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the CONNECTION

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

*All children
deserve to
grow up
in a safe,
permanent
home.*



CASA Volunteers Offer Hope to Older Children Leaving Foster Care

Also in This Issue:

Helping Children Cope After a Disaster

Profile: Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch

Checklist Prompts Judges to Consider Educational
Impact of Decisions



Volunteer VOICE

by Carolyn Muscari
Volunteer, 8th Judicial District Court CASA
Las Vegas, NV

I was sworn in as a CASA volunteer in 1981, back when the CASA program in Las Vegas was approximately two years old. Over the years, I'd estimate that I've worked on close to 50 cases involving about 150 children. When asked why I continue to volunteer, I tell people "because it pays better than any job I ever had—but not in money." Being a CASA volunteer is not just something I do, it is a large part of who I am. I cannot imagine *not* being a CASA.

What keeps me focused is the belief that a caring person in a child's life at a crucial time makes a difference. I understand that I cannot change the world and make it a utopia for the children I deal with; but if the presence of a person who cares about them can prevent their dropping out of school, running away, becoming drug addicted or pregnant, that is a huge impact on their lives and the only reward I need or want.

When I help train new CASA volunteers, there are two things that I want them to know. First is that although we are all doing this because we care about kids, it is important to remain somewhat detached. The whole world feels sorry for these children. They don't need us to feel sorry for them; they need us to help them, and we can't do that if we are too emotionally involved.

The second thing I want new volunteers to know is that there will be times they become frustrated and even disillusioned because they can't always give their kids what the children want or even need. But it is important to remember that without our involvement, they would likely have even less.



One of the most heart-wrenching aspects of being a CASA volunteer is wondering what happens to the children I serve after their case closes. A recent experience helped to reinforce the importance of volunteering. A young girl was in the system for seven years, and I was her CASA for most of it. She reunited with her mother, her only known family, and the case closed. Four years later, I received a message on my answering machine from her telling me she had graduated from high school and just wanted me to know. This child had *not* been on the road to graduation before CASA became involved; she had been very angry, moving from home to home because of her behavior. So it's not boasting to say that having a CASA volunteer in her life *did* make a difference.

It has always been my hope that when one of my CASA kids is grown they will remember that during one of the hardest times of their life, someone cared about them. It is not necessary to remember who I was or even why I was involved in their lives, only that someone cared and that it had a positive impact on their lives. Hopefully my story may inspire another CASA volunteer to hang in there when they wonder if what they do really matters. *It does matter.*



Message from _____ **THE CEO**

The Power of One

Michael Piraino, CEO

Kids need just one person to fight for what's best for them, just one person to believe in their dreams. I distinctly remember that December day in my sixth-grade classroom in Oberlin, Ohio. A new student arrived from the residential foster care facility in my hometown. As he walked in, my classmates and I cast glances his way, immediately noticing he was different. He looked different. He acted different. But what I don't remember is his name—probably because my friends and I never asked. To a bunch of sixth-graders, different was bad and we decided early on that we wouldn't "let him in."

In reminiscing about this, it seems ironic to me now that I've spent my entire career advocating for children just like that boy from that foster home in Oberlin—children who might not have even one caring adult in their lives. Throughout my personal and professional journey, I've had an opportunity to meet many children and hopefully make a positive impact on some of their lives. Nap is one of these young people.

I met this talented artist while he was living on the street. He spent the better part of his childhood in foster care. Nap had aspirations to become a professional animator but, given the statistics, what chance did he have? That would require formal training. And,

after all, 40% of foster children never even make it to high school graduation.

Nap was just one of the 500,000 US children in foster care who face the reality of being torn out of the classroom almost immediately after getting settled. School is challenging enough coming from a stable environment, so imagine the hurdles for a child who gets bumped around from home to home and school to school throughout their educational journey. The obstacles are even greater when they face it alone.

While his journey was not easy, that boy from the inner city made it. He didn't have much, but what he did have was just one individual who made sure that Nap reached his dreams. And reach those dreams he did. The young man is now in college and expects to graduate in 2007.

As for the boy from Oberlin, I guess I'll never know.

As a new school year begins, I've been thinking about Nap and about the many children whose lives were disrupted by hurricane Katrina. If it all feels overwhelming, let us keep in mind the impact each of us can have on a child's life. Whether we have an hour per day or an hour per month, that hour invested in a child today can make all of the difference for a lifetime of tomorrows.

inside the CONNECTION



A publication of the National CASA Association representing 954 program offices and 51,674 CASA volunteers nationwide.

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is a nationwide movement of community volunteers who 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 juvenile justice 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. CASA gives children a chance to grow up in safe, permanent homes.

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Helping Teenagers Get Serious About Becoming Adults

*Guest Editorial
By Ruth Massinga, President and CEO
Casey Family Programs*

In the nearly 40 years that Casey Family Programs has provided foster care services, we've learned never to underestimate two powerful forces. One is the traumatic impact of disrupted family connections. The other is the resilience of courageous young people forced to grow up without their birth parents.

As CASA volunteers, you are uniquely positioned to recognize resilience—and to help older youth channel theirs into making a successful transition from foster care to independent adulthood. Far too many of the 20,000 18-year-olds who “age out” of foster care every year do so without the life skills, education, health services and caring relationships they need to survive and thrive.

By law every youngster must have a transition plan. But waiting until age 16 or 17 is too late; middle school is none too soon to begin thinking about transition. At the same time, we need to work extra hard to help kids connect to government and private services as well as money available for remedial and transition support.

We must do better. And CASA volunteers can play a pivotal role in that process.

What makes the biggest difference?

Let me share with you some of the most important things we have learned at Casey—along with some of the best tools we know—to prepare youth to build a good life after foster care.

Researchers from Casey Family Programs and Harvard Medical School studied 694 alumni (people who were formerly in foster care) to learn how they fared as adults.

The study documents their mental health, their educational achievements and their employment and financial status as compared to the general population of the same background. And, most important for this discussion, it recommends ways to improve the lives of youth in care.

I encourage you to read a summary of the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study findings (available at casey.org). To function effectively as agents of change, we must all know what barriers foster youth are up against. I will highlight here three study recommendations that can guide your advocacy work:

- **Home stability**—We must reduce the number of times youngsters change homes.
- **Educational stability**—We must reduce the number of times youngsters change schools.
- **Mental health stability**—We must provide timely, quality mental-health care.

All three recommendations are tied to better coping skills as adults. The more stability youngsters experience, the more they are able to pursue postsecondary training and education, get better jobs, build a firmer financial standing and develop lifelong, supportive relationships.

Bringing systems together

CASA volunteers must navigate in a sea of professionals in the child welfare, justice, health care and education systems. The more you know about those systems, the more effective you can be as an advocate—and, most important, the more you can teach youth how to be effective advocates for themselves.

As you encourage foster teens to think concretely about ways to use what the systems offer, you could be the first trusted person who helps them to get serious about becoming an adult. A new view of their personal power may slowly open each time you coach them to ask themselves: “Who am I? What is it that I want? And how can I make this foster care experience work for me?”

Yes, this is tough work. Communicating with teenagers requires significant effort, particularly because they give so little back compared to younger children. I thank you for your persistence and willingness to hang in there with older youth.

I'm also mindful that as CASA volunteers, you have a special status. You care deeply and advocate passionately for the youngster's needs and wishes. Yet you are limited in your responsibilities for her or him. You don't have to be the expert or come up with all the answers. And you don't have to be an enforcer. To me, that's the beauty of the CASA role. Your most potent contribution is to ask questions and make suggestions that keep everyone focused on the best interests of the child.

I know your work is demanding, sometimes confusing—understanding the foster care system is not easy. And you deserve to feel proud because you are making a difference in young people's lives. How do I know? My niece is a CASA volunteer too.

Ruth Massinga is president and CEO of Casey Family Programs, the largest national foundation whose sole mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care.

CASA Volunteers Offer Hope to Older Children Leaving Foster Care

By Harvey Meyer

At 19, Michelle Holbrook has already weathered a lifetime's worth of struggles: she had a single-parent father whose alcoholism sparked agonizing pain; 26 school changes from kindergarten through high school; and difficulties making friends during eight years in the San Diego foster care system.

Unfortunately, foster teens like Holbrook are far from alone. An estimated 500,000 children are in foster care, a precipitous jump from the 300,000 or so reported in 1980. Troubles are often compounded for many of the estimated 20,000-25,000 who annually "age out" of the foster care system, usually at 18.

Foster youth leaving the system are more likely to be undereducated, unemployed, financially unstable, pregnant and in need of counseling than other teens, according to a study by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. The May 2005 study—involving more than 600 mostly 19-year-olds in Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois and considered the broadest of its kind in 20 years—revealed that more than one-third had neither a high school diploma nor GED, compared to less than 10% of same-age non-foster youth.

Furthermore, only 40% of these young adults were employed, versus 58% of their peers, according to the study. Females were more than twice as likely to have become pregnant by 19. And older teens reported more health problems than their peers.

Hope Offered by CASA Volunteers

CASA volunteers who work with aging-out youth are intimately familiar with their heartbreaking tales. But they also are often

in prime positions to advocate for the needs of these youth.

"It's a perfect role for CASA volunteers," says Robin Allen, state director of the California CASA Association. "CASA volunteers have the time and opportunity to intervene on behalf of these young people. They can really listen to their wants, identify gaps in services and then advocate for those resources."

Increased Resources

More resources are being allocated to help prepare foster youth for the real world. Since 1986, Congress has authorized funds to help 16-18-year-olds develop independent living skills such as household and money management. The law was a good first step, but it did not go far enough because it did not target funds for skill building at an earlier age and after foster children turned 18, according to Martha Shirk and Gary Stangler, authors of *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System*.

The 1999 Foster Care Independence Act—commonly known as the Chafee Act



in honor of late Rhode Island Senator John Chafee who long championed children's issues—doubled federal funding and expanded eligibility to include young people from ages 14 to 21. The law requires preparing youth for self-sufficiency and offering employment and career services as well as vocational training after they have aged out. It also extends Medicaid coverage to age 21 and permits states to help these youth pay room and board.

Continuing Challenges

Yet funding and resources are not enough.

“Courts are overburdened, and many jurisdictions have been forced to focus on younger children,” says Tracy Flynn, National CASA’s training director. “But transitional living skills and support services are needed by all ages—especially older foster youth. These youth are emancipating at 18, and they’re not prepared or connected to the supports necessary for any young adult to survive and thrive.”

Troubling as it is, the gap in care for those aging out also offers opportunities for CASA and non-CASA organizations alike. At the very least, they can serve as resource referrals. In some cases, older foster youth are not even aware they are eligible for educational, employment, health care and other assistance beyond 18. Some teens who take independent-living classes complain these classes do not offer enough planning, goal-setting and hands-on experience. Other youth eschew funding and care because they are in a hurry to shed a system they believe has shackled or failed them.

But according to the University of Chicago study, it appears foster youth who

remain in the child welfare system past age 18 realize “significant advantages” as they transition to adulthood. They receive more independent living services and continued—some say critical—support from child welfare advocates, including CASA volunteers. The study showed that those staying in the system made educational progress and were more likely to access health and mental health services. They were also less likely to become pregnant and confront economic hardship.

CASA and Partner Program Successes

As part of its Transitioning Youth Project, the 11th Judicial Circuit Guardian Ad Litem program in Miami collaborates with Legal Aid to offer services to post-18 foster youth. While Legal Aid provides office space for the project and assists with legal issues, CASA staffers and volunteers connect aged-out young adults to critical resources. “We don’t just drop them like hot potatoes when they turn 18,” says Joni Goodman, the Miami program director.

To Roxana Torrico, it makes abundant sense for foster youth to receive services as long as possible, even beyond age 21. “I know I wasn’t ready at 18 to be

completely on my own,” says Torrico, acting director of youth services at the Child Welfare League of America in Washington, DC. “Young people with family members often count on them as a cushion when they make mistakes. But those in foster care often don’t have that cushion.”

While ongoing independent living services are clearly needed, foster care experts say it is even more important for the aging out to develop sustained “interdependent” relationships. Children with supportive families already claim a built-in network, but foster youth must often fashion their own. They need counseling for major life decisions and everyday concerns from people they can rely on.

Says Robin Allen of California CASA, “Lots of young people can’t be adopted, and returning to their family isn’t realistic. But they have told us they still want a relationship, though not necessarily a legal one, with someone or several people who will stay with them when they reach adulthood.” There is a growing tendency among CASA volunteers to help make those connections.

The California Interdependent Living, Training and Evaluation Project is specifically aimed at these sustained relation-



Independent Living Resources

Independence: A Lifeskills Guide for Teens

By Anne Brobyn Julius Ceccerello



A guide for teenagers in pursuing responsible independence, this book addresses topics such as finding a place to live, banking and budgeting, health and nutrition basics, transportation, finding a job, counseling and leisure time. It is designed to stimulate ideas and questions, making it a useful tool in lifeskills education. (\$12.95)

Preparing Adolescents for Life After Foster Care: The Central Role of Foster Parents

By Robin Krieger, Anthony N. Maluccio and Barbara A. Pine

Foster parents play the central role in helping adolescents prepare for life after foster care. This practice-oriented book provides comprehensive suggestions and strategies that foster parents, social workers and child advocates may use to guide young people toward self-sufficiency. (\$11.95)



These publications are available for order through cwla.org/pubs or by calling (800) 407-6273.

ships. Through this three-county project, CASA volunteers receive special training on helping 16-18-year-olds forge connections. The training also helps familiarize advocates with topics such as adolescent development, interdependence versus independence and effective case planning for older teens. And it demonstrates how youth themselves can develop these caring relationships.

At DC CASA in Washington, DC, Executive Director Shane Salter underscores the importance of establishing healthy, sustained relationships for the aging out. In a youth transitioning initiative launched this past summer, Salter promotes a more-engaged leadership role for CASA volunteers. It is not so much that advocates provide services as flag needed resources.

“More often than not, no one is monitoring whether the players involved in implementing a strategy for a youth are doing what they are supposed to,” says Salter, a former foster child himself. He authored an autobiography earlier this year titled *Trouble Don't Last Always: When a Child Becomes a 4-Year-Old Parent*. “That’s what young people really need, and CASA volunteers are in a good position to keep people focused on objectives for those youth.”

In transition plans for these young people, Salter asks his 120 CASA volunteers to immediately chart key objectives and then record milestones en route to those goals. “We don’t want a cookie-cutter approach,” he says. For instance, one objective might be helping with career planning. This might involve a CASA volunteer matching school curriculum with the child’s vocational goals. The advocate would monitor the youth’s progress and update all parties. “We want our volunteers to hold all parties’ feet to the fire to ensure plan elements are carried out,” says Salter.

When asked whether this enhanced accountability overtaxes CASA volunteers, Salter responds: “Having that responsibility

and making that contribution will actually make CASA volunteers feel better about their role as advocates. Now, we have volunteers who sometimes feel they’re not making a difference.”

At the 11th Judicial Circuit GAL program in Miami, another approach actively targets the aging out process. As part of its Transitioning Youth Project, a paid outreach coordinator connects CASA volunteers to community housing, education, employment, health care and other resources. This coordinator also participates in community endeavors, including policymaking, addressing aging out concerns. The position frees other CASA staffers and volunteers from making time-consuming contacts and navigating ponderous bureaucracies.

“This outreach coordinator,” says director Goodman, “really helps us take the lead in terms of pushing the community to respond to the many needs of these aging out youth.”

Engaging Youth in Solutions

Another recommended way to improve outcomes: require aging out teens to become more engaged in their cases. After all, few know the specific needs of foster teens better. San Diego Voices for Children features the *Real Word*, a program in which selected current and former foster youth discuss their experiences in front of social workers, police, judges, CASA volunteers and foster teens. Their powerful San Diego-area presentations have helped Voices for Children recruit more volunteers. But as importantly, the teens’ talks often capture the attention of younger peers.

“They tell them directly what it’s like to be out of the system,” says Sharon Lawrence, Voices for Children’s executive director. “A lot of foster kids will say how their life is terrible and that all these things happened to them. But the speakers will come back and say, ‘Yeah, well, I was a foster kid too

and if you don't take responsibility for your life, nothing good will happen.”

Michelle Holbrook says her *Real Word* involvement has boosted her confidence and empowered her. “I feel like *Real Word* gives me a voice,” says Holbrook. “As a foster youth, you don't have much opportunity to speak for yourself and, if you do, it's not taken seriously. But with *Real Word*, people take you seriously.”

Another program in which youth participation makes a difference is the Youth Leadership Boards established by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (JCYOI) in St. Louis, a national foundation dedicated to helping foster youth successfully transition to adulthood. On these youth-operated boards, 14-23-year-olds at 13 sites nationally collaborate with the community in advocating for their well-being, according to Carla Owens, JCYOI communications and public affairs officer.

Transitional Housing

CASA volunteers often link teens to tangible support such as transitional housing. In the University of Chicago study,

Interested in learning more about the issues facing youth aging out of care?

- *Aging Out* is a documentary that tells the intimate stories of three young people who age out of the foster care system. It shows the challenges they and other foster children confront. For questions about the documentary, contact Public Policy Productions, 3 Ludlow Lane, PO Box 650, Palisades, NY 10964 or call (845) 398-2119. To order a copy, call (800) 555-9815 or visit pppdocs.com/agingoutdistributors.html.
- *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System* is a book by Martha Shirk and Gary Stangler. Contact Perseus Books Group, Special Markets Department, 11 Cambridge Center, Cambridge, MA 02142, call (800) 255-1514 or email special.markets@perseusbooks.com.
- *The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment* is a web-based tool to evaluate youth independent living skills. Visit casey-lifeskills.org to learn more about this useful assessment.

Keeping options open

There are some very good tools available, free of charge, from organizations working to improve the foster care system. For more information, please visit casey.org/resources/publications.

- *A Road Map to Learning: Improving Education Outcomes in Foster Care*
- *It's My Life: A Framework for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care to Successful Adulthood*
- *It's My Life: Employment Guide*

foster teens were twice as likely as their 19-year-old peers to be unable to pay the rent or mortgage. Thus, many foster youth

appreciate a transitional—and usually subsidized—housing program that acquaints them with independent living.

Transitional housing has proven a godsend for Holbrook in San Diego, one of the country's most expensive cities for housing. The 19-year-old lives in a county-subsidized apartment.

“If I wasn't in transitional housing, it would be difficult,” says Holbrook. “It's helping me make a life for myself. Transitional housing helps prepare me for (adulthood), instead of just throwing me out there.”

Educational Advocacy

Foster youth also benefit from some CASA volunteers' hands-on educational assistance. A recent California law named CASA volunteers as educational surrogates for children when their care provider cannot adequately serve in that role. That designation means California CASA volunteers can make educational decisions for

(continued on page 12)



Recent Studies Focusing on Youth in Foster Care

Improving the Well-Being of Children in Foster Care

Children in foster care are at increased risk for poor outcomes and need high quality programs to ensure their physical and emotional well-being. A recent issue brief from Voices for America's Children (voicesforamericaschildren.org) highlights these critical needs and provides information about some promising approaches.

Strategies discussed in the brief include:

- **Enhancing well-being while in care.** Includes creating programs that ensure caregivers are well educated, informed and prepared; developing cultural competency in foster care; and helping children maintain connections with their families and communities of origin.
- **Helping children recuperate.** Includes helping to ensure initial, comprehensive and ongoing health assessments for children in foster care; providing for adequate expertise in screening and assessments; ensuring access to health care services and treatment; supporting developmental and mental health services; ensuring appropriate management of children's health care data; and providing educational services. A program that sets specific goals for improving children's health outcomes is described.
- **Preparing children for a permanent home.** Includes helping children transition more smoothly back to their families of origin or to new homes.

Those Who Outgrow Foster Care Still Struggle

The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago has released a second report based on the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, a longitudinal study examining youth aging out of foster care and transitioning to adulthood in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois. Survey data were collected during follow-up interviews with 603 of the 736 youth from whom baseline data were collected. The outcomes of the

282 young adults who were still in care at age 19 were compared to the outcomes of the 321 who had already been discharged. The sample was also compared with a nationally representative sample of 19-year-olds from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

The results suggest that youth making the transition from foster care to young adulthood face a number of significant challenges, including educational deficits, mental health problems, economic insecurity, victimization and early child-bearing. They fare worse than their same-age peers across a variety of domains and are much more likely to have been involved with the criminal justice system. At the same time, many of the young adults continue to have strong ties to family and perceive relatively high levels of social support.

In addition, the results suggest that allowing foster youth to remain in care beyond their 18th birthday may confer some advantages during the transition to adulthood. Those still in care were more likely to have received services to prepare them for independent living, to be continuing their education and to have access to health and mental health care services. They were also more likely to be working or in school than those no longer in care even after controlling for a variety of factors that might explain this difference. See chapinhall.org for more information.

Understanding and Preventing Foster Care Runaways

Chapin Hall has also recently conducted the largest study to date of youth who run away from out-of-home care in an effort to understand the trends, demographics and reasons behind this phenomenon. Running away from foster care exposes youth to grave risks and prevents them from receiving needed educational and treatment services. This information, presented in an issue brief titled

Youth Who Run Away from Out-of-Home Care, may better protect youth by helping child welfare agencies prevent children from running away.

Key findings about the youth who ran away include:

- 90% of those who ran away from care were between the ages of 12 and 18.
- Girls were more likely to run than boys.
- Youth who experienced placement instability were more likely to run than those with stable placement histories.
- Youth placed in foster home care were less likely to run than those in residential care. Those in kinship care were less likely to run than both groups.
- Youth placed with siblings were less likely to run than those placed on their own.
- While the likelihood of a first run was low and difficult to predict, youth who had run away once before were found to be very likely to do so again.

Researchers also collected data on trends in running away over time, what happened to youth when they ran away and reasons why youth ran away. These analyses lead to a number of implications for child welfare practice. In general, the authors suggest that viewing running away as a coping behavior may help agencies begin to devise prevention strategies. Some of their specific suggestions for how child welfare agencies can address runaways include:

- Facilitating relationships between foster youth and schools as well as foster families and biological family members to provide youth with a critical sense of consistency and stability.
- Involving youth in developmentally appropriate activities to foster a sense of normalcy.
- Increasing attention to assessment and treatment of substance abuse and mental health issues.
- Focusing prevention efforts on engaging youth who run and return to decrease the occurrence of subsequent runs.

The abstract of the issue brief is available at chapinhall.org.

Former Foster Children in Northwest Suffer PTSD at Twice the Rate of War Veterans

Findings From New Study Point to Need to Increase Access to Mental Health Services

A new study released by Casey Family Programs, Harvard Medical School, the Washington Office of Children's Administration Research and the Oregon Department of Human Services shows that rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among adults who were formerly placed in foster care (alumni) were up to twice as high as rates for US war veterans. Few studies have examined how children in foster care have fared as adults, and even fewer studies have identified what changes in foster care services could improve their lives. *The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study* provides new information in both areas.

Despite facing many challenges, including past unstable living conditions and child abuse, more than 20% of adults formerly in foster care placement were found to be doing well. The majority, however, still faced major challenges in the areas of mental health, education and employment. One-third of youth formerly in foster care had incomes at or below the poverty level, one-third had no health insurance, and nearly a quarter had experienced homelessness after leaving foster care. Researchers examined the long-term effects of foster care on adults who are now between the ages of 20 and 33. Although the study participants were from Oregon and Washington, the findings were indicative of national trends, according to researchers.

Casey Family Programs believe that the study serves as a valuable tool for keeping the state of Washington on

the right course in improving the foster care system through its Kids Come First reform initiative. The initiative seeks to reduce the need for foster care placements, reduce time spent in foster care and ensure that children and youth in foster care get the services and support they need to become successful adults.

Many adults who spent time in foster care as children are in fragile economic situations, researchers found. The employment rate for study participants was 80%, compared to 95% for the general population of a similar age. The information in this study is unique because reflections on participants' own experiences not only provide insight into the child welfare system but also provide an opportunity to identify important reforms.

In addition to the PTSD finding, more than half (54.4%) of adults formerly in foster care had clinical levels of at least one mental health problem within the previous 12 months, such as depression, social phobia, panic syndrome and anxiety.

"The findings underscore the urgent need to improve the support provided to children and youth in foster care," said Ruth Massinga, president and CEO of Casey Family Programs.

Key recommendations from the study include:

- Reduce how many times a child moves on their way to a permanent home.
- Encourage the establishment of life-long connections with foster parents and other supportive adults.
- Increase access to effective medical and mental health treatment.
- Improve foster parent orientation and training with respect to identifying and addressing child mental health needs.
- Adopt measures to increase high school graduation rates with diplomas rather than GEDs.
- Inform older youth about local college-preparatory programs, such as Gear-Up, TRIO and Upward Bound, and help them enroll in these programs.

- Expand youth employment programs.
- Strengthen housing programs to prevent homelessness.

Many Homeless Teens in Minnesota Shelters Are Former Foster Youth

The Amherst Wilder Foundation, a nonpartisan organization in St. Paul, Minnesota, found that on any given night an estimated 500 to 600 youth are homeless, living on their own in Minnesota without parents. Seven out of 10 have spent time in some type of placement away from their family, primarily in foster care but also in group homes and other institutions. Drawn from interviews with more than 3,000 homeless adults and youth throughout Minnesota, this research describes some of the causes, effects and circumstances surrounding homelessness. For detailed information on this study, visit wilder.org/research/reports.html?summary=1173.



Psychiatric Disorders Prevalent Among Older Youth in Foster Care

A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* concluded that older youths in foster care had disproportionately higher rates of lifetime and past-year psychiatric disorders. The findings support recommendations for initial and periodic mental health assessments for these youth and mechanisms to continue mental health services for young adults transitioning out of the foster care system. Visit jaacp.com for more detail on this study.

Helpful Organizations Addressing the Issues of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

- Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative
jimcaseyyouth.org
- Orphan Foundation of America
orphan.org
- Child Welfare League of America
cwla.org
- University of Chicago
chapinhall.org
- National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information
nccanch.acf.hhs.gov
- Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care
pewfostercare.org
- Child Trends
childtrends.org
- The University of Oklahoma College of Continuing Education
nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd.htm
- Connect for Kids
connectforkids.org

a child, from choosing a school to okaying a field trip.

While not all CASA volunteers are educational surrogates, a new pilot project is aimed at helping all advocates improve educational outcomes for California foster children. Among other things, the project educates CASA volunteers about pertinent laws and assists them in producing initial educational assessments and assembling an educational planning team for children.

“Our CASA volunteers ensure all the relevant educational information gets back to the court,” says Allen of California CASA. “Often, the ball gets dropped in communication among the teen, social services and educators, and the court needs all that information to understand the child’s whole picture.”



Money Management

Another key concern for aging out youth involves money management. One component of JCYOI’s Opportunity Passport program offers matching funds of up to \$1,000 annually for youths saving for a rent deposit, computer or health insurance.

The trademarked passport program includes a “Door Opener” feature in which community businesses, organizations and individuals offer youth discounts for services such as auto servicing, legal advice or tutoring. Another component introduces foster youth to money management. As of September 1, 2005, an estimated 1,400 youth in JCYOI’s 13 sites nationwide had attended financial literacy training, which is required before they receive the Opportunity Passport.

“Financial literacy is very important for these youth,” says JCYOI’s Carla Owens. “They learn the importance of saving, building a good credit score and just good overall money management.”

Final Words

Clearly, there is no shortage of initiatives targeted at helping aging out youth

transition to adulthood. It is perhaps too early to gauge their impact—at least quantitatively. But qualitatively, CASA programs and volunteers are making a difference.

“Through ups and downs, my CASA has always been there for me,” says Michelle Holbrook.

And Sharon Lawrence of Voices for Children recalls a 16-year-old boy whose actions caused enormous heartaches and sleepless nights for one CASA volunteer. “I saw this boy in juvenile hall, and he told me to pass one message to his volunteer,” says Lawrence. “He said, ‘Please just tell her I love her.’”

Lawrence sums up the situation: “There are so many kids for whom the CASA volunteer has been the only person there for them, regardless of their situation. So the message is, don’t give up.”

Harvey Meyer is a veteran freelance writer from St. Louis Park, Minnesota who contributes primarily to national general interest, consumer and business magazines. He especially enjoys writing about community service, volunteerism and philanthropy and has crafted features for The Connection in the past.

Helping Children Cope After a Disaster

Mark S. Mendelow, LICSW

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it is helpful to take a minute and consider how we can best support our children as they learn to cope with a disaster. A child's response after a disaster is mediated by the following:

- Developmental level
- How their parents or guardians are functioning at that moment in time
- How their parents or guardians respond to the disaster
- Exposure to media coverage about the disaster
- Their "temperamental style"
- Past history of loss
- The family's level of functioning before the disaster

How children perceive their world and how they take in new information is directly related to their level of cognitive development. Very young children have limited language development and may be unable to put words to how they are feeling; however, the images of the traumatic event may take a prominent place in their minds. Young children are not able to comprehend complicated questions or explanations. In this age group, "magical thinking" is prominent; children believe that what is happening in the world is the direct result of what they are thinking or feeling—e.g., "It's raining because I am sad." Children at this age do not yet understand that death is permanent, and they may believe a person's death happened because they were angry with the person.

After a disaster, school age children are likely to have a difficult time going to school and completing school work. They may be very fearful of being separated from their

parents and may even begin "shadowing" their parents around the house. As children progress through elementary school, their language development continues to evolve; but they typically remain fairly concrete in their thinking. As with adults, all children have a more difficult time hearing information and expressing themselves when they are under stress.

Adolescence is typically a time when teens are struggling with identity formation and emancipation from their families. They have a greater ability to think abstractly and to express themselves more articulately. They may ask more existential questions as they work to understand the meaning of the events. Teenagers, especially young men, may also be more self-conscious about their fears and vulnerability; they often mask their fears, sadness and anxiety with acting-out behaviors, such as being more argumentative or rebellious. A very fearful child may try to appear powerful or omnipotent.

Every child comes into the world with a unique temperamental style or individual differences in their behavioral style. Temperament is a set of in-born traits that organize the child's approach to the world. These traits also determine how the child goes about learning about the world around him. They are enduring characteristics that are actually never "good" or "bad." Some children are noisier than others. Some are more cuddly than others. Some have more regular sleep patterns than others. Some children are more adaptable, while others have a difficult time with change. Understanding a child's temperament allows us to better understand how a child will cope with a disaster and what type of specialized support will be most helpful.

Parents who faced significant challenges (for example, substance- or mental health-related) prior to a disaster are going to be limited in their ability to support their child after the disaster. Likewise, chronically chaotic families may also be challenged in how well they can help their children cope after a disaster. If the child or family has experienced many losses prior to the disaster, this will certainly impact their ability to cope after a disaster.

The symptoms seen in children following a disaster can be emotional, behavioral, cognitive, physical or a combination of these. In the very young or preschool child, previous developmental gains (toilet training for example) may be temporarily lost. Sleep disturbances are common, including nightmares, night terrors and enuresis (bedwetting). Children often exhibit signs of anxiety and depression, but it is not uncommon to see signs of anger and irritability. They may display a heightened sense of arousal—easily startled or jumpy. Some children may seem more scattered or have new problems concentrating on school work. Others may become very worried about their bodies and begin complaining about physical symptoms with no apparent physical cause such as headaches or stomachaches. It is normal for children (and adults) to have a range of symptoms following a disaster. One becomes concerned if these symptoms are not self-limiting or do not diminish over time as life returns to normal.

After a disaster, all children need care, comfort, safety and support. Children need information as well. Children benefit from reassurance that tragedies are rare occurrences.

(continued on page 14)

Children and Disasters: Websites of Interest

The following sites offer information on supporting children and families dealing with trauma related to hurricanes and other disasters.

- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
aacap.org/publications/DisasterResponse/index.htm
- American Academy of Pediatrics
aap.org/terrorism/index.html
- Child Trauma Academy
childtrauma.org
- National Association of Social Workers
naswdc.org/pressroom/events/katrina05/default.asp
- National Center for Children Exposed to Violence
ncev.org
- National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
ncptsd.va.gov
- National Education Association
nea.org/crisis/index.html
- National Institute of Mental Health
nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/traumaticmenu.cfm
- National Mental Health Association
nmha.org/reassurance/children.cfm
- Public Broadcasting System (PBS)
pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/strategies_10.html
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
samhsa.gov

(continued from page 13)

They want to know:

- Will I be safe?
- Who will take care of me?
- Will my parents be okay?
- Will my other family and friends be okay?
- Will it happen again?
- Will I be alone?
- What is being done to protect people?

Children do best in an atmosphere that fosters open communication. It is essential to give children clear information and details that are age-appropriate. Don't offer false assurances, and always be honest, including letting the child know if you don't know the answer to one of their questions. Acknowledge the frightening aspects of the situation. Ask clarifying questions if unsure about what the child really wants to know and then provide honest, simple answers. Encourage children to ask additional, fol-

low-up questions, remembering that children will continue to ask questions until they have enough information. As we provide information, be mindful of signs that the child is becoming overwhelmed with the information they're hearing.

Children continually watch and learn from adults. This holds true for learning how to appropriately express one's emotions and feelings. It is important for adults not to hide all of their feelings but to carefully modulate what they allow their children to see and hear about how they are feeling. Young children are especially sensitive to how their parents cope under stress. When parents are extremely anxious, their children are likely to be very anxious too.

Children do not always want to talk about how they feel just because we think they should. We get clues to how children are feeling and coping by observing their behavior and their play. It is useful to have

materials such as dolls, toys and art supplies available when talking with children to help them share information and express their emotions. Encourage children to express themselves and normalize their feelings through play, art, reading stories, mutual storytelling and movement. Be supportive, and respect their fears or anxieties. Don't minimize the need for extra support.

It is critical to monitor the child's exposure to information about the disaster from the media and the internet. Repeated exposure to news stories on television, in newspapers and on the internet floods children with images of disaster often to the point of overwhelming them. To the degree possible, maintain a child's normal structure and routine, including school, meal times, chores and extracurricular activities. Maintaining limits and boundaries related to acceptable behavior is essential. Allow for some sense of control when possible; include children in decision-making, as is appropriate.

Children benefit from reminders of all the people who care about them, love them and will keep them safe. Rituals familiar to the family—e.g., candle-lighting—are useful, and faith communities are an additional resource for support and comforting traditions. Children should be encouraged to take an active role in planning for future disasters, since rehearsal diminishes anxiety and provides a sense of control. Children can also be incorporated into volunteer efforts to support disaster relief. The goal is to help decrease feelings of helplessness and increase a child's sense of mastery, even in the face of serious and often unexplainable tragedy.

Mark Mendelow has been a social worker for almost 25 years, specializing in clinical work with children and families. He currently works with the Family Resource Center at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle.

Nurturing a Dance of Integration: *¿Porque No?—Why Not?*

A Profile of Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch

by James E. Thompson

“*Why not?*” has led this remarkable woman from the barrios to cybernetic theory to the army to the corporate power table—and to her true life’s work: helping children and youth. “When I start working with the kids, I am seen as an outsider; but after a while, they’re coming up to me and confessing! Once a part of their circle, the work begins.” And the work? Setting a context wherein these youth—many with broken dreams, broken hopes and broken families—can see that they, as individuals, are not broken at all.

“Parents are really the first leaders children encounter. But parents and families may not always be able to provide the love and care these kids need. Being aware of how much the fact my own mother did not say she loved me affected my life and triggered destructive behaviors enriches my ability to draw forth expressions of the heart from people who have perhaps lost their way. As with CASA, ‘giving voice to the voiceless’ is the essence of true joy.”

Voiceless is something Kickbusch is not. She has a deep interest in holistic systems thinking and the journey of self-discovery that arises from observing and reflecting on how seemingly separate happenings are interconnected. Kickbusch also supports holistic family therapy and boldly reflects, “There is no one issue, one problem, one anything affecting a child’s behavior, but rather a maze of interactions needing to be understood.”

Kickbusch’s 2003 book is built on the interaction of many different theories,



Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch (center) mingles with attendees after keynoting at National CASA’s 2004 national conference in Washington, DC.

exercises, metaphors, inspirational stories and quotes, real-life happenings and even make-believe scenarios. *Journey to the Future: A Roadmap for Success for Youth* (see sidebar) “arose from the kids,” as Kickbusch remembers. “These wonderful ‘diamonds in the rough’ kept asking me for more about how I keep the hope and continue onward—sayings, stories, ideas, whatever. These kids are searching for something to grab on to as adults continue to nurture their courage to hold on to themselves. I provided many options in my book hoping that one or the other would be picked up on by my young readers, carrying them to a new plane of development.”

Speaking about her book further, she noted “Several publishers turned the book down because there is no sex, no scandal, no drugs involved in the larger story I am telling. It seems to me that in every home there is a shelf waiting to safeguard a book that stands to help children rather than reiterate things they already know so much about! We need to send a message to the book

publishing industry that we’re about more than this—there is wholeness, responsibility, freedom and love as well.”

Rest assured that *Journey to the Future*, although upbeat and hopeful, is not candy-coated. The lives of the youth reading this book (a book many adults will enjoy as well) are not candy-coated; and one thing Kickbusch does with elegance and aplomb is meet human beings where they are.

Porque No—Why Not? The world we are living in today provides a proverbial feast of fear and anxiety. With discussions of family values and leaving no child behind occurring at nearly every gathering of people concerned about America’s youth, Kickbusch was not afraid to make the comment: “I am a nonpolitical entity—but...let’s go beyond the words to some real and measurable outcomes. Let’s walk the talk. Public servants: Wake up to serve the public!”

She spoke just as forthrightly about CASA, especially CASA volunteers. “I got a medal for being a leader. CASA volunteers don’t (get medals); yet at the end of each



Kickbusch greets students at Holmes High School in San Antonio, TX at the release of her book, *Journey to the Future*.

Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch's background represents a seemingly limitless tapestry of achievement: Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army (retired after 20 years as the highest ranking Hispanic woman in the Army's combat support field), an avid student/learner with a BS in Law Enforcement from Hardin-Simmons University and an MS in Cybernetics from San Jose State University, speaker, writer, entrepreneur, daughter, mother, wife, friend—Leader. Kickbusch has risen above numerous barriers and built bridges to difference, along the way becoming one of the 100 most influential Hispanics in American (*Hispanic Business Magazine*). As founder of Educational Achievement Services, Inc., she travels the country sharing her years of leadership experience and techniques for success with corporations, schools, government



agencies and nonprofit organizations.

At the latinaspeaker.com online store, you will find *Journey to the Future* and a number of other videos and materials available (some in Spanish). You can also learn more about a program Kickbusch is extremely proud of, the Family Leadership Institute (FLI).

Designed to celebrate and empower immigrant/migrant Hispanic families, this program teaches parents and caregivers “the art and skill of family leadership.” As she notes, “This is a very hard-working population but because of cultural differences or language barriers often gets overlooked or misunderstood by school districts in our country. We believe our FLI can be a bridge between schools and families that will benefit our nation’s most important asset, our children.”

day they realize they are fulfilling their life purpose. These people are the torch—the light that guides the children they represent. The children see their footprints in the desert—and they follow.” Kickbusch spoke at CASA’s national conference in June of 2004 to great acclaim. Of this experience she most graciously reflects, “I felt so honored as a person worthy of standing before CASA and supporting its vision. The people, the audience, are indeed angels on earth—they are the dream makers, not the gatekeepers. CASA and its volunteer advocates are the true epitome of the America Dream...we take care of our own.”

Integration. Becoming whole. Perhaps these experiences are not blatantly stated anywhere in the American Dream; but that doesn’t matter. Not when Kickbusch is your compadre and guide. She is the difference that makes a difference in the lives of youth across the globe. ***Porque No—Why Not?***

James E. Thompson is a freelance writer living in Seattle, WA. He thanks Gregory Bateson, Humberto Maturana and especially Rodney E. Donaldson for their inspiration.

Checklist Prompts Judges to Consider Educational Impact of Decisions

The future success of children depends heavily on the educational opportunities they receive. According to research provided by Casey Family Programs, the following facts reveal the impact of foster care on children's educational achievement:

- Students lose 4-6 months of academic progress every time they change schools.
- Foster children attend an average of six different schools in their K-12 experience.
- Between 60% and 70% of foster children do not graduate from high school.

The Permanency Planning for Children Department (PPCD) of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) plays a vital role in nationwide collaborative efforts to address the educational needs, outcomes and transitional issues of abused and neglected children. This focus on improving educational outcomes is part of an overall systems reform effort

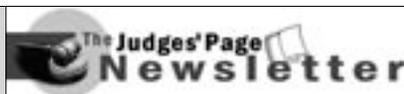
designed to improve the situation of children in foster care and their families. Jurisdictions participating in the national Child Victims Act Model Courts Project have implemented a number of reforms designed to improve educational results.

With a grant from Casey Family Programs and the participation of TeamChild, the PPCD recently published a judicial education checklist and technical assistance brief designed to support the judiciary in advancing the educational progress of young people in care. To order a hard copy or download a free PDF or customizable Microsoft Word version of the checklist (formally known as *Questions to Ensure That the Educational Needs of Children and Youth in Foster Care Are Being Addressed*), visit ncjfcj.org/content/view/full/340/322 or contact the PPCD at (775) 327-5300.

As part of this effort, the NCJFCJ has partnered with four other national nonprofit

organizations: the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, the Child Welfare League of America, Casey Family Programs and the National CASA Association. This partnership grew out of the joint recognition that only with collaboration can there be structural, nationwide change that will lead to prioritizing education as a key value in making decisions related to the lives of children and youth in foster care. The intent of this collaborative effort is to promote best practices and reforms across educational, child welfare and juvenile and family court systems. One key priority for the partnership members in 2005 is to champion the adoption and use of the judicial education checklist.

For more information about the PPCD, the reform efforts of the Model Courts and additional publications and resources, visit ncjfcj.org/dept/ppcd.



Excerpts From the Judges' Page

"While I have always spent time in hearings inquiring about each child's education, the Checklist helped me to be more thorough and focused on important education issues such as attendance, special education issues, extra-curricular activities and the child's talents. After using the Checklist a couple of times, all the stakeholders became more attuned to the educational issues that children in foster care must deal with on a daily basis. A court culture has developed where stakeholders are now prepared to provide information on each child's education situation.

I particularly like the way that the Checklist is organized and the fact that a focus group of young adults who have been in foster care

provided input about the content of the Checklist. This means that the judicial education Checklist asks questions designed to obtain the information that youth in foster care want judges to know about their educational pursuits.

Whether we reunite children with their families, achieve permanency through adoption or are forced to let youth age out of foster care, we must ensure that foster children get an adequate education while they are under the court's supervision. As judges, we can do no less."

—Judge Ernestine Gray, New Orleans, Louisiana and past president of NCJFCJ

"Drifting from placement to placement and school to school, children in foster care often tend to slip through the cracks of the

two systems designed for the sole purpose of serving them, the foster care system and the educational system."

—Yu, E., Day, P., & Williams, M. (2002). *Improving Educational Outcomes for Children in Care: A National Collaboration*. Child Welfare League of America, Inc.

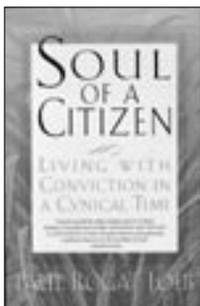
Editor's Note: The Judges' Page, is a web-based newsletter co-produced by National CASA and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Past issues have focused on topics such as parental substance abuse, family violence, foster care reform and the Indian Child Welfare Act. Current and archived issues of the Judges' Page can be found at nationalcasa.org/JudgesPage.

The Novel Volunteer

BOOK CLUB



In this issue of *The Connection*, we introduce a forum to share books that have inspired and informed us. We hope to regularly feature a brief description and review of books that help encourage and enlighten CASA advocacy.



Our premiere book club feature is *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time* by Paul Loeb. Based on 30 years of studying the psychology of social involvement, Loeb describes how ordinary citizens can make their voices heard and their actions count in a time when citizens are often told neither matters. This book contains true stories from people who found strength within themselves to overcome great odds and get involved with making a change in our society. Not only does it describe the steps that they took to get involved but also how they overcame roadblocks.

This book may provide a better understanding of the reasons why some people in our communities may feel helpless when faced with the issues that CASA/GAL staff and volunteers deal with every day. The perspective outlined in this book may give you ideas on how to inspire others and get them involved. At the end of the book, you will find "Questions for Reading Groups" (see sidebar for sample questions). Whether you read and ponder these questions alone or with a group of volunteers, staff, board members or others you work with in your

community, this call to become involved in issues that matter will continue to fortify your commitment to CASA.

For information on *Soul of a Citizen* and Paul Loeb, visit paulloeb.org. On this site, you will find online study questions as well as information on bulk purchase discounts. Bulk book purchases can be made by calling (800) 221-7945, ext. 645, faxing (212) 598-9173 or emailing alexis.sheehan@hbpublish.com. The cost is half price for 10 or more copies (\$8.50 including shipping).

What books are you reading? Have you read a book that inspired, motivated or enlightened you about issues in child welfare? Send your book suggestions for future CASA Book Club features along with comments and reflections on the book to theconnection@nationalcasa.org. Put "CASA Book Club Suggestion" in the title of your message.

Sample Discussion Questions for *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time* by Paul Loeb

- Which stories and examples from the book moved you most and why?
- Pick two or three quotes from the chapter you're reading, and be prepared to talk about why you picked them: How did they inspire you, annoy you, trouble you or otherwise affect you? Break into groups and have different people represent the different arguments.
- Has the book made you want to get more involved in some issue you care about?
- What barriers still remain, making involvement more difficult, and how would you get past them?



Visit CASAnet.org for
more information.

Mark Your Calendar!
**2006 National CASA Association
Annual Conference**
April 1-4, 2006
San Diego, CA
Town and Country Hotel



Students from Communities in Schools of Central Texas and the Trinity Child Development Center pose with their new backpacks. In addition to CASA of Travis County and these organizations, other community groups also received backpacks through local promotions.

Office Depot and CASA Programs Provide School Supplies to Children

Office Depot made it possible for CASA and volunteer GAL programs to put more than 3,200 backpacks with school supplies in the hands of abused and neglected children for the new school year. National CASA and Office Depot teamed up to lead the project, in which 20 local CASA/GAL programs from around the country participated. Office Depot's Director of Community Relations Mary Wong stated: "We are proud to partner with National CASA and local CASA programs to make a difference in the lives of children around the country. CASA is a wonderful organization that shares our commitment to helping at-risk children."

"One of the most important objectives of our charitable giving program is to create a brighter future for children in disadvantaged communities," said Office Depot Ex-

ecutive Vice President of Human Resources Frank Scruggs. In 2001, Office Depot began its National Backpack Program to ensure that children had the tools they needed to successfully start the school year. By the end of this year, Office Depot will have placed more than 880,000 backpacks in the hands of children. For some communities, multiple child-focused organizations received donated back-to-school supplies.

The CASA program in Houston, TX shared the following observation about the partnership, "Some of these children had never even had a new shirt or pair of jeans to start school in, let alone a brand new backpack of their very own. It's amazing how important having things of their 'own' is to children in [foster care], things that they don't have to worry about sharing or being taken away from them. For that

reason, those backpacks served a bigger purpose than just carrying books and school supplies—they allowed many of our kids a sense of normalcy and a feeling of pride as they started the school year."

Another CASA program wrote, "It was all handled very smoothly, and we are delighted for the kids to get the backpacks. They have been really excited and happy to get them. One little 6-year-old put his on at the beginning of his volunteer's visit to the foster home and wore it the entire time she was there. He wouldn't take it off."

National CASA is now one of Office Depot's recognized charitable partners, and we hope to bring future partnership initiatives to the network as the relationship grows. To learn more about Office Depot and its philanthropic activities visit community.officedepot.com.

(continued on page 20)

CASA/GAL Programs Participating in Office Depot Backpack Giveaways



- Dallas CASA, Inc., TX
- Voices for Children Foundation, Inc., Miami, FL
- Voices for Children, Inc., San Diego, CA
- San Francisco Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, CA
- Friends of Child Advocates, Los Angeles, CA
- CASA of Travis County, Austin, TX
- Court Appointed Special Advocates of Cook County, IL
- Friends of CASA, Inc., Boston, MA
- Milwaukee CASA Program (In Their Best Interests, Inc.), WI
- Bergen County CASA, NJ
- CASA of El Paso, Inc., TX
- Children In Placement, Inc., CT
- Friends of CASA, King Co. CASA, Seattle, WA
- CASA of St. Louis County, Inc., MO
- Essex County CASA, NJ
- Metro Atlanta CASA, GA
- CASA of Camden County, NJ
- CASA of Orange County, CA
- CASA for Douglas County, Omaha, NE
- Child Advocates, Inc. Houston, TX



Voices For Children Foundation's Tania Rodriguez (center) stands with representatives from Miami Mayor Carlos Alvarez's office, the Miami-Dade Public Schools, US Senator Bill Nelson's office and Office Depot management.



CASA of Cook County Executive Director Sharon Hurwitz (holding backpack) is joined by Illinois State Senator Kwame Roul (center), Office Depot Store Manager Jim Smith and District Manager Brian Mullan at the Chicago area backpack giveaway event.

Join the National CASA Association

Help support our vital work for abused and neglected children by becoming a member of National CASA.

Your Member Benefits:

- *The Connection*, our quarterly magazine, full of information about CASA advocacy, child welfare and the children we serve.
- *The Powerful Voice*, a semi-annual newsletter showing how your support is making a difference.
- Discounts on National CASA conferences, merchandise and publications.
- Updates on legislation impacting abused children, with ways you can take action.
- A vote in the election of National CASA's board of directors.
- Satisfaction of knowing you're helping a network of CASA/GAL programs to support abused and neglected children.



Mailing Address: National CASA Association, 100 W. Harrison, North Tower—Suite 500, Seattle, WA 98119

Membership Information Form:

Please check any of the following that apply:

- I am a new member.
- I would like to renew my membership to National CASA.
- I am a CASA/GAL Volunteer.
CASA/GAL Program Name: _____
- I would like additional information about the National CASA Association.

Name _____

Organization/Title _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Email Address _____

- Enclosed is a check for the \$35 annual membership fee
- Please charge \$35 to my VISA or Mastercard:

Credit Card Number _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature _____



Resources for FOSTER YOUTH

Foster Care Alumni of America

Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA) aims to transform the lives of children, youth and adults who share the foster care experience by connecting them to a community and ensuring that they become a powerful, collective voice of change for both individuals and whole systems of care. This nonprofit organization works to harness the knowledge and strength of the 12 million Americans who are alumni of foster care to improve the lives of youth currently in care. FCAA believes the first-hand knowledge alumni have of the foster care system gives them an expertise that can be a powerful tool for improving foster care policies and practices.

Created and launched in 2004 by Casey Family Programs, FCAA is led by an executive director and board of directors who are nearly all alumni of the foster care system. By joining the voices of alumni with those of other child welfare experts, teachers, foster parents and others who care, FCAA aspires to enhance research, planning and imple-



mentation of new approaches with foster care. Both alumni and friends of foster care are encouraged to share their experiences, to recommend changes and to get involved on any level.

FCAA believes that those who share the foster care experience have two overriding needs: to have a voice and to be connected. The group provides alumni with a way to share their experiences and enrich the lives of the nearly 500,000 children and youth in care. It also convenes individuals who share the foster care experience; collects valuable input and data from individuals who share this experience; and advocates for those who share the foster care experience by capacity-building, providing counsel and expertise in the foster care system and circulating and disseminating important findings and perspectives in foster care.

For both current children and alumni of foster care who would like to locate people who positively influenced their lives, FCAA created *FosterFind*, a national registry of foster care alumni, foster families, social workers, teachers, counselors and others who would like to reconnect. Registering with *FosterFind* enables participants to search for and, if they choose, contact those found. Individuals are discouraged from using *FosterFind* as a search engine but instead encouraged to register to connect with alumni of the foster care system. Register at fostercarealumni.org/fcaa_register.jsp.

Do you have a foster youth resource to recommend to *Connection* readers? We're especially interested in featuring resources available nationwide. Send your suggestions to theconnection@nationalcasa.org with "Foster Youth Resource Suggestion" in the subject line of your message.

Additional Information and Research on Foster Care Alumni

Congressional Briefing on Mental Health Services and Former Foster Care Youth, Connect for Kids Field Report, April 6, 2005, connectforkids.org/node/2966.

Foster Care Alumni Studies: Stories from the Past to Shape the Future, Casey Family Programs, casey.org/Resources/Projects/AlumniStudy/.

Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, Casey Family Programs, casey.org.



Association NEWS:

Judges' Survey Results Released

National CASA Responds to Hurricane Katrina

National CASA Survey Finds CASA Volunteers Highly Valued by Judges

In June, 2005, the National CASA Association conducted a national survey of juvenile and family court judges in jurisdictions with CASA programs. A total of 564 judges and commissioners completed the survey, with representation across all regions of the country except Washington, DC and Hawaii. The objective of this survey was to evaluate:

- The process judges use for assigning CASA volunteers to cases.
- The role CASA volunteers play in supporting judicial decision-making and court processes.
- Judicial satisfaction with local CASA programs and volunteers.

The findings from the survey indicate:

- Nearly half (48%) of the responding judges' dependency cases are assigned to a CASA volunteer.
- Judges are most likely to assign CASA volunteers to the most difficult and complex cases.
- When assigning a case to a CASA volunteer, judges are most likely to consider the instability of the child's current placement, conflicting case information, concerns about implementation of services and extreme neglect, physical or sexual abuse.
- Judges clearly value input from CASA volunteers in their court decisions. CASA volunteer input is most highly valued on issues related to placement stability as well as permanence and safety of the children while in placement.

- Judges report that CASA volunteers' activities have been "very useful" in their decisions about case outcomes.
- Judges find CASA volunteers to be very effective in a wide range of activities that support court processes. They find volunteers most effective in considering the best interests of the child and in monitoring the case.
- Overall, judges agree that the work of CASA volunteers is high quality, beneficial to their decision-making and beneficial to the children and families they serve.
- The majority of judges reported that there was an insufficient number of CASA volunteers to meet their caseloads.

If you would like to review the judicial survey evaluating the impact of CASA volunteers, visit casanet.org to download a copy of the report, or request a copy by contacting Theresa Carleton at theresa@nationalcasa.org.

National CASA Responds to Hurricane Katrina

The special Hurricane Relief Fund, created by National CASA in response to Hurricane Katrina, collected over \$8,000 from National CASA staff, board members, state organizations and local programs. National CASA also received additional funds from the Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Jewelers for Children. These funds will be allocated through a limited number of grants to state and local CASA/GAL programs within the hurricane-affected areas.

The affected CASA programs face enormous challenges. In Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama (the states hardest hit by the disaster), there are currently 36 CASA/GAL programs. Last year, these programs reported serving 5,001 abused or neglected children with 1,672 trained volunteer advocates.

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 one of the following sites to learn more.

NationalCASA.org

The National CASA website continues to be 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 the National CASA Association.



CASAnet.org

CASAnet is designed to meet the needs of CASA program staff and volunteers, including the advocate's library, program tools, updated information on national initiatives and other material for download.

NationalCASA.org/JudgesPage

A webpage dedicated to judges who hear child welfare cases.

ShopCASA.org

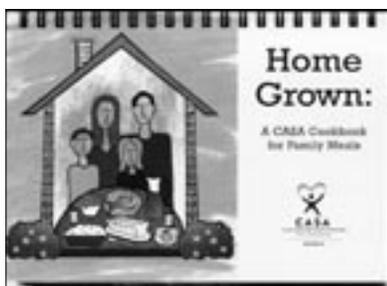
A broad assortment of support materials and CASA/GAL promotional items is available through the ShopCASA site.





Pointers from PROGRAMS

Cook Great Family Meals and Help Support Georgia CASA



Home Grown: A CASA Cookbook for Family Meals is now available. The 5" x 7", spiral-bound cookbook includes over 65 recipe contributions from people in the Georgia CASA family, including volunteers, board members and staff. Enjoy making family meals—main dishes, breads and condiments, sides and salads, desserts and Georgia favorites—and read the stories behind the recipes as well as information about CASA.

The inspiration for a CASA cookbook came about when a volunteer advocated for a child who had never eaten a meal around the table until she went into foster care as a teenager and became part of a family. The cookbook is a great way to encourage fellowship and sharing that all children need.

Jackson Spalding, a communications management firm, contributed design services for the cookbook. Proceeds from sales go to support the work of CASA volunteers. To get your CASA cookbook for only \$10, visit gacasa.org for an order form or call Georgia CASA at (800) 251-4012.

CASA Colt Raffle First Circuit CASA Program Mitchell, SD

In April, I.J. Carey of Mitchell, SD generously donated a 2005 registered "paint" colt to the First Circuit CASA Program (FC-CASA) to be part of a fundraiser entitled "A Colt for CASA—Come Along For The Ride!" Affectionately called "CC" (for CASA Colt), the colt, thanks to the many hours of training by CASA volunteer Linda Seaton and I.J. Carey, made several appearances at the Rodeo Mixer and Stampede Parade and stole the hearts of many at the Chili cook-off. In July, at the Mitchell Stampede Rodeo,



From left behind colt, I.J. Carey, Delbert Carey, Zachary Schrank and FCCASA Executive Director Brenda Schulte.

the winning ticket belonging to grinning 10-year-old Zachary Schrank of Salem, SD was drawn.

FCCASA was able to raise \$4,322. This money will be used to train additional volunteers to advocate for children in court as well as covering their expenses in doing so. Brenda Schulte, FCCASA executive direc-

tor, said, "In a profession that sees so much tragedy, I feel we have been blessed to see the caring side of so many communities." The help of many volunteers, board members, businesses, family members and community organizations within the six counties CASA serves (Davison, Hanson, McCook, Douglas, Aurora and Sanborn) made this event successful.

Justice is Served Tulsa County CASA, OK

Tulsa County CASA's annual event, *Justice is Served*, featured profiles of CASA volunteers and the children they serve. The event began with a welcoming presentation by LeAnne Taylor, co-anchor for Channel 6 in Tulsa. "As many of you know," she explained, "I've battled cancer for the past year. I am delighted and honored to have been asked to join you this evening in celebrating the wonderful work that Tulsa CASA does on behalf of the community."

The night's main event kicked off with the auction of five aprons painted by children with CASA volunteers. After a slow start, one generous donor upped the ante by bidding \$1,000 for one apron, with the stipulation that Taylor wear the apron on the morning news program. Taylor agreed and, thereafter, the aprons sold quickly for \$1,000 each. Guests received desserts from celebrity servers who mirrored a list of "Who's Who in Oklahoma," including Tulsa Mayor Bill LaFortune, Oklahoma State Attorney Drew Edmondson, Tulsa Police Chief Dave Been, state representatives and district attorneys.

Annual "Run for Kids" Benefits ProKids of Cincinnati



Bryan Wise, chair of the Run for Kids, holds the Largest Team Award, won by Taft, Stettinius & Hollister LLP, the firm where he practices.

More than 400 participants turned out in July to participate in the 9th Annual "Run for Kids" 5K Run and Fitness Walk, generating over \$14,000 for Cincinnati's ProKids. The Cincinnati Bar Association Young Lawyers Section and Horan Associates served as title sponsors and producers of the annual Hyde Park-area event. Krogers, Dannon and Samuel Adams donated refreshments for the after-party. MOJO 94.9 and Kelly Red and the Hammerheads provided the entertainment. Awards were given to the top 25 men and women runners. In addition, Taft, Stettinius & Hollister LLP, with 19 members, won the Largest Team Award. It also won the Most Deliberately Paced Team Award.

Partnership with local Home Depot Builds Support Athens-Oconee CASA Athens, GA

Athens-Oconee CASA of Athens, GA recently partnered with the local Home Depot to reach out to the community and spread the word about CASA. This activity gave children an opportunity to learn about building and parents an opportunity to learn about CASA.

Every month, the local Home Depot offers project-based clinics for children and kits which usually promote an event such as a movie premier. Athens-Oconee CASA

Executive Director Christian Orobello approached Home Depot to inquire about collaborating. As a result, during a local music festival, Home Depot provided 300 kits and staff to assist while the CASA program provided a space and volunteers to help with the projects. This was an opportune time to inform parents about the problem of child abuse and what CASA is doing to make a difference in the community. Each child received a finished project, Home Depot apron and CASA decals.

During the festival, children could be seen wearing their aprons, and parents were reading CASA literature. This was a significant success not only for Athens-Oconee CASA and Home Depot but also for local children. Orobello believes that a partnership between CASA and Home Depot makes sense: he hopes this will become an annual event and will grow in its ability to reach the community and beyond. If this collaboration is of interest to your program, contact Orobello at info@athensoconeeCasa.org.



Children building with Home Depot staff and volunteers.

Celebrity Bike Race and Kid's Festival Raise Awareness Pennsylvania CASA

The Pennsylvania CASA Faulkner Honda Harrisburg Criterium and Milton Hershey School Children's Festival were held recently on the streets of downtown Harrisburg and inside Strawberry Square. The event, covered by local television stations and print media, combined the excitement of high-speed, professional/amateur bicycle racing with a wonderful variety of family and kid-focused activities. Activities at the festival delighted more than 500 children, and nearly 25 vendors participated during the day-long event. Festival sponsorships generated more than \$17,000.

More than 325 bike riders competed in the Harrisburg Criterium's 3.5 kilometer course while some 30 local legislators, TV personalities and business executives took part in the one-lap Third Annual PSECU (Pennsylvania State Employees Credit Union) Celebrity Race. Following the Celebrity Race, PSECU Board Chair Kathleen A. Salmon presented Pennsylvania CASA Executive Director Dennis Hockensmith with a check for \$10,000. In addition to the donation, the PSECU staff spends numerous hours preparing for the event demonstrating a belief in the CASA mission and a tangible show of support.



Pennsylvania CASA Executive Director Dennis Hockensmith, back center, joins National CASA Chief Communications Officer Jim Clune (holding bike), King's Clowns, member of the PA Bike Caucus and PSECU Board Chair Kathleen A. Salmon (left) before the big race.

Awards & Recognition

Richland County CASA Columbia, SC

Richland County CASA of Columbia, SC received an achievement award at the National Association of Counties (NACo) annual conference in July in Honolulu, Hawaii. The program was designated "Best of Category" for volunteer-related projects. This recognition within NACo's achievement award program was initiated to highlight outstanding county model programs. In the past eight years, only 17 awards have been given nationwide.



Joan Drury Southeast Missouri

CASA volunteer **Joan Drury** of Southeast Missouri won an outstanding



Joan Drury, winner of an outstanding volunteer award from the United Way and the Volunteer Intergenerational Center.

volunteer award presented by United Way and the Volunteer Intergenerational Center during their 18th annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon. Pam Jenkins, director of CASA of Southeast Missouri, said, "Joan is a dedicated, hard-working and very caring CASA volunteer. She understands her role well and is always willing to go the extra mile for her children regardless of the increased efforts or time." A volunteer who gives her time and talent to many organizations, Drury serves in various capacities at church and school. As owner of Drupers Excavating, LLC, she has also brought organizational and management skills to her appointed cases.

Yellowstone CASA

Yellowstone CASA received national recognition in RBC Dain Rauscher's 2004 Report to the Community. Dain Rauscher, a national financial investment firm headquartered in Minneapolis, has a branch in Billings. This branch adopted Yellowstone CASA as its "charity of choice" and raised nearly \$10,000 for the program. This partnership was highlighted in their national report, including several photos of the branch director and program director, CASA volunteers and their Light of Hope candle-lighting ceremony.

Dr. Sylvia P. Richards 2nd Judicial District, Arkansas

Dr. Sylvia P. Richards, CASA volunteer in the 2nd Judicial District, State of Arkansas, was recently awarded the Larry Dunklin Award for Outstanding Advocacy and Ser-

vice to Victims of Crime. The award was presented by the Arkansas Crime Victims Reparations Board at a ceremony held in the state capitol in Little Rock.



(L to R) Angelena Van Don and Amy Harris of the 2nd Judicial District CASA office are pictured with Dr. Sylvia Richards and Diane Robinson, state director of Arkansas CASA.

Joan Mueller Milwaukee CASA



CASA volunteer **Joan Mueller** of Milwaukee CASA was selected as the Volunteer of the Year by Marshall & Ilsley Banks (M&I). Each year, M&I employees dedicate countless hours to the causes in which they believe. Marshall & Ilsley Corporation honors their efforts through its annual WINGS awards for volunteer service. The WINGS (Worthy Individuals Noted for Generous Service) awards are presented to 10 employees, one of whom receives special recognition as M&I's Volunteer of the Year. A donation is made in the names of award-winners to the organizations for which they volunteer.



Closing words

from JUDGE HATCHETT

by Judge Glenda Hatchett

All Children Need a Stable Education

Few things provide as much stability in a child's life as school. The hours, the teachers, the friends—all change little from day to day. For children, school can provide the peace of mind they need to be better students and to experience the discoveries that are part of the wonders of growing up.

For foster children, this peace of mind, which we all take for granted, is a rare gift indeed.

In every one of our communities, too many foster children are confronted with the real possibility of being torn out of the classroom after just getting settled in. Not just once, but several times. Not just this year, but every year. That can have devastating consequences. Not just for them, but for all of us.

One of the biggest challenges facing foster children is that the consistency of a strong adult relationship is too often taken from their lives. It puts them in a downward spiral that can devastate them personally and lead the rest of us to hang our heads.

It doesn't have to be that way. Many youngsters today have the chance to live a more stable life because a specially trained CASA or GAL volunteer with a big heart is there to help them. This is why I feel so passionate about CASA. These volunteers have the responsibility to champion the well-being of a child for whom virtually no one is standing up. One critical measure of their success: once a child gets a CASA or GAL volunteer, their life becomes more stable and they are less likely to fail in school and later in life. Let me give just one example.

Lerrion Byrd was 15 years old when first-time Travis County Texas CASA vol-

unteer Emily Schroeder went to meet him in his foster home. He says he remembers the smile on Emily's face the first time he saw her and a quality about her that put him at ease. Prior to being placed in foster care, Lerrion and his brother had been living on the streets, in cars and in shelters. He would often skip school and spend the afternoon at different corners and underpasses in Austin. "At that point, Lerrion had some serious truancy issues," says Emily. "He maybe went to school four or five times in a term." Emily quickly learned that the boy wasn't staying away from school because he didn't want to be there but because he was missing the clean clothes and the warm meals and the support that would allow him to make school a priority. He just needed some long-overdue stability in his young life.

Once Emily began to provide the boy the stability of a reliable adult presence, and the encouragement she knew he needed, Lerrion began to thrive. Emily says she wrote a note in a Christmas card to Lerrion that said she was proud of him. It was what the young man had been waiting to hear. "He started setting goals for his own life and really focused on his education," Emily says.

At 18, Lerrion aged out of care and gained entrance into Texas A&M University. Emily says he worked and saved up enough money to buy a very used car to take to college. Emily had a friend look at the car before Lerrion left on the five-and-a-half hour drive to College Station, Texas. The combination of a bad alternator on the car and Emily's memories of having her mom help her off to college convinced Emily she should caravan behind Lerrion as he drove to school. His car died 30 minutes from the

school. Emily helped Lerrion get his stuff to campus only to learn that the deposit for his dorm room hadn't come through. Emily stayed until everything was sorted out and Lerrion's car was in working order.

During the ordeal, Lerrion turned to Emily and told her, "If you hadn't been here, I would have just gone back home."

Lerrion says "Emily constantly encouraged me to do better and believe in the good and right thing. I genuinely and honestly thank her and CASA for such a positive and constructive experience in my life. At this time, I am very proud of myself and my many accomplishments."

And Lerrion has a lot to be proud about. His accomplishments include an induction into the National Honor Roll 2003-2004, serving as president of the Lexington Chapter I Business Professionals of America, acceptance into Texas A&M University and, most recently, becoming a member of the CASEY Youth Panel.

Lerrion's story has a happy ending because one person paid attention, giving him the stability he needed to succeed in school. And when you ask Emily to list the greatest joys in her life, she doesn't miss a beat. A broad smile spreads across her face as she says how proud she is that she was able to help a troubled boy blossom into a dynamic, self-assured young man with a tremendous future in front of him.

The Honorable Glenda A. Hatchett is a nationally recognized authority on juvenile justice issues and a passionate spokesperson for the National CASA Association. She is perhaps best known by the public because of her award-winning nationally syndicated television series Judge Hatchett and recent book Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say!

Connection Sightings



Babies of National CASA staff members gather 'round *The Connection* for story time. Pictured (l to r) are Olivia (daughter of Grants Program Manager Anna Moore), Michael (son of Publications Specialist Carla Spaccarotelli) and Ellis (son of Human Resources Director Jill Wiedenboft).

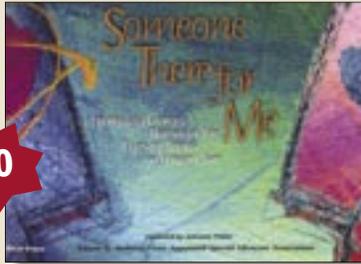
Where do you take *The Connection*? Send us a photo of you or someone you know reading *The Connection* in a unique or interesting location. Because *The Connection* staff is especially interested in comments from readers, submissions including feedback about the publication are most welcome.

Send photos (min. 4x6) to *The Connection*, National CASA Association, 100 W. Harrison, North Tower, Suite 500, Seattle, WA, 98119, or email high resolution photos (300 dpi scanned at 4x6 size) to theconnection@nationalcasa.org. Include your name, address, phone number, email address and photo location.

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