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### **Local Volunteer Named National CASA Volunteer of the Year**

**Los Angeles, CA. – June 1, 2005** – Local CASA Volunteer Josephine Martinez has been named Volunteer of the Year by the National CASA Association at its annual convention in Atlanta, GA. Jo, who was also named Volunteer of the Year for the local program, is an active volunteer with CASA of Los Angeles, which provides volunteer advocates for children in the Los Angeles County Foster Care System.

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteers are the bridge between the often-bleak reality of a foster care existence and a brighter future. After training and subsequent appointment by the Dependency Court, volunteers become strong vocal crusaders for children whose futures rest in the hands of a Dependency Court judge. CASA volunteers work one-on-one with children in foster care, conducting independent investigations of the child's circumstances and reporting their findings to the court. In choosing Jo to be the volunteer of the year, the award committee noted in particular her role as a powerful advocate for all children and her exceptional sensitivity in dealing with some of the most difficult foster care cases within Los Angeles' foster care system.

"Jo has been a CASA volunteer since 1992, and during her years of service she has advocated for the best interests of many children, from infants to teenagers," says Bryan Borys, CASA of Los Angeles Executive Director. "Her dedication, compassion and commitment have made her invaluable to the abused and neglected children she has served."

"I am delighted to be selected, of course," Jo said. "But my proudest moment was when I became a CASA and began working with my first child. I can't tell you how

wonderful you feel when your foster child finds peace at the end of their case. I encourage men and women throughout Los Angeles to join me in being a CASA volunteer.”

Jo’s sensitivity toward children can be illustrated by one of her many difficult cases. ‘Evie’ (not her real name) witnessed the murder of her little sister and was placed into foster care. As Evie’s CASA, Jo drove many miles and spent countless hours meeting and interviewing numerous relatives in order to help determine how to find Evie a safe, permanent home. As a result of Jo’s work, a judge placed Evie with her aunt in a distant California county, where she would be able to heal within the supportive environment of loving and caring relatives. Jo remained in contact with Evie, traveling hundreds of miles over the course of three years to regularly monitor Evie’s progress and keep the court informed.

CASA of Los Angeles, one of a network of CASA organizations in every state, recruits, trains, supervises and supports CASA volunteers who are selected based on simple criteria. Interested candidates, both male and female, must be 21 and commit to the program for a year. Currently in Los Angeles, there are 400 CASAs serving about 450 children.

According to Borys, CASA tries to pair one child with one CASA. “Despite the best intentions of everyone in the foster care system, it is often difficult for a child to voice his or her needs, desires and interests,” Borys said. “A CASA volunteer helps a child be heard, helps them have a say in his or her life, and helps the child feel cared for and loved, one child at a time.”

Established in 1978, CASA differs from other volunteer organizations. Volunteers, selected after thorough background checks and interviews, undergo extensive training, covering all aspects of the child welfare system. They also receive continued training throughout the year.

For more information on CASA of Los Angeles or to become a volunteer, please call 323-526-6666 or visit [www.casala.org](http://www.casala.org).

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