

THE Connection



News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

**Cover
Story:**

**Advocating for LGBTQ
Youth in Care
(page 6)**

Features:

**Essay by Volunteer
of the Year
(inside cover)**

**Youth Editorial by
FosterClub All-Star
(page 5)**

volunteer voice

Frankye C. Hull

2009 G.F. Bettineski Child Advocate of the Year
Kershaw County Guardian ad Litem Program
Camden, SC

Being a guardian ad litem volunteer is a lot like being a detective. You have to be nosy. To help a child find a safe home, you've got to really want to know what's going on.

Since 1998, I've been an active volunteer for a number of causes, especially after retiring from teaching school for 30 years. But after I suffered from a brain aneurysm a few years ago, there was a period when my surgeon would not let me go back to my volunteer work. I had to keep my head down much of the time, and I had trouble with equilibrium. As a result, I wasn't doing too much of anything.

I prayed over it. I said, "Lord, tell me what to do. Because I have to do something, I can't just sit down." And it fell with the children. That's all I really want to do. The children come first with me. So when I returned to my volunteer work, I focused only on the GAL program.

I can't even begin to tell you how many cases I've had over 11 years, a couple dozen at least. I always begin by meeting with the children and with the parents. And I tell the parents: "I'm here to help your children. I hope that we can cooperate with each other. But I'll be very frank with you. I'm going to do what I think is right. If it means that I've got to sneak around; if it means I've got to act like Dick Tracy; if it means I have to travel a thousand miles: I'm going to get to the bottom of what's wrong."

When I was accepting the volunteer of the year award at the National CASA conference, I told the audience that guardian ad litem volunteers were very well paid. I was joking about the money but not about the rewards. The little children come innocently. All they want is love. They can't understand *Why does my mamma not want me?* or *Why does my daddy treat me like this?* or *Why does my mamma ignore me?* When you show them there is a goodness out here in this world, that maybe they are not getting what they need at home but that somebody out there knows they are special, it becomes engrained in that child's mind. They grow up knowing that they are good people. By showing them something different than what they've experienced, we can put those children on the right track. This is my reward.

I had a case where there were allegations that a young boy was being sexually abused by his daddy. But there was no proof, and they were getting ready to send him back to the father. The boy's foster mother called me one day and said, "You know, Mrs. Hull, they're letting him go home every weekend to be with his

daddy. And after every weekend, when he comes back to our house, he can't sleep."

I got off the phone, and I sat down and I thought about this. I prayed over it. Then I went to his school. And I asked the principal if I could speak to the child in front of a school staff member. They gave me two guidance counselors to talk with him.

When the little boy came in, I said: "Joe, I want to talk with you, and I want to talk with you frankly. I want you to talk in front of these ladies. Do you mind?" And he said, "No, Ma'am."

I asked him, "When you go home to be with your daddy, why can't you sleep when you come back to Miss Violet's house?" And he told us what had been happening. I looked at the guidance counselors—one of them was crying—and I said, "You all know what you have to do now, don't you?"

A lot happened after that, but today that child is doing well. He's happy and he's safe, and now he is going up for adoption.

As long as I can get out there and help these children, I'll keep doing what I'm doing. I can't do all of the things that I used to: I can't take care of my own garden anymore; I have to hire someone to do that. I can't drive long distances; someone else has to take me. But as long as I can get out of bed in the morning, I'll keep reaching for my cane, calling for a ride and asking the questions that need to be asked about the children. 🗣️



National CASA is accepting nominations for the 2010 Awards of Excellence until December 11, 2009. Nominate an outstanding volunteer, program director, board member, judge or program excelling in its inclusiveness efforts by going to CASAforchildren.org. Questions? Call (800) 628-3233.

Journeys of Respect and Purpose

Michael S. Piraino
CEO, National CASA



It was an interesting summer. The 40th anniversary of Woodstock came and went. The best point made in the press about it at the time was the comment of a police chief. He expressed great respect for that crowd as “the most courteous, considerate and well behaved” group of young people he’d ever met. I love to see those adjectives used to describe children and young adults.

In July, my son Andrew and I took a road trip from Seattle to Los Angeles. Along the way, we had the good fortune to visit with this year’s FosterClub All-Stars. They had joined us a few weeks earlier at our annual National CASA staff picnic. FosterClub brings these young people together to “train, educate and make a difference in the lives of their peers in foster care across America.” What a great group of young people—fun, lively, interesting. I respect them for their thoughtful and honest presentation of difficult foster care issues.

Recently, respect seems to be more in evidence among the young than among some older folks. Health care forums around the country have degenerated into shouting matches. Fox News and MSNBC can’t seem to figure out how to stop name-calling attacks on each other. If only I had some magic, I’d instill the courtesy of many young people into every national debate about difficult issues.

Sometimes our perceptions of morality get in the way of respect. The journalist H. L. Mencken once wrote that “morality is the theory that every human act must be either right or wrong, and that 99% of them are wrong.” The parents of maltreated children often do not get much respect. It’s too simplistic to view these parents as morally bad people. As Mencken also said, “for every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.”

One group of young people in care who have too often experienced little respect are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. You will read more about this in these pages. I firmly believe that everyone has a purpose in this world. If we accomplish something beyond basic safety for children, I think it should be to help them find who they are and what they want to become.

And probably, youth need to realize that getting to what they want to be is not as simple as making one

choice. As behavioral economist Dan Ariely points out, we almost never have the opportunity to choose between absolutes. Instead, life is about weighing the relative merits of various options. This is the complicated work our volunteers do in their advocacy for children.

The work requires a respectful and compassionate understanding of young people as highly capable individuals. Debates about their participation in abuse and neglect proceedings have often been based on the myth that young children cannot tell truth from fiction. According to Professor Alison Gopnik, even fairly young children have some understanding of the difference between law and morality as well as between fantasy and reality.

I would like each of our volunteers to know that while we aim for specific results such as safety and permanency in our cases, each step of the journey has its own value. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton once wrote a friend that no good action is wasted even if there is no immediate victory:

When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on...you may have to face the fact that your work will at times be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results but on the value, the rightness, and the truth of the work itself. In the end it is the reality of our personal relationships that saves everything.

My journeys this past summer were both by cars and by words—the words of young people, of my family, of foster youth and of the writers listed in the sources section below. I respect, appreciate and learn from all of them. And what I learned was, in the end, pretty simple. In the words of a song Jimi Hendrix played at Woodstock, “The reason we’re here, every man, every woman, is to help each other, stand by each other.” 🗨️

 For bonus information on the books, resources and organizations mentioned above, see [CASAForphildren.org/Connection](https://www.casaforphildren.org/Connection).

THE Connection

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association



A publication of the National CASA Association, representing 1,018 program offices and 68,842 CASA volunteers serving 240,894 children nationwide.

The nationwide Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) movement mobilizes community volunteers to speak up for the best interests of abused and neglected children.

CASA volunteers work for the judge to review and monitor cases of children who become part of the child protection system. CASA volunteers work closely with the child and family to bring an independent assessment of the case to court, recommending to the judge what is best for the child's future.

CASA volunteers help prevent children from becoming "lost" in the child welfare system. They give children a chance to grow up in safe, permanent homes.

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Speak Up for a Child®

Voices & Viewpoints

Volunteer Voice by Frankye C. Hullinside cover
 From the CEO by Michael S. Piraino
 Journeys of Respect and Purpose 1
 Partner Perspective by Flor Bermudez
 Helping Courts Serve the Best Interests of LGBTQ Youth 3
 Youth Editorial by Tobias Rogan
 Being Happy 5
 Closing Words from Judge Hatchett
 How Are the Children in These Challenging Times? 29

Special Features & Profiles

Cover Story
 Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care 6

Regular Features

Top Tips for Volunteers by LaRae Oberloh
 12 Tips for Advocating for LGBTQ Youth 14
 Association News 16
 Above and Beyond
 New Mexico CASA Volunteers Leverage Community Connections. . 19
 Featured Supporter
 Kappa Alpha Theta 20
 Book Club
Closing Time: A Memoir 22
 Child Welfare News 23
 Program Spotlight by Traci E. Mears
 Rural Program Launches Successful Fundraising Plan 24
 Field Notes 26
 Connection Sightings 28



We welcome letters, comments and suggestions. The editorial staff of *The Connection* reserves the right to approve all content and submissions. If you do not want your comments to appear in the publication, simply include a line that says, "This letter is not for publication." Advertising inquiries are also welcome. Articles and advertising appearing in *The Connection* do not necessarily reflect the official position of the National CASA Association or its member programs.

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Photo Submission Requirements: Please submit your best original photos. Digital photos are often not acceptable for print purposes. Connection staff will make every effort to return photos but cannot guarantee their return.



Helping Courts Serve the Best Interests of LGBTQ Youth

Flor Bermudez
Youth in Out-of-Home Care Project Staff Attorney
Lambda Legal

A teenager in a group home is beaten bloody by eight residents because he is gay, while staff ignore his screams and then show him the door. Another teenager, taunted by foster parents, staff and peers for being a “dyke,” is shuttled among foster families, group homes and shelters because she “doesn’t fit in.” A gay youth is forced by his foster family to undergo “conversion therapy” designed to change him to a heterosexual by attempting to convince him that his same-sex attraction is repulsive and deviant.

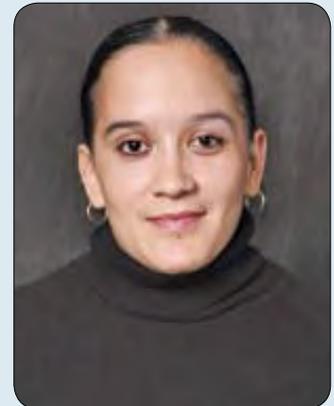
Countless youth in the child welfare system across the country who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) face similar experiences. Other LGBTQ youth in care, fearful of such abuses, attempt to hide their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Consequently, it may be impossible to know exactly how many of the nation’s 800,000 youth who spend time in out-of-home care each year identify as LGBTQ. However, numerous studies highlight the overrepresentation of these youth in child welfare settings and the substandard treatment they often receive (search for “Getting Down to Basics” at lambdalegal.org for research examples).

LGBTQ youth in foster care, already coping with shattering family problems and displacement, bear the often overwhelming added burden of hostility toward their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. They often suffer the following:

- Disapproval from court personnel, attorneys, CASA/GAL volunteers, judges and caseworkers
- Rejection by foster families
- Harassment and violence at the hands of peers
- Prejudice from and neglect by group home staff

Once in care, it is not uncommon for LGBTQ youth to be isolated from other youth, threatened or attacked by youth, blamed by service providers for their own mistreatment and even denied services outright because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Transgender youth face particularly poor treatment. They are often targeted for harassment and assault, given rooming assignments in accordance with their birth sex rather than the sex with which they identify, called by their birth names and forced to abide by dress codes that make no room for their gender expression.

CASA volunteers play a guiding role in helping judges understand the risks LGBTQ youth in care face and what impact they may have on children’s lives. The CASA volunteer is charged with advocating for the best interest of a child, leaving room for a variety of beliefs and the possibility of anti-LGBTQ bias. Such bias may rise to the level of an ethical violation if the CASA volunteer is unable to carry out his or her obligations to the child’s interests. At Lambda Legal, we receive calls from CASA volunteers seeking to educate themselves on LGBTQ issues so that they can



perform this function without bias and ensure that the best interests of the children they advocate for are promoted.

The first step to understanding the neglect and abuse of LGBTQ adolescents in foster care is to recognize that anti-LGBTQ attitudes are the product of prejudices with no place in the child welfare system. To dispel biases, CASA programs should implement basic LGBTQ competence trainings. These trainings should cover issues such as making oneself approachable for conversations about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression; responding to prejudicial behaviors by youth, staff or others; and examining one’s own attitudes and separating moral reservations from professional obligations.

When initially gathering information, it is essential that CASA/GAL volunteers fully explain to their youth clients their role as agents of the court, who are expected to make recommendations regarding the child’s best interests, whether or not those interests are in conflict with the child’s wishes. If a youth confides that they are LGBTQ, CASA volunteers should be trained in how to respond and what to do with this information. It is important to discuss disclosure with young people, taking actions that respect their privacy and wishes to the fullest extent possible.

[continued on page 4]

CASA service recommendations should provide parents and foster parents with support and guidance to gain the education necessary to move towards understanding and acceptance. Parents' reactions to a child's sexual orientation or gender identity will have a major impact on the child's life. LGBTQ children and youth who are rejected by their parents face a significantly higher risk of depression, suicide and substance abuse compared with youth from accepting families.

CASA volunteers can help LGBTQ youth in care receive culturally competent services. These include:

- Placements where their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are respected
- Referrals to LGBTQ-friendly physical and mental health providers
- Affirming mentors and role models who can provide long-term sources of support in their lives
- Other transitional services that take into account the specific challenges that LGBTQ people face

Most importantly, CASA volunteers can help the court assess whether foster families and congregate settings are able to ensure safety and positive development for these youth.

To better address the health needs of LGBTQ youth, CASA/GAL volunteers should make sure that youth's health care providers are informed of the risks these youth face and have the sensitivity needed to address issues of sexuality or gender. Health care providers should also be knowledgeable about gender identity disorder and about transition-related services like hormone prescriptions and sex-reassignment surgery as well as related professional standards. It is equally important that CASA volunteers pay particular attention to an LGBTQ youth's educational needs. Because these youth face particularly high levels of harassment and violence in schools, many times the underlying reason for school absenteeism is fear for their safety.

Without a doubt, CASA volunteers who have acquired the values, knowledge, cultural competence and skills necessary to assist LGBTQ youth in their cases are invaluable to achieve permanency and well-being for this population. At their best, the CASA volunteers' informed recommendations can be compelling, humanizing and educational for all the parties in a case, including the judge. Contact Lambda Legal at (866) LGB-TEEN (toll free) for guidance on how to ensure that LGBTQ youth receive the support and guidance they need to thrive and succeed in child welfare settings and beyond. 

Flor Bermudez leads Lambda Legal's *Youth in Out-of-Home Care Project*, addressing the needs of LGBTQ adolescents and adults involved with the country's foster care, juvenile justice and homeless systems. She travels the country presenting at conferences and advocating for needed reform. Learn more about Lambda Legal at lambdalegal.org.



Winter 2010 Connection Will Save Trees



The Winter 2010 issue of *The Connection* will be published online only. Other future editions will be available, as usual, in print *and* online. You will receive a postcard in the mail when the Winter issue is posted to the *Connection* homepage in February 2010. If you would like an additional reminder via email, please look for the "Subscribe" button at CASAforchildren.org/Connection.

After this test of an online-only edition, we will ask for your feedback. If you have any questions or suggestions before the survey, please email theconnection@nationalCASA.org.

Being Happy—in Spite of Rejection by My Birth Family for Being Gay

Tobias Rogan

From my birth, being gay has been against my family's way of life. Because of my family and their religious views, my journey through the foster care system began at the young age of 12. When my family disowned me for being gay, I was completely side-struck. I felt I was alone. I believed that I was the only gay kid around. I now am openly gay and happy with life. But it wasn't easy getting to this point.

Growing up in care in our society can be a struggle. Being of the LGBTQ community while *also* being in care makes it an even greater challenge for a young person. I know it was for me. I had many challenges while being in care and being gay. I didn't know where to go to find resources; I felt I didn't have any supportive adults; and my relationships always seemed to fail.

Growing up in the system, the importance of equality and being treated equally would have helped me more than anything. Many times I felt alienated.

On numerous occasions I was treated differently from my peers. Many LGBTQ youth in care feel that they are being treated unfairly. Having adults who can simply be the support that we need, no matter who we are, is extremely important.

For CASA volunteers, it's vastly important to understand the needs of an LGBTQ youth. It's very common that gay or transgender youth in care have been exposed to some form of sexual abuse. You should take

into consideration the importance of the young person's voice. Ask yourself this: Would a youth be comfortable in a specific situation? For example, in an all female or male setting? In a single-parent home? In an independent living program? Personally being placed into many group homes, I felt unsafe because of my history of abuse. I know that a CASA volunteer would have helped me "amplify my voice" to let my needs become heard.

Because I unfortunately did not have a CASA or a specific supportive adult when I had times of struggles and abuse, I had to become very "head smart" in life. I constantly kept to myself, isolated from the world around me. I looked up to certain people. Whether it was someone real or fictional in my life, I looked up to many, many adults. In my mind I kept telling myself that I was going to be a better person.

I know from experience that being in the system is tough, especially being LGBTQ. I had to become a positive person. But becoming that positive and successful person wasn't easy. I had to be resourceful and find the help that I needed. There were plenty of websites, organizations and other resources that I constantly looked up for advice, optimism and hope. Some of those were books! I read books very often to have a sense of freedom from my reality. I read to "get away." One of the ways I did find hope was through the YouTube website, where basically anyone can upload and share videos on any

topic. Whenever I needed an answer or some form of advice, I went to YouTube. I was able to hear personal stories and advice from people my own age, from around the world. It gave me hope that one day I would become happier.

Years later, I am a *happy individual*. It took a lot of self-help, research and reaching out, but I am proud of the person I have become.

Currently I am enrolled in college full time. I am in my junior year, and I participate in the campus color guard. I am double-majoring in social work and film and media studies. I want to take my skills and talents working with the media to help the foster care system and advocate for those in care—especially those who are LGBTQ. I also am the 2009–2010 FosterClub All-Star Michigan representative. FosterClub gives me the opportunity to help the system and advocate for young people in foster care. Because let's face it: Who's going to make a change if we don't step up to the plate? 🗣️

Tobias Rogan, 19, was selected through a competitive national application process to serve as one of 12 FosterClub All-Star interns. The All-Stars travel the country motivating and informing their peers, providing child welfare professionals with the perspective of youth and raising public awareness. To learn more, visit fosterclub.com. Tobias studies at Western Michigan University. He is also a photographer and provided the self-portrait above.



Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care



Estimates of the population attracted to members of the same sex range wildly from 1% at the low end (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1993) to 10% at the high end (Alfred Kinsey, 1948), depending on the study and its exact definitions. Most experts split the difference at about 5%. Rates of transgender identity (see Vocabulary sidebar on page 11) are much lower than the other categories under discussion; however very little statistical data exists. Many child welfare professionals believe that youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) are overrepresented in the child welfare system. After all, a significant portion of LGBTQ teens enter foster care because they are exiled from their homes. Without taking transgender youth or disproportionate representation into account, this subset of the 800,000 children who experience foster care every year could easily populate a city the size of Twin Falls, ID (40,380).

Opinions vary about whether homosexual orientation causes problems in itself. Adults' opinions about the pitfalls of gay, lesbian or transgender identity often take the focus away from meeting the needs of these youth. Society's reaction to a youth's identity can without a doubt cause a great deal of harm. A recent study published in *Pediatrics* demonstrated that lesbian, gay and bisexual young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were more than eight times more likely to have attempted suicide (See "American Academy of Pediatrics" in the expanded Resources sidebar available at CASAforchildren.org/Connection). The challenges and risks faced by LGBTQ

youth in care can be summarized in three broad categories: intolerance, barriers to permanency and lack of safety.

A Stigmatized Identity

A teenage girl's foster parents refer to her as a 'dyke' and try to remake her by replacing all her clothing against her will. (From Out of the Margins, listed in Resources sidebar on page 8)

Nearly every challenge faced by LGBTQ youth in care can be traced to a lack of acceptance. Whether it is called prejudice, discrimination, ignorance or thoughtlessness, these youth may experience rejecting behavior from birth parents, foster parents, advocates, peers and sometimes even the professionals who serve them. Sources of this discrimination may be cultural or religious.

"All of us carry our biases, beliefs and attitudes with us," points out Ellen Kahn, director of the Human Rights Campaign's Family Project. "I think homophobia and transphobia are the last frontier for tolerating intolerance. There aren't yet national laws against this discrimination that would give us the foundation we need in order to fight it successfully—nothing parallel to what we use in fighting racial discrimination."

Many researchers and LGBTQ individuals believe strongly in the genetic origins of sexual orientation. "People need to understand that it's not a choice—any more than it would be for a heterosexual person to say they chose to be straight," says Mary McGowan, a guardian ad litem volunteer with the 4th Judicial District Guardian ad Litem

Program in Minneapolis, MN. “We have to see it as not a lifestyle, not a choice—but who you are.” In addition to being a GAL volunteer, McGowan is an adoptive parent of five special-needs children. She is also a professional trainer and speaks nationally and internationally on this subject.

McGowan takes it a step further when she does new foster parent education. “I talk with the foster parent candidly when they say, ‘I want to raise little kids so they won’t grow to be gay.’ I let them know it’s a myth that they can control this. I tell them that if they don’t think they can raise a child who eventually identifies as gay or lesbian, then they should reconsider doing foster care. It will be a terrible influence if their issues get in the way and the child sees her own identity as something bad.”

Prejudicial treatment of these youth is so pervasive that young people themselves often don’t recognize it when it happens. “We sponsored a listening forum last fall offering LGBTQ youth in our county a chance to share their experiences with us,” says Ann Marie Foley Binsner, executive director of CASA of Prince George’s County in Hyattsville, MD. “One of the things that struck me most was that even though the youth were recounting discriminatory and hateful experiences, they weren’t identifying those experiences as such because it was par for the course. When a young man was told, ‘As long as you don’t *act* gay, you’ll be fine in our group home,’ he didn’t think it was a big deal. He said, ‘So I don’t act gay and I’ve been getting along there just fine.’ It’s shocking to me that somebody would be told not to be themselves and they would be okay with that.”

Lack of Permanency

A teenage boy is singled out by his foster parents and social worker solely because of his non-gender-conforming appearance and mannerisms. A recommendation is made for placement in a residential center known for treating youth who are sexual offenders.

Youth in foster care who are LGBTQ are less likely to find a permanent home than other children, whether that means reunification or adoption (see “Lambda Legal” in the Resources sidebar for sources). “One of the issues that affects youth in the system who are sexual or gender minorities is not enough focus on permanency,” says Jody Marksamer, staff attorney and youth project director at the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR). “Child welfare workers often give up on the idea that these youth will find a family that’s excited to have them.”

Transgender youth may have the hardest time with permanency. “I’ve worked with a lot of homeless transgender youth who couldn’t find anyone who would



accept them for who they are,” says Lydi Davidson, MSW, director of resource development for the National CASA member program Advocates for Children in Columbus, IN. “The bigotry they face in the community is incredible. Institutions that most of us take for granted such as family, education, health care and religion often have turned their backs on them.” Davidson formerly ran Indiana Youth Group, an agency that offers a safe house and other services for gay and transgender youth ages 12–18.

Marksamer believes that CASA/GAL volunteers are in a good position to help make sure that youth who are gay or transgender are getting the same attention for finding permanency that other youth receive. “They should also work with the LGBT youth to help identify adults that these youth can really get support from, because it is very difficult leaving the system without those permanent adult relationships,” he adds.

LaRae Oberloh is program manager at the Sioux Falls Area CASA Program in South Dakota. She says, “We need to ensure permanency. I think it’s critical to find a family where the youth can feel safe and accepted. And it doesn’t have to be parents who identify as LGBTQ. They just have to be people that youth can trust and know will be there for them as they go on to adulthood.”

Tyler Smith, 20, of Tacoma, WA, aged out of care two years ago. He recalls being in “more than 25” foster homes before age 11, when he reached the home of Berdie Williams, who he now considers his second mom. “I definitely think my being gay impacted my movement between homes while I was in care,” says Smith. “I knew by the time I was 6, and I was open about it at a very young age. Before I moved into Berdie’s house, I never lived in a permanent home.”

Tobias Rogan, who wrote this issue’s Youth Editorial, spoke movingly of his lack of a consistent adult presence

[continued on page 8]

Resources Related to LGBTQ Youth in Care

Unless otherwise indicated, find publications and other resources by searching for the title from each website.

For a list of 19 additional organizations offering web-based resources on this topic, visit CASAforchildren.org/Connection.



Lambda Legal (lambdalegal.org)

National organization committed to achieving recognition of the civil rights of LGBTQ people and those with HIV through litigation, education and public policy work. Co-produced a number of resources with the Child Welfare League of America through their joint initiative, *Fostering Transitions*. Free resources available in hard copy or downloadable PDF:

- *Getting Down to Basics: Tools to Support LGBTQ Youth in Care*, CWLA Press, 2006. A comprehensive toolkit for a variety of audiences. Includes references to many more resources.
- *National Recommended Best Practices for Serving LGBT Homeless Youth*. Co-produced with the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the National Center for Lesbian Rights and the National Network for Youth, 2009.
- *Out of the Margins: A Report on Regional Listening Forums Highlighting the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Care*, CWLA Press, 2006.
- *Youth in the Margins: A Report on the Unmet Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adolescents in Foster Care*, 2001.

National CASA Association (CASAforchildren.org)

Download the following free resources related to LGBTQ youth in care from the *Connection* home page: a tip sheet and sensitivity exercise for CASA programs; a podcast featuring the voices of sources interviewed for our cover story; a podcast on working with LGBTQ youth; and the 42-page

Annotated Bibliography: Resources for Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth and Families in the Foster Care System, 2006, which includes national resource websites and publications.

Commercially Available Books

- *Foundations of Social Work Practice with Gay and Lesbian Persons*, Gerald Mallon, Haworth Press, 1998.
- *Hatred in the Hallways: Violence and Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students in U.S. Schools*, Human Rights Watch, 2001.
- *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*, Warren J. Blumenthal (ed.), Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1992.
- *Let's Get This Straight: A Gay -and Lesbian-Affirming Approach to Child Welfare*, Gerald Mallon, Columbia University Press, 1999.
- *Lesbian and Gay Foster and Adoptive Parents: Recruiting, Assessing, and Supporting an Untapped Resource for Children and Youth*, Gerald Mallon, CWLA Press, 2006.
- *Lesbian and Gay Youth: Care and Counseling*, Caitlin Ryan and Donna Futterman, Columbia University Press, 1998.
- *Social Services with Transgendered Youth*, Gerald Mallon, Harrington Park Press, 2000.
- *Street Child: An Unpaved Passage*, Justin Reed Early, AuthorHouse, 2008.
- *We Don't Exactly Get the Welcome Wagon: The Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Adolescents in Child Welfare Systems*, Gerald Mallon, Columbia University Press, 1998.

[Cover Story continued from page 7]

in his life. Another youth had this support, but from an unusual source. Schylar Canfield of Montana, now 26, was in foster care from age 6 to 18. He lived in 11 foster homes, two group homes and a children's home. "Then I was allowed to live on my own just as I was turning 17," he says. "I'm going through an adult adoption that will be finalized soon. My new father was my sixth-grade music teacher. Through all my homes, I always kept in contact by writing or calling. He was always there to listen to me. But besides that there was really no one who was always with me."

"I tell [gay youth], 'If people don't accept you now, they'll eventually come around. And if they don't, it's their loss.'"

—Berdie Williams, Foster Mother

Lack of Safety

A young man in a group home is beaten up by other boys in the home. When he reports the incident to the program's director, he is told, "Well if you weren't a faggot, they wouldn't beat you up." No effort is made to intervene in the continuing violence.

There is not room in this article to document the many ways and the degree to which LGBTQ youth in care lack safety. The Resources sidebar above contains sources of more information. Suffice it to say that they are more likely to drop out of school, to become involved in the criminal justice system, to be sexually assaulted or exploited, to contract STDs including HIV, to become homeless, to have mental health issues, to abuse substances and to commit suicide.

While Schylar Canfield did not have a CASA volunteer, he is now on the board of directors of Montana CASA. "I'm a FosterClub All-Star from way back, so my being gay isn't a big secret," he says. "I had to hide it a lot growing up though. As soon as I reached junior high was when my

foster brother at the time started beating the crap out of me. He could tell I wasn't like the other boys."

Berdie Williams, Tyler Smith's foster mom, recalls how as a teenager he would ask her to take in homeless teens who were visiting the gay youth center: "These were wonderful kids whose parents had kicked them out when they found out they were gay. All had the potential to go so far, had they had parental support. Some knew how to survive; some didn't. And I would tell them, you're welcome to sleep on my couch."

One former youth in care who did not want to disclose his name stated, "I was diagnosed with HIV at 18. I think a huge part of that was that I was taught my whole life, 'Just don't have sex or you'll go to hell.' It's impossible to expect an older teen to remain celibate. If you tell someone not to have sex, period, you're kidding yourself and that kid. So I had one unprotected partner, and that pretty much shot it. I've met a couple of other foster kids who had similar stories."

For transgender youth, access to appropriate health care is a critical safety issue. "For those youth that have been diagnosed with gender identity disorder, the standard treatment usually involves psychotherapy as well as hormone treatment," says Flor Bermudez, staff attorney for the Youth in Out-of-Home Care Project at Lambda Legal. "Unfortunately, many of the state child welfare agencies are not equipped or willing to find trained professionals to first diagnose the youth and second to provide and pay for the treatment. When youth buy hormones from street sources, they put themselves in great danger."

Georgia Feiste is a volunteer advocate and trainer with CASA for Lancaster County in Lincoln, NE. She has also been active for 15 years with Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) because her son is gay.

"One of the things that I have observed about LGBT people is that there is often a great deal of introspection," says Feiste. "And that is unusual for a teenager. What I found with young teens is that at first most didn't want to be gay. There is this self-hatred that starts to permeate their personality. Many teenagers who have not accepted the fact that they are gay become very angry and often end up self-medicating with alcohol and drugs, and our son was not an exception. What they are really looking for is someone to help them understand who they are—and help them learn to love themselves."

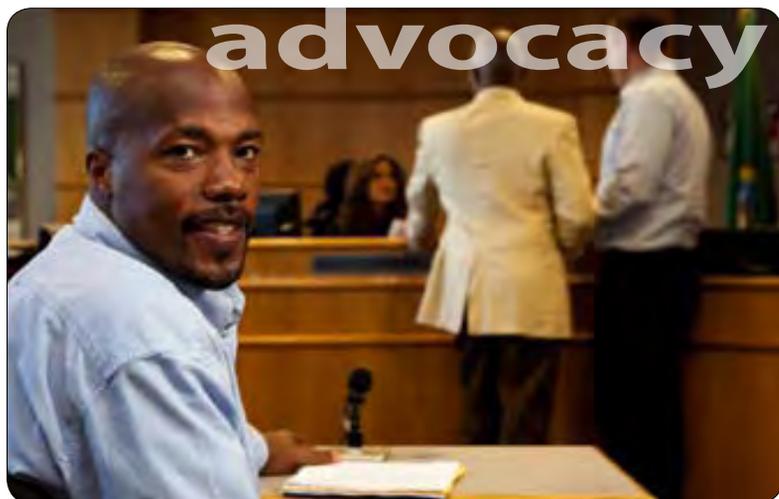
What is Feiste's message when she helps train new CASA volunteers? "The most important thing that these teenagers need is someone to tell them that they are okay just the way they are. Oftentimes it may only be the CASA volunteer who can give them that feeling of acceptance."

Rob Woronoff, formerly LGBTQ program director for the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), continues to consult and train adults working in child welfare. He points out the dangers of "conversion" or "reparative" therapy, which has been denounced by nearly all mainstream child welfare and psychological/psychiatric associations. "There is no need to try to 'change' a child's sexuality. Research shows that trying to do so only harms children, making them more likely to commit suicide."

Having to hide their identity means that youth can't reveal the normal rites of passage such as their first romances or breakups. And while their peers may be confiding or even bragging about their first sexual experiences, they must keep silent. Former foster youth Schylar Canfield tells how this affected him: "My foster parents were extremely religious. My foster mother found out I was gay after my first crush broke up. I came home pretty devastated. She jokingly asked me if I was a 'fag,' and that launched the whole thing. She freaked out. Our relationship had been great up until that point, but the moment she found out I was gay it turned very dark. I actually ran away from that home, the last foster home I lived in."

Regarding coming out, foster mother Berdie Williams offers this advice to adults: "Just be neutral. And if you know they are gay but have not come out, just pretend that you don't know. Because they do need to come out, to face it. They build up confidence when they do it. They think, 'I'm living here in this house, and I came out to her, and it worked just fine.' And I tell them, 'If people don't accept you now, they'll eventually come around. And if they don't, it's their loss.'"

The question of confidentiality can be difficult to navigate when a youth's safety is involved. How do you advocate for protection without outing a youth who would rather not be open? LaRae Oberloh of South Dakota



[continued on page 10]



offers this advice: “I think that foremost is to respect the confidentiality of the youth. If safety is an issue, the key is to leave it to the youth to decide whether to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Any breach could lead some kids to self-harm or to running away. But I think that a trusted adult can tell the youth, ‘We have these resources, and I can help you with this issue’ and let them have control. The youth may say, ‘Okay, fine, let’s do this.’ We’re better off including them and developing a plan to ensure their safety. But once it’s documented that a youth has come out, that will follow wherever he or she goes, and that’s not always a good thing.”

What CASA Programs Are Doing to Address Youth Needs

CASA of Prince George’s County, Hyattsville, MD

“The majority of the youth we serve are teenagers,” says Ann Marie Foley Binsner of CASA of Prince George’s County, introduced earlier. “So we have a lot of young people who are questioning or realizing their sexuality.”

“One thing we were able to do here was approach the Department of Social Services and express our concern to them regarding the lack of services offered to older youth and the need to train social workers who serve LGBTQ youth,” says Binsner. “We were very pleased that they were open to working with us to bring training to the social workers, the foster families and others who are working with youth in our county.”

This partnership led to the formation of an active countywide, multidisciplinary taskforce that has met monthly over the past three years. Adds Binsner, “We address training for service providers, policies that impact youth in our state and county and needed services for our young people.”

The taskforce consists of representatives from youth-serving county agencies along with the CASA program and other private providers. The county now frequently

offers training on gay and transgender issues to all social workers. The Prince George’s CASA program has also made this topic a regular part of the new volunteer training curriculum.

Binsner points to two new practices of her CASA program: “First, in our pre-screening interview of potential volunteers we’ve added a question inquiring as to their experience with and thoughts about LGBTQ youth and adults. Then a follow-up question asks if they would be comfortable being assigned to a youth who identified as gay or lesbian or was questioning his or her sexual orientation. If they lack knowledge or experience in this area, we can train around it. But we feel it is important to carefully screen volunteers who would not be, at a very minimum, accepting of a young person for who they are.”

The second new practice of Prince George’s CASA program involves pre-service training. “We’ve added a component that we adapted from a training provided by the Child Welfare League of America,” says Binsner. “The centerpiece is an exercise to help volunteers understand what it might be like to be a young person who is gay or lesbian and who cannot express their true self because of fear of how they might be treated. The exercise has helped our volunteers ask questions and identify with the young people they serve.” (This sensitivity training exercise is available at CASAforchildren.org/Connection.)

11th Judicial Circuit GAL Program, Miami, FL

The 11th Judicial Circuit Guardian ad Litem Program in Miami is another CASA program leading the way on this issue. The Miami staff is going through a three-part training put on jointly by the National Association of Social Workers and Lambda Legal, using materials co-produced by CWLA.

“What we envision is our GAL program becoming known as a place where children in care know they can talk to someone who respects them and cares about their needs,” says Garry Bevel, staff attorney with the program. “I hope we’ll also be known as a place where youth can be linked to services, resources and people in the community who will support them.”

Bevel recounts, “About a year ago our staff went through training by Safe Schools South Florida. It reminded me of my own experience at Florida State University where there were ‘safe zones’ designated by pink triangle stickers on various doors across campus. These were places I knew would be accepting and I could go talk to someone.” After this training, he took the idea of a GAL safe zone to the program’s director.

One of the first things Bevel knew would be important was to give staff members a baseline understanding of LGBTQ issues. “We’ve done several communications

trainings because a lot of it involves healthy, informed communication about this topic. People still have their own perspectives, but we're able to connect around the common purpose of serving these youth."

While recognizing that not everyone shares the same beliefs, the Miami leadership reminds its staff and volunteers that they are committed to ensuring that *all* youth are safe. Bevel insists, "I truly believe you can hold your own personal opinions regarding gender and orientation and still advocate to see children safe and be able to identify resources that will help them."

Beyond the services of the GAL staff and volunteers, Bevel hopes to make statewide inroads in terms of legal advocacy: "I'd like to see us identifying instances where laws need to be changed and making sure that appropriate services are part of these youth's case plans."

Up to this point, the special training has only been for the Miami program's staff members. "We certainly envision making it a part of the new volunteer training," says Bevel. "It's about offering people information and believing that change is possible. It's exciting because I'm confident it's going to get better."

CASA for Children of DC, Washington, DC

Training volunteers to be nonjudgmental and to know the resources available to gay and transgender youth is also important to Richard Harris, senior manager at CASA for Children of DC. "Our volunteers spend a lot of time trying to close in the gaps by providing a sensitive and caring ear as well as connecting youth to the services and resources available in the community," Harris says. Each year, the DC program conducts an in-service training to make sure all volunteers are aware of local providers who help gay or transgender young people.

Harris points to the importance of having volunteers become known for their open-mindedness. "While we may have volunteers working with eight young people right now who have identified as LGBTQ, we need *all* of our volunteers to be prepared to do so. We're sure there are a number of young people who are not comfortable coming forward yet. So it's important for everybody to make sure they're being sensitive, that they're using the right language, that they're not sending any messages about being unsupportive."

CASA for Children of DC has also been working with the district's child welfare agency on this issue. "They are preparing to do training for all of their social workers," says Harris. He sees this as a direct result of the LGBTQ taskforce that was started by the family court about three years ago. "Membership includes the judge, social workers, providers and a range of professionals who demonstrated an interest in this population."

[continued on page 12]

LGBTQ Vocabulary

Bisexual—A person who is romantically, emotionally or physically attracted to both sexes. A bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both men and women, and the degree of attraction may vary over time.

Coming Out—An evolving process of identifying oneself as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender—first to oneself and then to others.

Gay—The term used to describe people who are physically, romantically or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex. *Gay* may be used to refer to both men and women, but *lesbian* is the preferred term for women.

Gender Identity—An individual's self-perception as a man or a woman.

Heterosexism—The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid sexual orientation.

Homophobia—Fear or hatred of LGBTQ people, including fear of one's own gay or lesbian feelings or of people who are thought to be LGBTQ.

Homosexual—As a noun, a clinical and dated term considered inappropriate or offensive to many gay men and lesbians. *Gay* and *lesbian* accurately describe people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Queer—Once considered strictly derogatory, the term has been embraced by younger LGBTQ people as an umbrella term for not being strictly heterosexual or gender-conforming. Because the general public and older LGBT people still find it offensive, use with caution.

Questioning—The stage of exploring or being unsure of one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation—Lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual orientations refer to the kind of person an individual is romantically or physically attracted to.

Transgender—A transgender person is someone whose gender identity is at odds with their physical sex. Many transgender people live as members of the sex not assigned to them at birth. In addition, some people whose gender expression differs from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity identify as transgender.

Transsexual—This is considered an older, clinical term which originated in the medical and psychological communities. Many transgender people prefer *transgender* to *transsexual*, but it is best to ask someone which term they prefer.

Transvestite—A person who dresses in clothing of the opposite gender. This is a derogatory term and should not be used.

Adapted from a compilation from numerous sources edited by Kelly Franks, program coordinator for CASA of Prince George's County in Hyattsville, MD.

Success Stories

Richard Harris gives one example of a case where a CASA volunteer was very helpful. A young transgender man (born female but who identifies as male) was assigned to a volunteer advocate. Prospects for the youth to remain at home, even with supportive services, looked bleak because of his father's attitude. "He was extremely homophobic," says Harris. The family constantly reminded the youth that his gender identity was "against God's will." The CASA volunteer identified resources for the young man and his family. The mother was connected to a progressive parent of gay children who shared her Christian values and helped the mother learn to deal with her son's identity and remain comfortable with her religious convictions. The young man also got into minor trouble with the juvenile justice system. During his very brief incarceration, the CASA volunteer advocated for him to be in a private cell so that he would not be subject to harassment by other inmates. A number of policy and resource challenges were brought to light by this particular case, leading to system improvements. And best of all, the youth was ultimately able to safely remain at home with his family.

Another successful young man is **David Ambroz**. He was on CWLA's National Foster Youth Advisory Council when he learned of the agency's then-new LGBTQ initiative with Lambda Legal. Ambroz felt comfortable enough to come out as gay and get involved with the project. He went on to law school and was recently named the American Bar Association's young lawyer of the year.

Tyler Smith, the young man from Tacoma introduced earlier, credits his foster mother with establishing a safe environment for him to come out very young as well as her ability to find resources for him, particularly the local gay youth center. Smith graduated from high school at 17 and completed college by age 19. Today, he is a social worker and HIV prevention counselor. "So I'm extremely familiar with GAL and CASA volunteers. I always say that it's important to help kids build a support circle that is safe and nurturing. That's what was most important for me, and I know that's what CASA volunteers do." Having his foster mother connect him with the youth center was life-changing for Smith. "That's where I learned everything I know about the



community," he says. "The staff there are people who greatly influenced my choice to go into social welfare."

Jarel Melendez, now 23, was in foster and kinship care in New York State from ages 5 to 18. Today he works as a youth advocate at Lawyers for Children. "We have law guardians and we have masters-level social workers, and then we have me, the youth advocate," says Melendez. "I'm in family courts throughout New York advocating on behalf of adolescents." As a volunteer, Melendez

is proud to run a monthly support group for gay and transgender youth. He is finishing his last year at the City University of New York, Baruch College, where he is earning a bachelor's in international business management. Melendez credits his mentor for being open and willing to research resources for him. "I call him my father now. He didn't really understand foster care or the LGBTQ piece. But he wasn't afraid to get out of his comfort zone and read up on things to help me. I feel I'm where I'm at today because of him."

Podcast and Tips for CASA Programs Available Online

In researching this article, telephone interviews were conducted with 25 CASA staff members and volunteers, youth formerly in foster care, parents and national experts on the needs of gay and transgender youth in foster care. You can find a podcast featuring many of the voices of these subject-matter experts by going to CASAforchildren.org/Connection. Also on this web page you will find the sensitivity training exercise mentioned earlier and the web-only article "Seven Tips for CASA/GAL Programs Working with LGBTQ Youth."

Where Do We Go from Here?

There are many more resources today than there were ten or even five years ago in terms of organizations, publications, trainings, toolkits and websites dealing with LGBTQ youth in general as well as those in care. With research, planning, training, collaboration, creativity and sensitivity, CASA volunteers and staff members can help ensure that these youth are not retraumatized by negative reactions to their identity.

In addition to the subject-matter experts quoted in this article, we thank the following individuals for providing their insight:

Anonymous Mother
Spike Alper, Volunteer Advocate, CASA of Santa Cruz County, Watsonville, CA
Beth Barnes, Executive Director of Adoptions, Walden Family Services, San Diego, CA
Naeemah Carter, Volunteer Advocate, CASA of Prince George's County, Hyattsville, MD

Krista Gerty, Director of Programs and Operations, Jacksonville Area Sexual Minority Youth Network (JASMYN), Jacksonville, FL
Tammy L. Hanks, PhD, Executive Director, Sandoval County CASA, Rio Rancho, NM
Dee Horn, Volunteer Advocate, Fulton County CASA Program, Atlanta, GA

Paul Horton, Volunteer Advocate, CASA of Prince George's County, Hyattsville, MD
Dennis Patrick, Foster and Adoptive Father
Diane Wagner, Adoption and Permanency Resources Division Chief, DCFS, Los Angeles, CA



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- Workshops organized by track, including fundraising, youth voice and volunteer management
- Discounts and special pricing for National CASA members, active CASA/GAL volunteers and youth/students



Registration now available at CASAforchildren.org/conference.

12 Tips for Advocating for LGBTQ Youth

LaRae Oberloh
Program Manager
Sioux Falls Area CASA Program, SD



CASA and GAL volunteers have a unique ability to make a profound difference in the lives of LGBTQ youth in care. As challenges arise, what do you need to know to make that difference? In training, volunteers are taught to have the goal of finding safe, permanent living arrangements for the children they advocate for. To ensure this result for LGBTQ youth, keep in mind the following tips to help you in your advocacy.

1. Examine your own biases and recognize that it is okay to be uncomfortable at times.

Please know that a person does not choose to be lesbian, gay or bisexual—they just are. Remember: Youth do not require therapy simply because of their sexual orientation. As long as you are open-minded, the LGBTQ youth will recognize that it is safe to disclose personal information. You will often see that you have biases that you weren't aware of and begin looking at things differently.

2. Obtain specific education and training on how to advocate for LGBTQ youth.

For example, using correct terminology is key (see the Vocabulary sidebar in the cover story). Your program may provide an in-service training on this topic as part of your continuing education. Also investigate local training opportunities with other agencies. National CASA provides workshops at the national conference on LGBTQ issues and has published a bibliography of resources on working with LGBTQ families (see the Resources sidebar in the cover story).

3. Research and be aware of resources in your area.

A good place to start is the Resources sidebar provided at CASAforchildren.org/Connection. Be sure that youth have opportunities to socialize with other youth who identify as LGBTQ. This is important to eliminate feelings of isolation and of “being the only one.” If local resources are scant, research an online support network for gay and transgender youth.

4. Use general terms when speaking with people.

Rather than asking a boy if he has a girlfriend or a girl if she has a boyfriend, ask whether there is someone special in the youth's life. Or ask young people what term they would prefer you use.

5. Strive to learn the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity.

Working with a transgender youth can be most challenging for a volunteer. A transgender person has a variety of complex issues to address. Know when to ask for help and seek outside resources and information.

6. Respect confidentiality and don't “out” a youth.

If an LGBTQ youth comes out to you about his or her sexual orientation or gender identity, it is not for you to share with others. You have gained the youth's trust, and you should respect that. Don't guess or make assumptions about whether or not a youth may be LGBTQ. If youth are at risk of harm or in a facility that is not beneficial to them, empower them to assist you in developing a safety plan

or a recommendation for moving to an appropriate placement. Remember: Just because youth come out to you, it doesn't mean they are ready to be out to everyone involved in their lives. Nor will others in their lives necessarily be ready to receive that information. Breaches of confidentiality can lead to the youth being harmed—in extreme situations—to suicide. There are rare exceptions to preserving confidentiality; for example, if a judge requires you to reveal this information or if it would not be in the youth's best interest to keep it private. If you are uncertain about a specific case, talk to your volunteer supervisor.

7. Ensure safety for the LGBTQ youth.

Be prepared to advocate for youth who are not safe in their living arrangements. Federal law (the 14th Amendment along with various child welfare acts) ensures that every youth in state custody will have safe and appropriate care based on their needs.

8. Learn the laws pertinent to LGBTQ individuals in your state or city.

State and local laws vary greatly. Know what is required for medical care and treatment as well as for safe living arrangements. Transgender persons may need referrals for legal assistance to challenge policies that do not permit them to dress in a means consistent with gender identity rather than birth gender. Or they may need legal assistance to ensure their basic care and placement in housing that is appropriate to their preferred gender as well as safe from harassment. Sometimes assistance is needed to access medical or mental health care, including transition-related treatment if called for.

9. Be a visible advocate by challenging myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ persons.

Practice supportive, accepting, affirming and nondiscriminatory behavior. Challenge biased, discriminatory behavior, not just in your advocacy efforts but in your daily life as well. Youth will be testing you along the way to determine whether you are trustworthy.

10. Recognize system failures that impact the youth.

LGBTQ youth are often erroneously labeled as sexual offenders and end up in the juvenile justice system. As you read the child's file information, you may deduce that the youth was charged and placed in the juvenile justice system simply for having a same-sex relationship or encounter. Consider whether this would have been seen as typical adolescent sexual exploration had it been a heterosexual couple. Challenge these system failures.

11. Recognize educational failures.

Schools may be unsafe places for LGBTQ youth due to verbal harassment and physical harm or threats. The harassment may come from peers or even school staff and educators. As a result, many LGBTQ youth become truant or drop out of school altogether. Help youth complete their education by advocating to ensure their safety while in school. Again, be certain not to out the youth without his or her permission or involvement.

12. Advocate strenuously for permanency.

Long-term foster care is not a permanent living arrangement for any youth, including an LGBTQ youth. Too often, it is difficult to find foster families with the knowledge and openness to care for an LGBTQ youth. Social workers may tend to rush to place children in group home settings rather than finding a family and providing resources to ensure that the living

arrangement is successful. LGBTQ youth often leave out-of-home placements by running away or aging out without a caring adult in their lives. It is our responsibility to ensure that every child leaves care with an identified family or other adult for youth to turn to for support, love, assistance and continued advocacy. Help youth identify adults who they feel could provide them with safe, affirming environments and be long-term families who will commit to them over the long haul. This should begin while LGBTQ youth are in care and not be left to them to establish when leaving the child welfare system.

Follow these guidelines and you will be a strong advocate who shows youth that you are open-minded and caring. With their trust, you will be better able to speak up and ensure that youth have their needs met in safe, affirming living arrangements while in state custody. 

Three Holiday Gifts Also Benefit Children

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Sterling silver charm designed for National CASA's *Forgotten Children* campaign. Text on the back reads "Not Forgotten." For every purchase of this item, \$2 will be donated to National CASA.



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This popular pendant is a beautiful way to help abused and neglected children. For every purchase of this item, \$10 will be donated to National CASA.



Visit CASAforchildren.org/jewelry to purchase your CASA jewelry gift today!

Jewelers Brilliantly Support Local CASA Programs

This year, Jewelers for Children (JFC)—the industry organization of jewelry retailers, manufacturers, watch companies and trade associations—awarded National CASA \$500,000, all of which will be re-granted to local programs. JFC has also recognized National CASA as a “Super Legacy Charity” deserving of continued support.

Since 2005, JFC support has put CASA volunteers into the lives of more than 4,300 children and youth in 416 communities across the US. Further, many individuals who work in the jewelry industry are deeply committed to helping CASA programs in their own communities. Here are two sparkling examples:

Russell Kwiat
Partner, Kwiat Diamonds
Member, Junior Board of Directors,
New York City CASA



My company has long supported National CASA through JFC, and the more I learned about the organization, the more I loved what it did. I was looking to get involved locally—and personally—when I met National CASA CEO Michael Piraino at the jewelry industry trade show several years ago. He put me in touch with the New York City CASA program, and I went through training and became a CASA volunteer. I was an advocate for two years and then became the first co-chairman of the New York City CASA junior fundraising and awareness board, which was created to get more young professionals involved. We’ve held three fundraisers so far and raised more than \$150,000 for the program. I’ll keep working for CASA because it’s a great organization.

John Berglund
Group Vice President of
Merchandising and Marketing,
Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers
Secretary, Board of Directors,
CASA for Children, Portland, OR



I learned about CASA for Children, the program serving Multnomah and Washington Counties, because Fred Meyer Jewelers supports the program’s golf tournament fundraiser. Today I am secretary of the program’s board of directors and co-chairman of that tournament, which raises about \$50,000 each year for CASA for Children! I donate my time to CASA for Children because doing so helps kids in need. My youngest son, Blake, died when he was 16 months old from a disease called spinal muscular atrophy. The CASA mission of working to give kids voices resonates with me as a result of that tragedy.

CASA Volunteer Featured in AARP The Magazine

AARP The Magazine is the largest circulation magazine in the world, with over 24 million readers. The September/October edition featured CASA volunteer Thelma Harris in the article “People Helping People.” Harris offered perfect examples of how a CASA volunteer can make a dramatic, positive difference in a child’s life. For helping us to gain this exposure, thanks go to Harris, who is pictured twice in the issue together with Tamika, a teen she guided, and to Fulton County CASA, GA. To read the article, visit aarmagazine.org and search for “People Helping People.”



Photo by John Huba

“The AARP article exemplifies the success of intergenerational relationships and the long-term impact these relationships have in the lives of children,” said Robbyn Ingram, board chair of Fulton County CASA.

Hollywood NOTE Foundation Award

National CASA’s commitment to humanitarianism and philanthropic work has been noted. On May 31, the Hollywood NOTE Foundation honored National CASA with its first-ever *Foundation Award of Giving*. Trustee and retired actress Renne Bilson accepted the award on our behalf at the first annual Change the World Awards Gala in Hollywood, CA. National CASA was one of 12 organizations and individuals honored. The mission of the Hollywood NOTE Foundation is to bring to light the work and philanthropy of the many men and women known for their craft in the arts and the film industry. Individuals at the foundation first learned of National CASA through one of CEO Michael Piraino’s appearances on the *Dr. Phil* show. The founders were moved by the CASA network’s commitment to children as well as by Dr. Phil and Robin McGraw’s commitment to volunteer advocacy. In addition to a sparkling piece of art referred to as the *Award of NOTE*, National CASA received a \$20,000 donation.



National CASA trustee and retired actress Renne Bilson accepted the award. Photo courtesy of Gates Photography (gatesphotography.com).

National CASA Helps Send Children Back to School with Confidence

National CASA, a partner since 2005 in the Office Depot Foundation National Backpack Program, received 25,000 backpacks for distribution this school year to youth served by CASA programs in 12 major urban communities. Logistics and shipping support were provided by Hewitt Associates and Xerox Corporation.



The Office Depot Foundation donated a total of 300,000 backpacks to organizations across the country this year to help disadvantaged children start the school year right. Since 2001, the foundation has distributed two million backpacks. On behalf of the more than 75,000 children who have received backpacks through the CASA/GAL network and through our community partners, thanks go to the Office Depot Foundation, Hewitt Associates and Xerox Corporation. 📩



Left to right: Office Depot District Manager Victor Palacio, Office Depot Foundation Board Member Vera Cuevas, Miami Voices for Children President and CEO Nelson Hincapie, Office Depot Foundation Board Member Robert McCormes-Ballou and Store Manager Oliver Codorniu

"Fulton County CASA was able to partner with our local Department of Family and Children's Services in their back-to-school event to give away backpacks. I understand the event was an overwhelming success and they gave away all the backpacks we donated."

—Iris Ross, Executive Director, Fulton County CASA, Atlanta, GA



"I was impressed with the Office Depot Foundation and the way in which it handled the press conference. We also enjoyed the support of the Indianapolis Kappa Alpha Theta alumnae chapter. Thanks, National CASA, for keeping these partnerships going!"

—Cynthia Booth, Executive Director, Child Advocates, Inc., Indianapolis, IN

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Discover our new social networking tools and become an active part of our growing online community.



...Be Connected.

National CASA thanks the following for making our new website possible through their generous donations:

- The Hearst Foundations
- Jewelers for Children
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Anonymous Donors



New Mexico CASA Volunteers Leverage Community Connections to Create Homes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

In May 2007, John and Jean Whiteside, CASA volunteers with Bernalillo County CASA in Albuquerque, NM, happened onto a situation that changed the lives of not only the children in their CASA cases but also the lives of dozens of local youth aging out of the foster care system.

Just before she retired from her job as a real estate agent, Jean listed a property for the trustees of an estate. The owners, an elderly couple, had both died, leaving behind their home and all of its contents: furniture, dishes, pictures, linens, televisions, pots and pans...all the things a family would need to furnish a home.

When she asked the trustees what they would do with everything in the house, they said they would probably call Goodwill to come pick it up. "Whoa!" Jean said, "I have a family that could really use all these things." She explained that the four CASA youth she and John were advocating for were going back to live with their mother. The state had rented a nice four-bedroom house for them, but it was completely empty; there was not even a chair to sit on.

The trustees agreed to give everything to the Whitesides if they agreed to move it all themselves. It took a week of hard work, but, with the assistance of their grandson, Erik Lee, and neighbors Don and Georgia Beatty, they got it all moved.

The couple quickly realized that their efforts to help this one family could be replicated to help



Don Beatty and his grandson, Jacob, unload furniture donated to help another foster care alumnus get off to a good start in his first apartment.

others, particularly youth who were aging out of the system with few possessions. Jean began contacting real estate agents about the possibility of collecting furniture and household goods to distribute to emancipating youth in need.

Though she is now retired from real estate, Jean continues to leverage her connections and makes pitches to new groups of realtors during their weekly sales meetings. Through these efforts, she and John have filled three donated storage

units with furniture, appliances, televisions and kitchenware. With the help of friends, they are furnishing two to three apartments each month and always stand ready to make another delivery. Says Jean: "We'll do whatever it takes to help these kids get off to a good start—but we're always hoping that their new apartment is on the ground floor!"

Jean is happy to share her advice and lessons learned. Contact her by email at whiteside9@msn.com. 📧

Twenty Years and Counting: National CASA and Kappa Alpha Theta Celebrate and Look Ahead

When the Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity chose National CASA as its official philanthropy in 1989, it planted a seed that quickly took root in the hearts and minds of its members. Today, Kappa Alpha Theta and its members are deeply involved in the work of National CASA and its network—making lasting contributions as leaders, financial supporters and passionate ambassadors for the CASA mission.

Founded in 1870 as the first Greek-letter fraternity for women, Kappa Alpha Theta has a clear social aim: *to exercise the widest influence for good.* “Every member promises to uphold this founding value,” says Fraternity President Katie Busby. “During the past 20 years, members of Kappa Alpha Theta have had a special opportunity to fulfill this promise through CASA.”



Since 1989, the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation has contributed \$1 million to National CASA in support of expanding volunteer advocacy for children. But that’s only the tip of the iceberg. The fraternity’s 125 college-based chapters and 190 alumnae chapters are vital supporters of the CASA/GAL network; in 2008 alone, Kappa Alpha Theta chapters gave more than \$330,000 to CASA programs in their communities.

As the collaboration moves forward, National CASA and Kappa Alpha Theta envision the remarkable women of Theta increasing their involvement by donating their time, talent and experience to local CASA programs.



Left to right: University of Missouri Thetas Lacey McFadden, Rose Sammur and Valerie Craig sport their CASA polos.

Weaving CASA and Theta: The Missouri Model

Megan Phillips and Allie Chang Ray were initiated into Kappa Alpha Theta at the University of Missouri (known as “Mizzou”) in 1989, the very year Theta adopted National CASA as its official philanthropy. Concocting campus fundraisers to support CASA programs gave Phillips, Ray and their Theta sisters the chance to practice *leadership in service*, an ideal upon which Theta culture was built. By the time they graduated and went their separate ways, loyalty to CASA programs was a thread connecting Theta members.

Fast-forward 20 years. Today, Phillips is president of the board of directors of the Missouri CASA Association, one of two Theta alumnae on the state board. Ray is executive director of CASA of St. Louis County. That CASA thread, says Ray, is now “woven into the culture” of Theta in Missouri.

Thetas serve as CASA volunteers and board members. Alumnae chapters throughout Missouri support local CASA programs in diverse and meaningful ways. And at the state’s two collegiate chapters—at Mizzou and Westminster College—Theta collegians incubate passion and learn leadership skills by helping CASA programs.



Allie Chang Ray

Theta support “is vital to our efforts to provide CASA volunteers” to the state’s abused and neglected children, says Missouri CASA Association Executive Director Beth Dessem.

“I know the alumnae here are genuinely interested in the child welfare system because they have reached out to me to learn more,” says Ray. “For them, CASA is more than a philanthropy Theta has adopted—it’s addressing a serious issue in our community.”



Megan Phillips

Phillips is proud of the Missouri model and sees vast potential for Theta alumnae to become leaders in the CASA movement nationwide. “The sort of talent and commitment and enthusiasm that exists within the Theta community here exists across the country,” she says. “It’s out there, ready to be harnessed.”

“Show Me State” Thetas Show Creativity in Their Support

Thetas in Missouri support CASA programs in a number of imaginative ways.

University of Missouri Thetas organize an annual Fantasy Football competition on campus. Last year the event raised \$12,000 for CASA programs. The Mizzou Thetas also host an annual pancake breakfast benefit.

Theta collegians at Westminster College recently partnered with St. Louis–based Build-a-Bear Workshop to make teddy bears for CASA children, which they sent along with cash donations collected from alumnae.

St. Louis alumnae throw an annual outdoor movie event, *Movies in the Moonlight*, raising nearly \$10,000 a year for the three local CASA programs. They also staff information and fundraising tables at local malls.

Kansas City alumnae compiled and published *Dining in Kansas City*, a cookbook to benefit their local CASA program. The group also organized a private shopping event at Crate & Barrel, donating ticket sales and 10% of proceeds to the local program.

On Campus: TCU Run is More than Fun

This year, more than 1,500 runners registered for the *Fall Breakaway* 5K run, a highlight of the Texas Christian University (TCU) *Family Weekend*. Now in its 13th year, the run is organized by TCU’s Kappa Alpha Theta chapter and raises funds for CASA of Tarrant County.

Stacey Mortenson, a TCU Theta alumna, is “floored” by the event’s size and overjoyed by its success. When Mortenson chaired the first *Fall Breakaway*, she and her Theta sisters could only hope that they were starting something big. “We wanted to establish a signature philanthropy event that would be a permanent fixture on our campus,” she says. The first run raised \$4,000—a resounding success.

In the years that followed, TCU Thetas tweaked and changed the run. As its popularity skyrocketed, so did the windfall for CASA of Tarrant County. Between 2005 and 2008, the run raised more than \$100,000 for the program.

“These young women have been steadfast in their commitment to the CASA mission over the years,” says Connie Brown, executive director of CASA of Tarrant County. “And they contribute so much more than dollars,” she adds. “They’ll show up to assist us in any way we need.”

Mortenson, who is now the executive director of the Arizona chapter of the American Lung Association, says planning the first *Fall Breakaway* provided a valuable introduction to the inner workings of a nonprofit organization. It also made her a lifelong CASA supporter, a feeling she says is shared by all the Thetas she knows. Although her 13-year-old CASA 5K T-shirt

has worn thin, Mortenson says, her enthusiasm for CASA has only grown.

Atlanta Alumnae: “CASA Is Part of Who We Are”

The year Theta adopted National CASA as its official philanthropy was the same year Georgia launched two pilot CASA programs. The Atlanta Theta alumnae chapter was right there in 1989, supporting the fledgling state CASA organization. Today there are 48 CASA programs in Georgia; the women of Theta have been instrumental in supporting this tremendous growth and providing leadership at both the state and local levels.

According to Nancy Wood, an Atlanta Theta alumna who has served on the Georgia CASA board of directors and is now a life member, “Members of the Atlanta Theta alumnae chapter have sold wrapping paper; worked at golf tournaments; organized wine tastings; commissioned and raffled off elaborate playhouses; and organized fashion shows—all to raise money for Georgia CASA.”

Thetas have also put their considerable professional skills and experience to work for Georgia CASA, which frequently calls on the Theta brain trust to serve on committees and help with projects. A Theta alumna has been on the state board since 1993.

“One of the things you learn when you pledge Theta is that you are a Theta for a lifetime,” says Wood. “Being involved in CASA is very much a part of who we are.”

The Theta alumnae are just wonderful, and they have been instrumental in our success.

Duaine Hathaway
Executive Director, Georgia CASA



These Theta alumnae attended the 2009 Georgia CASA luncheon and fashion show. Thetas help with every aspect of planning and staging the luncheon, which is the primary event held annually to raise funds for Georgia CASA. The first two young women from left in the back row were among the models. Nancy Wood is third from left in the back row.



Visit CASAforchildren.org and search for “Theta” for more information, including a story about alumnae supporting CASA of Santa Barbara County. 🖱️



Closing Time: A Memoir

By Joe Queenan; Viking, Published by the Penguin Group, 2009, 338 pages

Closing Time: A Memoir is the chronicle of Joe Queenan’s quest to escape. Escape his father’s abuse, escape a life of humiliating poverty, and escape his fate—as predicted by his father—that he would “never amount to more than a pimple on an elephant’s behind.”

Today, Queenan is a regular contributor to *The New York Times*; his writing has been featured in magazines including *Time*, *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone*; and he is the author of 10 books. So it is not revealing the end of his memoir to say that not only did Queenan escape, he transcended his upbringing and everything that his family expected of him. What makes *Closing Time* a compelling read is not discovering his fate but rather learning about the people and pursuits that empowered his escape.

Queenan was one of four siblings, children of Irish Catholic parents living in inner-city Philadelphia in the 1950s. Though he dedicates *Closing Time* to his three sisters, they receive only brief mentions in the book. And though his mother did not divorce his father until Queenan was an adult, she plays a small role in his upbringing and in the memoir.

Joe Queenan Sr. is the star of *Closing Time*. A charming, witty, well read man, he is ruined by alcoholism and beaten down by a life of poverty and failure:

My father got broken when he was young, and he never got fixed. He may have wanted to be a good father, a good husband, a good man, but he was not cut out for the job. He liked to drink, but unlike some men who like to drink, it was the only thing he liked to do.... When the fancy struck him, and he was not too tired, he would take off his belt and beat us. Other times he would announce impending beatings, only to explain that, as he was too tuckered out to administer a whipping that day, we’d have to reschedule.

Throughout *Closing Time*, Joe Queenan is rescued from this abuse by a series of relatives, childhood employers and friends’ families who offer safe havens and windows into a better life.

Uncle Jerry gives young Queenan “a day pass from the stockade” with road trips to southern New Jersey for pizza; first boss Len, the eccentric owner of a local clothing store, teaches Queenan how to tell stories and throw curveballs; his best friend’s family “opened their doors on weekends whenever my father was on the warpath.”

To an interesting cast of characters—and to his father’s love of writing and books—Queenan credits his great escape from poverty and from perpetuating the cycle of alcoholism and violence that marked his childhood:

Everyone who is saved is saved because someone tossed him or her a lifeline, or, in my case, numerous lifelines. It may be a parent, it may be an employer, it may be a teacher, it may be a priest...it may even be a parole officer.... Nobody is saved all by himself. 🗨️

I Am a Voice

To a child silenced by injustice,
I am a voice.

To a child with whom the world has
broken faith,
I am someone to believe in.

To a child who knows only rejection,
I am unconditional acceptance.

To a child lost in a nightmare,
I am permission to dream.

Amid confusion, I am certainty;
amid instability, constancy.

Amid cynicism and shame,
I am innocence restored.

In a dark labyrinth of bureaucracy,
I am a way through—
a steady arm around the shoulder,
a calming voice in the ear.

Where others are moved to pity,
I am moved to action.

I am as quick to confront the powerful
as I am to comfort the powerless.

Though I may be visited by discouragement,
I do not play host to despair.

I do not relent;
I do not back down;
I do not give up.

In a system of shifting loyalties,
my loyalty never wavers.

For while my appointment may come
from a court,
my calling comes from within.

To the child neglected,
the child abused,
the child cast upon the mercy of an
often merciless system,
I am heart and caring and courage
personified.

I am a CASA volunteer.

—Written and graciously donated by
Richards Partners of Dallas, TX (richardspartners.com).

New Serve America Act Includes Mentor Programs for Foster Youth

On April 21, President Barak Obama signed into law the *Serve America Act* (Public Law No. 111-13), aimed at increasing the number of service and volunteer opportunities across the nation. Programs geared to mentoring youth in foster care are specifically mentioned. The law will cover programs that provide academic or direct mentoring services to youth in foster care as well as support of mentoring partnerships. It will also expand and modify the existing Foster Grandparent program—which provides opportunities for seniors to serve as mentors, tutors and caregivers to underserved youth—by lowering eligibility of individuals from age 60 to age 55 and increasing tax-free stipends to \$3 an hour. To read the new law, go to thomas.loc.gov and search for H.R.1388 in the “Search Bill Summary and Status” field.

New York Agencies Issue Handbook for Relatives Raising Children

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance have issued a handbook, *Having a Voice and a Choice: New York State Handbook for Relatives Raising Children*. This resource for relatives raising or considering raising children—including kinship, foster and adoptive

families—covers topics such as legal arrangements, financial support, health care resources and educational issues. This handbook could serve as a model for other states that want to develop similar guides. It can be downloaded by going to ocfs.state.ny.us and searching for the title.

Guidebook Identifies State Policies That Help Children and Families

Policy Matters: Setting and Measuring Benchmarks for State Policies, a child welfare state policy guide, was published in April by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. This guide identifies state policies that promote strong families, supportive communities and effective systems as well as policies that promote child safety, permanency and well-being. To access the guide, go to policyforresults.org and search for “Benchmarks for State Policies.”

Analysis Links More Attachment Issues to Adoptions After Age 1

An analysis of 39 studies on attachment in adopted children revealed that children adopted after age 1 had more “insecure attachments” than their non-adopted peers but fewer attachment disturbances than institutionalized children. “Fostering Security? A Meta-Analysis of Attachment in Adopted Children” by Linda van den Dries, Femmie Juffer, Marinus van IJzendoorn and Marian Bakermans-Kranenburg was published in the *Children and Youth Services Review* (volume 31, issue 3). Children adopted before age 1 were comparable in attachment security with nonadopted peers, and those adopted after age 1 were comparable to

foster children. In contrast, studies using self-report measures (rather than observational measures) as a group did not find significant differences between children adopted before and after age 1. For an abstract, go to sciencedirect.com and search for author Linda van den Dries.

Center for the Study of Social Policy Offers Website to Improve Services

With the help of experts at other nonprofit organizations and the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Center for the Study of Social Policy has launched policyforresults.org. The new website offers legislators, government officials and child welfare policymakers a range of data and resources to improve services to children and families during the nation’s economic recession. The site also includes a blog that enables individuals to share ideas and strategies.

Manual Explores the Responsibilities Essential to Child Care Providers

The Role of Professional Child Care Providers in Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect, a manual in the Child Abuse and Neglect User Manual Series, is now available from the Child Welfare Information Gateway website. The manual explores the responsibilities that are essential to child care providers: recognizing physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological maltreatment and neglect; reporting child abuse and neglect; minimizing the risk of maltreatment in child care programs; preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect; caring for maltreated children and children at risk for maltreatment; and supporting parents. Read the manual at childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/childcare. The entire User Manual Series is available at childwelfare.gov/pubs/umnew.cfm. 



Rural Program Launches Successful Fundraising Plan

Traci E. Mears
Executive Director
CASA of Natrona County
Casper, WY

After our CASA program opened in 2002, we recognized very quickly the need for developing a strategic plan that would include diversification of our funding portfolio. Jill Friedman Fixler of JFFixler & Associates was instrumental in working with us to develop our strategic plan. As a result of that process, we decided to implement a fundraising plan that would include an annual gala event. In researching fundraising event ideas, the following six necessary steps became very clear:

1. Develop our fundraising goals—the amount we needed and what those funds would be used for.
2. Create a written fundraising plan that included how much we needed to raise, from what sources and how we would go about it.
3. Estimate how much the fundraising program would cost (postage, printing, facilities, products, food, etc.).
4. Develop a timeline—filling in one year's calendar with specific activities

and identifying who would be responsible for each activity.

5. Identify potential funders/supporters for our event.
6. Evaluate the fundraising plan each year (amount raised, number of new donors, successes, challenges, changes/additions).

We live in a small, relatively rural community. There are many nonprofits seeking funding and support from the relatively few donors who are able to provide it. Part of our fundraising plan was to come up with an event that was different from all of the other local events. We chose the “celebrity serve” dinner format for our first annual fundraiser, held in August 2007. We invited local and state “celebrities” (politicians, doctors, business leaders, etc.) to be servers and tasked them with filling their tables and with doing whatever they saw fit to gather tips to benefit our CASA program. The event also featured a small live auction



Traci Mears and event guest Darth Vader

and silent auction. The theme was *Fragile Glass for Fragile Children*, and we brought in glass art pieces from around the country for our auctions. The success of our first event was phenomenal, with gross proceeds over \$100,000!

After the first annual event, we met to evaluate and determine whether we needed to make any changes to the plan. We felt that the amount of work that went into the celebrity serve was a daunting task to take on every year. We decided to plan something that would serve more as a community awareness event and to alternate the awareness event with the celebrity serve event

GET CONNECTED!

The National CASA Association hosts several websites of interest to anyone who values promoting and supporting quality volunteer advocacy to help assure each child a safe, permanent, nurturing home. Visit the following sites to learn more.

CASAforchildren.org

The National CASA website is one of the strongest resources for recruiting new volunteers and supporters for state and local CASA/GAL programs. The website contains volunteer stories along with information on recruitment, public



relations activities, news and donating to National CASA. The site now also meets the resource needs of CASA program staff and volunteers.

CASAforchildren.org/JudgesPage

This webpage is dedicated to judges who hear child welfare cases. Content is valuable to other child advocates as well.

ShopCASA.org

A broad assortment of support materials and CASA/GAL promotional items is available through the ShopCASA site.



every other year. So for our second event in April 2008, we featured a keynote speaker with a dinner and silent auction. We decided not to include a live auction so as not to detract from the keynote address. This event was also a huge success for us, and the planning and implementation were much easier than for the celebrity serve.

Our third annual event was held in April 2009, and following our fundraising plan we went back to the celebrity serve dinner. We again invited local and state celebrities and actually had so much positive feedback from the 2007 event that people were calling us and asking to be servers! For this year's theme, we decided to have

the dinner be a formal masquerade event. The theme was *Unmasking Child Abuse*, and we brought in masks from around the world. We asked everyone participating in the event to wear a mask and offered masks for sale at check-in for the event. For our table decorations, we partnered with one of the local high school art departments. Their students and faculty made masks that were used on each table and offered for sale by silent auction right at the table. Even with a difficult economy—and in spite of the blizzard that hit us the day of our event—the event was again a huge success.

What we have discovered is that fundraising is a process that combines

common sense, hard work, preparation, commitment and belief in your mission. We also learned that support must be earned and is not an entitlement. It is not only necessary but essential that you carefully cultivate your donors—they can and will become friends of your organization for life if you take the time to build relationships.

Fundraising, especially in a difficult economy, requires building relationships with other agencies and organizations in your community as well as with current and potential donors. If you prepare, work hard and truly believe in your mission and organization, it is possible to cultivate and increase your donors and funding. 🎯

NEED A GIFT IDEA?
PERFECT FOR THE HOLIDAYS...

Celebrate the season with an elegant beveled glass ornament or charming 3 oz. glass candleholder, complete with tealight. See ShopCASA.org for additional product details.

Item #	Description	Price
7043	Light of Hope candleholder	\$3.99 each
	50 or more candleholders	\$2.99 each
7032	Clear glass CASA ornament	\$7.95 each
	12 or more ornaments	\$6.95 each

ShopCASA.org

Overcoming Poverty and Building Capacity Kentucky CASA

To celebrate its 43rd year of service to America's most vulnerable citizens, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) published a book profiling 52 projects, including 10 feature-length stories. One of the stories was dedicated to the five VISTAs who currently serve at Kentucky CASA, which seeks to serve the needs of more than 17,000 children residing in foster care. The five volunteers serve as "capacity-builders" and grassroots organizers in CASA programs throughout the state. They also help raise money through special events, grants and individual donations. Special attention was paid to VISTA Amanda Townsell for having assisted CASA of Ohio Valley in Owensboro, KY, by overhauling and growing the office's annual fundraiser. Kentucky CASA director and former VISTA Alex Blevins believes that VISTA's assistance has increased the number of children served by CASA volunteers by approximately 500 youth each year. He says, "Without the help of VISTAs, many of our rural programs would not have been sustained."



neglected children to have a voice in court as well as to highlight the disproportionate number of children of color who enter the foster care system every day. The event began on Saturday with an emotional march down Biscayne Boulevard with 850 cut-outs of children that were then placed on display at Bayfront Park and remained through Monday. Following the march, Voices for Children hosted its annual *Children's Celebration*, a free, fun family event designed to increase awareness of the lives of abused children through their own creative artwork. "The response from our community, the 19 collaborating agencies, our corporate sponsors, media partners and children formerly in foster care was overwhelming," said Sonia Ferrer, executive director of Miami's GAL Program. "This campaign has definitely raised the consciousness of our community and reminded them that our children will *not* be forgotten!"

Miami Forgotten Children Event Raises Awareness

The 11th Judicial Circuit Guardian Ad Litem Program brought National CASA's *Forgotten Children* campaign to Miami-Dade County on September 12. The event was hosted by the program's nonprofit arm, the Voices for Children Foundation. The *Forgotten Children* campaign was designed to increase awareness about the need for all abused and



The Miami *Forgotten Children* march



Left to right: Nelson Hincapie, president & CEO of the Voices for Children Foundation (VFC); Sonia Ferrer, executive director, Miami GAL Program; Johan Askowitz, GAL volunteer and VFC board member; Andrea Steinacker, GAL volunteer and VFC board member; Judge Marcia Caballero; Michael Rosenberg, DDS, VFC board chair; Tracy Evans, National CASA program officer; Gail Applerouth, GAL volunteer and VFC board member; and Michael Piraino, National CASA CEO

Walmart Donations Kentucky CASA

Kentucky CASA has received a \$100,000 donation from the Walmart state giving program. The award will help fund the *Speak Up for a Child Campaign*, which includes training and recruitment of volunteers statewide as well as pass-through grants to each of the 21 CASA programs in Kentucky. State Director Alex Blevins said that the funding closely mirrors the work done with Walmart on a national level. In addition, more than 50 Walmart stores around the state hosted volunteers collecting donations for the CASA program on August 6, the day proclaimed *CASA Awareness Day* by Governor Steve Beshear.

Preparing Youth for Adulthood

CASA for Children of DC, Washington, DC

Shumeka Moore, a youth served by CASA for Children of DC, Kristal Wortham, her dedicated CASA volunteer, and Shane Salter, the program's CEO, were featured on WTTG (Fox 5) in a discussion of the program's *Preparing Youth for Adulthood* project. The three also affirmed how a CASA volunteer can affect a youth's life. Kristal Wortham says, "Support is a lifelong necessity." Wortham, who had a son at age 14, says that she and Moore, who has a 1-year-old daughter, can understand each other in a way others may not. Wortham adds, "There is a very deep sense of personal satisfaction—just knowing that someone actually relies on my input, my feedback, my support on a consistent basis."



CASA for Children of DC Executive Director Shane Salter with Shumeka Moore

Volunteer Makes CASA Kitchen a Reality

CASA of Monterey County, CA

CASA volunteers in Monterey County, CA, are not permitted to meet with the children they serve in their own homes. So Wendy Grim was in a dilemma when she learned that the girl she volunteered for wanted to do some cooking. Grim and Executive Director Siobhan Greene came up with the idea of creating a kitchen in the CASA office itself. They rearranged some office space, raised funds from friends and relatives and solicited contractors to donate their services—and the galley kitchen was born! Children baked cookies and cakes, sharing them with staff and foster families. There are several benefits to this activity in addition to providing a bonding opportunity. Cooking together requires children to read and follow instructions as well as to use basic math skills in measuring ingredients. According to Greene, "In providing a life skill like this, we are also stressing the importance of eating healthy and preparing nutritious meals."



Wendy Grim, left, a CASA volunteer, and Siobhan Greene, CASA executive director, show off their new kitchen. (Photo courtesy of Richard Green, *The Salinas Californian*)

Awards and Recognition

US Commerce Association Honors CASA New Orleans CASA New Orleans, LA

CASA New Orleans was selected for the US Commerce Association's (USCA's) 2009 *Best of New Orleans Award* in the social service and welfare organizations category. Each year, the USCA identifies companies that have achieved exceptional marketing success in their local community and business category. Funded by local businesses operating in towns across America, the organization promotes local business through public relations, marketing and advertising.



CASA Staff Member Receives Award for Outstanding Service to Victims CASA of Adams and Broomfield Counties, CO

Lori Markley, volunteer coordinator for CASA of Adams and Broomfield Counties, recently received the *Thomas E. Green Award for Outstanding Service to Victims* in nonprofit-based settings. For more than five years, she has dedicated her time and compassion to support abused and neglected children and the CASA volunteers who provide them with appropriate and effective advocacy services.



Neiman Marcus—Willow Bend Honors CASA Board Member CASA of Collin County, TX

Neiman Marcus—Willow Bend in Plano, TX, held a series of events in August to honor ten Collin County women for their contributions to the community and to local nonprofit organizations. One of the honorees was Diane Chester, a former CASA volunteer and immediate past board president of CASA of Collin County. Her vision was instrumental in the program's ability to raise more than \$750,000 in a capital campaign during the current challenging economic climate. The funds were raised to purchase and renovate a building in downtown McKinney to ensure appropriate office space for CASA program staff and advocates. 🏠



(photo by Gittings)

Yonder



Lieutenant **Philip Mazzara** shows off *The Connection* from the cockpit of an F/A-18E Super Hornet at 15,000 feet above Virginia Beach, VA. (Don't worry, the autopilot was engaged!) An instructor pilot in Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 106, Mazzara is stationed at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, where new pilots are trained to fly the F/A-18 Hornet and Super Hornet. His time at VFA-106 is considered shore duty, meaning that he does not have to deploy aboard an aircraft carrier. This gives Mazzara uninterrupted time to devote to his work as a volunteer with Virginia Beach CASA.

Swaziland

CASA of Humboldt Executive Director **Steve Volow** and CASA volunteer **Trina Massion** (at right) visited their daughter Aiesha in Swaziland, where she is serving in the Peace Corps. One of Aiesha's projects has been to set up a 25-school children's theater competition, with the themes being HIV and domestic violence prevention. Her mother, Trina Massion, teaches art to children, including one she served as a CASA volunteer. This child in turn helped launch CASA of Humboldt's greeting card program (see humboldtcasa.org/Cards/Casacards.html). Steve Volow says he believes in CASA because "when the candle of hope flickers in a child's life, it is often the CASA who turns that flicker into a beacon."



Where do you take *The Connection*? Send us a photo of you or someone you know reading *The Connection* in a unique or interesting location. Since the *Connection* staff is especially interested in comments from readers, submissions including feedback about the publication are most welcome. Whether you are on an airplane or in a courthouse waiting room, help spread the word about this amazing way to advocate for children by telling others about the CASA/GAL cause. Pass along your copy of *The Connection*.

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How Are the Children in These Challenging Times?

Judge Glenda A. Hatchett
National CASA Spokesperson

My sons and I visited East Africa in 2006, spending time in several Masai villages. We quickly learned that when one greets someone, instead of saying, “How are you?” one asks, “How are the children?” And the positive response is, “All the children are well.”

This greeting spoke to my heart because it was clear that the approach to raising children in the Masai culture was community responsibility. Although individual children may be *my* biological children or *your* biological children, *all* of the children belong to our tribe. If we as a society can honestly say in response to the question, “How are the children?” that “All the children are well,” it means that we are all well. And if we *cannot* honestly respond in the affirmative, then none of us are as well as we should be.

We are in a desperate situation in the current economy. Parents have lost their jobs; families have lost their homes to foreclosure; people are sleeping in cars or wherever they can find shelter. Parents who would normally be able to cope can find the additional burdens of poverty unbearable. These extra pressures can push parents over the edge into abuse or neglect, bringing them and their children into the social service system. Many of these parents would normally be able to turn to other family members in hard times, but those family members are now dealing with the same hardships. So the situation builds upon itself.

It’s important to note that in many communities, social services departments are finding funds to help families with housing to avoid bringing children into care. But other families fall through the cracks.

I have heard so many miraculous stories about the children served by CASA volunteers. One involved a sibling group that was able to spend time together because a CASA volunteer cared enough to make it a priority. These children were living within a one-hour radius of each other yet had not seen each other in months. But the advocate made it possible for them to regularly have dinner together. It may not seem like this could change the world—having pizza with your siblings. But

if you are 9 years old and have a 5-year-old sister whom you have felt responsible for, and all of a sudden you do not see her for six weeks—those six weeks are a lifetime.

By investing in this generation of young people, we are making a wonderful head start for their children’s children who will live long after we are gone. I cannot think of more important work than to take a child’s hand, connect with his heart and do what we can to make his life better. We know that children with a CASA volunteer are less likely to be in care long term. They are less likely to reenter care. And their whole future is brighter.

I thank the CASA volunteers, and I thank the staff members, board members and donors—all these committed men and women throughout the nation who are working tirelessly every day to make this their priority. I thank all of you because your work really moves us every day toward the goal of being able to answer, “All the children are well.”

We can all feel overwhelmed at times. But if I commit to working on my piece, then I am part of a larger movement. The successes we influence for children are often incremental. The child may not find a permanent placement today, but it is an incremental win that he is staying in school. It is an incremental win that she won her science fair, that he got a part in the school play.

I often advise people, “Do what you can, when you can.” Maybe it means being a volunteer. Or maybe it means helping a local CASA program with its fundraising, or writing a letter to the editor to help recruit volunteers. We all have our place in this continuum. We each need to feel that we are taking ownership of a specific piece and then celebrate even the small victories.

You *do* make a difference to that young woman in care to whom you are assigned. Or to that boy who has a volunteer as a result of your commitment as a donor or staff member. Your support changes generations to come. You help the girl become a stronger adult and in turn to become a stronger mother. If we all do what we can, when we can, one day all of the children *will* be well. 📩

The Honorable Glenda A. Hatchett is a nationally recognized authority on juvenile issues known for her award-winning television series Judge Hatchett and her book Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say! See her website for more information: glendahatchett.com.

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