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Spring 2006
Vol. 22, No. 2

the CONNECTION

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

Stand Up

for an

Abused

Child®



Advocating for Infants and Toddlers

Also in This Issue:

CASA Family Gets Extreme Home Makeover

Outback Steakhouse Partners with CASA Programs



Volunteer VOICE

by Sharon and Rod DePue
Volunteers, Milwaukee CASA
Milwaukee, WI

We are retirees who started volunteering with CASA two years ago after reading an article in the Sunday paper written by a children's court judge. It inspired us to contact Milwaukee CASA to ask more about their work.

Both of us had been active volunteers in our community, Sharon with the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin and Rod with the Mental Health Association. Together we were active with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee, where we set up a volunteer coordination program. When we retired, we were looking for another volunteer opportunity that would be at least as rewarding. We found it at Milwaukee CASA.

We work as a team, so our first case after training was a family of four siblings, ages one to nine, who were split up in several foster and kinship homes. We learned that as CASA volunteers, we must be the "nudges" who push to see that services ordered for the children are, in fact, delivered in a timely manner.

About six months into this case, the biological mother with whom we were working to achieve reunification told us a troubling story. A psychiatrist to whom she had taken her three-year-old had prescribed Ritalin for his behavioral symptoms after a very short interview and no evaluation. (The drug is not approved for children under six years of age.) We brought this to the attention of the case manager, who was familiar with this doctor and confirmed his unorthodox prescribing techniques.

After further investigation—and guidance from our CASA program—we decided to file a complaint with the Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing, only to learn that six other complaints had been filed. One of these involved the death of an 18-year-old. Further, the doctor was not board-certified. As a result of our filing, his license to practice has been indefinitely suspended.

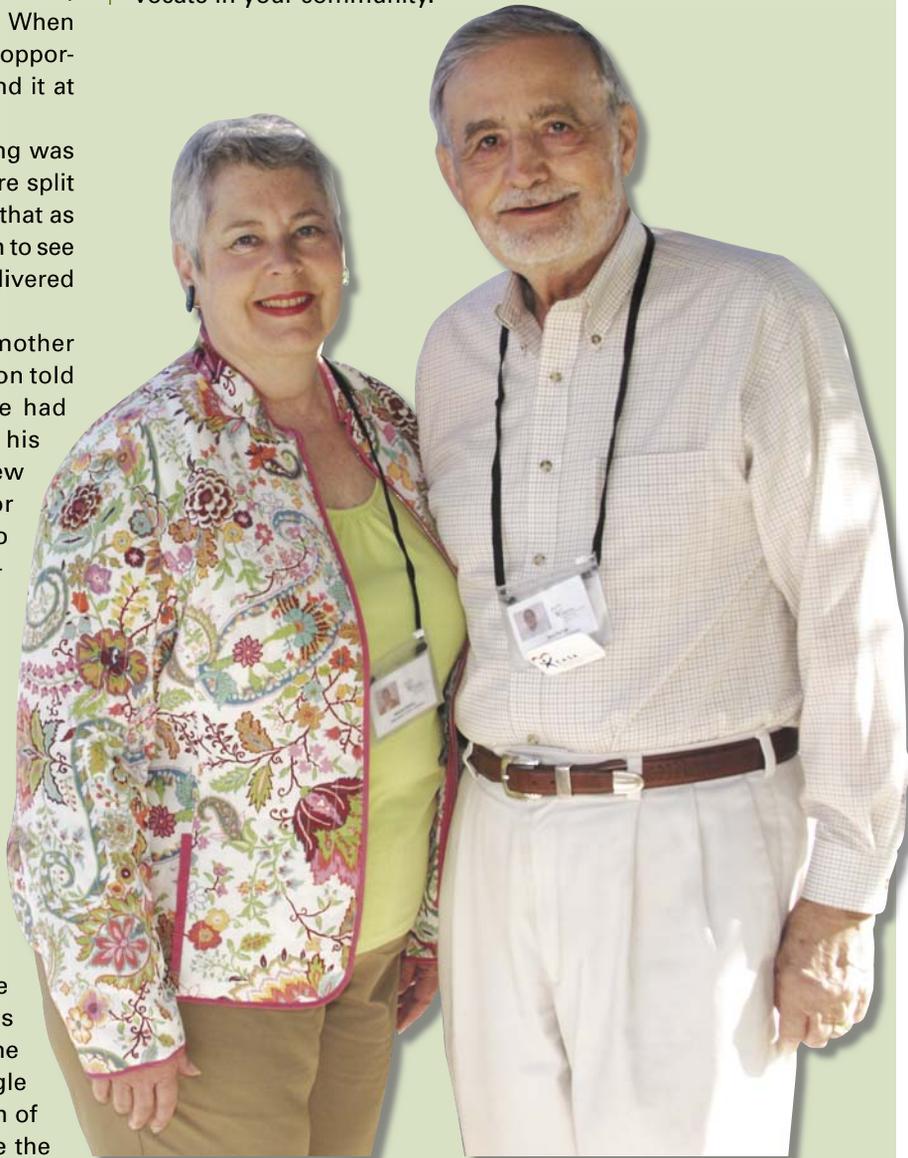
But the best news is that these four siblings have been reunited with their mother, the family is doing well and the case is closed. Our main work in this case was helping the mother to keep her eye on the goals she had agreed to. She was willing but often became frustrated and discouraged. This was a young, single mom with a lot of responsibility—and without much of a support system. Being careful not to compromise the

well-being of the children as our first priority, we were able to offer support to this mother as well.

There are many advantages to volunteering as a couple. We can bounce ideas off each other, which helps us to clarify our thinking. Sharon has a more cautious, by-the-book personality, while Rod is more aggressive and likely to follow his instincts. This is a good balance to have. A drawback might be that we have to make an effort to not let our CASA work encompass all our conversations at home.

Our current case is a family of four boys, two to nine years old. These young children have been in and out of multiple foster homes in the past year and a half. It now appears they are settled in good foster homes and starting to do better in school. In less than a year, we have already seen positive change in their lives.

There are many ways that CASA volunteers work to help protect children and parents caught up in the child welfare system. This is the most rewarding volunteer work we have ever done, and we think you will agree if you become an advocate in your community.



A Message from **THE CEO**

In Praise of Great Men and Women

Michael Piraino, CEO

I write this having just said goodbye to a great man.

Judge Stephen Herrell was buried today in Portland, Oregon. Many of you did not know Steve, but most of you have benefited from his work.

A former member and officer of the National CASA board of directors, Steve dedicated his life to helping victims of violence, abuse and neglect. We are a stronger network of advocates because of him.

I had the honor to consider Steve a friend. He taught me much that has made me a better person. Humor, intelligence, compassion and most importantly, a full engagement in life—these are part of Steve's gift to me and to many others.

Greatness like Steve's does not seek attention. As one eulogist said, when Steve saw a need, he simply did something about it.

CASA is just one example. When he learned about this innovative approach, Steve founded the Multnomah County program. His wife, Alice, has been a longtime volunteer there. A huge number of children have benefited.

I have seen this kind of greatness many times, and it is awesome. It is, I believe, one of the defining characteristics of CASA and GAL volunteers and staff, just as it is of the many wonderful judges with whom we work.

Time after time, our volunteers demonstrate that, just like Judge Herrell, they are on the cutting edge of advocacy for abused and neglected children. One of the fascinating aspects of all our great CASA/GAL people is that they do



Steve and Alice Herrell

not start off worrying about whether they can help. They start off with the firm belief that one way or another they will get the job done. When Steve Herrell saw a need for a change to benefit children, he didn't stop to wonder how it would happen. He made a personal commitment to that result. The methods of accomplishing it came later.

Another example is the CASA volunteer I spoke with at one of our national conferences several years ago. He had attended a workshop on the needs of transitioning youth, and left with a personal commitment to do something about the issue in his state. He didn't know what program, which protocols, where the money would come from. All that got figured out later. The next year at our conference, he told me he had been instrumental in helping establish independent living programs in his state.

Great leaps of faith happen when people ask what needs to happen rather than explain why it cannot be done. The many visionary leaders of America's civil rights movement could never have foreseen all the pathways their efforts would have to take. But they never wavered from the commitment to doing what is right and just, and this country is a better place as a result.

Steve Herrell's life on earth may have ended, but I will continue to see him every day in the work that we all pursue on behalf of abused and neglected children. There is greatness in all our efforts to pursue justice and safety for them.

inside the CONNECTION



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

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is a nationwide movement of community volunteers who speak up for the best interests of abused and neglected children.

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

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

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The Connection is designed to keep CASA programs, volunteers and the public abreast of the latest news and developments affecting CASA's work with abused and neglected children. Written contributions are welcome. Published quarterly by the National CASA Association.

The Connection is produced and paid for by the National CASA Association.

This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement No. 2002-CH-BX-K001 from the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the US Department of Justice.

Children in *Connection* photos are not from actual abuse and neglect cases.



**Support provided by the
Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation**

Subscriptions: \$35 for one year. Subscriptions to *The Connection* are included as part of National CASA Association membership. See page 23.

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Editor's Note:

The winter 2006 *Connection* featured a main article addressing the needs of youth whose parents are incarcerated. Keith Hefner, executive director of Youth Communication, suggests the following booklet on the topic: *Wish You Were Here: Teens Write About Parents in Prison* (\$10; booklet #CW18; youthcomm.org/miva/merchant.mv). Youth Communication helps teenagers develop their skills in reading, writing, thinking and reflection, so they can acquire the information they need to make thoughtful choices about their lives. One of Youth Communication's many resources is *Represent*, a magazine written by and for young people in foster care.

Cover Photo Credit:

Kelly Chandler Photography (kellychandler.com)



Learning Begins at Birth

Guest Editorial

By Matthew Melmed, JD

Executive Director of Zero to Three

Over the past 20 years, we have learned a great deal about infants and toddlers in foster care and how to provide services to these children and their parents to heal relationships and move toward safe permanent families (biological or adoptive). Those involved in the lives of young children already know that the bond that forms between a baby and a consistent loving caregiver is the single most important predictor of a child's healthy growth and development. Now we have the scientific research to support this central claim. A secure emotional bond with a loving caregiver gives infants the belief that they are worthwhile and the ability to nurture themselves, care for those around them and develop the motivation to learn about their world.¹ Conversely, inconsistent, neglectful or abusive parenting leads a child to grow up believing that the world is a painful place and that they are unworthy of care.

As adults it may be hard to believe but it is important to know that all babies attach to their caregivers—even if they've been abused by that person. They grieve when their birth or foster parents disappear. Their reaction to such losses follows a pattern. During the first phase the baby displays anger (for example, screaming, arching the back or tantrums). The second phase is marked by agitated watchfulness, fear and clinging behavior. Finally, the young child gives up and shuts down. In both the second and third phases, the behaviors can be misinterpreted. Adults might see an extremely compliant, quiet child and say,

“what an ‘easy’ baby.” Prolonged periods in any of these three phases, or repeated cycles as caregivers come and go, compromise the child's growth across every developmental domain—social, emotional, sensory, motor, speech, language and cognition.²

There is much that CASA volunteers can do to improve children's experiences in foster care. We know that children need to see their parents often, even if reunification is not the ultimate goal. Sometimes restricted visitation is used as an incentive to get parents to comply with other parts of their case plans. This approach has the opposite effect: children lose touch with their parents, and the visits can become more painful to the parents as the children grow less attached. Infants and toddlers build strong attachments to their biological parents through frequent and extended contact. Visits should occur several times every week if the child is not harmed by the contact, in a safe setting that is comfortable for both parent and child and should last long enough for a positive relationship to develop and strengthen.

To make sure that young children are getting the care they need, it is important to identify foster parents who can develop nurturing relationships with infants and toddlers that continue from the child's removal from home until it is determined that the child can safely return to his parents' care. Foster parents can, and should, serve as mentors for birth parents. Where reunification is the goal, visitation can take place under the supervision of the foster

parent and should allow the birth parent to feed, bathe and play with the child in a safe and home-like setting. Foster parents should also be groomed as adoptive parents, standing ready to help birth families succeed but willing to assume permanent custody of the child if parental rights are terminated. Because it is difficult for birth and foster parents to work as a team, CASA volunteers can support both by developing positive working relationships with foster and birth parents. Your encouragement will help all parties keep the children's interests uppermost in their actions.

From the first days of life, babies remember what has happened in their lives. Through what is known as “perceptual memory,” babies remember sights, sounds and smells that will continue to trigger intense psychological and physiological responses throughout their lives. Because the brain is developing rapidly during the first three years of life, repeated experiences—positive or negative—will determine the hard wiring of the growing brain.

CASA volunteers can—and do—make a difference to children who have been catapulted into the foster care system. To bolster your work with individual children, Zero to Three is implementing a national demonstration program, Court Teams for Maltreated Infants and Toddlers. This program combines judicial muscle with child development and mental health partners to give babies and toddlers the attention and life-changing help they need.

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Advocating for Infants and Toddlers

By Harvey Meyer

The infant girl tugged at CASA volunteer Marissa Kretzmer's heartstrings. Not only was the child the same age as her daughter, but the little girl was born with cocaine in her system—and her drug-addicted parents thwarted her chances for normal development. Sadly, the parents failed to complete multiple drug rehabilitation time after time, so a judge ultimately terminated their parental rights. Thanks in part to Kretzmer's diligent advocacy, the girl was adopted by a woman who had served as a long-time foster mother.

"It was hard to see the parents' rights terminated, because it was just very sad," says Kretzmer, a volunteer with CASA of Westchester (NY). "But as the judge said to the parents, 'This is not about you; it's about your child.' It was the best outcome for this little child. Our program is a definite help in that regard because the focus is on what is best for the child."

CASA of Westchester is in the forefront of programs stepping up their advocacy for infants and toddlers in foster care. Research suggests that the sooner birth-to-three children's needs are identified and served, the less chance they will accrue developmental delays and health problems, and the greater chance they will sooner achieve the ultimate goal—permanency.

Facts Highlight Needs of Infants and Toddler in Foster Care

Several reports underscore why infants and toddlers are increasingly grabbing the attention of some CASA programs:

- Infants are the fastest-growing segment of children entering foster care¹.
- Infants and toddlers are more likely than older children to suffer abuse and neglect, and they stay longer in foster care.



- The youngest children in foster care are less likely to reunify with their parents. According to one study, 36% of infants who enter care between birth and three months are reunited, compared to 56% for those between 10 and 12 months.
 - Infants in foster care are at great risk for chronic medical problems, developmental delays and disabilities. They represent the largest segment of children who are physically abused and medically or physically neglected. About eight in ten of these children, according to one report, are exposed to substance abuse prenatally. Infants and toddlers are developmentally delayed at rates four to five times those of children not in foster care.
 - Infants and toddlers in foster care are far less likely to receive well-child health care, immunizations and treatment for childhood illnesses than the general population.
 - Children aged zero to four-years-old accounted for 78.7% of child fatalities; children younger than one-year-old accounted for 43.6% of all child fatalities.²
- Infants and toddlers in foster care are clearly at risk, but they are also at an age when prompt intervention and care can produce lasting impact. Victoria Youcha, director of the Court Teams for Maltreated Infants and Toddlers Project at Zero to Three, notes that social, emotional, cognitive and moral capacities develop more rapidly from birth to five than at any other time in life. But if children's very earliest experiences are fraught with abuse and neglect, that portends permanent and profound consequences, says Youcha.

Healthy Development Checklist

Giving Voice to the Needs of Very Young Children

Because babies and toddlers do not communicate using words, CASA volunteers need to speak for them. The following tips were adapted from *Ensuring the Healthy Development of Infants in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals*, a joint publication of the New York Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children and the ZERO TO THREE Policy Center. A copy of this publication can be downloaded at zerotothree.org/policy/policybriefs/ensuringhealthydev.pdf.

Be a powerful advocate for babies and toddlers simply by asking the right questions:

- Has this child had a comprehensive health exam since entering foster care? Young children need frequent pediatric check-ups because they are growing so fast. Children in foster care are likely to have medical problems that make these check-ups even more critical. And they need a “medical home” where the pediatrician knows them and their caregivers.
- Has the child had a developmental screening by a provider with experience in child development? Because of the high likelihood of developmental delays for children in foster care, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a comprehensive assessment within a month of entering foster care.
- Has the child had a mental health assessment? It is now possible to identify signs of depression and other psychological disorders in babies as young as 3 months.¹ This assessment will pave the way for the professional support that can mean the difference between a stable foster care placement and disruption. An assessment can also better prepare families for reunification or adoption.
- Has the family been informed about Early Head Start? High-quality early care and education programs can support foster, kinship and biological parents by directing them to other support systems, providing information and connecting them with other parents they may turn to for advice



and support.² Comprehensive early childhood programs, such as Early Head Start, combine home visitation, comprehensive services and technical assistance as well as provide the specialized services that very young children in the child welfare system need. Early Head Start is a federally-funded program available at no cost to eligible infant, toddlers and their families.

- Is the child placed in a stable, loving home with a caregiver who is knowledgeable about the special needs of babies and toddlers in foster care? The single most important predictor of a child's healthy growth and development is the attachment formed with a consistent, loving caregiver. A secure emotional bond with a loving caregiver lets infants know they are worthwhile and gives them the ability to nurture themselves, care about those around them and develop the motivation to learn about their world. When parents cannot care appropriately for their young children, it is critical that the children spend the time apart from their parents in a family setting where they can form a close bond with a warm, attentive caregiver.

¹Wingert, P., Brant, M. Reading your baby's mind: new research on infants finally begins to answer the question: what's going on in there? *Newsweek*, CLXVI (7), 35.

²Dicker, S., Gordon, E., & Knitzer, J. (2001). *Improving the odds for the healthy development of young children in foster care*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.

CASA Role in Infant and Toddler Advocacy

Fortunately, CASA volunteers are well positioned to intervene and make a difference for this age group. Their observational reports, service referrals and follow-up functions are vital. “This vulnerable population needs as much support as we can give them,” says Kim Gifford, program director of Mountain CAP of WV, Inc., a CDC (CASA program) in north central West Virginia. “Helping them is one of the most valuable things our CASA volunteers can do.”

Much of the urgency for assisting this young population stems from a growing body of research suggesting that much more is occurring with infants emotionally and psychologically than had been suspected. It is a monumental leap from 1890, when noted psychologist William James described infants as being in a state of “great, blooming, buzzing confusion.”

It turns out that underneath seemingly mindless babbling, infants are rapidly establishing the scaffolding for personality traits, learning and coping with stress and emotions. Research indicates that they comprehend even complex emotions such as empathy and frustration well before they utter their first words. For instance, according to one study involving four-month-olds, not making eye contact is a clear sign of distress.

Advanced Training for Infants & Toddler Advocacy

This enhanced understanding has some CASA programs offering additional training about infants and toddlers. The 30 hours of required training for beginning CASA volunteers provides basic awareness of cognitive, motor and language developmental milestones and stresses early intervention if there are red flags.

“Foster care children under five are the most vulnerable because they cannot verbalize or express themselves like older kids,” says Tracy Flynn, National CASA's training

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director. That these youngsters often merit extra attention spotlights CASA's role and the benefits volunteers could receive from added training, she says.

Washington State CASA developed specific training materials addressing developmental milestones for infants and toddlers about four years ago. Pat Helgren, training development manager for Washington's 33 CASA programs, says that the extra hours of training help CASA volunteers identify almost month-by-month developmental markers during infants' first year. The training also increases volunteers' awareness of age-specific resources and services.

"Volunteers really like the developmental checklist because it's very hands-on," says Helgren. "They're not experts, so they like using this tool to specifically guide them on what to look for in normative development and identify areas of concern."

From Tracy Cook's perspective as ProKids of Cincinnati's executive director, their Building Blocks Program stressing developmental progress pays huge dividends. The program requires CASA volunteers assigned to children aged birth-to-three to take ten additional hours of training that includes monitoring infant-caregiver interaction and performing home assessments. Building Blocks-trained advocates are encouraged to learn even more about infant/toddler advocacy during in-service training throughout the year.

In most cases, CASA volunteers are required to visit youngsters twice monthly or even weekly, says Holly Schlaack, Building Blocks director. Frequent visits ensure that developmental needs are addressed promptly.

Tracking Milestones

Charting infants' developmental achievements adds an objective component that helps neutralize emotions—especially valuable during volatile parent-child break-ups, says

Sherry Farnham, a Building Blocks-trained CASA volunteer. Unlike older children, whose vocal and behavioral outbursts demand regular monitoring by school, social service and other professionals, nonverbal infants usually do not command notice. "These are the kids who can fall through the cracks," asserts Farnham.

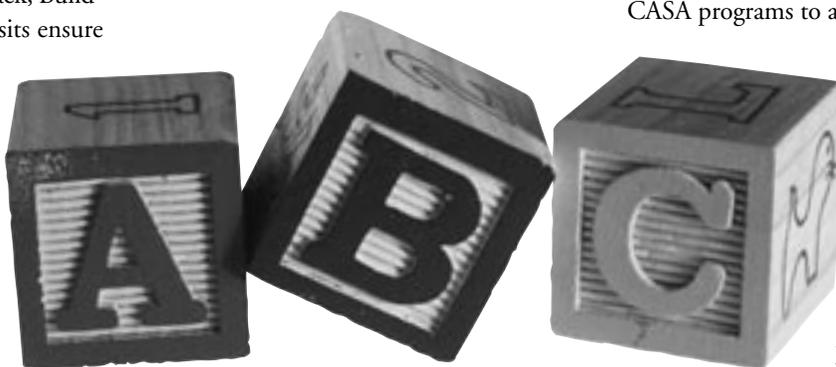
Advocates find a developmental checklist helpful in decoding the secret language of babies. "Some are fascinated by what they're learning," says Cook, whose CASA ProKids program served 297 children last year. A checklist can provide guidance on things to look for. For example, if a child is not trying to lift its head or roll over by six months, there should be a concern that sparks an assessment request.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the six-year-old Building Blocks program, winner of a Promising Practices Award from Ohio's attorney general, is working. Volunteers routinely request assessments; experts discover developmental delays sooner; and, most importantly, infants receive timely and appropriate services. Another sign of success, according to Schlaack, is that Building Blocks youngsters spend significantly less time in foster homes than the national average.



CASA of Westchester also stresses tracking developmental progress through use of a 10-question Healthy Development Checklist (funded in 2000 as a judicial commission pilot project). Use of the checklist quickly demonstrated that foster children aged zero to five were not receiving developmental screenings and services entitled to them (see checklist on page 7). Introduced in initial volunteer training, the checklist poses straight-forward questions to social service and health care professionals. Among other things, it asks whether a child has received a comprehensive health assessment since entering foster care, a development screening, a mental health assessment and dental services. The checklist's usefulness sparked many other New York CASA programs to adopt its use.

Jackie Boissonnault, CASA of Westchester program director, says that CASA volunteers are perhaps taken even more seriously since they applied the checklist. "They are viewed



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Infant and Toddler Advocacy

Additional Resources

Zero to Three (zerotothree.org)

Zero to Three's mission is to support the healthy development and well-being of infants, toddlers and their families. The nation's leading resource on the first years of life, it is a nonprofit, multidisciplinary organization that advances its mission by informing, educating and supporting adults who influence the lives of infants and toddlers. Publications include *Ensuring the Healthy Development of Infants in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals* (zerotothree.org/policy/policybriefs/ensuringhealthydev.pdf).



Birth to Three (birthto3.org)



This organization provides parenting education and support to families with young children. It brings parents of young children together to share parenting experiences, increase their knowledge of early childhood development, learn about community resources and create support networks among themselves. Through the dissemination of their nationally recognized curricula and trainings, Birth to Three shares its expertise with other organizations that work with families.

Child Trauma Academy (childtraumaacademy.com)

The mission of the Academy is to help improve the lives of traumatized and maltreated children in three primary ways: education, service delivery and program consultation. Every year millions of



children undergo physical or emotional trauma. The Child Trauma Academy offers free online courses that offer creative and practical approaches to understanding and working with maltreated children.

The National Foster Parent Association (nfpainc.org)

The NFPA strives to support foster parents, and remains a consistently strong voice on behalf of all children. It brings together foster parents, agency representatives and community people who wish to work together to improve the foster care system and enhance the lives of all children and families; promotes mutual coordination, cooperation and communication among foster parents, Foster Parent Associations, child care agencies and other child advocates; encourages the recruitment and retention of foster parents; and informs its members and general public of current issues regarding foster care.



Prevent Child Abuse America (preventchildabuse.org)



Since 1972, Prevent Child Abuse America has led the way in building awareness, providing education and inspiring hope to everyone involved in the effort to prevent the abuse and neglect of our nation's children. They provide leadership to promote and implement prevention efforts at both the national and local levels. With the help of state chapters and concerned individuals the organization is committed to

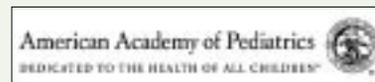
valuing children, strengthening families and engaging communities nationwide.

Children's Bureau Express (cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm)



Children's Bureau Express is designed for professionals concerned with child abuse and neglect, child welfare, and adoption. *Children's Bureau Express* is supported by the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services and published by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse.

American Academy of Pediatrics (aap.org)



The AAP is dedicated to the health of all children and committed to the attainment of optimal, physical, mental and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents and young adults. The Academy believes that the law ought to protect the health and well-being of children just as ardently as pediatricians do. When state legislators assemble, children's issues deserve the same consideration as other matters. The AAP website section "Adoption and Foster Care" is dedicated to improving the health and well being of children in foster care and those who have been adopted (aap.org/sections/adoption/default.htm).

(continued from page 8)



as well trained and professional team players who work on behalf of abused and neglected children,” says Boissonnault. Successful anecdotes about CASA advocacy work with infants and toddlers have also engendered respect from child services professionals.

Benefits of Early Intervention and Advocacy

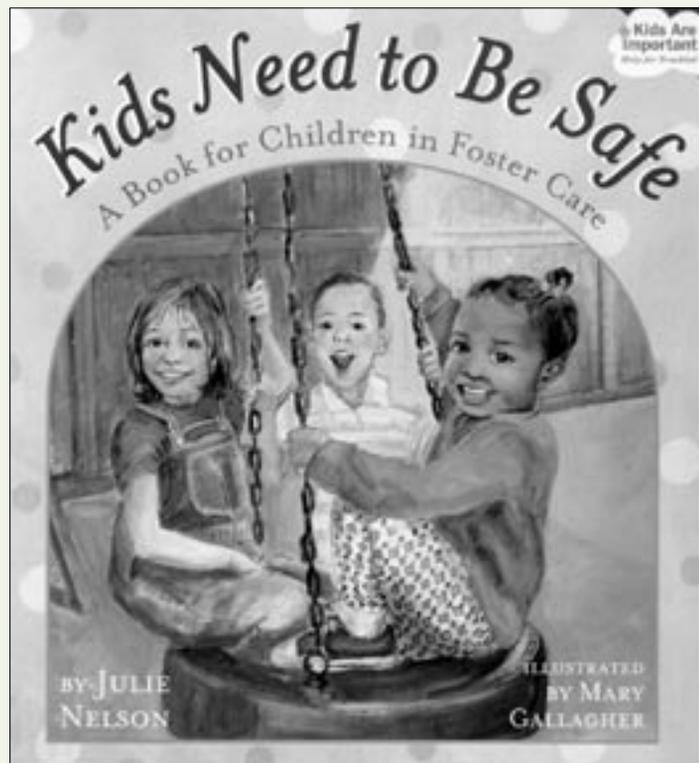
Anecdotally, CASA programs working with developmental checklists and incorporating extra training report that early intervention and advocacy are helping to achieve results: quicker access to entitled health services and screenings, resources for families and ultimately fewer foster home placements.

“The services we’re able to access for young children are amazing,” says ProKids’ Cook. In some cases, social workers are unaware of developmental services. In other cases, overworked child service professionals may order services but are subsequently

Kids Need to Be Safe: A Book for Children in Foster Care

by Julie Nelson, illustrated by Mary Gallagher
Free Spirit Publishing: 2006

All kids need safe places to live and play. For some children, this means living with foster parents. *Kids Need to Be Safe*, by Julie Nelson, provides a hopeful message to those children in transition. Through simple thoughts and color illustrations, the book helps children prepare for, understand and accept foster care. Nelson has taught in at-risk early childhood settings for most of her career and illustrator Mary Gallagher is a pediatric occupational therapist. The book offers hope and support for both kids and adults. The first part of the book is to be read and shared with children while the second includes information and resources for foster parents, social workers, teachers and caregivers on providing support and encouragement to stressed young children. This resource may help adults understand and support the children in their care.





unable to monitor provisions of the services. That is where a CASA volunteer's follow-through is important.

Caring for a child with health problems or disabilities taxes the emotional, financial and physical resources of even the most stable parents, let alone those battling poverty, homelessness, substance abuse or mental illness. So identifying infants' needs early on and supplying appropriate services improves their physical and mental health, and that healthy development encourages family stability. Many infants in foster care are entitled to a variety of healthy development services they are not receiving; all foster children are eligible for medical, vision, hearing and dental screenings through Medicaid. Also, developmentally delayed and disabled children from birth to three years and their families are eligible to benefit from a federal grant program that assists states in offering a comprehensive array of early intervention services. That program also requires states to refer children under

the age of three to early intervention services if they are abused or neglected.

Often, a critical component of infant-focused CASA programs is services for parents. For instance, Mountain CAP WV, Inc. works with the national Birth to Three organization to provide in-home parental training. A Birth to Three specialist trains CASA volunteers and parents on children's developmental milestones and community resources. The specialists often spend two hours monthly teaching parents helpful ways to interact with their youngsters.

"It takes a CASA who is very patient and willing to go the extra mile to help a younger child," says Gifford. "They have to dig a little deeper because they (infants) can't tell you how they feel or what they want." Yet many CASA volunteers extol the chance to work with infants and toddlers. For one thing, these cases often produce quicker resolutions, whether involving foster home placements or reunification. Cook believes that advocating

for these youngsters inspires additional commitment.

And while some volunteers attest that advocating for infants and toddlers can be heartbreaking, the rewards are often immeasurably heartwarming. "You can have more impact than with any other age," says Tracy Flynn, National CASA's training director. "You can help them realize their potential. You can change their entire life."

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

¹ Zero to Three: Critical Issues for the Juvenile and Family Court, Julie Cohen and Victoria Youcha. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, Spring 2004.

² US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2005) *Child Maltreatment 2003*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office (acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb).

Child Welfare News

Mythbusting: Breaking Down Confidentiality and Decision-Making Barriers to Meet the Education Needs of Children in Foster Care

This document from the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law answers common questions by individuals involved with the child welfare system, including judges, children's attorneys, parents, foster parents, youth, caseworkers and court appointed special advocates. It provides context and explains why there is a need to address the education needs of children in foster care, debunks myths about confidentiality and decision-making, explains the federal laws that affect confidentiality of education records and decision making as well as suggests strategies to overcome confidentiality and decision-making hurdles when addressing the needs of children in foster care. To access the report, visit abanet.org/child/rclji/education/caseyeducationproject.pdf.

Casey Family Programs Introduces New Resource

Knowing Who You Are... Helping Youth in Care Develop Their Racial & Ethnic Identity is a suite of tools that includes a video, online course and in-person training to help child welfare professionals develop awareness, knowledge and skills around the importance of working with youth on this key aspect of identity. Child welfare professionals are powerful potential resources and role models for youth in care as they go through the process of developing a healthy sense of racial and ethnic identity. The components of this resource help promote pride in a young person's racial and ethnic identity, develop multicultural competency in staff and youth as well as prepare youth to address racism and discrimination. Available at casey.org.

Poverty One Reason African-American Children Stay Longer In Texas Foster Care

A Texas study shows that Black children have longer stays in foster care, are less likely to be reunited with their families and wait longer for adoption than White or Hispanic children. The statewide study, *Disproportionality in Child Protective Services*, was released by the Department of Family and Protective Services through the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and was prepared in response to Senate Bill 6, which required a comprehensive reform of the state's Child Protective Services. Factors cited as contributing to the disproportionate rates of Black children in foster care include a slower rate of exit from care and higher instances of poverty. The findings, which mirror national statistics, also indicated that black families were no more likely than White families to have a child removed from the home. To read the report, visit dfps.state.tx.us/Documents/about/pdf/2006-01-02_Disproportionality.pdf

Resource Center Offers Updated Information On Sibling Policies

The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning has updated several resources and added others. Updated items include an annotated bibliography, sibling placement policies and sibling visiting policies. Added resources include an information packet, *Siblings in Out-of-Home Care*, and a PowerPoint presentation that reviews progress over the past several years in addressing the needs of siblings. Visit hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/info_services/siblings.html.

Federal Programs Available to Assist Transition-Age Youth with Serious Mental Health Conditions

Numerous federal programs address the wide range of needs for youth with serious mental health conditions who are transitioning into adulthood. The Bazelon Center has prepared fact sheets about the 57 programs, run by 20 or more different agencies in nine departments of the federal government (bazelon.org/publications/movingon/).

Report on Preventing Foster Teen Pregnancies Released

Youth in foster care are at greater risk of teen pregnancy than other teens. A new report delves into teens' views on sex, pregnancy and decision-making to explore why this group remains at higher risk. The report, *Fostering Hope: Preventing Teen Pregnancy Among Youth in Foster Care*, is the result of focus group discussions with youth in foster care and foster parents. A number of themes emerged from the discussions that highlighted the unique circumstances of youth in foster care as well as their many similarities with other youth. Based on discussion of these themes, implications and recommendations regarding pregnancy prevention efforts are offered. *Fostering Hope* is a joint project of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and the Uhlich Children's Advantage Network (teenpregnancy.org/resources/reading/pdf/Fostering_Hope.pdf).

Standards for Caseworker Visits with Children in Foster Care

Caseworker visits with children in foster care have been linked to permanency outcomes, safety and well-being for the

(continued from Guest Editorial page 5)

children in care. Most states have standards specifying how often caseworkers should visit children in foster care as well as how the visiting time should be spent; however, these standards are not consistent across states. Two reports recently released by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) in the US Department of Health and Human Services documented which states have standards, what the standards stipulate and how states track visitation. The OIG offers recommendations for improving visitation standards and the frequency, content and tracking of actual visits. The complete report can be accessed at oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-04-03-00350.pdf.

Childhood Loss and Behavioral Problems: Loosening the Links

This report from the Vera Institute of Justice, which draws upon existing research, promising practices and the experience of Vera personnel, is designed to increase policymakers and practitioners' awareness of how the loss of a loved one

influences children's behavioral problems. It also offers suggestions on how to identify grieving children and intervene in cycles of misbehavior tied to grief. While the report focuses on young people in the juvenile justice system, the experience of loss is universal for children and youth in the child welfare system. The report can be accessed at vera.org/publications/publications_5.asp?publication_id=324&bulletin=56&token=1728.

Tape Includes Strategies On Foster Children's Mental Health Needs

Strategies for Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Youth in Care, the most recent in a series of teleconferences sponsored by the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning and the Child Welfare League of America, is now available. Four audio files, with presentations from four speakers as well as handouts, may be downloaded. Visit hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/teleconferences/index.html#mentalhealth2

As you approach cases that involve the very youngest children, you are the voices for children too young to speak for themselves. Advocate on their behalf for consistent loving caregivers and multiple weekly visits with their parents and you will give them a great gift. Your advocacy will hopefully make an immediate difference in their lives and a life worth living down the road.

Matthew Melmed, J.D. is the executive director of Zero to Three. Zero to Three whose mission is to promote the healthy development of our nation's infants and toddlers by supporting and strengthening families, communities and those who work on their behalf. Learn more at zerotothree.org.



¹Goldsmith, D.F., Oppenheim, D, Wanlass, J. Separation and reunification: using attachment theory and research to inform decisions affecting the placements of children in foster care. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 55 (2), 2.

²Ibid, 85-87.

GET CONNECTED!

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

NationalCASA.org

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



CASAnet.org

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

NationalCASA.org/JudgesPage

A webpage dedicated to judges who hear child welfare cases.

ShopCASA.org

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



Extreme Makeover—CASA Style



From left to right: Billy Jack, Clara, Daphne, A.J., Rebecca, Dusty, Jennifer and Anne Barrett

In *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, a popular, Emmy-nominated TV reality show, a team of designers, contractors and hundreds of workers rebuild a house in seven days. That's exactly what happened in July 2005 when the Barrett family of Peyton, CO was selected to receive an Extreme Home Makeover for their family. However, the real makeover began years earlier when Billy Jack and Anne Barrett opened their hearts to several children including two CASA youth. These children underwent an emotional makeover of their own when the Barretts' began caring for and helping the children deal with a history of abuse and neglect.

A.J. and Jennifer (now 14 & 17) experienced serious neglect in their early lives and their caregivers struggled with substance abuse. Both were fortunate to have a

CASA volunteer involved with their cases. Initially A.J. needed professional therapy for Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) developed over years of neglect and abuse and Jennifer needed medical attention for her diabetes. Both were leery of trusting adults: Jennifer withdrew and A.J. became violent as both were shuttled from foster home to foster home. Both A.J. and Jennifer were institutionalized.

Anne Barrett notes, "I noticed the difference in A.J. and Jennifer. They had someone (the CASA volunteer) in their lives. They had someone speaking for them, someone saying, 'This is what they need.'"

A.J. and Jennifer's own "extreme makeovers" began as their CASA volunteers from the CASA of the Pikes Peak Region program took the time to get to know them and fought to get A.J. and Jennifer the care,

resources and healing family environment they desperately needed. They were the only ones still involved in their cases after several years and numerous moves. Today, like their other siblings they have great hopes and dreams for their futures. A.J. wants to be a Marine and Jennifer is aiming to become a chef.

Anne Barrett home schools six of their eight children. Raising and home schooling children labeled as "unmanageable" and "unadoptable" would seem an insurmountable challenge, especially in a small, 101-year-old farmhouse with one and a half bathrooms. But the Barretts' strong Christian faith guided their decision to open their home and their family.

The Barretts' love of horses (Billy Jack Barrett is manager of the Air Force Academy



The new ranch house with the red schoolhouse

Equestrian Center, and Anne once worked as a horse trainer in the Olympic sport of dressage) also helped the children to open up. In an interview with the *Air Force Link*, Barrett said that “We were told by experts these children would be institutionalized and on medication their entire lives. We brought them into our family and put them in the corral cleaning stalls and brushing horses. They accepted responsibility for the horses and it made all the difference. It does wonders for their self-esteem. Working with the animals, in this environment, is what really helped us pull these kids out of where they were.”

Out of love and gratitude for their new family, the Barrett children wrote and nominated their parents for the *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* TV show, which chooses families that deserve a new home. As part of the show last fall, the farm house was demolished and replaced

with a spectacular new ranch house, twice as large as their old one, and a 600 square foot red schoolhouse.

What the TV show did for the Barretts’ home serves as a metaphor for what has happened in the lives of the Barrett children. The Barrett children clearly deserved a new home. Now, thanks to CASA, the courts and the TV show, they have realized both dreams of a family and a house.

The *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* website notes Executive Producer Tom Forman saying the show looks for people among the 1,000 applications a week “who can really benefit from what we can do. We can’t change their life or solve all their problems, but it’s a boost for people who have given their whole lives and suddenly find themselves in a situation where they need a little help.”



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

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Foster Kids as Heroes

By Lee McClain

Eddie is a young boy in foster care. In his special reading class at school, he hears *The Great Gilly Hopkins* read aloud. He marvels that Gilly, a smart-mouthed troublemaker who's moved from home to home, can still be a hero in her own life.

Later, he gets the chance to attend a presentation given by the author of the book. And suddenly, according to author Katherine Paterson, "he was wild about a book—one of those reluctant readers or even nonreaders, who had to this point seen words, not to mention books, as the deadliest of enemies."

Too often, the media portrays foster kids—especially teens and tweens—as troubled, dysfunctional and challenging. Since we become what we think about, it's important for foster children to see a better vision of themselves. Books that portray foster kids as heroes should be a part of every foster parent's and foster care organization's library.

"Every child needs adults who will help her find books—good books—that have special appeal," said Dr. Elizabeth Segel, author of *For Reading Out Loud* and co-founder of Beginning with Books, an award-winning family literacy organization. For young people in foster care, that may mean books that portray kids like them.

What Books Do for Kids

"Developing a love of books is the best guarantee that a child will become a good reader," Segel said. "A good reader will be a successful student. That is a huge asset for a disadvantaged child." Segel lists other benefits books provide: they can offer a healthy escape from daily life, they illustrate children facing and overcoming

challenges as well as portray different types of families—possibly happier ones than the child has experienced.

All of the books described here show foster and adopted kids solving problems, growing stronger and learning to live well in family situations. Because they portray imperfect children who nonetheless do well, they can engage young readers and offer a needed dose of hope.

The Great Gilly Hopkins: **Foster Care Classic**

The Great Gilly Hopkins, a Newberry-award-winning middle-grade novel, shows a larger-than-life foster child and the most loving foster mother imaginable. "I wrote it because my husband and I had been asked to serve as temporary foster parents and although I thought I was at least an average mother of our own four children, I felt I had flunked out as a foster mother," says author Katherine Paterson. "I heard myself saying things like, 'Well, I can't deal with that problem, they'll only be here for a few weeks' or 'Thank goodness, they'll only be here for a few weeks.' And what I was saying, what I was doing, was treating two human beings as though they were disposable. People aren't disposable."

Paterson's creation, the gum-chewing, irreverent Gilly Hopkins, is anything but disposable. She becomes a savior and a hero in a bittersweet, realistic book that's every bit as relevant now as it was when the book was written 25 years ago.

Would reading a book like *The Great Gilly Hopkins* make a difference for a foster child you care about? Based on Paterson's visits to schools and even a prison, it might.

The right book can create a passion for reading in foster kids. And more than any other skill, reading can open doors.

Parents Wanted and The Ocean Within: **Realistic with Elements of Heroism**

Some books present foster and adoptive families in a realistic light. These authors strive to illustrate the changes children in the system go through.

George Harrar's *Parents Wanted* tells of a 12-year-old boy who has lived in group and foster homes for many years, and who finally gets the opportunity to be adopted. "I wanted to create a character that adopted kids could look to and say, 'he's like me,'" Harrar said. "My other goal was to write a book that prospective adoptive parents could read to get a better understanding of what adopting an older child is like."

Harrar, who based his book on his own experiences adopting an older child, says he wanted to build understanding for the immense changes foster kids experience. "We expect through once-a-week therapy and some aid from the school guidance department that this child will soon adjust. When he doesn't, we summon all the affected adults and ask, 'what's wrong? Why isn't he behaving?'"

While Harrar's character learns to accept love and discipline, seeing the difficulties of the process can be helpful both for young readers and the adults who care about them.

V. M. Caldwell's *The Ocean Within* tells the story of a quiet, mistrustful young girl who is awaiting adoption by a noisy, emotional family. Author Caldwell says that about half of her readers identify with quiet, fearful Elizabeth, and the other half with the expressive, close-knit Sheridan siblings. "I hoped *Ocean* might be a lens for people of both backgrounds to understand each other—foster kids who have suffered losses and built walls and kids from tightly-knit families," she says.

Caldwell, an adoptive mother, believes passionately in the importance of books for kids from disadvantaged backgrounds. “Reading about other orphans and displaced kids—and how they coped with and rose above difficult circumstances—must hold solace and hope,” she says. “Beyond that, reading offers connection to others, to the past and to the future.”

**A Touch of Magic:
The Alternate Life Series**

During the teenage years, identity issues become intense for foster and adopted teens. They may idealize their birth families and wish to return to them, but that’s often impossible.

Thinking about this situation, imagining the curiosity and pain adopted and foster care teens experience, led me to write a series of teen novels, starting with “My Alternate Life.” The books feature a magic computer game that shows foster and adopted teens what life would have been like with their birth families.

Though the books deal with serious issues—from racial prejudice to family problems to date rape—they’re short and easy to read. I was conscious while writing them that many foster teens age out of the system

reading at less than seventh grade level. The books also include plenty of lighter teen issues: clothes, dating and friendships. That’s because foster kids are regular kids at the same time that they’re different.

But My Kids Don’t Like to Read

What if a foster child you know does not enjoy reading? Take a page from Eddie’s story and try reading aloud. Many teens and tweens enjoy being read to, and reading a chapter each night can be a special family time. The material from any of these books will bring up issues you can share with your child, promoting family closeness. And since many foster children don’t come from a reading background, being read to can take them back to a younger era, providing a sort of re-parenting recommended by attachment specialists.

“Often, children will be interested in a book that is too hard for them to read,” Segel said. “Having an adult read it aloud makes the book accessible. At the same time, just listening to it will improve children’s attention spans and comprehension skills. Listening also promotes children’s desires to read independently.”

Another strategy Segel recommends is offering a book on tape and the same

book in print form. Listening to the tape provides the necessary introduction; the child is more enthusiastic and able to read the book after hearing the tape.

It may take a bit of work to find the right books at the right levels to appeal to your child. But it is worth the effort. Foster kids have a lot of strikes against them. Sharing books that help them see themselves as heroes can make all the difference.

This article originally appeared in the November/December 2004 issue of Fostering Families a magazine about the parents, children and dedicated professionals in the child welfare system providing foster care and domestic adoption to children. Learn more at fosteringfamilies.com.



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

About the Author

Dr. Lee Tobin McClain is an adoptive mother and the author of this issue’s Resources for Foster Youth as well as three easy-to-read novels: *My Alternate Life*, *My Abnormal Life* and *My Loco Life* featuring teens in foster care. It’s no wonder Lee McClain writes about teens with alternate lives. She has a couple of alternate lives herself. By day, she’s an English Professor in charge of a graduate program in creative writing at Seton Hill University. At night, she goes home to her husband and three-year-old daughter they adopted from China in 2002. The Alternative Lives series was inspired by McClain wondering what her daughter’s life would have been like if she’d stayed in China. She is active



in local adoption organizations, writes for teen and adoption magazines and volunteers for Beginning with Books, a family literacy organization that encourages disadvantaged kids to love books.

Visit her website at leemclain.com to read book excerpts, access discussion questions and get a list of McClain’s favorite books about adoption and foster care.

The Novel Volunteer

BOOK CLUB

Me May Mary

by Mary Cameron Kilgour

Child & Family Press: Washington, DC, 2004

Me May Mary is a straightforward but moving story of how a young woman was able to not only survive the tribulations of an abusive childhood but triumphantly become a prominent, contributing member of society.

Brian Lew, National CASA's publications coordinator, recommends the book. He observes how much easier Mary Kilgour's childhood might have been if she had had a CASA volunteer. The poignant memoir tells of her troubled adolescence and the wretchedness of a childhood littered with memories of sleeping in cars and stealing food and clothing to survive.

Having parents who cared nothing for her well-being, Kilgour was fortunate to find people who did respond to her needs. Her brother was a constant presence from the beginning; a pastor opened his home to her; and her guardians and teachers encouraged her, impressed by her notions of good and determination to do better. Throughout the story, Kilgour possesses an innate sensibility to "do the right thing" and she is guided by these feelings. The tale chronicles a troubled past, spending her teen years in foster care and an orphanage. It goes on to tell of overcoming the past, embracing her potential and drawing strength from a belief in her own future.

Eventually, with the desire for adventure and "the opportunity to do good,"



Kilgour joined the Peace Corps after graduating with honors from university. Her Peace Corps experience whetted her appetite for further involvement with foreign aid and she began work with the US Agency for International Development. Her Agency experience not only provided challenges that inspired her until retirement, but it also led her to pursue a doctorate from Harvard.

Most inspiring to CASA Book Club members will be Kilgour's decision to work as a guardian ad litem eight years ago. She notes that she wrote this book both as a tribute to the important work GAL volunteers do with children as well as testimony that everyone, with work and determination, can create their own future. The book serves as yet another reminder of what CASA/GAL volunteers have always known: it takes just one person to show care and understanding to positively change the life of a child.

Michael Piraino, National CASA Association's CEO commented, "*Me May Mary* is a powerful personal story of hope, written by a woman who has given hope to many abused and neglected children through her work as a volunteer child advocate. Mary's story is an inspiration for anyone who wants to help children... As Mary often says to the young people she knows: 'If I could do it, you can do it too.'"

That Kilgour has herself become a GAL volunteer, bringing care and hope to children going through ordeals similar to hers, shows that the seemingly interminable cruel spiral of abuse and neglect, to which so many generations of children are condemned, can be broken.

Sample Discussion Questions for *Me May Mary* by Mary Kilgour:

1. Do you think Kilgour would have written this memoir if she hadn't become a CASA/GAL volunteer?
2. What aspects of Kilgour's memoir did you most identify with, and why?
3. Who was your favorite person in the memoir, and why?
4. Kilgour's memoir takes place fifty years ago. What parts of her story would be most relevant for today's youth?
5. As you read Kilgour's story, would you have predicted the kind of life she led as an adult (as recounted in the epilogue)?
6. What does Kilgour say about foster care versus the kind of home she lived in? What are your own thoughts?
7. Who were the people who most helped Kilgour survive and thrive?
8. What are the universals in Kilgour's story that you can apply to your own life?
9. What did you think of the humor in *Me May Mary*?
10. If Jacky wrote a memoir, how do you think it would differ from Mary's?
11. Why did Mary reject the minister's home? Did she make the right decision?
12. What was Mother Superior's approach toward Mary?

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



A Tribute to CASA Volunteers

©Brenda Perryman 2005

Always caring,
 Never to be pigeonholed or ignored
 From courtrooms to classrooms
 Doing what needs to be done
 Never retreating
 Until the child has won a chance
 To live healthy,
 To live whole,
 And recognize and fulfill their goals.
 A chance to grow healthy and older,
 So that they want to become a stakeholder
 In their very own lives.
 And you, CASA volunteers, do it
 Right before their very eyes.

When there is no one else, there you are.
 YOU care where a child has been,
 YOU go where they've had to go
 To uncover the truth
 That has to be told
 When some child may exist
 In an unconscionable hellhole.

You know what the child needs
 In order to flourish and grow.
 But there have been too few
 To care, or show the love
 The child needs to know.
 Then you intercede and the child smiles
 While they watch their greatness unfold
 As good as gold,
 Right before their very eyes.

This child is not just a number
 On a backlog of cases.
 With you they are paramount
 And you touch all the bases.
 You delve into their abuse
 You investigate every misuse,
 And every bad caretaker's excuse.
 You are the powerful voice
 Who speaks up to the court.
 You implore for a positive change and choice.
 And you do it
 Right before the child's very eyes.

I stand in awe of you.
 You are unafraid of the challenge.
 You are fearless and tenacious on behalf of a child.
 There is a life of hurt you seek to replace
 With safe and permanent space
 So that they can live life
 On the best of terms.
 You are incredible.
 You are vigilant
 As you fight for their rights.
 With your commitment as your weapon,
 Your resolute spirit as your shield,
 You show your courage
 And it is signed, sealed
 And delivered to children
 On a platter full of hope.
 And you do it right before our very eyes.



Pointers from PROGRAMS

Fire and Ice Gala CASA of Rapid City, SD

In late February, the fourth annual Fire and Ice Gala fulfilled its promise of “Fire” as the hottest place to be in the middle of winter in Rapid City, and “Ice” where everyone had the opportunity to win a one-carat diamond, graciously donated by Riddles Jewelry, a Jewelers for Children member. The evening’s honored guest speaker, US Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD), spoke about the importance of CASA and helping children. The evening’s events included a silent auction and among the unique activities at the gala was the chance of winning the one-carat diamond, valued at \$6,000. The 7th Circuit Court CASA program generates early excitement for the event by delivering invitations to the event in style. Program staff have created a tradition (and heavy media coverage) by delivering invitations to the event’s Gala Sponsors; this year, program staff braved snow and 50 mph winds to deliver tickets and chocolate inside tuxedo boxes. As Sheila Troxel Snyder, program executive director, affirmed “The Fire and Ice Gala is a great way to bring awareness of the CASA program to the community, a way to recruit additional volunteers and raise funds, all while having a wonderful, elegant evening.”

Picturing a Home for Every Child CASA, First Judicial District, NM

At any given moment, over 2,400 New Mexico children are in the custody of the New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department (CYFD) due to abuse or neglect. While most children are returned to



Melissa, Janeal and Vicky by Debbie Fleming Caffery, the first children in the US to be adopted through a Heart Gallery, New Mexico 2001. They were featured in People, Parade and on 20/20.

their birth families after certain court-established requirements are met, some children can never return home again and CYFD must seek permanent homes for them. At the suggestion of Santa Fe photographer and adoptive mother Cathy Maier Callanan, CYFD brought the expression “a picture is worth a thousand words” to life at the nation’s first Heart Gallery exhibit in 2001 at the Gerald Peters Gallery. Heart Gallery organizer Diane Granito, now adoption event specialist with CYFD, reports that the show drew a crowd of people who were inspired by stirring portraits of children in CYFD custody who were dreaming of finding their “forever families.” The portraits were created and donated by some of the region’s most talented photographers. Since then, the annual New Mexico Heart Gallery has found homes for many children who were considered “hard to place” due to their age or the fact that they were members of

a sibling group. One of the happiest endings came last year, when a very special portrait inspired one couple to adopt five teenaged siblings. Two photographers even “clicked with” and adopted their charming subjects.

This past December, CASA First Judicial District and CYFD partnered to hold a benefit preview reception and host



Francis (Faye) by Jackie Mathey, who adopted her.

the Heart Gallery together. “Heart Gallery Children,” their foster families, waiting adoptive parents, the Heart Gallery photographers and special sponsors attended the opening. It



Waiting child Hawk with his Heart Gallery photographer, Tony Bonanno.

featured food from top restaurants and caterers, entertainment, portrait viewing and a raffle drawing for portrait sessions with the talented Heart Gallery photographers. Through the generosity of Heart Gallery underwriters, 100% of the proceeds from the benefit were allocated to support New Mexico’s foster children via CASA’s advocacy work and expanding the New Mexico Heart Gallery program.

Thanks to media coverage and technical support from CYFD, the Heart Gallery has spread to other states. Last year, a *Parade* article about the project by Santa Fe reporter and CASA volunteer Rosemary Zibart touched the hearts of millions of readers, resulting in a virtual explosion of Heart Gallery groups across America, where foster children are waiting to be adopted. Later coverage included *People*, the *Today Show*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *USA Weekend*, the *New York Times*, *ABC World News Tonight* and *20/20*. The federal Children’s Bureau’s adoption initiative, The Collaboration to Adopt US Kids, has been a strong supporter of the project and has named the Heart Gallery a “best practice”.

Kooking for the Kids Alabama CASA

Kooking for the Kids, a cookbook comprising more than 400 recipes submitted by CASA friends, staff and volunteers, was published recently by Alabama CASA. The cookbook is dedicated to Brittany, a little girl who had been abused before the age of four by her parents and left to care for her two younger brothers. When a CASA volunteer was first assigned to Brittany’s case, the young girl would often eat voraciously, afraid the food would disappear. Her foster mother constantly assured Brittany there would always be plenty of food. One of the first chores Brittany learned on her food appreciation journey was setting the table; this was quite an accomplishment for a child who had never eaten a meal at a table nor held a fork or spoon. Now 12 years old, she still loves to set the table, bake cookies and plan meals with her adoptive parents.



Kooking for the Kids Cookbook

Kooking for the Kids is not just a cookbook; it is a testament of compassion and devotion by people associated with CASA. Cooking is a great way to bond and spend quality time with friends and family while having fun! All proceeds from the cookbook help Alabama CASA continue to provide a powerful voice for abused and neglected children. To obtain the \$15 cookbook, visit alabamacasa.org or call (877) 625-2272.

Holiday Historic House Walk Coles County CASA, Charleston, IL

In order to raise funds for Coles County CASA, its fundraising committee recently held a Holiday Historic House Walk, a tour of five of Charleston’s historic residences. With an enthusiastic community, and all expenses for items such as tickets, posters, programs and refreshments donated by local merchants, the fundraiser was a success. The walk included touring homes built in the late 1800s and early 1900s: the Dudley House (listed on the National Register of Historic Places); the Cougill home owned by former Charleston mayor, Dan Cougill and his wife, Sallie; the Briggs house, which is the only completely stone house in the area; the brick Robert Samuel Hodgens house; and a Gothic revival home built in 1866 by a Civil War soldier for his bride. “The people who are opening their homes really want to help CASA. They have been very supportive,” said CASA board member Mary Gherardini. A repeat of the event is planned for later this year.



One of Charleston’s historic residences.

Awards & Recognition



Left to right: St. James Masonic Lodge #47 Senior Deacon Joe Richard, Liz Betz, executive director of the Capital Area CASA Association and Master David Dodge.

The St. James Masonic Lodge #47 awarded \$500 to the **Capital Area CASA Association, LA**, supporting advocacy efforts for abused and neglected children in East Baton Rouge Parish.

CASA of the Plains, CO, recently received two grants. The Centennial Mental Health Center board awarded

funds for a training on mental health and substance issues. Executive Director Diane Callahan noted methamphetamine will be a major issue of discussion since a majority of their program's cases involve meth and child neglect that often accompanies this substance abuse problem. The Anschutz Family Foundation also awarded a grant to the program. The focus of this foundation is strengthening

families and communities especially in rural Colorado.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) recognizes and promotes volunteer



programs throughout the nation that enhance or preserve the quality of life by awarding Acts of Caring Awards at a ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Up to 18 organizations are recognized for outstanding Acts of Caring. Organizations were recognized in the following categories: Community Improvement, Criminal Justice/Emergency Management, Elderly Services, Health/Social Services, Libraries and Programs for Children & Youth. This year, three CASA programs were recognized: **Grand Traverse County CASA** (Probate Court Volunteers—Volunteers in Prevention), MI (Criminal Justice category); **Wise County CASA, TX** (Health/Social Services) and **Stevens County CASA, WA** (Programs for Children & Youth). CASA advocacy for children is a special emphasis for NACo this year.

OFF THE NEWSWIRE

After the death of a 7-year-old girl at the hands of her parents, **The Wall Street Journal** carried an article by staff reporter Elizabeth Bernstein on the National CASA Association and three other nonprofit organizations working to protect abused and neglected children. The article is available on CASA.net.org.

The **News-Bulletin** of Valencia County, NM, extensively profiled the Valencia-Cibola County CASA pro-

gram in a series of feature stories the newspaper carried on groups making a difference in local communities.

In a letter to the editor of **The Washington Post**, Diane Charles, executive director of Stop Child Abuse Now of Northern Virginia (SCAN), Alexandria, VA, emphasized that everyone has a role to play in keeping children safe. She added, "If you see a child in danger, whether the child has been left alone in a car or seems to be mistreated in some

other way, call the local child protective services agency or police. We all have the responsibility—and the power—to prevent abuse and neglect."

A story about Rock County CASA volunteer Cathy Smith appeared in **The Janesville Gazette, WI**, after she helped an abused teenager whose childhood was spent in 13 different foster homes. The story related how she continues to advocate for the young woman who is now a mother herself.

Outback Steakhouse Partners with CASA Programs

Outback Steakhouse takes great pride in giving back to communities by supporting many organizations. Their giving is accomplished in a number of ways: donating food and enlisting the volunteer spirit of employees (they call them “Outbackers”) to help organizations raise money and awareness for their cause.

During the past year, National CASA member programs around the country in partnership with their local Outback Steakhouse restaurant held fundraising and volunteer appreciation events. Outback also sponsored and promoted program fundraisers and general awareness events.

National CASA helped build and launch this program through use of a toolkit provided to local CASA/GAL programs. The toolkit provided guide-



lines and resources for working with their local Outback Steakhouse for partnership opportunities. A number of programs have been working with their local Outbackers for years. Others experienced success shortly after the launch release.

There are several examples of the successful collaboration between Outback Steakhouse and local CASA programs. Outback Steakhouse has strongly supported **Idaho CASA** programs with recognition dinners over several years through partnership efforts. **CASA of Coeur d’Alene** is now working on a summer recognition picnic with their local Outbackers. In Virginia, Outback Steakhouse partnered with **Chesapeake Volunteers in Youth Services** to host a fundraiser and luncheon

raising nearly \$2000. In Alabama, the **Huntsville CAJA** program hosted their first volunteer recognition event at Outback Steakhouse, where Outbackers generously donated food, service and space, opening solely for their event. And in Asheville NC, Outback Steakhouse hosted a successful volunteer luncheon for the **28th Judicial District GAL program**.

“We appreciate Outback Steakhouse for opening their restaurants and their hearts to our programs and our volunteers,” says National CASA CEO Michael Piraino. “Their support has helped many of our local programs raise needed funds and recognize the work of their CASA and GAL volunteers. If anyone is in the mood for a good steak, go visit your local Outback Steakhouse. And please tell them ‘thank you’ for their support.”

Join the National CASA Association

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

Your Member Benefits:

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

Thank you!

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

Membership Information Form:

Please check any of the following that apply:

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

Name _____

Organization/Title _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Email Address _____

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

Credit Card Number _____

Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Association NEWS:

Volunteer E-learning Initiative Launched

New Outreach Video Released

2006 National Conference Recap

National CASA Introduces E-learning Opportunities

To address the educational needs of the children we advocate for, the National CASA Association is pleased to announce a new e-learning opportunity for trained advocates and program staff. *Education and Youth in Out-of-Home Care* is the first e-learning series posted on the password-protected private area of casanet.org. The five modules in the series address the following objectives:

- Increasing understanding about educational issues.
- Supporting educational rights and needs of children and youth.
- Navigating the school system.
- Reviewing developmental milestones and learning about assessment and school meetings.
- Becoming familiar with special education terms, common learning disability diagnoses, discipline and the role of the surrogate parent.

This series is accessible to local CASA program staff who in turn can invite volunteer advocates or others in their community to progress through the series. As learners work through the modules, certain assignments will be sent directly to the inviting supervisor. This will ensure proper completion of the module via review of a short answer essay and quiz by the learner. These modules will be most helpful for advocates working with children whose academic success, learning or school readiness is of concern.

National CASA's e-learning initiative is being developed to maximize the reach of training. It will also increase flexibility and access for our volunteers and staff as they meet their training needs. Judy Lieb from the Lucas County Juvenile Court CASA/GAL Program in Toledo, OH, recently completed the e-learning process and had this to say: "I finished the educational advocacy curriculum on line and thought it was very professionally presented. It was easy to use and understand."

Volunteer advocates can complete the series as part of their yearly in-service requirements. National CASA suggests that vol-

unteers receive between five and seven hours of in-service credit for completion of this series.

Watch for news about future topics to be covered through e-learning. For more information or assistance on e-learning, contact Tracy Flynn, National CASA's training director, at tracy@nationalcasa.org.

New CASA Video Released

National CASA recently released *Make a Lifelong Difference*, a new outreach video for use by local CASA/GAL programs. The video features four former CASA/GAL youth: Scott and Jonathan Williams from Miami; Kaiya Combs from Colorado Springs, CO; Alonzo Portlock from Boston, MA; and Pamela Butler from Portland, OR. All share their poignant and touching stories of how their CASA and GAL volunteer changed their lives. National CASA member programs received their copy in mid-April.



"To give a child a CASA is to give them a voice. To give them a voice is to give them hope, and to give them hope is to give them the world. I believe that with all my heart."

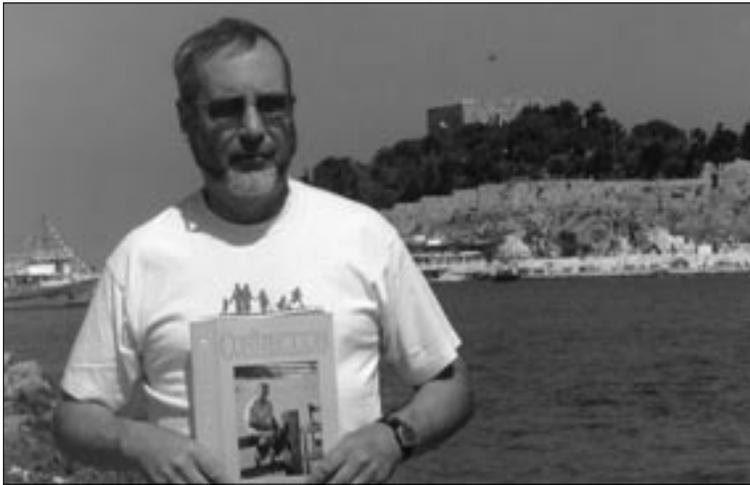
2006 National CASA Conference Recap

Over 1200 child advocates, program staff as well as judicial and child welfare professionals attended the 2006 National CASA annual conference held in San Diego, CA April 1-4. Over 70 workshop and training sessions were offered to participants on a wide range of topics. Special guests included authors Dorothy Roberts and John Hubner as well as NACo President Bill Hansell.

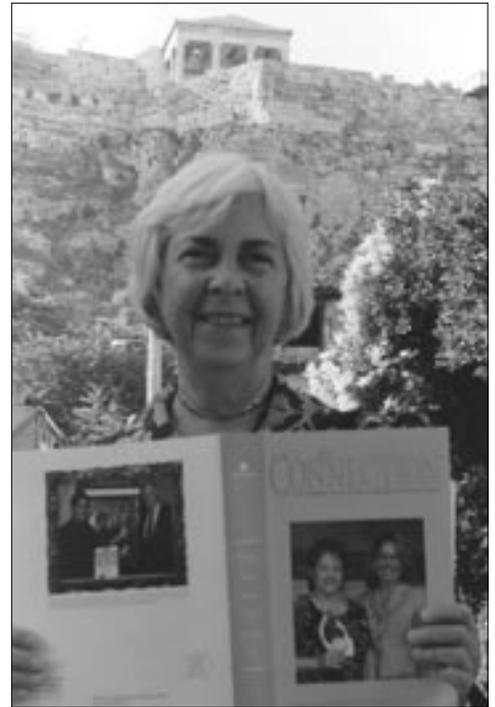


Mark your calendars!
National CASA's
30th Anniversary
conference will be held
June 9-12, 2007
in Orlando, FL.

Connection Sightings



Jim Copley, a volunteer with CIP in New Haven, Connecticut, vacationed in Kusadasi, Turkey, taking his Connection.



Ruth Baldino, volunteer coordinator for the Volunteer GAL Program in Honolulu, Hawaii, proudly holds the Connection in front of the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Besides enjoying the sights, Ruth made a detailed survey of the ways the European Union and other European countries take care of their abused and neglected children.



While waiting to board the Chattanooga Belle for a sail on the Chattanooga River, Marci Ryan, CASA volunteer in Springfield, OR, fortuitously brought her Connection to read.

Send photos (min. 4x6) to:

The Connection
National CASA Association
100 W. Harrison
North Tower, Suite 500
Seattle, WA, 98119

or email high resolution photos (300 dpi scanned at 4x6 size) to theconnection@nationalcasa.org. Include your name, address, phone number, email address and photo location.

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. No matter your destination with the *Connection*, spread the opportunity to advocate for children by telling people about the CASA/GAL cause. Pass along your copy of the *Connection* whether you are on an airplane or in a courthouse waiting room.

Closing words



from **JUDGE HATCHETT**

by Judge Glenda Hatchett

Giving a Voice to Those Who Cannot Yet Speak: Advocacy for Infants and Toddlers

As advocates for children in foster care, we often think of ourselves as people who give a voice to voiceless children. When we define voiceless children, we often think of them as overlooked and forgotten and need someone to *figuratively* speak up for them. However, infants in foster care need someone to *literally* speak on their behalf because they have no voice to speak whether they would like to or not.

Infants go through various stages where they develop such skills as walking and talking. When it comes to speaking for the average infant, at three months they begin to make “baby” noises such as cooing and gurgling. By nine months, although they are not able to use actual words and sentences, they can often make two syllable sounds and repeat tones and sounds made by others around them. It is not until toddlers reach the age of twenty-four months that the average child can make two word sentences.

These stages are often used to help gauge a child’s development and growth and many parents use them to make sure their child is developing at the normal rate—as a mom myself, I can attest to this. While most parents would love for their 18-month-old child to be able to talk prior to the average stages and express themselves early, infants in safe and loving

homes have people around them to care for them so if they don’t speak, it’s okay. However, what about the 18-month-old infant who is growing up in an environment where they are being abused and neglected? What happens when they need to have a voice, but because they cannot yet use two word sentences, they cannot even utter the words “help me!?”

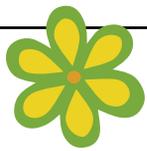
Statistics show that infants are the fastest growing category of children entering foster care in the United States and account for 1 in 5 foster care admissions. Unfortunately, these babies are spending most of their critical period of development in a troubled environment with inconsistent “care giving” and may suffer developmental delays and experience life-long implications as a result.

Your role as a CASA volunteer is truly making a difference and we need more child advocates to speak for all children in foster care—including infants and toddlers in the system. Every child deserves to have someone to love and care for them and to know that someone out there, whether a parent or child advocate, has their best interest at heart.

I encourage you to continue your tireless work to help children and I commend you on your dedication and commitment in helping to reverse the alarming statistics on youth in foster care,

especially infants and toddlers. However, I also challenge you to **recruit other volunteers**—whether co-workers, family or friends—to help impact the lives of so many children in this country and give them a voice. **We need more people like you** who have a passion for helping others and know how only a few hours each month of personal time can make a lasting impact in the lives of children in foster care. What a great feeling it would be to know that you made a difference in the life of a child who entered the foster care system as an infant and was unable to ask for help, but that years later when that child was able to speak and say two word sentences, that their words to you would not be “help me,” but “THANK YOU!”

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. 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.



Special Pendant Benefits Children



The National CASA Association is proud to partner with Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers this Mother's Day to promote the sale of a specialty pendant. Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers has created a custom-designed blue agate pendant aptly named "Wings of Love" depicting two children with a guardian angel (see ad below). For each pendant sold, Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers will donate \$15 to National CASA. The promotion runs through the end of 2006 while supplies last.

In addition to the donated funds, one of the key components of the promotion is an effort to generate more national awareness of CASA. The pendant and CASA will be featured in a direct mail advertisement to two million Fred Meyer/Littman customers as well as in a newspaper insert delivered to 13.5 million homes. Additional awareness will be generated through in-store counter displays throughout Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers' 440 stores nationwide and via the company's website.

National CASA CEO Michael Piraino noted his excitement about the potential of the promotion, stating "this is an exciting commitment to abused and neglected children nationwide. Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers is helping keep these children safe, and that will give them new lives of hope."

Cheryl Zander, Senior VP Merchandiser with Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers, added "We are proud to be partnering with National CASA to help abused and neglected children. We want to make an effort to help raise awareness of CASA's important work across the country."

In addition to supporting the Mother's Day pendant project, Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers is a key stakeholder and partner in the highly successful Champions for Abused Children Initiative through Jewelers for Children (JFC). For many years, the company has also been an outstanding supporter of CASA for Children in Portland, OR.

The pendant is now available in stores and online. For more information and to order your pendant, visit nationalcasa.org and click on "Wings of Love."



What is CASA?

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates. CASA volunteers are everyday citizens appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children to assure that they are placed into safe, permanent homes.

"For All Those Special Times"®

Fred Meyer JEWELERS

www.fredmeyerjewelers.com

LITTMAN JEWELERS

www.littmanjewelers.com

For the store nearest you please call 1-800-457-5977.

Blue Agate Cameo



"Wings of Love"
\$159

With every purchase of this pendant \$15 will be donated to CASA to help abused and neglected children.

Fresh New Products!

at ShopCASA.org



NEW!

CASA CD/DVD CASE

Black fabric with fashionable white stripes covers this cd/dvd case that holds 24 discs. Get yours today!
Item #7021
\$10 each



NEW!

CASA DECALS

Our Static Window Decal just became bigger and better! The decal measures 4"x4" and the printing is all white for better visibility.
Item #6006
Same great price—\$.50 each or \$.30 each for 100 or more



CASA KEY RING
WITH LED LIGHT

Black with logo imprinted in white.
Item #7018
\$5 each or \$4 each for 50+

CASA BUSINESS CARD HOLDER

Made of Maplewood with the CASA logo laser engraved on top.
Item #7020
\$9 each



CASA COMMUTER BAG

Top-quality black polycanvas with the CASA logo embroidered in gold.
Item #7015
\$25 each



TO SEE MORE SALE ITEMS
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