

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.