



Merger Will Bring a Stronger Voice to Abused and Neglected Children

ST. LOUIS [August 5, 2011] –

We are excited to announce two local agencies are coming together to provide an even stronger voice to abused and neglected children in St. Louis. The boards of CASA of St. Louis County and Voices for Children approved a definitive merger agreement at the July meetings. After nearly 18 months of exploration, due diligence and planning, Scott Larson, board president of CASA of St. Louis County said, “This is an exciting opportunity to bring two local agencies together to better serve St. Louis on a regional basis.” The closing date is tentatively scheduled for October 1st. When merged operations begin later this year, our unified organization will serve 1,200 children, birth to age 21, with 500 CASA volunteers working on their behalf each year.

The new agency will operate under the name Voices for Children with Jan Huneke serving as the chief executive officer and Allie Chang Ray as the chief operating officer. Members from the two boards will be integrated into one board chaired by Brian Ashworth, a former CASA of St. Louis County board president.

“Our commitment to serving the most vulnerable children and youth in St. Louis remains unchanged,” said Bill Hutton, board president of Voices for Children. Our mission will be to advocate for abused and neglected children and youth in St. Louis by representing their best interests in court and in the community. Our vision is that every child lives in a safe, permanent home and has the opportunity to thrive.

While program models differ in some ways, both agencies have a long history of speaking up for children who otherwise might be forgotten. For the past three years, the two agencies collaborated on recruitment and training of CASA volunteers in St. Louis County and the City of St. Louis. Dedicated CASA volunteers represent a child’s best interests in life-altering decisions that are made for the children. “This collaboration has been very beneficial, and it has opened our eyes to

the greater impact that could be achieved through a merger,” said CASA of St. Louis County executive director Allie Chang Ray.

The merger will leverage more resources to advance the mission. “While cost savings will be realized, the most significant impact will be better outcomes for St. Louis children,” said Jan Huneke, executive director of Voices for Children. A merger will help the agencies reach the scale needed to tackle the critical problems they are both trying to address. This includes growth in one-on-one legal and social advocacy, as well as working with partners on systemic and policy changes that will benefit all abused and neglected children.

There are over 2,500 children in foster care each year in St. Louis city and county. Many more CASA volunteers are needed to give every one of them a voice and hope for a brighter future. By eliminating the competition for volunteers and funding and being proactive to changes in the nonprofit sector, the unified organization will be better positioned to attract more resources with increased capacity to steward those resources to support future growth.

“The merger of two strong and stable agencies brings greater capacity to serve the needs of our children. This is a great move for the kids they both serve.” said Jerry Paul, president of the Deaconess Foundation, a financial and strategic partner of both agencies.

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