

# Dunham Fund offers child advocates \$100,000 now, \$400,000 later

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For The Beacon-News

AURORA — A half-million-dollar legacy from an Aurora industrialist could give abused children a hand to hold in court for years to come.

The Dunham Fund, established by Aurora businessman John Dunham in 1996, has given the Court Appointed Special Advocates program's Kane County chapter a \$100,000 grant to kick off its Grow a Healthy Child endowment campaign. The fund also has pledged to match each dollar CASA Kane County raises over the next two years with a 40-cent donation, up to a total of \$400,000.

CASA provides volunteers to shepherd victims of child abusers through their foster care hearings and the criminal trials of their alleged

abusers.

"This is the first time we've ever donated to an endowment fund, but CASA provides a unique service not provided by anyone else," explained Dunham Fund Executive Director Robert Vaughan. "They're assigned by the courts to help children, but they get no funding from any government source.

"Like many other nonprofit organizations, they've suffered from the recession. We surely didn't want to see the service they provide disappear."

"The Dunham Fund doesn't usually fund endowments," said CASA Kane County Executive Director Gloria Bunce. "We're very excited to have the opportunity to earn the matching grant."

CASA Kane County employs 11 people and coordinates more than 200 vol-

unteer advocates. Called guardians ad litem, volunteers represent children involved in abuse court cases who have no responsible adults to speak for them. They research the children's circumstances and make recommendations to judges on where to place children being removed from their homes and what other services those children might need.

Last year CASA received more than 300 new cases.

"The difference between CASA and DCFS (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services) is that we advocate solely for the child's best interest. Other social service agencies are focused on what's best for the family as a whole, which may not always benefit the child," Bunce said.

Most of CASA's funding comes from grants, United

Way funding and special event sponsorships.

CASA Kane County's board of directors decided to set up an endowment fund to ensure the agency will have operating funds even in hard times and to expand services in good times.

"We're holding our own paying for day-to-day operations, but there are a lot of 'unforeseens' out there," Bunce said. "We're seeking to raise \$5 million over the next three to four years as a source of interest income to stabilize our funding stream. It's going to take some work, but we have a strong steering committee and a good plan."

The endowment fund drive will officially kick off March 5 at CASA's "It's a Small World" fund-raiser. The dinner dance will include live and silent auctions. Visit [www.casakanecounty.org](http://www.casakanecounty.org).