



Media Contact:
Jessica Randazza
Publicis Consultants | PR for National CASA
206.270.4615
jessica.randazza@publicis-pr.com

NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION AIMS TO ELIMINATE THE FOSTER CARE STIGMA

Results From Two National Studies Gauge The Popular Attitude Toward Foster Care and How Foster Youth Would Like To Be Perceived

SEATTLE (Feb. 3, 2009) – When Americans are asked about the kids in the foster care system, a national online Harris Poll, commissioned by the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association, **found that 83 percent of adults know little or nothing about the experiences of children in foster care, and nearly half (42 percent) know *nothing at all* about these children.** When adults do think of children in foster care, only a minority (11 percent) cited positive impressions about these children and the foster care system that serves them. Most often, adults picture foster children as poorly treated, facing a hard life and in need of sympathy; 46 percent of knowledgeable adults believe these youth in foster care face unsuccessful futures.

However, when you talk to the youths themselves, you see an entirely different picture. A national focus group study of 50 current and former foster youth, also commissioned by the National CASA Association, found these youth see themselves as uniquely empowered by overcoming adversity, determined not to repeat the mistakes of their birth parents and optimistic about their futures.

“Yes, I have been through a lot of hell and high water, but because of that I am a stronger person. I’m still standing,” said a male Dallas foster youth who participated in the study.

Despite the lack of awareness by the general population of the foster care system, 87 percent agree that foster care should be a national priority. Furthermore, 73 percent of adults believe in their potential to positively influence the lives of foster children.

“These are people we – and our foster youth – so desperately need,” said National CASA CEO Michael Piraino. “We know that when a CASA volunteer is involved, children are 95 percent less likely to re-enter the foster care system. There are people out there that are willing to help, they just don’t know how.”

When asked what foster children want they say it’s simple – “we just want someone to be there to listen. We trust people who are willing to listen to us.”

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“There are a number of ways caring adults can become involved in the lives of these young people, not only as foster parents, but also as mentors or CASA volunteers,” said Piraino. “By becoming a CASA volunteer adults provide the stability that foster youth often lack. That stability helps these children transition from care into successful adulthood and helps ensure that each child has the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.”

The results of the two studies were presented by Piraino in January, in New York to an audience of national media, National CASA staff, and various members of the child welfare community. Supporting Piraino was a panel of foster youth advocates, featuring best-selling author and long-time CASA supporter, Anna Quindlen; National CASA spokesperson and TV-personality Judge Glenda Hatchett; and former foster youth and author Julia Charles.

For more information on the national studies on foster care, please visit the National CASA Associate website, www.nationalcasa.org.

About National CASA

In 1977 a Seattle judge, concerned over making decisions about abused and neglected children’s lives without sufficient information, conceived the idea of using trained community volunteers to speak for the best interests of these children in court. So successful was this program, that judges across the country began utilizing citizen advocates. Today, more than 1,000 CASA/GAL offices operate in 49 states, with more than 68,000 men and women serving as CASA/GAL volunteers.

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