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# the CONNECTION

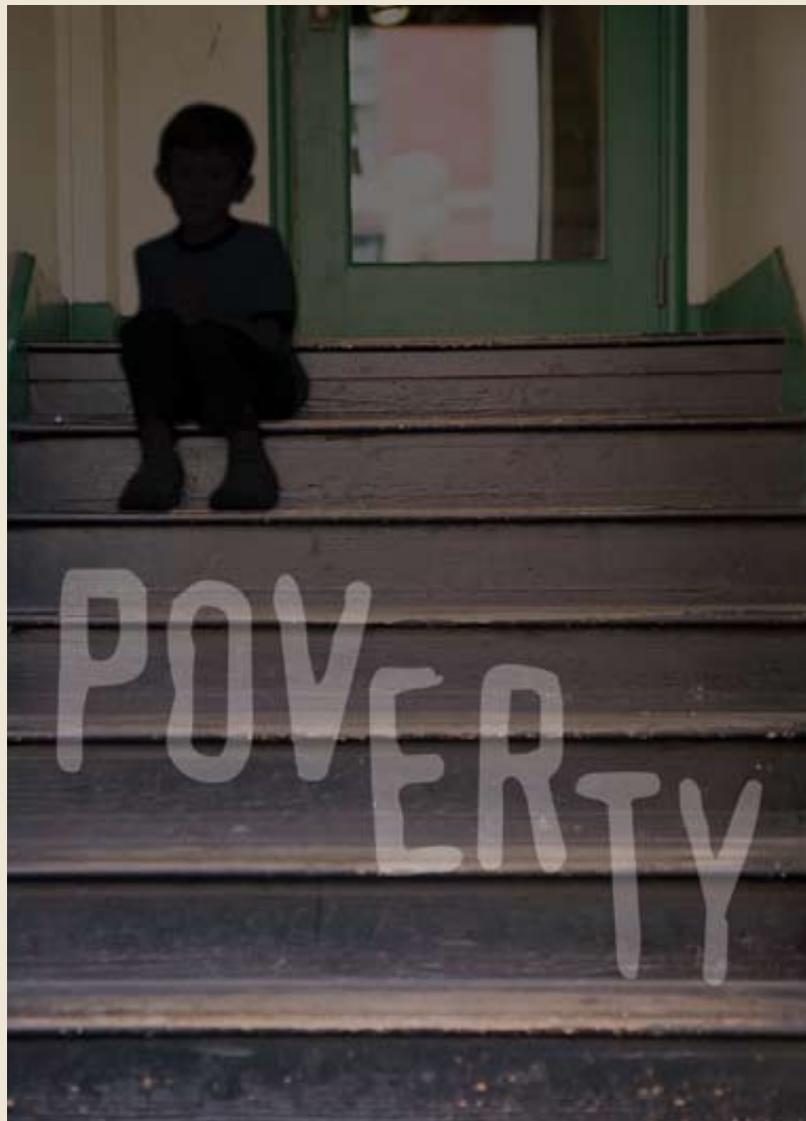
*News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association*

Stand Up

for an

Abused

Child®



## The Interplay of Poverty and Child Welfare

*Also in This Issue:*

Youth Editorial

Working with American Indian Families

CBS Cares Profile



# Volunteer VOICE

by Melisa Byrd  
Volunteer, CASA of Cook County  
Chicago, IL

This month, I am proud to celebrate my one-year anniversary as a CASA volunteer. I vividly recall my first meeting with my CASA child. The boy told me that just when he would start to get used to a caseworker, he would be reassigned to another one. As an advocate, I am a constant to a child who has had to deal with a revolving door of people in his life—family members, caseworkers and friends—not to mention a relentlessly changing environment both at home and at school.

When I make my visits, this boy still sometimes sits across from me with his arms folded across his chest, mumbling responses to my questions, looking at me warily. But with each encounter, I see a slight relaxation in his eyes, posture and conversation. I am dedicated to seeing in his eyes the understanding that I'll be with him for the long haul.

One source of inspiration for my CASA work has been my experience as an Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority member. AKA was the first Greek-letter organization established by Black college women in America. It was founded in 1908 at Howard University by women who were resolute that their college experience should be as meaningful and productive as possible. As an AKA alumna, I apply that determination to my CASA work.

Another source of inspiration has been my job with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The foundation is an international grantmaking institution dedicated to improving the human condition, with a long history of supporting reforms in juvenile justice. In 1989, the foundation established a holiday tradition of allowing employees to nominate for a grant a local organization that normally would not fall under the foundation's guidelines. A foundation committee then chooses the recipient. In 2005, I had the pleasure of nominating CASA of Cook County, and the program was unanimously selected for a significant award.

As a CASA volunteer, you will experience ups and downs. Sometimes, you'll probably become

frustrated with your case. But remember: it's not about you, it's all about the child. This really is life-changing volunteer work. You are out there in the field advocating for this small person who has no voice in the system. So push past the frustration of not seeing the difference you are making and keep at it. You will have an impact.

Maybe a sports analogy will make this clearer. I recently took up golf and am finding it to be frustrating and overwhelming. But the very few times that I hit that ball just right—those are the experiences that keep me coming back. Whatever your hobby or interest may be, there will be times that after all the work you put in on your CASA case, you will make par!

"I could never do what you do" as a CASA volunteer. I hear this often, from men and women who have accomplished amazing things. Of course they—and you—can! I especially want to appeal to Black, Hispanic and Latino men reading this. Fewer than 20% of CASA volunteers are men. Black and Hispanic boys in the foster system typically are being parented by women and have female caseworkers and CASA volunteers. Often, boys in the system have not had a positive male role model in their life, and I believe they would benefit tremendously from having one.

Over the past few months, I have been advocating for my CASA child to be assigned a Black male mentor, which recently happened. I believe this boy will be more responsive to a man, particularly a man who looks like him. Seeing him making a positive contribution to society will help mold the boy into a responsible young man himself. Since this mentor came on the scene, my CASA child's appearance and attitude have already improved. Together in our different roles, the mentor and I will have a much greater impact than we would individually.

I recently saw a documentary titled *March of the Penguins*. There is a scene in which the mother who has been protecting her egg from extremely harsh conditions needs to go out and feed, and the father has to assume care of the egg. I long for the day when all children can be nurtured by both parents, just as these penguins care for their young. While this may be a while in coming, I ask all of you who are not already CASA volunteers to consider joining our ranks.



# A Message from THECEO

## Time Well Spent

*Michael Piraino, CEO*

I was feeling good. I'd just spent several hours with a child in foster care. His foster parents wanted to adopt him. As his guardian ad litem, my job was to tell the court whether the adoption was a good idea. I'd decided it was.

As we left the house, the young man's caseworker turned to me and said, "You can't spend that much time with one child." I was really annoyed. I'd figured I could help this boy by being there for him. Wasn't it time well spent?

I still hope I helped that young man find a happy life. But I don't actually know. The adoption went ahead, and I went on to other work.

A lot of CASA and guardian ad litem volunteers know this feeling of uncertainty about a child's future, even when their cases end up well. They work hard to get to know the children; our volunteers spend more time in touch with the child than with any other case-related activity. They listen carefully and work toward a good, safe, caring home for them. We know that this is effective because judges overwhelmingly tell us that they frequently incorporate the volunteers' recommendations in their court orders.

But when the case ends, the children often disappear from our lives.

This is an experience also familiar to teachers, who put so much time and thought and caring into their students. Those students will soon move on, many never to be in touch again. Every good teacher must hope to have instilled a love of learning and inquiry in those young minds, but the impact on specific children may never be evident.

Like CASA volunteers, teachers have very complicated jobs. Recently, I've been observing a group of extraordinary teachers (of which my wife is one). My observations are that good teachers approach their pupils with a belief in their abilities to succeed. Good teachers have a caring attitude and a clear desire to make a difference in young



lives. They put countless extra hours into their work. But they also know that they cannot immunize children against poor outcomes. All of us can only do our best for them while they are part of our lives.

Whenever one of these children succeeds beyond our dreams, it is a great cause for celebration. My wife once came home from school and couldn't stop talking about one child who had sunk her first basketball shot—and her classmates cheered.

I saw this same reaction in a GAL volunteer whose case, after many years, finally ended successfully. She pumped her fist in the air, with a smile on her face and joy in her voice. The child she had worked with for so long was on her way to a new life in a loving home.

For all these reasons, I started thinking about how great teachers would make great CASA/GAL volunteers. Clearly, many are already involved in protecting children and advocating for effective child welfare services. Just in the past few weeks, I have read news reports with these headlines: "Teachers Call for Commission on Child Protection," "Teachers Helped to Protect Children" and "Teachers Fear Child Protection Is Failing."

Like good teachers, our volunteers have an impact on children's lives far beyond their direct involvement. Our volunteers give young people hope in their futures and the strength of character to overcome the very real challenges they have already faced in their lives—as well as challenges yet to come. The time we spend with children is time well spent.

So I think I need to remind my wife again that she would be a good CASA volunteer. But I can't talk with her right now about that; she's hosting a party for several of her students.

With teachers as with CASA/GAL volunteers, the kids come first.

# inside the CONNECTION



A publication of the National CASA Association, representing 948 program offices and 53,847 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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# Looking to Leave Poverty Behind

Guest Editorial

By Hattie Rice, 17

Freshman at SUNY Binghamton in NY and

Writer for Youth Communication's Represent magazine, where this originally appeared

As a kid, I believed that I lived a regular life with a normal standard of living. The truth was, I was born in a homeless shelter in New Jersey and then moved on up to the East Side—to a rat-infested city-owned building inhabited mostly by the elderly.

Inside you had your common street pharmacist selling drugs to the elderly (they were not for arthritis) and a guy who threw his wife out the window for not buying cigarettes. (The crazy part was that she ran right back upstairs to him.)

One day I walked into the kitchen and saw a rat the size of a cat (I call it a crat). I'm still traumatized to this day. There were so many roaches our white wall looked black. Eventually, the floor started to cave in and the building got closed down.

By then I had figured out I was living in poverty. When my family got evicted, I had high expectations that we'd move to a more appropriate place to raise children.

## This Was the Ghetto

My first reaction to our next apartment was, "At least it looks better and bigger—three rooms instead of two." Then I took a look at my environment and realized: this was the ghetto.

The block had more than enough drug dealers (it's been featured in three rappers' videos, which is not a good look). This time, the elderly were the drug dealers. They were known as O.G.'s [*original gangsters, editor*], and that's who the young up-and-comers got their game from.

This was also where my mom progressed from an occasional crack user to

a straight-up fiend. The drugs were heavy all around us, from the corner store to the barbershop.

## A Sheltered Child

Our place was marked by special holes designed by the artist known as Mr. Rodent—with the assistance of his 20 or so kids. I woke up to a rat in the tub, one in the fish tank or one chewing at my door to start my day.

I thought the rats were normal because, being a sheltered child, I never got to see how life was on the other side of the fence. I didn't question it. I tried to make the best out of what I was given.

## How the Other Half Lives

But when I was 14, I was placed in foster care and moved to a group home in a better neighborhood: St. Albans, Queens. This community was beautiful.

The streets were as clean as if somebody had licked them, and the neighbors were friendly as could be. On Halloween, kids actually dressed up to receive candy. On Christmas, families decorated their front porches (hell, they *had* porches).

I vividly remember my brother's amazed expression when he came to visit. He had his mouth gaping wide enough to fit three pairs of Jay-Z's lips.

Then my cousin shocked me. While everybody in my family was telling me to get out of foster care and come home, my cousin pulled me to the side and said, "Look at this place. You would be an ass to come home."



Hattie Rice

## A Better Picture of Life

Seeing that happy neighborhood pissed me off. How could I have grown up thinking every home has a large population of rats when other people live in homes where the closest thing to a rat is a pet hamster?

It was painfully obvious to me that living in private houses and enjoying larger incomes gave the people of St. Albans a more positive outlook. Parents who are well-to-do don't have four kids and only \$100 for food for a whole month, so they aren't as stressed, and the kids are calmer too.

Seeing how people lived in St. Albans, I realized I was unsatisfied with my life, and I progressed from being a girl too scared and withdrawn to go to school to being an A-student determined to reach a high standard of living as an adult.

## Back on the Block

Unfortunately, six months after I came into care, I moved to another group home—positioned right next to the projects. One block above us was the crips, and one below was the bloods. The shootings sounded like firecrackers on the 4th of July.

I lived across from a park infested with rats the size of rottweilers (ratwei-

(Continued on page 6)

lers) and saw little kids on the street, no shoes, with just popcorn for dinner. I knew what their moms and pops were on. I knew about having to stand outside of churches, waiting and praying (and I don't even believe in God) for a meal.

Every day I saw how the neighborhood affected kids' dreams. I asked one boy what he wanted to be in the future, and he replied, "Nothing." I asked another, "What's your hobby?" He said, "Standing on the corner making money."

I understand why they're selling. The drug dealers are the ones with money, and if someone has a beautiful house, car and boyfriend or girlfriend, wouldn't you admire that person? A lot of people would. The only problem is that, in the 'hood, the respected idol is a drug dealer, and people in the 'hood die over respect

because they feel they have nothing else. Can you blame them?

### Fighting Like Hell

Your environment molds your expectations. If you see everybody around you failing, you'll likely fail too, unless you fight like hell against it. If your dad and mom met while he was selling drugs and she was buying, it's more likely their baby will turn out to be a lookout for 5-O [*the police, editor*] than a Yale graduate.

But I believe that it's possible for me to block out everything around me and all the painful, negative things I've grown up with. I'm sure that if I succeed in school, I can make it out of the ghetto.

Since I came into foster care, I've maintained my grades no matter what was happening in my life. And last year, when I got the chance to move to a foster home, I

demanded to move to a good neighborhood and to live with a foster parent who could help me get into college.

### A Picture of My Future

That foster home wasn't the greatest (I've moved yet again). But at least it was in a nice area downtown, a serene environment with no gunshots and no kids screaming from a beating. I felt safe walking home because I didn't hear "Yo, Shorty!" on every corner or see a bunch of broke-ass hustlers.

I felt like I could calm down living there. On my new streets, I saw role models—business people on their way to work, heading into beautiful buildings. It was such a moving experience for me to walk among them, imagining myself one day working in one of those buildings or going into one of those homes too.

## About Youth Communication

Youth Communication is a nonprofit youth development program located in New York City whose mission is to teach writing, journalism and leadership skills—and to provide a voice to the voiceless.

In 1980, Youth Communication launched *New Youth Connections* (NYC), a magazine written by and for New York City public high school students. Some of the teens who wrote for the magazine were in foster care. Though it would have been natural at Youth Communication for teens to write about being in care, they would not do it—partly because they did not want their peers to know their circumstances.

As youth poured into care during the late 1980s and early 1990s—and as NYC staff realized how crippling it was for those youth not to have a voice and to feel ashamed of their status—Youth Communication decided to start a magazine by and for teens in care.

*Foster Care Youth United* (now called *Represent*) was launched in July 1993. It was the first time that youth in care had a forum to share their stories, with their real names and photographs attached to those stories. The magazine grew quickly to a circulation of 15,000 copies per issue (a 40-page bimonthly publication), with subscribers in 45 states.

More than 250 teens have worked on the magazine since then, and tens of thousands of teens and adults have benefited from reading their stories. The stories have been reprinted in books, magazines, anthologies, curricula and training manuals. Youth Communication's most recent book is *Do Youth Have What It Takes?* (\$24.95), a 300-page manual on transitioning from foster care to adult life. The stories are all by teens who are about to leave care or who recently left care. Lessons and activities associated with the stories help teens strengthen the practical and emotional skills they will need when they leave care.

Youth Communication also publishes *Rise*, a newsletter written by parents who have lost children to foster care. Youth Communication staff noticed that teens have a magnetic attraction to their families of origin (even when it seems harmful). Helping parents through *Rise* is another way to help teens.

Youth Communication has published more than 30 anthologies by teens in foster care on every subject from mentoring to mental health. You can learn more about the magazine and books—and read dozens of stories—at [youthcomm.org](http://youthcomm.org).

# The Interplay of Poverty and Child Welfare

By Martin Westerman



Imagine three individuals, alike in almost every way except income, who happen to be named Fred. In this story, they could just as easily share the name Juanita.

“In our social service system, Wealthy Fred generally funds an agency for Middle-Class Fred, who provides services for Fred from Poverty,” explains Jodi R. Pfarr, president of J. Pfarr Consulting in Minneapolis and a trainer at National CASA conferences. “The first two Freds don’t usually invite Fred from Poverty to their meetings, so they tend to run their social service agency based on what they *think* will work for him, rather than on what *will* work for him.”

## Removing Our Filters to Really See the Challenges of Poverty

This scenario presents a challenge for CASA/GAL volunteers. Most cases they

handle involve low-income and poverty-level families, but most volunteers live in the world of the first two Freds: they are Caucasian, female and middle- or upper-middle class (see sidebar on page 11). As they work with poor families and children, they may find themselves encountering situations or behaviors they do not understand, forming judgments and getting frustrated.

“Our main challenge in this area is overcoming personal biases toward people different from ourselves,” explains former National CASA training director Tracy Flynn. For example, poverty does not equal abuse. “Poor families are generally healthy, loving, even thriving. Poverty does not cause abuse; it’s an additional stressor that stacks the deck against parents. It becomes painfully apparent when children get into the child welfare system. Families often lack

resources for even the most basic things—groceries, insurance, bus fare. The phone may be disconnected because they haven’t paid the bill, so they can’t be reached; or they can’t cover the cost of transportation to a treatment program. People in poverty have higher hurdles to overcome.”

It is also important to remember that poverty is a concept that not all people define in the same way, according to Lynn Squires-White, CASA program coordinator for the Juneau, Alaska Office of Public Advocacy.

“Many of our clients live a subsistence lifestyle, which they don’t view as poverty. This is common in many rural areas, from Alaska to Alabama and Georgia,” she says. “We have to watch our biases about this. Just because they don’t have the resources we’d expect from a middle-class perspective

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*Poverty (continued from page 7)*

doesn't mean they're poor. These families live closer to the rhythms of nature and organize priorities around the seasons—planting, hunting, fishing, gathering. These are bonding experiences that strengthen family ties. The rewards are not monetary, but they're no less valuable."

Pfarr encourages volunteers to rethink how they view class as a way to begin developing mutually respectful relationships with the children and families they serve. "Each person lives in a different place, views the world differently and behaves differently," she affirms.

Juneau CASA volunteer Rosemary Matt often thought of people in poverty as street people or those lined up at soup kitchens. "But they look like you or me. The working poor, it's all they can do to pay rent and utilities and keep their families fed and clothed. They can live in middle-class neighborhoods and still struggle to pay the rent."

Training expert Flynn agrees: "We encourage volunteers to clarify their own

values so they don't impose them on others. We ask them to imagine how far a poverty-level budget would go in their own lives or to research how many children in their area qualify for the free or reduced lunch program at school. Or we ask them to look at their neighborhood through the eyes of someone living in poverty—it takes lots of tenacity to make things work when you're poor. You have to budget carefully; know the bus routes so you can get to your appointments on time; know where to find the nearest, cheapest services and products."

Different relationships to time also present a challenge for CASA volunteers. Their work generally focuses on the future, but the families they serve focus on getting through the present.

"The middle and upper classes tend to emphasize the future story," Pfarr says. "They earn enough to meet current needs and create stable lives, so they can look forward to a future of vacations, hobbies, college for the children, retirement. People

in poverty, who don't earn enough to meet their needs and create a stable present, tend to emphasize surviving day to day."

Another related challenge is working with different priorities around money.

Rosemary Matt observed one low-income family that would pay back-rent and utilities whenever they came into money and then, instead of saving the rest, go on a buying spree: flashy toys for the children, hobby- and automotive-related items for the adults.

"They were just buying things, not thinking of their future. It was their choice, but I'd think they'd want to relieve pressure by paying off more bills. The good news is, they never get credit card solicitations because their income is so low, so they've got no credit card debt."

Jodi Pfarr explains that people focused on the present look for things that will bring them immediate gratification. Entertainment offers that—from splurge shopping with windfall money to sitting in front of a wide-screen TV or a loud stereo at home.

“They all offer a brief escape from poverty, a chance to zone out without people interrupting,” she says.

People in poverty can rarely afford to go out for dinner, leisurely shopping or hair appointments. Families that remain in poverty from one generation to the next often live in crowded conditions, so no one can tie up the bathroom for an hour to soak in a bubble bath. It is hard to find a quiet space to read a book.

### Recognizing When the System Adds Challenges

In addition, the welfare system often presents money challenges that you might not expect, according to Sharon Hurwitz, executive director of CASA Cook County in Illinois. While poverty alone cannot be cause for removing a child from a home, courts may show reluctance to return

children home due to the parents’ lack of means. “It’s ironic, but the court doesn’t want to set up the parents for failure,” she notes.

Part of the “Catch-22” is that the loss of a child or children also represents a loss of welfare income and benefits. Sometimes when one or more children are removed from a situation, the parents move to a smaller apartment while completing their rehabilitation program. When it comes time to reunite the family, the court may balk because now there is not enough room in the apartment to fit the family. The child-related income, now lost, would have helped them afford that larger place. In public housing, where space is allotted based on need, non-custodial parents often cannot get a large enough apartment to get their children back.

### Factoring in Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality

A disproportionate number of cases that CASA volunteers handle involve children of color, write Sandra Chipungu and Tricia Bent-Goodley in “Meeting the Challenges of Contemporary Foster Care” (see sidebar on page 11).

“Poverty and poverty-related challenges, structural inequality and racially biased decision-making are some of the factors that contribute to this situation,” according to Chipungu and Bent-Goodley. African-American families are no more likely than Caucasian families to abuse or neglect their children, yet they are more likely to be reported for child abuse or neglect and to have their children removed from the home.

This results, in part, because these families and their children come into contact with more “mandatory reporters”—staff in free clinics, schools, police precincts, after-school programs—than middle- and upper-class families do. Compounding this, mandatory reporters are subject to bias against poor families. And once children from poverty-level families get in, it is tougher for them to get out.

Children of all backgrounds are more apt to enter the child welfare system due to neglect than due to physical, sexual and psychological abuse combined.

Of those in the child welfare system, the largest share (38%) are African-American; most are placed in non-relative foster homes and eventually reunited with their birth parents or primary caretakers, Chipungu and Bent-Goodley report. Generally, “children of color receive fewer familial visits, fewer contacts with caseworkers, fewer written case plans and fewer developmental or psychological assessments.” And they tend to remain in foster care placement longer. Compared to middle-class children, those in poverty experience more stress-related illnesses and behavioral problems. They also get fewer vaccinations and develop more slowly emotionally and cognitively.

*Continued on page 11*

### Pointers for Advocates

1. Lack of money is no indicator of a person’s education, competence or tendency toward neglectful or abusive behavior, and it is not a valid reason to remove children from their home. Poverty is one of many contributing factors to any situation. Assess all the circumstances.
2. Focus on the health and safety of the child. Observe a home not from the perspective of whether this is where you would like to live but whether this is a safe, healthy place for the child to live.
3. Remain as detached as possible in the case so that you can make objective observations, convey information accurately and make clear recommendations.
4. Instead of looking for “solutions” to single “causes” of a family’s poverty, help them address the system in which they find themselves and the issues they face.
5. Continuously assess your own biases toward dealing with children and families in poverty. As a CASA volunteer, you might be the first person the family meets who is neutral about their situation.
6. Protect the children and families you serve by promoting agency accountability. Ask questions and make suggestions that keep everyone focused on the best interests of the child. You are the eyes and ears of the court. Observe the system, and ask service providers to make any necessary adjustments.
7. Create a forum in your organization for people in poverty to converse with volunteers and managers to give insights into how to make the system work better for them.
8. The more you know about the child welfare, justice, health care and education systems, the more effectively you can advocate, and the more you can teach youth how to advocate for themselves and to access resources.
9. Take good care of yourself—this is a stressful job. Learn about and take advantage of programs that support volunteers, both from your local CASA program and other organizations.

# A Snapshot of Poverty

Source: National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)

## Definitions

**Poverty/poor:** The federal poverty level is less than \$20,000 income for a family of four, \$16,600 for a family of three and \$13,200 for a family of two.

**Low-income:** Approximately double the poverty-level income allows families to meet basic needs related to housing, child care, transportation, food and health care. The actual amount depends upon expenses in the area where the family lives. For example, a family of four in the Boston area needs about \$49,000 to live adequately, in the Chicago area, \$38,000, and in the Atlanta area, \$36,000.

## Low-Income and Poverty Rates for US Families

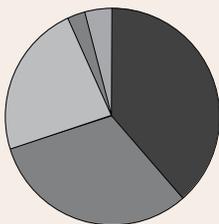
More than 73 million children under 18 live in the US today. About 40% of them, or 29.2 million, live in low-income families, and of those, 46%, or 13.5 million, live in poor families. Although the largest group of low-income children are Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino and African-American children are disproportionately low-income:

- 63% of Hispanic/Latino children live in low-income families.
- 61% of African-American children live in low-income families.
- 30% of Asian-American children live in low-income families.
- 27% of Caucasian children live in low-income families.

Other notable facts about low-income families:

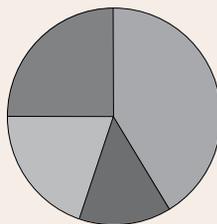
- 82% of children at low-income/poverty levels have at least one parent who is working year-round either full or part time.
- 73% of children at low-income/poverty levels have at least one parent with a high school diploma or college experience.
- 51% of children at low-income/poverty levels are in single-parent families.

## Demographics of Low-Income Americans



**RACE/ETHNICITY**

- Caucasian 39%
- Hispanic/Latino 31%
- African-American 23%
- Asian-American 3%
- Other 4%



**GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION**

- South 40%
- West 25%
- Northeast 15%
- Midwest 20%

## Web Resources for Poverty Issues

### The Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity ([law.unc.edu/centers](http://law.unc.edu/centers))

From this web page, click on the link with the name of the center (at lower left of screen at time of publication). Affiliated with the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, this organization provides research, analysis, statistics and other resources on poverty.

### Homes for the Homeless ([homesforthehomeless.com](http://homesforthehomeless.com))

From this web page, click on the "Reports and Statistics" link and then the "Foster Care" link. Provides resources on connections between homelessness and foster care. For example, one in ten homeless families has at least one child in foster care; and one in three homeless parents were foster children themselves.

### Child Trends ([childtrends.org](http://childtrends.org))

Covers research into child well-being; child abuse, neglect and family violence; welfare; poverty; and early childhood development, among other topics.

### US Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families ([acf.dhhs.gov](http://acf.dhhs.gov))

Serves as a clearinghouse for services, information and resources benefiting families with children.

### Annie E. Casey Foundation ([aefc.org](http://aefc.org))

Fosters public policies, human service reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of vulnerable children and families.

### National Center for Children in Poverty ([nccp.org](http://nccp.org))

Affiliated with Columbia University, this center provides research, statistics and resources on poverty and low-income children and families.

### Child Welfare League of America ([cwla.org](http://cwla.org))

Provides research and statistics on child welfare and its impacts. Also publishes the free *WeR4Kdz E-Bulletin*.

## Demographics of CASA Volunteers and Children

Of the 53,847 volunteers serving children through CASA/GAL programs in 2005, about 82% were women and 18% were men. The vast majority (80%) were Caucasian, followed by African-American (12%) and Hispanic/ Latino (4%). National CASA recognizes the value of having children served by volunteers from their own culture and community. Thanks to our outreach efforts, the share of all volunteers who are people of color is increasing by about 1% a year. Still, 26% of CASA children and youth served in 2005 were African-American compared to 12% of volunteers.

The majority of CASA volunteers are highly educated—40% are college graduates, and another 22% have completed post-graduate education. Some 25% have attended but not completed college, and 13% have earned a high school diploma without going on to college.



*Poverty (continued from page 9)*

### Publications of Interest

*Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*, by Ruby K. Payne, Philip E. DeVol, Terie Dreussi Smith, aha! Process, Inc., 2001, ahaprocess.com.

*Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin' By World: Building your Resources for a Better Life*, by Philip E. DeVol, aha! Process, Inc., 2004, ahaprocess.com.

*Integrating Systems of Care: Improving Quality of Care for the Most Vulnerable Children and Families*, by Steve Hornberger, Teri Martin and Julie Collins, CWLA Press, 2006, cwla.org/programs/bhd/mhpubintegrating.htm.

"Meeting the Challenges of Contemporary Foster Care," by Sandra Chipungu and Tricia Bent-Goodley, *The Future of Children*, Jan. 2004, pp. 75-93, futureofchildren.org.

*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*, by Barbara Ehrenreich, Henry Holt and Company, 2001, henryholt.com.

*Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, by Jonathan Kozol, Harper Perennial, 1991, harpercollins.com.

### Engaging Those Served in Developing Their Own Success

"Middle-class and wealthy people traditionally look for solutions, for the 'cure' for poverty, but if they do that without getting input from the people in poverty, they're not treating them with respect," asserts Jodi Pfarr. "If the mission of CASA/GAL is to advocate for Fred from Poverty, then we must hear from Fred about how the system is affecting him. Otherwise, once again, we're advocating for middle-class solutions, not for what will work for families. In order to move forward, volunteers must first understand how the class system in America works and how it affects people in poverty. Then they should engage in conversation and create mutually respectful relationships."

Melissa Mazio, who works as a CASA volunteer on Chicago's West Side, relates "When they've reached this point in the system, poor people have lost any expectations of privacy and of people respecting their boundaries. It's very unfair, because it strips people of their dignity. We operate with authority to enter their homes and look at whatever we want. At a fundamental level, it brings

out my need for decency, to treat these people like people, because that's what they are. The best thing we can do is to be careful to respect them, observe the niceties and conventions, to help them keep their dignity."

According to Pfarr, the person the child welfare system is designed to serve is probably the best source of information about how to make it work for them. That information can flow freely as CASA volunteers create mutually respectful relationships with the children and families they deal with, helping them effectively negotiate the system.

"Ultimately, the community should hear from all three Freds—from Wealth, Middle Class and Poverty—when systemic change is discussed," says Pfarr, "so that services become more effective for everyone. If everyone sat at the table, I guarantee we'd have a different system."

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*Martin Westerman teaches communications and sustainable business practice at the University of Washington School of Business. He has authored three books and most recently edited the stories for Spain from a Backpack and Italy from a Backpack, both to be published this winter by Pear Press.*

# An Interview with Matthew Margo on the CBS Cares-National CASA Partnership



A five-year-old partnership between National CASA and the CBS Television Network is helping to spread the word about the important work of CASA volunteers. A CASA-related public service announcement (PSA) by *Judging Amy* star Amy Brenneman started it all in 2001. Then in 2004, National CASA officially became one of the beneficiaries of CBS Cares with the release of a PSA featuring Simon Baker, star of *The Guardian*.

CBS Cares encompasses a series of broadcast public service announcements created by CBS and the related CBSCares.tv website, which has been widely acclaimed by experts for its unique and valuable content. The CASA cause is currently featured in 30- and 10-second PSAs featuring *Cold Case* star Danny Pino. An exciting section on CASA advocacy will be added soon to the CBS Cares website.

The creative messages and CBS's generous contribution of airtime have put a CASA volunteer recruitment message in front of approximately 121 million television viewers and have been instrumental in bringing on board a number of new volunteers.

Creation and production of the PSAs and website content are overseen by Matthew Margo, senior vice president of program practices with CBS Television Network. Margo shares his insights about the partnership between CBS Cares and National CASA below.



*Matthew Margo, CBS senior vice president of program practices*

**Connection:** *Could you talk briefly about the purpose and goals of CBS Cares?*

Margo: The purpose of CBS Cares is to produce and air PSAs, usually featuring our talent, on causes that are important to our audience. Our goal is to create PSAs that are very focused, grounded in extensive research and genuinely relevant. The ultimate purpose is to create awareness and cause viewers to take action.

**Connection:** *Your concepts and scripting are often edgy and different in really interesting ways. For example, you use a male star calling on other men to learn more about menopause, and you use humor in a colon cancer message! What is your strategy behind this?*

Margo: We want our PSAs to be as relevant and effective as possible. There's a lot of competition for viewers' attention, and they're just going to tune out messages that are predictable. So just as an advertiser has to differentiate its ads to stand out, we need to take creative risks conceptually and in our

writing. And it's not an abstract challenge: great ads cause people to buy products, and strong PSAs that people actually pay attention to can, for example, literally save lives or result in more volunteers to turn at-risk kids' lives around.

The male star in the menopause message you mentioned was our response on learning that many women can feel de-feminized and isolated from their male partners by menopause. Robert Newman of *Guiding Light* is there to reassure women, from a guy's perspective, that menopause is a natural and inherently feminine event. The call to men to learn more about menopause is really addressing men and women simultaneously. On the use of humor in our colon cancer PSA you mentioned, we'd learned that so many people needlessly die from colon cancer every year because they didn't get a colonoscopy—because they were uncomfortable about the procedure. Not getting tested is unacceptable. So we used humor because when people laugh about an issue, it can help make them more comfortable.

**Connection:** *It sounds like a lot of work!*

Margo: It is a lot of work. but PSAs aren't academic. They address issues that are important to the lives of millions of people we care about—namely, our audience. We have this incredible platform to reach people, and that comes with a responsibility to do it as well and as effectively as we can.

**Connection:** *Could you describe some of the causes that CBS Cares is supporting in addition to CASA?*

Margo: The causes are many and listed in the introduction to CBSCares.tv. We're very committed to causes such as diversity, depression, bipolar disorder, HIV/AIDS, women's health, child advocacy of course—which is where CASA comes in—and mentoring.

**Connection:** *Could you talk a little about the connection you see between mentoring and CASA advocacy?*

Margo: Well, mentoring in the US was spawned by concern for kids who were

alone in the family courts without a caring adult to stand at their side and guide them. That's what provided the spark for creation of Big Brothers, Big Sisters. CASA volunteers are essentially mentors for kids in the court system, and mentors are basically advocates for kids outside of a court setting. In both cases, the involvement of the advocate/mentor means that the kids are far less likely to use drugs, drop out of school, resort to crime or violence and so on—and much more likely to succeed in life. So advocates and mentors address a range of causes that we're committed to.

**Connection:** *Another cause that CBS Cares is concerned with is depression. What compelled you to tackle that one?*

Margo: We felt that, though millions of Americans and their family members are affected by depression each year, mental health issues have not received enough public service focus in our industry. There continues to be a certain stigma and discomfort associated with depression as well as a lot of misunderstanding. Depression is largely a physical disease, a medical disease, and with the right treatment, the vast majority of people will get well again and lead happy lives. So we felt that by partnering with experts and tackling the issues head on in broadcast messages and in related website content, we could support the important fight against stigma—and also provide information that would be helpful and supportive.

**Connection:** *Mike Wallace has been a CBS Cares spokesperson regarding the issue of depression. Did you select him to help combat that stigma?*

Margo: Yes, Mike has been very courageous in speaking out about depression. His image is that of a very tough and fearless correspondent, which he is, and our thought was that if someone like Mike Wallace could be felled by depression, anybody



Cold Case star Danny Pino with children served by CASA of Los Angeles volunteers

could be affected. It's just harder to continue thinking of depression as a character weakness or illness to be ashamed of after you hear Mike courageously articulate what he went through.

**Connection:** *What was it like to interview the legendary interviewer, Mike Wallace?*

Margo: It was an honor. But it wasn't easy because, as Mike says, he likes to ask the questions and take charge—and he was very ready to do so when we started the interview. We were as prepared as possible and determined not to squander this great opportunity. Mike was extremely generous with his time and allowed us to track into some very personal issues, which give an important insight into what was a really bad depression and a courageous recovery.

**Connection:** *Could you talk a little bit about the process of selecting National CASA as a CBS Cares cause and the research that you did?*

Margo: Marty Franks (executive vice president of policy and planning for CBS) was approached by Mimi Feller (National CASA board member), and he asked me to look into CASA to see if it was a cause we

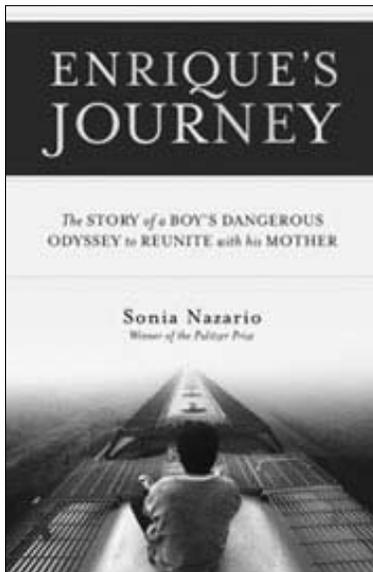
could take on. Our research showed CASA to be a very effective organization with volunteers and staff who are passionately committed to children's rights and welfare. All of the folks I've met with at CASA are engaged with the at-risk children and strong advocates for their interests. You don't sit in offices, cloistered; you're out there in the field. In meeting with CASA, it also became quickly obvious that you'd be a very strong partner who would contribute much to the project, as you in fact have.

**Connection:** *Simon Baker (of the CBS series Smith and formerly of The Guardian) participated in the first CBS Cares CASA PSA two years ago. I understand that this was his first PSA.*

Margo: I believe so, and our entire team was delighted to do it. Talents of many at CBS went into creation and production of this PSA, and I'd be remiss in not saying that National CASA was a full partner in the creative process—you came forward with strong ideas of your own. The results of the close creative collaboration between CASA and the CBS Cares team definitely resulted in stronger PSAs.

## The Novel Volunteer

# BOOK CLUB



### **Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother**

By Sonia Nazario  
Nonfiction, Random House, 2006,  
320 pages, [enriquesjourney.com](http://enriquesjourney.com)

Reviewed by Bob Arias  
Executive Director, CASA of Polk County,  
Dallas, OR and Member, National CASA  
Hispanic/Latino Advisory Committee

Just when I thought I had heard every reason for migrants to come North, along comes Sonia Nazario's graphic account of young Enrique from Honduras in search of his mother. This story is sad when you consider the obstacles that Enrique must face, with only his mother's phone number in North Carolina and \$57 in his pocket. It would be sad if it were only his story. But we find that Enrique is one of at least 48,000 children who travel North looking for their

parents who came to *El Norte*, as the immigrants refer to it, seeking a better life.

Enrique was 5 years old when his mother Lourdes decided she had to travel to *El Norte* in search of work so she could send money home. In Honduras, it is difficult for a single mother to raise a family; poverty is rampant in this Central American country. Her plan was to seek work and return home with enough money for Enrique and her family. Twelve years later Lourdes is in North Carolina still trying to make ends meet and never accumulating enough money to leave. Enrique never understands why his mother left him with his grandmother. "What's going on, where is she?" he asks.

Enrique becomes rebellious, coming home late, sniffing glue and using marijuana. At 16, he secretly wishes his girlfriend Maria Isabel would get pregnant so she won't leave him like his mother did. A year later, Enrique sets out to find his mother. The challenge is less crossing the border into the United States than traveling through Mexico. He is beaten and robbed and caught several times by Mexican officials and sent to bordering Guatemala. He attempts eight crossings before making it into the United States.

But many of the thousands of children who go looking for their mothers, some as young as 7 years old, never make it. Robbed and beaten by gangs, even the young ones are left to die along the tracks. They ride on top of the freight trains or hitch a ride on a truck, never knowing what is to become of them.

Author Sonia Nazario was born in Wisconsin of multiethnic parents who had met in Argentina. She lived in Argentina as a girl but returned to the United States two years after the start of the Dirty Wars of Argentina. Now a respected reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, Nazario was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Enrique's Journey*.

The idea to write about children like Enrique came to Nazario when her Guatemalan housekeeper in Los Angeles told her similar stories. Nazario decided to write about the young teenager, not just by interviewing him but by actually traveling North, retracing his journey from the moment he left home in Honduras to the time he found his mother. She traveled on freight trains, hitched rides in trucks and listened to the stories of the migrants in search of their mothers. Nazario wrote the account in the first person from Enrique's point of view. *Enrique's Journey* will challenge you to view things differently as you come to share the young teenager's desire to be with his mother again.

*"This is a twenty-first-century Odyssey. Nazario's powerful writing illuminates one of the darkest stories in our country. This is outstanding journalism. If you are going to read only one non-fiction book this year, it has to be this one, because you know these young heroes. They live next door."*—Isabel Allende

Enrique's Journey has been purchased by HBO, which is making it into a six-part miniseries. In September, Nazario was featured in the "Free Speech" segment of the CBS Evening News.

## Sample Discussion Questions for *Enrique's Journey*

You may want to read *Enrique's Journey* with members of your book club or a group of CASA/GAL volunteers. The following are questions you might consider in your discussion:

1. What made Enrique's trip unusual?
2. Did you initially think that Enrique was from Mexico because of US perceptions about illegal border-crossers?
3. What were your thoughts when you learned that Central Americans are entering the US in greater numbers than before? And that women are leaving home to look for work in greater numbers?
4. As an outsider, did you expect that the more difficult task for these individuals would be crossing into the US rather than traveling through Mexico?
5. Were you aware of the conservative estimate that 48,000 children come into the US illegally each year looking for their parents? How does this change your views?
6. It took Enrique eight attempts before he finally made it into the US. Some die in the effort. Have your thoughts and feelings about illegal immigration changed? How?
7. What would you say to Enrique or his mother if you were to meet?
8. Did you learn anything from reading about Enrique and the challenge he faced crossing Mexico and finally finding his mother? Do you think you could make this journey?
9. Do you know anyone who has made a long trip looking for a loved one?
10. What can we do to help these children? Is it our responsibility or that of the states or US government?

*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](mailto:theconnection@nationalcasa.org). Put "CASA Book Club Suggestion" in the title of your message.*

## Special Offer for New Members Only



Have you been meaning to join our national cause in support of abused children? But you need a little more incentive? For a limited time, register as a new member of the National CASA Association and receive **\$10 OFF** our already-low annual dues rate of \$35.

Membership in National CASA lets you support our work even if you don't have the time to volunteer. Your dues play a part in helping children nationwide find safe, permanent homes.

To receive the one-time \$25 rate for new members, go to [nationalcasa.org/join.asp](http://nationalcasa.org/join.asp) and type in the discount code **NEW**.

But hurry—this special rate applies only to new members signing up on line through January 31, 2007.

### Member benefit highlights:

- Subscription to *The Connection*
- Email updates on legislative policy changes affecting children
- Discount on registration for National CASA's annual conference
- A vote in the election of National CASA board members

# TOP TIPS for VOLUNTEERS



## Eight Steps to Engaging Children in Conversation

*Ben Wilkins*

*Director of Training/Assistant Program Director, Dallas CASA  
Member, National CASA Curriculum Advisory Committee*

*Children in out-of-home care experience a painful mixture of fear, confusion and loss, and it is often difficult for them to meet and trust new people. Knowing the challenges they face, how do you begin building rapport? What are the steps to engaging them in a friendly, supportive conversation?*

### 1. Do Your Homework

Empathy is the most important step in your preparation. Before you meet the children, review what you have learned about them so far. Pay special attention to anything that will help you understand their personalities, developmental level or past experiences. Ask yourself, "How is this child likely to feel right now? How might he or she feel about meeting me?"

### 2. Find a Peaceful Space

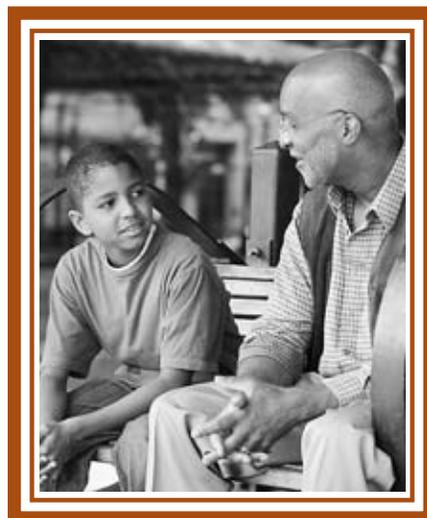
When you meet children for the first time, find a calm setting where they can feel safe, and join them on their level. Avoid rooms with blaring televisions or other electronic distractions.

### 3. Keep it Light

Find a game or toy so that the children have a neutral focus for their attention when nervous. Coloring books work well with younger children, while outdoor activities and card games such as *Uno* work for a variety of ages.

### 4. Start Small

Begin with the safest topics. Compliment their shoes or a picture they have drawn, and ask them about their likes, dislikes and interests. With older children, it is helpful to know something about the latest



entertainment personalities, music or movies. Engaging children in small talk will help you make quick assessments of their developmental levels so that you can select the most appropriate level of language to use.

### 5. Know Your Limits

Be mindful of your boundaries. You are not a therapist, attorney or forensic interviewer. It is not your job to find out more about the conditions that brought the children into care or to help them identify and correct their misbehavior. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you want merely to learn more about the children and help them understand your role.

### 6. Acknowledge Feelings

As the conversation progresses, children may begin to express their feelings and perceptions about the events in their lives. Be aware that something you intend to be comforting may instead sound like a contradiction and will shut down further conversation. Acknowledge feelings explicitly. Instead of, "I'm sure your new teacher was only trying to keep the class on task," try "That must have been very embarrassing. What happened next?"

### 7. Don't Just Say "No"

Children may make requests that you are unable to fulfill. Pause to consider all requests, even if you know you have to say "no," and think through your reasons out loud so that they can understand the reason for your denial. Follow up by suggesting an alternative.

### 8. Listen. Listen. Listen.

Above all, listen more than you talk. Listening to children demonstrates respect and builds self-esteem.

*For more information, see chapter 7 of National CASA's Volunteer Training Manual. Here you will find helpful advice about body language, word choice and other aspects of communicating with children.*

# Working with American Indian Families

*Excerpts reprinted with permission from Children's Services Practice Notes, Volume 11, Number 2, February 2006. In this article, the term "American Indian" is used interchangeably with "American Indian/Alaska Native" solely for the purpose of brevity.*



Despite their amazing cultural variety, all American Indians have one thing in common: a history of astounding resiliency.

Today, after centuries of violence, racism, and adversity, American Indian tribes are growing and continuing as unique, vibrant cultures. Many Indian families are thriving, healthy, and strong. They are nurturing their ancient ways, building their economies, strengthening their communities, and looking to the future with optimism and hope.

Yet oppression has left its mark. Many people believe that Indians' history of discrimination and forced assimilation is the true reason for the alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence that plague some Indian families (Gover, 2000).

Whatever their cause, problems such as these can make it hard for some Indian families to ensure the safety and well-being of their children. To work successfully with Indian families in crisis, child welfare workers must keep several things in mind.

First, they must understand that many Indians are citizens not only of the U.S. but also of their own tribes, which are distinct sovereign entities. Because of this, child welfare practice with many Native people is governed by the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), a federal law with which all child welfare workers must comply.

Child welfare workers must also understand that our government's past efforts to break up Indian families and destroy Native culture casts a terrible shadow over their work. Though it goes back many years, this

history extends to the very recent past and directly involves child welfare agencies.

They say that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. If this is true, unless they make a special effort to learn about, partner with and support American Indian children and their tribes, child welfare workers today are probably still at serious risk of misunderstanding and harming Native families.

The following brief history and tips regarding dealing with tribes and cultural considerations are provided to help you guard against the mistakes of the past and prepare for successful partnerships with American Indian families in the future.

In their dealings with the American Indians, the American government's initial policy was a well-chronicled one of extermination. After 1871, the policy shifted to one of assimilation (Halverson, et al., 2002). Boarding schools, adoptions and child welfare intervention were a significant part of this effort.

From the 1950s to the 1970s many private organizations tried to "save" Indian children by removing them from their homes and placing them for adoption in non-Native homes (Goldsmith, 2002). At the same time, Indian children were placed in foster care at shocking rates: a 1969 survey conducted in 16 states with large Indian populations found that between 25% to 35% of all Native children were removed from their families and placed in foster or adoptive homes. In some states Native children were 13 times more likely to be

removed from their homes than non-Native children (Goldsmith, 2002; CWLA, 2005). The majority were placed in non-Native foster homes.

Statistics such as these, as well as ten years of hearings, led Congress to pass the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. The law can be seen as an effort to end state and county child welfare policies and practices that Congress believed were devastating American Indian tribes. ICWA does several important things to protect Indian children and Indian tribes. First, it establishes a federal standard that defines what is in the best interests of Indian children. This standard is different from the standard for other children, in part because Indian children enjoy a different status in the courts because they are also part of tribes, which are distinct sovereign entities. This standard acknowledges that it is of vital importance to the well-being of Indian children to protect their rights as Indians, including their right to be raised in a home that immerses them in their cultural heritage (Goldsmith, 2002).

ICWA also protects the decision making role of the child's tribe by requiring state courts and child welfare agencies to notify tribes, invite them to intervene, and comply with tribal preferences during: 1. Foster care placements, 2. TPR proceedings, 3. Preadoptive and adoptive placements, and 4. Juvenile court custody or guardianship of the juvenile. Even if a tribe initially declines to intervene, it can change its mind at any time.

*(Continued on page 18)*

### 10 Tips for Collaborating with Tribes Under ICWA and Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

1. Approach tribes with respect as unique, sovereign entities. Treat tribes as partners.
2. Know the law and state/tribal agreements.
3. Inquire whether children/parents are American Indian in all cases at every stage of the case.
4. Provide tribes with timely notice of ICWA cases. Be sure to notify the right contact at the tribe, usually the social service provider.
5. Give tribal court orders and acts full faith and credit. Tribal courts have full authority to conduct Indian child custody proceedings (ICWA, P.L. 95-608, Section 1911 (d)).
6. Work collaboratively with tribal social workers in implementing ICWA requirements; include tribal social workers in all aspects of case plan development, including permanency planning.
7. Remember that the ICWA active efforts requirement is a higher standard of service than the reasonable efforts requirement under ASFA.
8. Contact extended family members. Remember that American Indian extended families are much larger than mainstream families and include relatives beyond grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.
9. Follow ICWA or tribal placement preferences.
10. Do not fast-track potential Indian child welfare cases without immediately involving the tribes and/or extended family members.

Source: Amanda Cross, Institute for Child and Family Policy, Univ. of Southern Maine, in consultation with NICWA (Muskie, 2003).

### Cultural Considerations for Child Welfare Practice with Native Americans

**Help-seeking patterns.** For various reasons Native people may be reluctant to seek “official” help. If an individual is unable to resolve a problem on her own, she will commonly turn to the following resources, in this order:

1. Immediate family
2. Extended family (cousins, aunts, uncles)
3. Religious leader
4. Tribal council/organization
5. Mainstream resource system

**Time.** Indian people may not feel a sense of urgency about time. Many will come to an appointment late—or not at all—if they have something they believe is more important to do. Events that may be considered more important can include the needs of family and friends, family crises, ceremonies, or deaths.

#### Communication Styles.

**Nonverbal:** Often Indian people communicate a great deal through nonverbal gestures, such as using downcast eyes or ignoring an individual when they are unhappy with or disagree with a person.

**Humor:** Indians may use humor to express truths or difficult messages, and might cover great pain with smiles or jokes. It is important to listen closely to humor, as it may be seen as invasive to ask for too much clarification.

**Criticism.** It is often considered unacceptable for an Indian person to criticize another, even if the individual has been exceedingly abusive. There is a common belief that people who have acted wrongly will pay for their acts in one way or another, although the method may not be the legal system.

Sources: AIMHAC, 2004; Dial, 2005

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For the full text of this article, see [practicenotes.org/vol11\\_no2.htm](http://practicenotes.org/vol11_no2.htm).

# Child Welfare News

## 2006 Kids Count Data Book Shows More Children Living in Poverty

National trends in child well-being are no longer improving in the steady way they did in the late 1990s, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 17th annual *Kids Count Data Book*. Each year, the *Data Book* reports on the needs and conditions of America's most disadvantaged children and families as well as on statistical trends. The 2006 *Data Book* shows that three out of ten child well-being indicators have worsened since 2000. There were more than 13 million children living in poverty in 2004—an increase of one million over four years. “*Kids Count* does contain good news in four areas: the child death rate and the teen death rate have fallen, the teen birth rate has continued to go down, and the high school dropout rate has improved,” says William O’Hare, senior fellow at the Casey Foundation and author of the 2006 report. To view the report, go to [aecf.org/kidscount/sld/databook.jsp](http://aecf.org/kidscount/sld/databook.jsp).



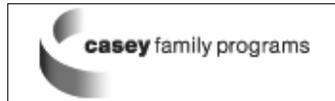
## Caring for Their Children's Children: Assessing the Mental Health Needs and Service Experiences of Grandparent Caregiver Families



This report from Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago combines information compiled during interviews with grandparents and a survey of social service providers regarding the use of mental health services among grandparent caregiver families in Illinois. The working paper outlines the unmet mental health needs of both grandparents

and their grandchildren while also discussing the implications of these findings for practitioners and advocates. To download the report, go to [chapinhall.org](http://chapinhall.org) and search for “grandparent caregiver.”

## Casey Fact Sheets on Child Welfare and Disproportionality



Using data gathered primarily from the national *Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) Report: Preliminary FY 2004*, Casey Family Programs provides this fact sheet with statistics illustrating major trends and issues in the child welfare system. Access the recently updated *Child Welfare Fact Sheet* at [casey.org/MediaCenter/MediaKit/FactSheet](http://casey.org/MediaCenter/MediaKit/FactSheet).

Disproportionality refers to the extent to which children are over- or under-represented in the child welfare system relative to their proportions in the Census population. According to a recent AFCARS report, over 50% of the 523,085 children living in foster care placements are children of color although they represent only 41% of the child population in the United States. Casey Family Programs has compiled additional figures about disproportionality in an updated fact sheet available at [casey.org/MediaCenter/MediaKit/DisproportionalityFactSheet](http://casey.org/MediaCenter/MediaKit/DisproportionalityFactSheet).

## New Publication Highlights Information from LGBTQ Listening Forums

The Child Welfare League of America and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund have launched *Out of the Margins: A Report on Regional Listening Forums Highlighting the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning*

*(LGBTQ) Youth in Care*, a new publication to serve as a guide for helping the child welfare system better meet the needs of this population. The guide is a compilation of the experiences of



LGBTQ youth in care along with concrete solutions to end the problems they face in the foster care, juvenile justice and homeless/transitional living systems. The information was gathered during 13 listening forums held in 22 states in 2003 and 2004 attended by more than 500 people, including social workers, service providers, administrators, caregivers and LGBTQ youth who are or were in care. *Out of the Margins* builds on Lambda Legal's 2001 publication, *Youth in the Margins*, a tool aimed at providing child welfare administrators with recommendations on policies, training and services to better meet the needs of LGBTQ youth in care. Download the new guide from [cwla.org/programs/culture/outofthemargins.pdf](http://cwla.org/programs/culture/outofthemargins.pdf).

## Mental Health Study in Development

New research is being developed in response to last year's *Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*, which found that adults who were formerly placed in foster care (“alumni”) were experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at rates up to twice as high as US war veterans. For these and other mental health findings, see the *Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study* at [casey.org/Resources/Publications/NorthwestAlumniStudy](http://casey.org/Resources/Publications/NorthwestAlumniStudy). In addition to mental health, the upcoming *Casey Field Office Mental Health Study* will explore issues of spirituality, ethnic identity, gender identity and sexual orientation in about 200 youth in Casey's care across the country.



## Resources for **FOSTER YOUTH**

### Apprenticeships and Internships Prepare Youth for Future Success

For children in the foster care system, reaching milestones such as completing an education and preparing for a career can be daunting. Even a quick look at statistics citing higher unemployment rates for youth in or exiting the foster care system reveals the challenges these young people face. But fortunately there are resources that address this inequity and support youth seeking to gain the skills and experience necessary to become independent adults.

Following are four examples of national apprenticeship and internship programs that provide education and job training opportunities.

#### YouthBuild



In 1978, a New York City activist asked a group of teenagers in East Harlem how they would improve their community if given adult support. “We’d rebuild the houses, we’d take empty buildings back from the drug dealers and eliminate crime,” the young people told her. The teens successfully renovated a local tenement, and the first YouthBuild program was born.

Today more than 225 YouthBuild programs nationwide are engaging young men and women ages 16 to 24 in a combination of job-training and education. YouthBuild students are exclusively low-income; the majority have had experience with foster care, juvenile justice, welfare and homelessness. Students spend six months to two years dividing their time between the classroom—where they prepare for high

school diplomas, GEDs, vocational school or college—and construction site, where they learn the trade by constructing and rehabilitating homes for homeless and low-income residents of their communities. Counseling and graduate support are also provided.

To search for the YouthBuild program nearest you, go to [youthbuild.org](http://youthbuild.org) and click on “Locate a YouthBuild Program.”

#### Job Corps

Job Corps provides education and job training for at-risk youth ages 16 through 24. Through Job Corps, students earn a high school diploma or GED and learn a trade in more than 100 occupational areas including business technology, health, hospitality, culinary arts, construction and auto mechanics. Job Corps programs last from eight months to two years depending upon the career area and learning pace. The majority of students live on site at a Job Corps campus.

To learn more and locate a program in your area, go to [jobcorps.dol.gov/](http://jobcorps.dol.gov/) or call 800-733-JOBS.

#### Registered Apprentice Program

While apprenticeships do not necessarily guarantee the fame and riches promised by Donald Trump in the popular reality television show, participants in a Registered Apprentice Program do gain skills necessary to embark upon a successful career.

Apprenticeship programs offer a combination of on-the-job training and



related classroom instruction in hundreds of fields, including the building trades, culinary arts, health and manufacturing. Apprentices work and learn under the direction of experienced journey workers. Programs last between one and six years and involve a minimum of 2,000 hours of on-the-job work experience. Standards and requirements vary by trade and are determined by industry or program sponsors.

Applicants for apprenticeship programs must be at least 16 years old and meet the program sponsor’s qualifications. To locate a registered apprentice program in your area, go to [doleta.gov/atels\\_bat](http://doleta.gov/atels_bat). Click on “For Individual” and then on “Find a Program” on the left sidebar.

#### Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute’s (CCAI) Congressional Foster Youth Internship Program

The CCAI internship program provides talented college students who have spent their formative years in foster care an opportunity to intern in congressional offices for a summer. Interns spend six weeks assisting with a mix of substantive and administrative duties ranging from researching issues and composing correspondence to answering phones and greeting constituents.

Internships are available to students who are currently enrolled in a four-year college program and have completed their first four semesters. Applicants must have been in the US foster care system at the time of their 18th birthday or have been adopted from the foster care system after their 14th birthday.

For more information, go to [ccainstitute.org](http://ccainstitute.org) and click on “Foster Youth Internship Program,” or contact Chelsea Buffington at 703-288-9700 or [info@ccainstitute.org](mailto:info@ccainstitute.org).



## Association NEWS:

Survey Describes Potential Volunteers

Jewelers Continue Partnership

TV PSA Wins Awards



### Survey Provides Snapshot of Potential CASA Volunteers

National CASA is now analyzing the results of a survey of individuals who have inquired about becoming a volunteer via the nationalcasa.org website or our toll-free phone number. The results are being finalized, but we immediately noticed two interesting trends:

- Almost 21% of online respondents and 34% of phone respondents, who tend to be older, have been or are currently teachers. This confirms what we have heard anecdotally from local CASA/GAL programs: that many volunteers have taught and that there seems to be a strong association between the skill sets needed by good teachers and good advocates.
- Almost 40% of online respondents and 46% of phone respondents enjoy gardening. A similar finding that linked the interests of nurturing children with nurturing plants came up in an earlier study of potential CASA volunteers. This resulted in our "Grow CASA" and "CASA Rose" promotions that we shared with local programs to support their public awareness and fundraising efforts.

### Jewelers Continue Partnership, Awarding \$1,000,000 to CASA Network

We are pleased to announce that the *Champions for Abused Children* initiative will be funded again this year through a \$1 million grant to National CASA from Jewelers for Children (JFC). National CASA is one of four charity partners of JFC. Ninety-five percent of the 2006-07 award will be passed through to local CASA/GAL programs in grants funding volunteer advocacy services and recruitment of volunteers in select areas of the country. JFC is an organization created by leading manufacturers and retailers in the jewelry industry to raise funds for national charities that benefit children.

### TV PSA Wins National Accolades

The National CASA Association's *Tired* TV public service announcement (PSA), which depicts the words of a child that seem more like those of a world-weary adult, has won three Telly Awards: local nonprofit, local public service and regional public service announcement. Founded in 1978, the Telly Awards is the premier award honoring outstanding local, regional and cable TV commercials and programs as well as the finest video and film productions. The Telly Awards annually showcase the best work of advertising agencies, production companies, television stations, cable operators and corporate video departments. A highly respected national and international competition, the Telly Awards received a record 13,000+ entries this year from all 50 states and many foreign countries. The *Tired* PSA was produced with support from Jewelers for Children.



Steve Wiser, vice president of Samuels Jewelers, and Janice Eisele, executive director of the Fifth Judicial District CASA Program, participate in a Jewelers for Children event in Twin Falls, ID.



# Pointers from PROGRAMS

## Glacier-to-Yellowstone Charity Bike Ride CASA/GAL of Montana, Helena, MT



Domie Aquino leads a group of riders on day four of the 2006 Park-2-Park Montana ride.

Twenty-three bicyclists on a five-day ride between Glacier and Yellowstone national parks increased awareness about Montana's abused and neglected children and raised \$14,000 to benefit CASA of Montana and its 15 programs across the state. The 370-mile ride took bikers from St. Mary—on the eastern side of Glacier National Park—through spectacular scenery along US 89 and concluded at Gardiner, near Yellowstone National Park. CASA programs along the route provided meals, snacks and other support.

Jens Jensen, the senior rider of the group at age 74, said "It's a good cause, and that's the main reason I'm riding. I enjoy doing these kind of rides. It's fun meeting people, and I love to get out and bike." Other cyclists included Bernadette Franks-Ongoy, executive director of the Montana

Advocacy Project, which was the Platinum Sponsor for the September bike ride.

## Chester's CASA CASA of Travis County, Austin, TX

Angela Shelf Medearis, a Texas children's author and CASA volunteer, and Anne Elizabeth Wynn, an Austin illustrator, created *Chester's CASA*, a book that provides comfort and information to children entering the foster care system. The story includes an introduction of CASA volunteers and explains their role. Scholastic, Inc. donated production for 10,000 copies. CASA of Travis County received nearly 2,500 copies of the book, enabling the program to give the books to children it serves and to volunteers when they accept a new case. Karen Cox, executive director of CASA of Travis County, gave the book to her CASA children to read aloud on a car trip. "It was such a gift to hear them read so well and recognize their CASA volunteer in the book."



Remaining books are being sold as a fundraising effort for CASA and Book Boosters, Inc., a tutoring program based in Austin that provides academic assistance and role models to low-income children. Visit medearis.com to learn more or purchase a copy of *Chester's CASA*.

## Eagle Scout's Project to Benefit CASA CASA - Voices for Children in Benton County, Corvallis, OR



Xavier and the playhouse

Xavier Brown, a junior at Corvallis High School, was looking for an Eagle Scout project last spring when he learned that the CASA - Voices for Children program needed someone to build a playhouse for a benefit raffle. Xavier took it on as his project, a requirement needed to reach the highest rank in the Boy Scouts of America. With help from his family, he designed the playhouse, rounded up the work crew and secured in-kind donations for the materials from several local businesses, including Mary's River Lumber, Spaeth Lumber, Sprick Roofing, Valley Remodeling, Habitat for Humanity, Alpha Graphics and the Paint Store. Xavier completed the project on schedule and then promoted the raffle at the Benton County Fair. It was the program's first year to carry out the project, which raised more than \$2,000. The win-

## OFF THE NEWSWIRE

ner of the raffle was a young family with three children.

Xavier said he feels good that his project will help children who have experienced neglect and abuse. Joanna Engle, executive director, was inspired by Xavier's contribution: "It is so nice for us to be reminded of the good in our community; this young man exemplifies all that is possible for the future."

### Quilt for Kids

#### Miami County CASA, Peru, IN



Holly Mallow, director, and John Walker, assistant director, display a blanket.

A new program is under way that encourages quilters to both practice their craft and provide something special to a child in need. "Quilts for Kids" was initiated by Miami County CASA and Miami County Community Corrections. The blanket collection drive began as an effort to collect handmade blankets that local Department of Child Services case workers could keep in their cars for children who are removed from their homes in emergency situations. "The goal is to give abused and neglected children a constant to hold on to during their sometimes lengthy journey toward permanency," says CASA director Holly Mallow. The drive has proven very successful, with many individuals, local churches and other agencies including the Miami County Extension Homemakers donating their time and talent to produce warm and comforting gifts for children.

Ethel Seiberling Fox, a volunteer with the Summit County CASA/GAL program in Akron, OH, was honored as an outstanding volunteer by the United Way of Summit County Volunteer Center and subsequently profiled in the *Beacon Journal* in an article titled "Children Find Voice in an Advocate." Fox, a grandmother of seven, has been involved with the CASA/GAL program for 19 years. "It's my passion," she said. "I wouldn't have stayed here for 19 years if it were not."

An article published in the *Tribune-Star* of Terre Haute, IN reported that there are not enough CASA volunteers to meet the needs of a new Indiana state law mandating that "every child entering the court system because of abuse or neglect by a caregiver must be represented by a CASA, a trained volunteer." Nikki Fuhrmeister, director of the Vigo County CASA program, emphasized the campaign to recruit more volunteers. "The need for volunteers is overwhelming," she said. "These children need someone to speak for them."



Nikki Fuhrmeister

The *Johnson County Sun* of Lenexa, KS reported that a successful case of adoption brought much happiness to Johnson County CASA volunteer Sheri Rice. The story featured Rice's advocacy for a boy born with fetal alcohol syndrome who was adopted by a family that later disintegrated in divorce. Rice met "Joey" when he was subsequently placed in a foster home.

She helped him by "being a friend who does not pass judgment and offers encouragement." When Joey was adopted again, his new family asked Rice to stay involved in the boy's life, which she gladly does: "He has brought joy to my life through his big smile and loving heart."

Two Jackson County CASA volunteers—Charles Scott and Lovia Harrell—were featured in a *Kansas City Star* editorial about the need for African-American role models to work with youth in Jackson County's CASA program. Scott, a 23-year veteran of the Kansas City police department, and Harrell, a retired FAA employee, are two of the 39 African-American volunteers working with Jackson County CASA. The editorial concluded by stating: "It's imperative that minorities increase their involvement. Turning our backs on abused and neglected children isn't an option. And claiming to be unaware of CASA can no longer be used as an excuse."

The *Millen News* in Millen, GA spotlighted the work of the CASA Program for the Ogeechee Judicial Circuit in an article titled "CASA Program Helps Children of Broken Homes." Director Carol Fields highlighted the CASA program's successful track record as well as its ability to reach families and effect positive change. Field also spoke directly to potential volunteers, urging them to get involved. "If you've got five minutes, five hours, five days or five years to help," said Fields, "there is a job you can do."

# Awards & Recognition



From left to right: CASA board president Dan Sachs, executive director Sharon Hurwitz and MacArthur Foundation president Jonathan F. Fanton pose with the award certificate.

**CASA of Cook County** received a \$50,000 grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation earlier this year. The grant is awarded annually to a Chicago-based organization providing service to the community. Jonathan F. Fanton, president of the foundation, stated "CASA's work reminds us that some young people are caught in the justice system through no fault of their own. CASA's volunteers are there for them when they need it most, and MacArthur is proud to support this critical work." CASA of Cook County was nominated for the award by Melisa Byrd, profiled in this issue's "Volunteer Voice" on page 2. For more information about the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, visit [macfound.org](http://macfound.org).

**West Virginia CASA** programs and volunteers were recognized by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) with its Angels in Adoption Award. "We are honored by this award and hope it helps bring attention to the West Virginia children waiting for an advocate and a loving adoptive family," said Monica Donohoe, CEO and executive director of the WV CASA Association. The CCAI's Angels in Adoption Award provides an opportunity to all members of the US Congress to honor the good work of their constituents who have enriched the lives of foster children and orphans. West Virginia CASA was nominated by Senator Robert Byrd.

CASA volunteer **Tyrone Thompson** of the 8th Judicial District Court CASA Program in Las Vegas, NV recently won the Volunteer Center of Southern Nevada's 2006 Community Enrichment Award, Individual Category. A CASA volunteer since 1997, Thompson has advocated on behalf of seven children and also shared his experience with new volunteers by serving as a mentor and on panel discussions. Shelia Parks, CASA



Tyrone Thompson, CASA volunteer

volunteer coordinator, commended Thompson for his willingness to take on challenging cases involving adolescents and teenage boys with behavior and emotional issues. Another CASA volunteer, **Kim Coats**, was one of the three finalists.



From left to right: Anita Braun, executive director, CASA of Lea County; Amy O'Neill, director, San Juan County CASA; volunteer Sheryl Reid; and Julie Fallin, program services director, NM CASA Network.

A CASA staff member and volunteer were recognized with Governor's Awards presented through the New Mexico Commission on Volunteerism. **Sheryl Reid**, who has volunteered with CASA of Lea County in Hobbs for 12 years, was named Volunteer of the Year. **Amy O'Neill**, director of the San Juan CASA program in Farmington for six years, was named Volunteer Administrator of the Year.

## GET CONNECTED!

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

### NationalCASA.org

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



### 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.

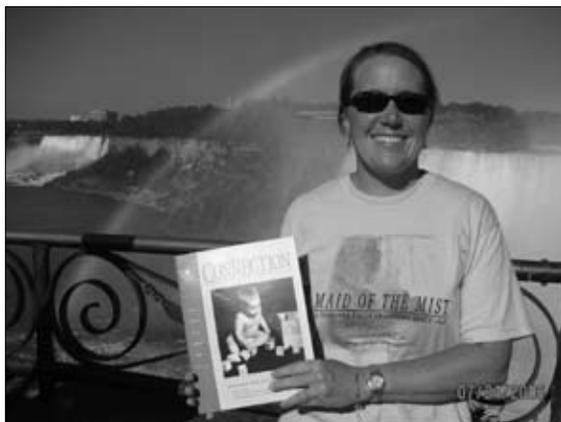


## Connection Sightings



*“It has been challenging at times, but I can only hope that I have made a little difference in the lives of some of Delaware’s children.”*

**Georgina M. Campbell**, CASA volunteer for the Family Court in Dover, DE, visited her sister who lives in Jish, a village in the Upper Galilee in Israel. They went to Jerusalem for three days, and one of the stops was at the Holocaust Museum where this photo was taken. Gina has been a CASA volunteer for 16 years.



*“I have enjoyed reading The Connection for four years—first as a volunteer advocate, now as a CASA staff member. The articles are interesting and valuable to me in my work as a child advocate. Every issue gives me new ideas and new resources to research. This issue went with me on my summer vacation when visiting family near Niagara Falls.”*

**Tricia Schneider**, development director and case supervisor at CASA of Central Texas

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

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](mailto:theconnection@nationalcasa.org). Include your name, address, phone number, email address and photo location.



*“My director and program coordinator are responsible for my enthusiasm and ongoing commitment to CASA. There’s no better volunteer program out there as far as I’m concerned.”*

**Stephanie Heller**, a CASA volunteer and former board member of CASA for Douglas County, Nebraska, recently toured Italy. The photo was taken in Vatican City, with St Peter’s Basilica in the background. Stephanie says that she was excited to read about the Barretts in *The Connection*, having watched them on the *Extreme Makeover* show, and to see mention of the Heart Gallery programs since she was involved in the program that started in Nebraska last year.

*Closing words*

from



**JUDGE HATCHETT**

by Judge Glenda A. Hatchett

## The Young Faces of Poverty

Oftentimes when we think of poverty in the United States, we see the unshaven faces of men sleeping in cardboard boxes under highway bridges or the woman approaching our car asking for money to buy food. However, what we don't often visualize when we think of poverty are the faces of the more than 13 million children living in impoverished conditions. Every day, there are children in this country who start each morning without a nutritious meal and go to bed at night with empty stomachs. Some may only have one meal a day, the lunch they receive at school, while others go for days without even an ounce of food. These are not children in far-away countries—these are children right in our own backyards.

Among the 13 million children living in poverty in this country are many of the more than 500,000 children currently in the foster care system. We know that most of the children in foster care were removed from their homes because they were victims of abuse or neglect, but we often don't know what factors led to such dire circumstances. Although it is now leveling off, there has been a significant increase in the national poverty rate over

the past few years. Research has shown that there is some correlation between poverty and entry into the child welfare system. When people are living in poverty, they are immersed in a situation that is often unstable as well as physically and mentally draining. Children living in poverty often become the innocent victims of the inevitable consequences of limited resources and services.

*No* child deserves to be abused, and no child deserves to be neglected. Likewise, no child deserves to live in poverty. Every child has the right to have a safe, loving and permanent home with at least three meals a day and clothes on their backs. Without these basic needs met, how can children thrive? They cannot. How will they survive? They will not. How can they prepare to become tomorrow's leaders when their focus is broken by pains from hunger and worries of what tomorrow may or may not bring? Because of this, poverty becomes not only a factor in children's suffering but also a measure of their disenfranchisement.

When you make the choice to become a CASA or GAL volunteer and advocate for children who cannot stand

up for themselves, you begin to make a difference far beyond what you may have initially expected. For the many foster children who are living in poverty, you not only make the commitment to help to find safe, permanent and loving homes, but your efforts will also help ensure that they will have nutritious meals every day and grow up in clean living conditions. These basic needs that many of us take for granted will help empower these youth to successfully thrive as members of society—and will foster an environment that encourages them to reach their full potential and achieve *greatness*.

---

*The Honorable Glenda A. Hatchett is a nationally recognized authority on juvenile issues. While 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!, Judge Hatchett has also gained deep respect from her peers as a zealous advocate for causes of children and families in need. She is the former chief presiding judge of the Fulton County Juvenile Court in Atlanta. Among her numerous awards are both the NAACP Thurgood Marshall Award and Emory University's School of Law Outstanding Alumni of the Year Award.*



# Advocates Across America:

## Connect With Nationwide Resources and Other Volunteers!

Have you ever struggled to find online resources to help you better advocate for children? Or wanted to communicate with other CASA/ GAL volunteers nationwide? National CASA is designing a volunteer community website to make this possible.

But we need *your* input to guide our decisions while developing the new site. Some initial ideas favored by a sampling of volunteers:

- Tips, tools, resources and links that will support you as an advocate
- Web forums on relevant child welfare topics, moderated by experts
- Volunteer success story "celebration" area
- Information on family services in other states

Please take 10 minutes to complete an online survey that will help us better understand what kind of website would support you as a volunteer. You will be entered into a drawing with five chances to win a \$50 gift certificate to ShopCASA.

To complete the survey, go to [nationalcasa.org/survey.asp](http://nationalcasa.org/survey.asp).

## Paperless Registration Coming Soon for June 2007 National CASA Conference

Watch for paperless registration opening in January at [casanet.org/conference](http://casanet.org/conference). You'll also find up-to-the-minute conference details such as workshop descriptions, general session speakers and exhibit opportunities as well as award nominations and winners. Visit early and visit often!

To join our email distribution list and receive notifications about discounts and registration information, email: [staff@nationalcasa.org](mailto:staff@nationalcasa.org) with "2007 National CASA Conference" in the subject line.



**Celebrate 30 Years of the  
CASA Cause for Abused Children**

**June 9-12, 2007**

**Caribe Royale Resort  
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*Celebrate the Season—*



*and Children*

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In addition to enhancing your home for the holidays, this wreath provides a year's supply of culinary herbs.

Proceeds from the sale of each designated National CASA wreath or bouquet (or any product purchased using the special link below) will result in a 10% donation to support our nationwide recruitment and training of community volunteers who advocate for foster children.

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