

Ohio CASA/GAL Association
The Honorable W. Don Reader Receives State-wide Volunteer of the Year Award

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The Honorable W. Don Reader, Canton, was announced as the 2004 Ohio Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian Ad Litem (CASA/GAL) Association Child Advocate of the Year Award recipient at the 10th Annual “Celebrate Kids” Conference held September 30th- October 2nd in Columbus.

“Each year our Association recognizes an individual who demonstrates their dedication and skill in advocating for abused and neglected children in the court system,” said Jackie Wilson, Executive Director of the Ohio CASA/GAL Association. “Judge Reader was selected for our Child Advocate of the Year award because of his continuing efforts to better the lives of children.”

In Stark County, Judge Reader is well known and respected. It was under his leadership that the GAL Program of Stark County Family Court was implemented, and he also hired the program’s first and only program director, Helen Stavrakis. Judge Reader has always been a strong advocate for CASA/GAL and remains so today.

Judge Reader served eight years as a Senior Referee in the juvenile division of the Stark County Family Court and 22 years as a Family Court judge. During that time, he received many awards of merit from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Ohio Association of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Supreme Court of Ohio, various educational associations, and most recently, was honored as the Public Official of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers.

During his tenure in Family Court, Judge Reader also implemented many other programs designed to help the youth of Stark County. Most noteworthy was the creation of the Sexual Abuse Task Force, which was conceived by Judge Reader and overseen by the prosecutor’s office under the strong leadership of late county prosecutor, Robert Horowitz.

Judge Reader has also served as the chair of the Governor’s Task Force for the Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse and Neglect, and on the Family Court Subcommittee of the Task Force. Notable recommendations from this subcommittee included the expansion of CASA programs to all 88 counties in the state, along with the possibility of partial state funding for program start-up and ongoing operations. It was also recommended that a Guardian ad Litem task force be established to develop standards of practice for attorney GALs. In 1997, Judge Reader was appointed and is currently serving as Chairman of the Stark Education Partnership.

About CASA

CASA/GAL volunteers are appointed by a judge to children who are in the Juvenile Court System as a result of abuse, neglect, or dependency. The volunteers receive a minimum of 30 hours of training prior to being appointed to a case and 12 hours of in-service training each year of service. CASA/GAL volunteers are trained to communicate with abused and neglected children, research and monitor their court assigned cases, and make recommendations to the court in the children’s best interests. They remain with their cases until their children are placed in safe, permanent homes.

The CASA/GAL movement began in 1977 when Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington, first recruited community volunteers to speak on behalf of abused and neglected children in court.

Judge Soukup felt frustrated that he was expected to make critical decisions regarding abused and neglected children with very little first-hand knowledge of their circumstances and experiences. By recruiting and training volunteers to communicate with these children and to make informed recommendations to the court, he hoped to bring more complete and accurate information to juvenile judges. In Ohio, the first CASA/GAL program was formed in October 1980 in Lucas County by Judge Andy Devine, with the help of the Junior League. The Stark County Juvenile Court came on board in 1982.

The Ohio CASA/GAL Association was established in 1993 to provide training, quality assurance, and financial support for Ohio’s 35 local CASA/GAL programs and to develop CASA/GAL programs in each county. In 2003, there were 1,822 CASA/GAL volunteers serving 7,017 abused and neglected children throughout Ohio.