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## **Richland County CASA honored for leading effort to protect children from human trafficking**

**SEATTLE, WASHINGTON | March 21, 2018** – Richland County CASA, based in Columbia, South Carolina, was recently honored with a 2018 Award of Excellence at the annual conference of The [National Court Appointed Special Advocates \(CASA\) Association](#). Together with its state and local member programs, National CASA supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so every child who has experienced abuse or neglect in the United States can be safe and thrive in a permanent home.

Richland County CASA (RCCASA) received the award for an initiative aimed at fighting human trafficking, which poses greater risks to children in foster care. In about 18 months, the program trained 657 volunteers to spot the warning signs of human trafficking. RCCASA devoted staff to coordinate the program, assist law enforcement with prosecution, and help social service agencies to provide appropriate placements for children and heightened training for foster families. In addition, RCCASA is collaborating with other agencies to train staff to identify and reduce risks to children in emergency shelters.

“Richland County CASA attributes the success of our Anti-Human Trafficking Program to the dedicated support of our team members, including our child advocates, community partners, the Richland County Sheriff’s Department, and the Richland County Council,” said Anti-Human Trafficking Project Coordinator Alexis Scurry. “We especially appreciate the leadership of County Council Chairwoman Joyce Dickerson and council members Chip Jackson and Jim Manning, chairman of the Task Force. In addition, I’d like to recognize the Richland County CASA Board of Directors and our awesome staff under the direction of Paige Greene.”

The Richland County Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, housed at RCCASA, has grown from 15 members to more than 130. The Task Force has changed how law enforcement responds to children who have run away. The effort has been recognized by the South Carolina Attorney General’s Office and has created a community of people looking out for children at risk.

“We see this award as an opportunity to encourage the expedition of action,” said Scurry. “Understanding that 75 to 90 percent of all human trafficking victims have been involved in the child welfare system, we must continue to expand our efforts. These are our children; the ones we serve.”

National CASA is a network of nearly 1,000 programs that recruit, train and support volunteers to advocate in courtrooms and communities for the best interests of children who have been abused and neglected. These volunteers see their assigned children regularly, staying with them until they are placed in a loving, permanent home. They provide judges the critical information they need to make decisions in the best interest of each child. For many abused children, their CASA volunteer is the only constant adult presence in their lives. More information about National CASA Association is available at [www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org).

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