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Advocates for abused kids scour D.C. for extra money Group helps children caught up in courts

By DONNA HARRIS
SUN HERALD

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PASCAGOULA -- A group of volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates and employees are meeting with elected officials in Washington, D.C., this week to keep abused children in Jackson County from slipping through funding cracks.

CASA volunteers are recruited and trained by the nonprofit agency with the same name to advocate for children who are in the court system because of abuse or neglect. The volunteers' only concerns are the children they represent. CASA volunteers generally only represent one or two cases at a time.

Executive Director Frances Allsup said the national group lobbies on Capitol Hill about every four years.

"We want to re-educate them about CASA," she said.

Allsup said it's easy to not think about CASA because of the subject matter, so lawmakers need to be reminded, especially when it comes times for appropriations. "Sometimes it may get overlooked because it's hard. It hurts," she said.

Allsup said the nonprofit receives about \$39,000 annually from United Way of Jackson and George Counties, but can always use federal money. She said she will be talking to Mississippi senators and congressmen especially to find funding to help those children who turn 18 while still being represented. "We need to see what resources are out there for those aging out of the system at 18," she said.

A CASA office has recently been opened in Hancock County and Allsup said Harrison County may be next.

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