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**CASA, FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT TO PILOT NEW PROGRAM TO HELP CHILDREN
TRANSITION FROM FOSTER CARE TO SUCCESSFUL, INDEPENDENT ADULTS**

Santa Fe – The CASA, First Judicial District program, serving Santa Fe, Rio Arriba and Los Alamos counties, has been selected as a site to help launch a new national program designed to address the unique challenges faced by youths as they leave foster care and become independent adults. This new program, titled *Fostering Futures*, was developed by The National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association, with the generous support from the Walmart Foundation.

Fostering Futures is based on a research model and study out of the University of Michigan that helps young people achieve their full potential by promoting a positive self-identity, setting goals for the future and planning to achieve those goals. This model, titled *Possible Selves*, has been used with middle school, high school and college-aged students and has led to significantly better outcomes for these youth.

Each year in New Mexico, over 100 young people between the ages of 18 to 21 are legally required to emancipate – or age out – from the foster care system. Aging out of foster care without a life plan or preparation puts these vulnerable youths at great risk. These risks include homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, criminal involvement and mental health issues.

The *Fostering Futures* program will engage CASA volunteers as advocates for and advisors to foster youth ages 14 – 21, with the goal of helping them identify supportive adult connections and develop specific transition plans for making a successful transition from foster care to independent, successful adults.

“These older youth need the support of CASA volunteers to prepare them for an effective transition and positive outcomes in early adulthood. *Fostering Futures* positions us to help achieve this promise for our young

people,” says Michael Piraino, National CASA Association CEO. “We are proud CASA, First Judicial District will be one of the 16 programs within our national network that will be helping us pilot this important new program. We selected CASA, First Judicial District because of their strong commitment to working with youths as they transition out of foster care. We also sought CASA programs that are well-managed, have strong infrastructures and leadership, a good record of sustainability, and the capacity to engage in a significant new project.”

"With our investment in *Fostering Futures*, we extend our commitment to make a lasting difference in the lives of foster youth aging out of the system," said Margaret McKenna, president of the Walmart Foundation. "Our support of *Fostering Futures* is a natural extension of Walmart's local commitment to the CASA cause. Our stores and associates have long supported their local CASA programs through our Volunteerism Always Pays program."

"My wife and I have been lucky enough to be foster parents for the past ten years" said BJ Ticho, Santa Fe Walmart Manager. "CASA provides a unique and necessary service to the community and I am ecstatic that the Walmart Foundation has chosen such a worthy organization to support."

Several local foundations and private funders have supported CASA First Judicial District's "Power Up" transitioning youth pilot program here in Santa Fe for the past three years, a precursor to the national *Fostering Futures* pilot. "The Court Appointed Special Advocates program stands alone in its focus on children trapped in the foster system – CASA volunteers are able to create lasting and focused relationships with children while the rest of their lives swirl around in a kaleidoscope of foster families, judges, lawyers and CYFD administrators," said Christa Coggins, Vice President of Community Philanthropy at the Santa Fe Community Foundation.

NM Supreme Court Justice Petra Jimenez Maes states: "Our youth are our future but they cannot succeed without the help and guidance from adults. The *Fostering Futures* program, by providing foster youth with an adult in their lives who will advocate and advise them, will give our older foster youth a fighting chance. I am proud of the selection of CASA First Judicial District for the *Fostering Futures* program, which is recognition of the strength of this program in their efforts to help foster youth. I encourage adults to volunteer for this unique opportunity to make a difference in the life of a youth."

For more information about National CASA's *Fostering Futures* program, contact Jim Clune at jclune@nationalcasa.org. To learn more about National CASA, and how you can help create a hopeful future for a youth in foster care, please visit www.CASAfor Children.org.

About CASA, First Judicial District

CASA, First Judicial District recruits, trains, supports and supervises community volunteers to advocate, in and out of the courtroom, for the best interest of abused/neglected children who are in foster care in Santa Fe, Rio Arriba and Los Alamos Counties. The program has served well over 2000 children since 1995, and currently supports over 70 volunteers. CASA, First Judicial District is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, partially funded by the Administrative Office of the Courts, but relies on donations from individuals, businesses, civic organizations, and grants from local and national foundations. To learn more, please visit www.CASAFirst.org.

About Philanthropy at Walmart

Walmart and the Walmart Foundation are proud to support the charitable causes that are important to customers and associates in their own neighborhoods. The Walmart Foundation funds initiatives focused on education, workforce development, economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, and health and wellness. From Feb. 1, 2009 through Jan. 31, 2010, Walmart and the Walmart Foundation gave more than \$512 million in cash and in-kind gifts globally, \$467 million of which was donated in the U.S. To learn more, visit www.walmartfoundation.org.

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