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Contact:

Karen DeRosa, Director of Community Development
CASA for Children of Atlantic and Cape May Counties
(609) 601-7800

karen@atlanticcapecasa.org

www.atlanticcapecasa.org

CASA OF ATLANTIC AND CAPE MAY COUNTIES CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF SERVICE TO ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN

SOMERS POINT, N.J.: CASA for Children of Atlantic and Cape May Counties celebrates 10 years of service to abused and neglected children in Atlantic and Cape May Counties this year. To kick off the celebration, CASA announces a special 10 Years with 10 Stories campaign to highlight the uplifting and sometimes heart-breaking narratives that children living in foster care face every day. The first account features a young boy, who we will call Hector, who spent the first two years of his life in a hospital because he was born addicted to drugs. A new story will be released nearly every month and will be available on CASA's website www.AtlanticCapeCASA.org.

In 2001, when CASA expanded into Cape May County, the organization had only 3 volunteers and was struggling to serve just 2 children. That same year, the Board of Trustees received a grant from the National CASA Association and hired its' first Executive Director Angie Waters. By September of 2001, under Waters leadership, the first class of 13 volunteers for CASA of Atlantic and Cape May Counties was trained and by the end of that year over 30 children were being served. That number continued to rise over the years and last fiscal year CASA served 316 children and with an active volunteer force of 162 diverse individuals from across the two-county region.

"Those early days were lean, it wasn't easy," says Executive Director Angie Waters, who has lead the organization since 2001, "I was young and had little experience running an entire organization, but the Board put their faith in me and together we have grown into an organization that truly makes a difference in the

lives of abused and neglected children. Our goal and mission is the same as it was 10 years ago – to find safe, permanent homes for children living in foster care as quickly as possible and I'm proud to say that this past fiscal year we helped facilitate permanent homes for 92 children. Next fiscal year our goal is to serve nearly half of the 700 children living care in Atlantic and Cape May Counties.

“I hope that everyone reading this story will take a minute to think about those 700 children living in foster care. These children are part of our community, not far removed from our own lives – they are our neighbors, our child's class mate and our co-worker's child - and they deserve a loving, safe family.”

About CASA

Trained CASA Volunteer Advocates speak in family court on behalf of abused and neglected children in the foster care system and are dedicated to ensuring these children are placed in safe permanent homes as quickly as possible. In Atlantic and Cape May Counties, over 700 children are placed in foster care annually. Last fiscal year, CASA served 316 abused and neglected children with 162 CASA Volunteers and helped place 92 children in permanent homes. Volunteering for CASA is a rewarding experience says CASA Volunteer Judy from Mays Landing, N.J., “The CASA program addresses one of the most compelling problems of our society, narrows it to one small child and allows me to enter that life and make a difference.” For more information about CASA visit www.AtlanticCapeCASA.org. CASA is a United Way Partner Agency.

About National CASA

In 1976, Judge David Soukup, then Presiding Judge of King County Superior Court in Seattle, Washington, realized he was making life-altering decisions regarding children's lives without enough information about the children. He began to look for alternative ways to make sure that the child's best interests would be consistently presented to the court. Judge Soukup decided to use trained community volunteers, individuals who would be asked to make a commitment for the life of a child's case. His idea became a full-fledged program in 1977 and word of its success spread quickly. Encouraged by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, new CASA programs began to develop around the country. Currently, over 1,000 CASA programs exist nationwide, with 68,000 CASA Volunteer Advocates serving over two million children. For more information on the national CASA program please visit www.casaforchildren.org.

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