

# The Abell Report

*What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about*  
Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

## Abell Salutes: CASA

*A Child May Lose His Own Voice in His Future; CASA Makes the Difference.*

There are approximately 60 children in Baltimore City today, victims of physical and emotional abuse, whose trauma has been greatly eased because of CASA. The agency with its volunteers shepherd the children through the forbidding and complex legal and child welfare system--and give them another chance at life.

Baltimore City's CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) program was founded in August 1988 by the Child Welfare Center of the University of Maryland School of Social Work and Community Planning. It is modeled after similar programs operating in 40 states, including Montgomery and Talbot counties.

Today more than 70 volunteers are working an average of five hours a week, in service to the agency's goals: to prevent abused and/or neglected children from being placed in out-of-home care, and to keep them from being involved in delinquency action of any kind. At the hands of a busy and insensitive bureaucracy, a child may well lose his voice in his or her own future; CASA, bringing to the child's side an attentive and caring human being, is making the difference.

Baltimore City CASA's operating budget is between \$150,000 and \$250,000 for the 1989-90 fiscal year. Of this, \$25,000 is provided by the University of Maryland School of

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## Billboards: Should Baltimore City Ban Them?

*Baltimore Joins Cities Across America Debating the Issue. "Exploitation" Versus "Commercial Interests" and "First Amendment" -- "76% of City's Billboards May Be Illegal"*

If in October 1989 you wanted to make an informal sampling of just how many billboards are posted and what is being advertised on them in Baltimore's black and low income neighborhoods, you could have ridden west out Lombard Street (it becomes Frederick Avenue) for about two miles, beginning just beyond the University of Maryland, and through to Irvington. Here is what you would have found:

at Poppleton: Gordon's Gin  
Monroe St.: Martell Cognac  
Australian Lamb  
Landwehr St.: Johnny Walker  
Marlboro  
Bentalou St.: Australian Lamb  
Willard St.: Bacardi Rum  
Newport  
Bacardi Rum  
Franklinton Rd: Salem  
Canadian Mist  
7-Eleven  
Parksley Ave: Gordon's Gin  
Mt. Olive Lane: Crown Royal  
Alpine  
Caton Ave.: Marlboro  
MOST (credit card)  
P. T. A.  
Ellamont St.: Salem  
N.A.A.C.P.  
Loudon Ave.: Australian Lamb  
CIGNA  
Marine Corp.  
"Schocker" (the movie)  
Pratt St./Payson: Salem  
Fulton Ave.: Salem  
Stricker St.: Newport  
Calhoun St.: Gordon's Gin

Driving through the black and low income neighborhoods of Baltimore, one needs no scientific survey to be convinced of the obvious: there are a lot of billboards in these neighborhoods and most of them feature advertising of addictive products--tobacco and alcohol.

One formal survey supports the observation with hard data. The survey was made by Scenic America, which lists its mission as a "private, non-profit organization that works to clean up visual pollution." It documented 2,015 billboards in Baltimore City. Here are some of its findings.

- 1) Over three-quarters of these billboards are located in predominantly black, usually poor neighborhoods.
- 2) 70 percent of these billboards advertise tobacco or alcohol products.
- 3) Only 12 out of 50 billboards selected at random from 2,015 billboards, or 24 percent, had permits; on this basis, 76 percent of the billboards in Baltimore City may be illegal.
- 4) The city has permits for 1,737 billboards. If this number represents only 24 percent of all billboards in the city, there may be up to 7,000 billboards in Baltimore City. Washington, D.C. has less than 100.
- 5) There are more billboards promoting lottery sales in Baltimore City than in the entire rest of the state. As to who makes up the buying market, the report quotes

Sun Business Editor Philip Moeller, "Lottery tickets are overwhelmingly purchased by lower income people." The report argues that the State of Maryland has responded by targeting their ads where low-income residents of Maryland congregate.

Total lottery billboards --

Maryland: 72

Baltimore City: 43

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*"Targeting" of black neighborhoods does not appear to be in dispute.*

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That advertisers of addictive products--tobacco, alcohol, gambling--have targeted the black and lower income neighborhoods of Baltimore does not seem to be in dispute. As will be detailed later, the Outdoor Advertising Association of America, the national association whose membership is made up mostly of companies that sell "thirty-sheet" boards and painted boards but does include some companies that sell eight-sheets, says its members recognize the problems of targeting advertising products or services that promote addiction, and attempt to deal with them. And the Eight-Sheet Outdoor Advertising Association, Inc. addresses the problem with this statement: "We are in the business of mass communications, one aspect of which is our unique ability to target advertising to select demographic groups concentrated in urban areas, and we accept--as our responsibility and right, even obligation--lawful advertising without sitting in judgment on the propriety of it."

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But if the case is made that tobacco, alcohol and lottery advertisers are in fact targeting black and

low-income neighborhoods in Baltimore, what are the consequences? To whom does it make a difference? What kind of a difference? And why are many community activists and public agencies so agitated about what they view as a private exploitation of minority and low-income groups? What is the position of the advertisers and the billboard companies? What can and should be done? By whom?

Sandra Esslinger, Director of Public Education for the North Central Maryland Area of the American Cancer Society says, "Congress banned cigarette advertising in electronic media after January 1, 1971. Since that time, cigarette advertisers have become the heaviest users of newspapers, magazines, and outdoor display advertising. We see this usage especially in the black community. The fact is, lung cancer incidence is higher among black Americans of both sexes than it is among whites of both sexes.

"Advertising is particularly effective in poor minority communities where levels of education and socio-economic factors can have significant consequences. Harold P. Freeman, M.D., who serves on the National Advisory Committee on Cancer Among Minorities, said, 'Cancer knows no prejudice. It is the same disease, the same uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells in ethnic groups. But if there is a similarity in the development of cancer in minorities, it is that these groups experience higher morbidity and mortality rates because of lack of education and low-income status, factors which lead to late diagnosis and insufficient access to medical care.' "

Dr. Steven Thomas is the Co-Director of Minority Health Research Laboratory of the University of Maryland at College Park, and Chairman of the Advisory Council on Racial and Ethnic Minority Health in Maryland. He sums up his views on the subject:

"There's no doubt about it, targeting of black neighborhoods by the tobacco and cigarette industries--through billboards or any other medium that confines itself to the black community--works for the advertis-

ers. They wouldn't be doing it if didn't. And I don't buy their argument that their advertising only causes brand switching. It creates demand by changing the environment, by making it socially acceptable to drink and smoke.

"This advertising is carefully crafted to be exploitative of the black market, as it expands and develops greater purchasing power. Those industries' techniques of persuasion are so powerful that I only wish we, on this side of the issue, had as much skill at communications to fight back with.

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*"Billboards are the only advertising medium that blights our urban environment."*

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"But in my view the consequences of this targeting of tobacco and alcohol advertising to the black communities is to help make tobacco and alcohol-related deaths among the leading causes of death among minority groups, not only in Maryland but in the entire country."

Washington, D.C. is apparently a dramatic example.

A new city study of smoking-related deaths found that illnesses related to cigarette smoking are robbing people in the District of productive life at a rate that exceeds 73 percent, and deaths in the District related to the nicotine habit far exceed those from other preventable causes. The findings were reported by Lynn Duke in *The Washington Post* (Nov. 16).

The study concluded that cigarette smoking among blacks in the District is the major cause of a dramatic disparity between the health of the city's blacks and whites.

Commenting, Deputy Administrator Marc L. Rivo of the city's Preventative Health Services Administration and leader of the research team, said, "I think the District is a barometer of the health of black Americans, and I think it's important to say that this is a national problem."

D.C. Public Health Commissioner Reed V. Tuckson accused the tobacco industry of "targeting advertising at the vulnerable and oppressed segments, and subjugating people of color through disease. The problem," he said, "involves a \$35-billion industry versus a minority population that suffers 60,000 excess deaths every year compared with the white population. The single greatest risk factor for premature death is cigarette smoking."

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Scenic America points up what it sees as the "uniquely negative impacts" of billboards.

- Billboards are the only advertising medium that blights our urban environment.
- As the most visible form of alcoholic beverage and cigarette advertising, billboards are unique in their ability to reinforce drinking and smoking as social norms.
- Children are particularly susceptible to billboard advertising. Even before they can read, children can see young, attractive, athletic-looking models smoking and drinking alcohol.
- Unlike magazines, newspapers, television and radio, the billboard industry exercises no meaningful restraint on the placement of its ads.
- Although billboards are the only tobacco and alcohol ads that the public cannot escape, the warning labels on billboards are either non-existent or impossible to read from a passing car.

As was mentioned earlier, the Outdoor Advertising Association of America, which represents those outdoor advertisers using for the most part the "larger" boards, has no quarrel with the finding that tobacco, alcohol and lottery advertisers are targeting black and low-income neighborhoods. It sees its problem as how to serve the advertiser, while respecting societal interests.

According to Kippy Burns, Director of Media Relations for the national group, "A lot of the structures that you see in inner city neighborhoods are 'eight-sheet' boards and

to the extent that there is a predominance of tobacco and alcohol billboards, much of it appears on these eight-sheet, or 'junior' boards, and it happens notwithstanding our policy that clearly discourages the practice.

"We have perceived a strong sense of concern about this problem within the larger community, and in June of this year as responsible corporate citizens we passed a tobacco and alcohol policy. Bottom line: We as responsible citizens discourage the placement of alcohol and tobacco advertising that may excessively target one segment of the population. It's not a 'law'; it's a commitment. We passed the resolution because we are citizens, too, and we share each respective community's interest in the problem. We represent 235 company plants around the country, including Baltimore.

"We did not react to any formal pressure, we did what we did because we thought it was the right thing to do. Although there is no formal mechanism for controlling the targeting of alcohol and tobacco billboards to the black communities, our members recognize the problem and are actively working to discourage their advertisers from such programming."

Ms. Burns is not able to give specific examples of programming in which individual companies actively deal with the problem in any community; "It is more of an off-the-record, word-of-mouth activism."

Ronald W. Waggener is Executive Director of the Eight-Sheet Outdoor Advertising Association, Inc., and his view, speaking for his membership, is that while it is true that eight-sheet billboards are sometimes used in targeted advertising to blacks, such a practice is a legitimate use of the medium. In the end, he feels, the numbers have been overblown anyway, and, taken all together, nothing need be done about the practice. "It's a case of eight-sheet advertising apparently working too well," he says. "For example, less than one percent of the advertising dollars expended by tobacco and liquor companies in the United States is spent on eight-sheet outdoor advertising targeted

towards black consumers. Eight-sheet advertising is so cost-efficient that consumer protection groups and reporters imply that a disproportionate amount of socially harmful advertising is directed towards this minority audience.

"The facts are that leading tobacco advertisers spend between 17 percent and 50 percent of their advertising budgets on newspaper advertising, only 1.2 percent on eight-sheet outdoor.

"Leading liquor advertisers spend approximately 10 percent of their advertising budgets on newspaper advertising, but only .6 percent on eight-sheets.

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*"We believe the marketers of lawful products have the right to advertise those products in a lawful way. We defend their right."*

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"Since the black population is 12 percent of the total population, the amount spent on eight-sheet outdoor would seem to be disproportionately low. National advertising is usually concentrated in the top 25 markets, which also happen to be markets with high ethnic populations.

"Eight-sheets are an effective way to reach demographically segmented audiences, one of which is black consumers. Without access to broadcast advertising, liquor and tobacco companies trying to reach black consumers naturally take advantage of eight-sheet outdoor's unique ability to reach this target market, but use a combined total of less than one percent of their advertising budgets in this way.

"While in our advertising policy we discourage the placement of tobacco or alcohol displays contiguous to schools and places of worship and we discourage morally offensive, false, misleading or deceptive advertisements, we respect and vigorously defend the guarantees of free speech provided by the First Amendment. Therefore, we believe that the marketers of lawful products have the

right to advertise those products in a lawful way, and we defend their right to use our medium to deliver their lawful messages to their selected target audiences."

But in its publication, "Marketing Booze to Blacks," the Center for Science in the Public Interest has a different perspective on dollars spent targeting tobacco and alcohol billboard advertising.

It quotes *Advertising Age*, (Nov. 19, 1984). "Ads for alcoholic beverages seem to soak up the majority of outdoor dollars spent on the black consumer. While the bulk of advertising to blacks is by way of magazines, newspapers and the broadcasting media, in some areas up to 20 percent of alcohol ad budgets is spent on outdoor advertising."

Quoting data from the Eight-Sheet Association, the Center says, "According to its 1985 Summary Report of the top 25 population-ranked markets, over 70 percent of eight-sheet revenues were for advertising directed to blacks. Advertising for alcoholic beverages was second only to ads for tobacco products, and accounted for about 37 percent of all eight-sheet advertising to blacks during 1985."

Drawing from other data released by the ESOAA, it reports in the same article, "In the first nine months of 1986, (liquor) advertising to blacks was up a whopping 62.8 percent. During the first nine months of 1986, liquor marketers spent nearly 16 times as much on eight-sheet billboards directed to blacks as they spent on advertising to the general public in that medium. Some brands...were advertised on billboards directed only to the black market."

But the high volume of dollars spent on advertising tobacco and alcohol now appears to be counter-productive. According to the "American Way of Buying" survey as reported by Alix Freedman (*Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 14), "Half of the nation's consumers would support an outright ban on advertising for all booze and smokes." Sixty percent of those polled -- including a majority of drinkers -- wanted equal time for public health messages to counter alcohol ads.

Freedman concludes from the same survey that, "The widespread support for constraints on alcohol ads indicates that many consumers aren't appeased by the industry's efforts to promote responsible drinking." And he quotes Paul Schlemm, chairman of Vintner's International, Inc. on what effect new warning labels on beverage containers might have: "The public has become completely immune to warning labels."

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*Black organizations accepting funding from tobacco and alcohol advertisers--a practice which subjects their views on liquor and tobacco advertising to undue influence.*

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The whole problem of advertising targeted to black neighborhoods is complicated by the public relations programs of some of the tobacco and alcohol advertisers, who continue to fund the black community's favorite projects. The practice finds black organizations accepting funding from tobacco and alcohol advertisers to support fashion shows, festivals and education programs ("Black History Month," for example), a practice which subjects their views on liquor and tobacco advertising to undue influence.

Participants in the National Black Leadership Conference, meeting in Washington in September, 1988, spoke to the problem. "Many of our groups urge that the money given by the tobacco industry to our causes be refused, and that the parent conglomerates owning tobacco companies be asked to advertise healthier products in the black community. It is urged that economic power and the sources of funding be scrutinized to see if they serve our broader concerns."

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Scenic America, at the conclusion to its survey, suggests the following options for action to deal with the problem.

Baltimore City government could:

- 1) Adopt a moratorium on the issuance of permits for new billboards.
- 2) Adopt an ordinance forbidding billboards in the city.
- 3) Immediately remove billboards that violate city zoning regulations.
- 4) Pass an ordinance phasing out over some reasonable period (say five years) all legal billboards in the city.

But Dr. Maxie Collier, M.D., Commissioner of Health, Baltimore City, calls for "war." "I believe the Baltimore community should wage a 'war' of eradication of tobacco and alcohol advertising from poor communities. The deleterious effects of this type of psychological conditioning is reflected in higher death rates due to cancer, heart disease and alcoholism."

The Center for Science in the Public Interest is calling on Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan and Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady, whose agency's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms regulates alcoholic beverage labeling and ads, to demand that advertisers stop targeting blacks and Latinos.

Dr. Thomas says, "To get at the problem (targeting of tobacco and alcohol advertising to the black communities), it would help significantly to change the environment in the black communities. One way to do that is get those billboards out of there."

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Should billboards in general, but in particular billboards advertising tobacco, alcohol and gambling, or any product or service that is addictive or deadly, be banned? Can they be? If so, how? Legally? By informal agreement?

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*Where billboards are shown to be illegal, they should come down.*

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To begin with, clearly where billboards can be shown to be illegal

they should come down immediately. Then, as to presently legal billboards, since billboards cannot be put up as a matter of right, should they be permitted by the city at all, anywhere, if we know that some significant portion of them promotes products that are addictive? How does the community reconcile what is perceived by many as the best interests of the citizenry with the interests of commerce? Cities, for instance, can ban or limit billboards, but they cannot under the First Amendment, control their content. Why does the city permit any billboards to be erected? What obligation, legal or moral, do the billboard companies and their advertisers have to environmental, social and health issues? The questions are being fought on many battlefields.

Today, one of those battlefields is Detroit. One day in the spring of 1988 the residents of the black neighborhood in the district of Wayne County Commissioner Alberta Tinsley-Williams woke up to see billboards advertising "rolling paper."

"Now that was 1988," Jacqueline Jackson, executive director of Coalition Against Billboard Advertising of Alcohol and Tobacco (CABAAT), says, "and in this day and age, nobody rolls his own cigarettes. What they were advertising was 'rolling paper' for marijuana. No question. We saw that advertising as an insult to our neighborhoods and we were not going to stand for it."

They didn't. They fought to have the advertising come down, with the only weapons available to enraged but economically powerless neighborhood groups. They held rallies, they wrote letters to the editor, they deluged their respective representatives, the billboard company and the advertiser with petitions. The "rolling paper" billboard came down.

The battle goes on. CABAAT, while continuously monitoring the advertising on the boards in the black neighborhoods it serves, has requested a hearing before the city council to try and put a cap on the construction of any new boards.

Baltimore City is another battlefield. Responding to citizen pressure, Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke held a

press conference on October 30, outdoors on a street corner at Calhoun and Mosher streets (at which five illegal billboards were visible). He went public with the efforts his office was making to address the problem.

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*The billboard companies --  
Boisclair and Penn -- have  
agreed to work with the city.*

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He announced his intent to form a task force to review the issue of billboard advertising in Baltimore and to report back to him in 90 days. He also made known that one of two billboard companies in Baltimore--Boisclair (the eight-sheet company that owns almost all of the apparently illegal billboards)--has proposed reducing the number of alcohol and tobacco related signs to 10 percent of its inventory. He said his office expected the copy on at least 50 signs visible from churches and schools will be changed within two weeks; that about 100 signs will be removed by January 31, 1990; and 300 more by the end of the summer. He said that Penn Advertising, the other major billboard company in the city, claims that it has already undertaken a program reducing the number of its billboards promoting (tobacco and alcohol) products. "These moves," the mayor said, "will mark a significant reduction in the number of such ads on local streets." No mention was made, however, as to what the city intends to do about the thousands of illegal billboards that will remain in the city. *The Baltimore Morning Sun* (Nov. 10) commented editorially, "Mayor Schmoke's new campaign against illegal billboards...would be a lot more convincing if he would bring an injunction against the company mainly responsible for this blight."

*The Baltimore Evening Sun* (Nov. 2) suggested the mayor and city council go further: it urged the passing of a five year moratorium on new billboards, to "give the city time to hammer out standards and regulations for billboard advertising that would enrich communities rather than tear them down." And WJZ-TV (Nov. 6) editorialized: "Targeting (black, low-

income) communities to market liquor and cigarettes is greed without conscience. Its ugliness can't be erased by corporate contributions to the NAACP or minority scholarship funds. Pity the parents trying to steer their kids away from potential substance abuse--in the shadow of bigger-than-life invitations to open that door. To add insult to injury, 50 to 75 percent of the billboards may be illegal. Many violate zoning laws and the city's not collecting taxes on them. Mayor Schmoke and his task force already have plans to remove 400 signs by next fall--with the hope of lowering the pitch for alcohol and tobacco. It's an effort that is long overdue."

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*Maryland places close to  
the bottom of the list of  
50 states...even though it  
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wealthiest.*

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The increase in the city's sensitivity to the problem of billboards comes at a time when a study prepared by Northwestern Life Insurance company ranked states by "health." The findings show Maryland placing close to the bottom of the list of 50 states in five out of the six categories measured, even though Maryland is one of the country's wealthiest states.

To create the rankings the company combined commonly accepted health measurement criteria available from government and health organizations. The measurements were grouped into six factors. States were ranked for each factor and assigned an overall order based on the six factors: lifespan, disease, lifestyle, access, lost time, mortality.

Here are some findings relevant to Maryland:

- Cancer cases, 49th;
- Prevalence of smoking, 46th;
- Alcohol consumption, 35th;
- Overall, 43rd.

In Washington, D.C., Reed V. Tuckson and the Junior League and community activists have carried the ban-billboard battle to the D.C. government.

Speaking for the coalition, Tuckson said, "We need to remove all existing billboards or insure that there are as few in the minority community as in the white community."

The District's Junior League suggested an even broader removal. It called on the city to remove all illegally placed billboards and remove all of those that are within 500 feet of homes, schools, churches, parks, playgrounds, hospitals, health centers and government buildings.

Brendan Dawson, a spokesman for the Tobacco Institute, responded, saying, "The underlying foundation of some of these allegations is that some groups need to be protected from images and pictures more than other groups, and I think that premise is way off base. I would call it paternalism. I would call it patronizing."

The matter in some communities has been settled decisively.

Billboards have been banned, to one degree or another, in Winston-Salem; in Palm Beach County, Jacksonville and Clearwater, Florida; in Richmond, Indianapolis, Denver, Boston, Washington, D. C., Louisville and Charlotte. In March, 1988, the St. Louis Board of Aldermen voted to permanently ban the construction of all billboards within the city. It did this after a survey found almost three times as many billboards in black neighborhoods than in white (not a surprising figure since almost all, if not all, communities ban billboards completely within their wealthier areas) and that over 54 percent of all billboards advertised either cigarettes or alcoholic beverages.

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Many might ask why any city permits billboards of any kind anywhere. Concerned citizens find it difficult to understand why billboards are permitted when it is known that most of them promote life-ending, addictive products; the most difficult fact to understand is why Baltimore permits almost 5,000 illegal billboards to continue to exist within the city. Perhaps public discussion of these issues will generate convincing answers to these questions.

## CASA

(continued from page 1)

Social Work, while almost \$50,000 has come from The Abell Foundation. The federal government contributes approximately \$40,000 and an unknown amount is expected from the State of Maryland.

Does the program work? Is Baltimore City's CASA achieving its goals?

### *CASA points to results*

Sharon S. England, executive director, points to results.

"In 26 cases we saw significant progress. And by 'significant progress' I mean the degree to which we have affected positively the children's and their families' active involvement in accomplishing independent living. The children have learned seemingly small things which most of us take for granted--taking a shower, filling out a job application, speaking in appropriate tone and manner--but which for them mark enormous growth.

"In six cases we have prevented out-of-home placement.

"We've helped 26 teenagers whose children have been placed away from them to see their children, so critical at this time to the development of a bonding relationship.

"In 14 cases we've been able to contribute to the successful accomplishment of the child's permanent plan, either through returning home, or adoption."

Whatever judgment one uses to determine how well CASA is working, there are at least 60 children out there with good reason to tell you that it is working very well indeed.

## Some Recent Grants By The Abell Foundation

**A Place For Us, Ltd.** \$25,000  
Development of new programs for a community-based rehabilitative program serving homeless, troubled, abused and delinquent adolescents in need of a stable environment in a group home or supervised apartments.

**Action for the Homeless** \$20,789  
Purchase of four computers and networking system to enhance advocacy and fund-raising activities on behalf of Maryland's homeless.

**Baltimore City Department of Social Services** \$3,500  
Printing costs of monthly educational flyers for AFDC recipients to encourage greater parent involvement by informing parents of activities, events and opportunities to help their child educationally.

**Changing Directions** \$31,886  
Renovation and equipment costs of expanded Educational Learning Resource Center to provide learning opportunities for chronic mentally ill and deinstitutionalized citizens in a day community rehabilitation center.

**Chesapeake Bay Foundation** \$163,000  
Consulting and staffing costs for research and development of a baseline State of the Chesapeake Bay report card for wide readership by the general public, professionals and policymakers to encourage a region-wide effort to protect the Chesapeake Bay.

**Maryland Food Committee** \$4,500  
Cost of an annual statewide conference for anti-hunger service providers, policymakers and consumers to access information, network, build skills and develop statewide strategies and action plans.

**National Center on Education and The Economy** \$8,500  
Conducting a study on the different models of restructuring public school systems being implemented across the country.

**National Committee for Citizens in Education** \$20,235  
Producing a study of different decentralization models being implemented throughout the country in urban public school systems.

**St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center** \$30,000  
Supportive services for two single room occupancy pilot projects for "at-risk" men and women to ensure stabilization and to encourage emotional and economic self-sufficiency.

**University of Maryland/Baltimore County** \$15,000  
Planning grant to establish an advanced manufacturing technology center to serve the Maryland mid-Atlantic region.