member of the Board, please contact the CASA office today.

"If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much."

-Marian Wright Edelman