Spring 2008

THE Connection

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

Editorial by FosterClub All-Star

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Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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volunteer voice

Rochelle Vigurs
CASA Volunteer
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It seemed like I had all my ducks in a row. I was enjoying a pretty comfortable life: good health, good friends, a loving partner, a first grandchild on the way. So when I came across 2006 statistics from the Department of Social Services (DSS), they were enough to knock me off my complacent little pedestal. Massachusetts holds the dubious honor of recording the third highest rate of child abuse in the country. DSS reports that by the end of 2006, the state had 42,000 children on their watch. Fully 10,000 of those kids live in foster care or residential facilities, sometimes for years. Imagine these numbers extrapolated to 50 states.

For me, these statistics were a call to action. I'd been thinking for years about finding some meaningful volunteer work. Through the website of the local United Way, I found Friends of Children in Northampton, a nonprofit child advocacy group. They showed me how I could be a voice for a child who needs to be heard.

Some children (kids with regular needs and hopes and desires) are being betrayed this very moment—abused, neglected, abandoned—by the adults in their lives. I know I can't stop what might be happening right now to some child unknown to me. I can't fix the past, or make it all better. But with training and ongoing support, I can investigate, report and make recommendations. I can be that child's voice in the present and into his future. I can stand up for her in juvenile court, and the judge will listen to the information I provide. Among all the competing adult interests, my voice, *speaking on behalf of the child's best interests*, will be heard.

By the time I met "J," he hadn't seen the inside of a schoolroom for six months. His progress was measured by the number of "holds" staff had wrestled him into that week. In and out of foster care, acute residential treatment centers—even the children's ward of a psychiatric hospital—abandoned and neglected by those he cared about most, this 10-year-old was understandably angry and confused.

Today, and for the time being, J lives in a supportive home for troubled youth, a place that cares about kids and their potential. As his CASA volunteer, I am part of the team working on his behalf to achieve stability and permanency. We mustn't waste time: the clock of his childhood is ticking away.

On my last visit with him, he smiled more times than I could count. I watched him help a younger child with a puzzle. I heard how he's working at grade level in school, how he's smart and cooperative, how he likes to use the computer and watch basketball on TV, how he's made a new best friend. Not long ago, I watched him skate around an outdoor rink, slamming a puck against the boards, his cheeks flushed in the cold. Kid stuff, the kind of thing every child should be able to take for granted.

What's next for J is unknown. One thing is certain, though: as long as he remains in the care and protection of DSS, I will be in the wings as his CASA. Because the way I see it, all you can do to make a difference is to take one step forward, one step at a time. Then you toss it out there—the love, the commitment, the belief.

Last week, I went to see J play baseball. I don't know much about baseball. But I do know something about J. I know what he's been through, that he's a survivor, that he is his own worst critic and that he doesn't trust easily. I watched him step up to the mound. He stood there a moment, feet together, thoughtfully turning the ball inside his left fist, his right arm with its big glove hanging loose. The hitter leaned over the plate. For a long minute, J studied him, yet I could see that his eyes were everywhere, alert to everything, to what might come next, or not. He shifted his weight and took a step back. He wound up. Took a step forward. Threw.

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Well-Being of Youth Depends on Adult Connections

Michael S. Piraino
CEO, National CASA

I have been having a discussion with a friend about the well-being of children who are involved in the courts. He says no one can know what is in a child's best interests, so the best we can hope for is that these systems will work according to their own rules and procedures.

My position is that what we really care about is that children are safe and well cared for. So I posed this question to my friend: "If you found that your teenage child had been drinking and was planning to drive to a friend's house, what would you do?" The answer, of course, was that he would take the car keys—because that would be in the young person's best interests.

When we talk with children who have had a CASA or guardian ad litem volunteer, we don't hear them talking about the rules of court, or the law or the procedures of any government agency. They talk about connections, about the many human ways the volunteers' involvement has helped lead them to more fulfilling lives.

What we are really trying to accomplish through our advocacy is to ensure that each child and family has a strong reservoir of protective factors. A lot is known about what these factors are. They include things like attachment, resilience and connectedness. For more on these, read Carol Horton's *Protective Factors Literature Review: Early Care and Education Programs and the Prevention of Child Abuse*, published by the Center for the Study of Social Policy in 2003 (strengtheningfamilies.net).

Promoting children's well-being also means being fully aware of and alert to specific risks they face. For many young people, especially American Indian/Alaska Native youth in urban areas, there is a high level of risk associated with the loss of culture and identity, a legacy of earlier policies of coerced relocation. Placement in a group setting can be especially inappropriate for young children, because of their needs for close attachment, but non-family placement settings are not necessarily a good thing for older youth either.

As this edition of *The Connection* makes clear, we have been increasingly concerned about the well-being of our older youth. I include in this area of concern not just those who will age out of foster care but also those who recently left care without any close and appropriate attachment to a caring adult. The litany of risks to these older youth is probably familiar to most readers, and there are some services available to transitioning youth, such as those funded under the Chafee Act. I am convinced, however, that simply making help available does not mean enough young people will actually receive that help.

Connectedness, it seems to me, is the most important gift we can give to these young people. They will leave, or have recently left, our systems of care and will face difficult choices in their newly independent lives. It is in their best interests to be connected to some responsible adult they can continue to rely on. Finding those connections is our best hope for ensuring the well-being of the older youth with whom we work.

I think my friend would agree.

THE Connection

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association

A publication of the National CASA Association, representing 954 program offices and 59,717 CASA volunteers serving 243,295 children 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 child protection system. CASA volunteers work closely with the child and family to bring an independent assessment of the case to court, recommending to the judge what is best for the child's future.

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

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Unless otherwise noted, children in *Connection* photos are not from actual abuse and neglect cases.

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Speak Up for a Child®

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Cover Artist

Cover artist Robert McCammon as he appeared in National CASA's 2004 annual report, *Portraits of Hope*.

Robert McCammon was introduced to National CASA by the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles. McCammon had this to say about helping older youth in care:

When people ask me what are some of the things that adults can do for foster children, I tell them: really just give them hope. Treat them like a person and not like a thing. Just because they have problems in their life doesn't make them different.

Speaking from experience, all a kid wants is love. All they want is somebody to help them out. With any kid—when anyone new comes into their life, they don't trust them. When I meet somebody, I try to push them away. But don't give up on the kid no matter how far he's pushing you away, no matter what he's doing. An adult should never give up on a kid.

CASA Court Appointed Special Advocates FOR CHILDREN

How Can We Best Support Older Youth in Care?

Gary Stangler
Executive Director
The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

Last December, the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago released findings showing that youth who are able to stay in foster care beyond age 18 are three times more likely to go on to college. They also are more than twice as likely to complete at least one year of college than those who leave care at 18. Extending care to age 21 might also increase earnings and delay pregnancy, according to the study, the most comprehensive examination of youth leaving care.

And yet, even though research clearly shows that young adults fare better if they can stay in foster care longer, very few states have extended foster care to age 21 since there is no federal reimbursement. Only a third of states are opting to provide Medicaid to age 21 for these young adults. More than half provide some sort of waiver of tuition at public colleges, but far too many states still do not. Services under the Chafee Act probably reach half or fewer of eligible kids.

Why have states been so slow to take advantage of the flexible Chafee funds? I believe states have lacked good policies and practice models for helping this population. Over the past decade, we have not seen the kind of state innovation and creativity that accompanied welfare reform in the 1990s.

The good news is that the situation is now beginning to change. I'm encouraged by the emergence of more creative policies and practices. State administrators are recognizing how important permanent family connections are for older youth in foster care. They are also using search technologies to comb through public databases to find possible extended family members. Many jurisdictions are using intensive team decision-making to identify family members who could provide support for youth aging out.[1]

Another important state innovation is better use of Education and Training Vouchers, which Congress created to help pay for post-secondary education. Michigan, for instance, has doubled the number of youth receiving vouchers. Until now, states have been slow to take advantage of this federal support.

Perhaps the most important "innovation" has been to listen to the youth themselves.[2] Youth often are excluded from the judicial processes that direct their lives. Many are not even aware that they have the right to legal representation. The move to engage youth directly in decisions that affect their lives is an overdue and critical change in policy, practice and how we approach casework training. CASA volunteers have played an important role in helping make sure that young people's interests are protected in court proceedings.

We know that the number of young people leaving foster care without a permanent family is at an all-time high, according to a new report by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Even though the total number of children in foster care has decreased, the number who age out of the system has grown by 41% since 1998.

Part of the change we are seeing nationally is a better understanding of what it takes to improve the grim outcomes for these young people. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative supports 10 projects around the US, testing a matched savings account that includes funds for housing, education, transportation and medical expenses as well as entrepreneurial ventures. At the Initiative, we promote five strategies that we believe will improve outcomes in education, employment and health as well as personal and community connections and engagement. We are learning that actively engaging youth, building community partnerships and resources, collecting research data, communicating effectively and building public will to improve state policy and practice must *all* take place for progress to be achieved.

Our work has shown us repeatedly that what these young adults want most is family. By that, we mean a young person being safely reunified with their parents or living with relatives, legal guardians or adoptive families—but certainly living in a relationship that has a strong sense of "forever" attached. J.J. Hitch, who has been active in our Michigan site, expressed the difficulty young adults have in coping when they have only marginal support: "It's hard when you don't have parents who love you. It sets us back. There are several things that have helped me succeed. I'm crowd surfing on my support system because I'm not strong enough myself."

[1]**Editor's Note**: Bills pending in Congress would strengthen supports for youth in foster care. One bill, HR 5466, would continue federal services up to age 21 if the state elects to continue foster care support. Family Connection Grants would provide funding to states for kinship navigator programs and intensive family-finding efforts such as those described here.

[2]**Editor's Note**: National CASA has just completed a series of focus groups involving 50 youth in 5 cities. Watch for the results in the next issue of *The Connection*.

Aging Out and Rising Above

Sherena Johnson, 22

The nine years I spent in the foster care system in Georgia are a *part* of me, but they are not *me*. I have faced many obstacles in my life; however, I have worked hard to rise above all of the negative stereotypes that are placed on foster youth. I liken myself to the Phoenix, the mythical bird that was destroyed and then rose from the ashes. In a sense I have recreated myself. My spirit, my mentors, my learning experiences have all propelled me to a higher level.

Now that I know who I am, I can be of service. Because others have helped me, I can be an inspiration, a motivator—and I can make a difference in the life of a youth in foster care. Child and teen advocacy is my passion. I have chosen to be an advocate for former and current foster youth because I want to let them know that they too can rise above stereotypes.

Each year, 20,000-25,000 youth age out of care with limited or no resources. I remember the moment that made me realize I was truly on my own. The first week of college, all the parents were moving their children into the dorms. I stopped to ask a lady in the hallway if she could help me with my things. She turned and looked at me and said, "Can't you see I am busy helping my own child?"

One of the most critical resources I lost while aging out of foster care was my health insurance. I did not realize the impact that this would have on my life. While I was in college, I began experiencing nausea, pain and high fevers. I knew that something was wrong, but I could not afford the cost of visiting a doctor. As my illness progressed, I became unfocused and depressed. I did not know who to ask for help. I stopped attending classes regularly and imagined that I would ultimately be diagnosed with cancer or worse.

My negative state of mind started a ripple effect. My GPA dropped below 2.0. I was suspended for a semester and placed on academic probation. It was not until I broke down and told some people I worked with about my health that I at last found treatment. I will continue to need care for my condition, maybe even surgery, but I am still without medical insurance.

Being a motivational speaker and an advocate for youth in foster care has opened up many doors for me. My life changed on November 14, 2007, the day I met Rep. John Lewis from Georgia and testified before the House Ways and Means Committee. I had pictured congressmen as hard and stern. But Rep. Lewis immediately expressed concern about my issues. When I learned of the things that Congressman Lewis had conquered in life, he immediately became my role-model.

He states, "As a child I knew that I was a different seed." Despite the 40 attacks he endured and his arrest for challenging the injustice of Jim Crow segregation in the South, Representative Lewis still stood up for what he believed. He knew that he had to be the one to fall out of the orderly line and challenge the unjust laws.

As a child growing up in foster care, despite the physical and emotional abuse that I received from my family, I was determined to be a leader of change. Today I stand up and challenge the child welfare system because I know that many children are afraid to speak up for the issues that affect their lives. Though I endured abuse, neglect and depression, I knew that one day I was going to stand up, be strong and speak out. I would be a "different seed" to ensure that youth journeying through the foster care system can have a good life.

There's a mythical bird related to the Phoenix, the Sankofa, revered by the Asante of Ghana. The Sankofa teaches that one must look back on one's past in order to move forward. The struggles that I went through transitioning out of foster care make me want to ensure that other youth have a better future.

Sherena Johnson is an active member of the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative, which partners with the Georgia CASA program each year to host a day at the capitol that allows the youth voice to be heard. Johnson is a senior at Clayton State University majoring in psychology and human services. National CASA is proud to have sponsored her as a 2007 FosterClub All-Star—only the second person in Georgia to receive this honor. As an All-Star, Johnson spent last summer facilitating youth conferences and training child welfare staff. She will speak at National CASA's annual conference on June 9.

Helping Youth Succeed as Adults: The Challenge of Aging Out

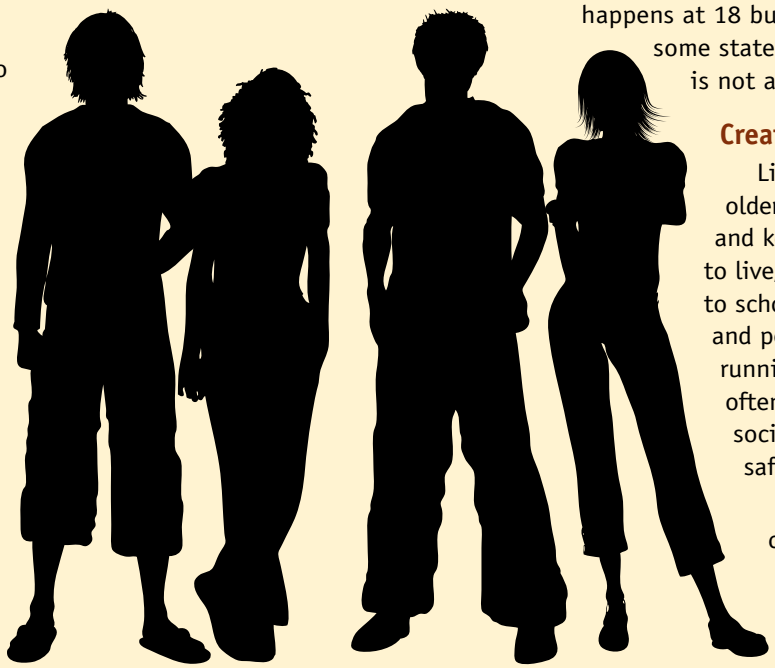
Charles Redell

Whether a child is able to return to safe and loving parents, moves in with another family member or is adopted, the goal for all youth in the child welfare system is permanency. Unfortunately for many 15- and 16-year-olds, the goal of permanent placement gets replaced with "independent living."

Many young people turning 18 might consider themselves adults. The reality, however, is that most youth this age are far from ready to live on their own. A 2003 study by the National Opinion Research Center found that most Americans do not consider a person to be an adult until he or she reaches 26 or finishes school, lands a full-time job and starts a family. Another study found that parents spend an average of $44,500 on their children *after* they turn 18. And the *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21*, released by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, estimated that parents provide $34,000 in "material assistance" to their children between the ages of 18 and 34.

Of course, a young adult who turns 18 while in foster care does not have this kind of support available. Often she has been in a group care facility or has moved from one family to another many times. In some cases, a young person is lucky enough to stay in one foster home for a long time, but many jurisdictions say 18-year-olds can no longer live with foster families or will no longer finance care. Suddenly, a young adult who has never lived on her own and has no idea what it takes to do so has nowhere to go. Often, she feels like she has no options.

"I needed extra time to prepare," says Amanda Metivier, a former foster care youth from Alaska. "I didn't start working on independent living until I was 17-½, so I had six months to become a fully independent adult. That's ridiculous." Metivier was able to extend her stay in care to age 21.



A Group at High Risk

The problem of aging out is not a small one. In 2005, the number of youth in foster care fell, but the number who aged out rose to more than 24,000, according to *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own*, a report released by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The study also found that in fiscal year 2005, close to 32,000 youth had a goal of "emancipation" and more than 37,000 had a goal of "long-term foster care."

According to the *Midwest Evaluation*, "On many dimensions that would be of concern to the average parent of a young adult in the United States, these young people are faring poorly as a group."

The Pew study backs this assertion up. It found that one in four young adults who age out will be incarcerated within the first two years of leaving the system and one in five will become homeless after turning 18. Only 58% have a high school diploma at 19, and fewer than 3% earn a college degree by 25.

All is not lost for these young adults though. The *Midwest Evaluation* found that, "As a group, they exhibit extraordinary optimism." Interviews with former foster youth and volunteer advocates bear this out. But aging out of the foster care system (which often happens at 18 but may be extended in some states to 19, 20 or even 21) is not an easy path to follow.

Creating Connections

Like all young adults, older foster youth must get and keep a job, find a place to live, pay their bills, go to school, manage a budget and perhaps keep their car running. However, they often do it all without a social circle acting as a safety net.

While creating connections for foster youth is the role of social services, this task often slips

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Resources for Supporting Older Youth in Care

The following organizations, programs and tools are helpful in understanding the scope of concerns of older youth in care. They are also resources to support youth in creating permanent connections and preparing for independence. Please see the separate sidebars on resources related to education, teen pregnancy and e-learning for volunteers.

California Youth Connection (calyouthconn.org)
This group's *Speak Out Report* is a compendium of foster youth voices on the challenges they face and ideas for addressing those challenges. Visit the "Resources" section of their site to find the report.

Casey Family Programs (casey.org)
With a variety of programs focused on the child-welfare system, Casey Family Programs is a treasure trove of facts and guides. The following are three of their resources helpful in life-skills preparation:

Foster Care Independence Act FAQ
Casey's three-part list of frequently asked questions is an excellent summary of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. Search for "Chafee FAQ" from casey.org.

It's My Life: A Framework for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care to Successful Adulthood
Casey offers a series of guides for older youth and advocates who work with them called *It's My Life*. Download a free PDF of this out-of-print resource from casey.org/Resources/Publications/ItsMyLifeFramework.htm.

Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment
To help young people learn more about the challenges of independent living and discover where they are in the process, encourage them to take the online Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment. Go to caseylifeskills.org, click on "Assessments" in the menu and select the first option to determine the appropriate assessment for your needs.

Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago (chapinhall.org)
This applied research center conducts and actively disseminates rigorous research that serves children and youth, their families and their communities. One of their latest reports is *A Reason, a Season, or a Lifetime: Relational Permanence Among Young Adults with Foster Care Backgrounds.* Gina Miranda Samuels interviewed 29 young adults who aged out of care to better understand their support networks and how they learned to cope with people coming in and out of their lives. All those in the study reported having a network that included friends as well as biological, adoptive and foster family members, but most said they lacked emotional support. The study recommends that child welfare policy and practice address the social-emotional health of youth aging out of care as well as their economic and physical well-being. Download the report for free by searching for "relational permanence" at chapinhall.org.

Family Search & Engagement: A Comprehensive Practice Guide
This guide was developed by the organizations that helped Orange County CASA develop its *Family Connections* program, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington and EMQ Children & Family Services in Northern California. This set of practices is designed to locate, engage, connect and support family resources for youth. It is available at emq.org/press/docs/FSE_guide.pdf.

FosterClub (fosterclub.org)
FosterClub is a national network supporting young people in foster care. Their free publications available online include a media guide with recommendations for journalists interviewing young people from foster care and tips for adults working with foster youth spokespersons. Their new *Permanency Pact* is designed to encourage lifelong, kin-like connections between a young person and a supportive adult. Young people preparing to transition out of foster care will find many resources on their own FosterClub website, fyi3.com. Finally, the FosterClub All-Star program incorporates current and former foster youth as facilitators and leaders of teen conference activities.

Youth Communication

Represent: The Voice of Youth in Care is a national bimonthly magazine written by and for young people in the foster care system. The March/April 2008 issue on permanency features a number of articles on independent living and finding support when aging out of care. Through personal narratives and reported stories, teen staff provide an inside look at life in the system that other teens in care can connect with to gain practical insights.

Youth Communication has also teamed up with New Yorkers for Children and the New York City Administration for Children's Services to create a new website to help youth leaving foster care. Young people can gain knowledge on topics such as how to obtain a GED or college scholarship as well as how to find housing or health services. Visit youthcomm.org/pyayouth.

[Cover Story continued from page 5]

through the cracks. CASA of Orange County Executive Director Gregory Bradbard thinks solving this safety-net problem could help solve some of the root issues youth face. He led his California-based program to develop the *Family Connections* project.

"We hear from a lot of youth that they don't have any permanent relationships with someone who they know is going to be in their life today, tomorrow and 20 years down the line," he says.

Family Connections is modeled on a project of Catholic Community Services in Seattle. In addition to their advocacy role, CASA volunteers are trained to locate close family friends, neighbors and family members with the goal of creating a permanent connection for the youth they serve.

The first step is to mine the youth's file to find information about "anyone who loves, could love or has loved the child," Bradbard says. They look for names and phone numbers in the margins of letters or other notes in a social services file. "We've found it to be much richer than a court file," Bradbard notes.

If they cannot find anything that way, volunteers will use the names, birth dates and social security numbers of parents to do an internet search for an aunt, uncle or someone else willing to connect with the child.

Once a name and contact information are found, "This is where the training comes in," Bradbard says. "With a lot of people, a wall immediately goes up and the volunteer must have a very sensitive conversation."

Bradbard stresses that the key is communication and taking it slowly. For more information about methods to establish permanent connections for youth, please see "8 Skills for Building Family Connections" in the Winter 2008 issue of *The Connection* (casanet.org/communications/connection-magazine.htm).

Amanda Metivier, the former foster youth in Alaska, entered the system at 17 and emancipated when she turned 21. She agrees with the need for a permanent adult connection.

"Being someone who is there to stay and letting youth know you're available to have a relationship and really be there for them is key," she says.

According to National CASA Chief Program Officer Sally Erny, "The CASA volunteer can be an important support in helping youth find these connections."

Real Life Demands Real Solutions

As important as connections are, the practicalities of life also demand attention. According to the Pew report, youth emancipated from the system do not know how to create a budget or understand the need for one. Many cannot drive because their states do not allow foster youth to get a driver's license, and the maze of paperwork necessary to take advantage of education benefits can be daunting. Even setting realistic goals is often beyond the scope of their skills simply because they are 18.

To help youth learn how to set realistic goals, Eileen McCaffery, executive director of the Orphan Foundation, says they need to be taught the concrete steps it takes to achieve a goal.

"You'll have an 18-year-old who wants to be a rock star but doesn't play an instrument, or one who wants to be a lawyer but can't write a sentence," she says. "It's a major gap between goals and planning."

Telling a young person things she does not want to hear is vital to teaching her how to reach her goals. "Nobody says, 'But wait a minute, you skip school every day.' No one calls them on that," McCaffery states. Finally, she believes that most adults realize nothing comes without work, but young people do not know this yet.

"They may feel as if they have to jump through hoops, but everyone has to jump through hoops," she says. "We've got to start talking in very concrete ways that help them mature and understand the amount of work it takes."

Cathy Netter, a CASA volunteer in Ohio, agrees. She worked with a young person who received a stipend for going to school and completing chores.

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Coming Soon: New E-Learning Module Will Train Volunteers to Support Aging-Out Youth

The National CASA Association is putting the finishing touches on its second major e-learning initiative. *Aging Out: Supporting Youth Transitions into Adulthood* is designed to assist volunteers working with adolescent youth who are preparing for emancipation from the foster care system. This e-learning program will be released to the entire CASA/GAL network in June 2008. Watch for details in the next issue of *The Connection*.

Critical Risk for Older Youth: Teen Pregnancy and Parenting

Did you know that youth in foster care are at greater risk of teen pregnancy than their peers? According to a recent study of youth aging out of foster care from the Chapin Hall Center for Children, almost half of teen girls who have been in foster care become pregnant at least once before age 19, and 71% become pregnant at least once by age 21. In addition, children born to teen parents are at increased risk of abuse and neglect. Transitioning from foster care to independent living as a parent can create hardships for these young adults. Pregnancy prevention education—and support for young parents—ensures that the transition from foster care is a more successful one. The following resources are available to prevent teen pregnancy and to support young parents aging out of care.

National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (thenationalcampaign.org, teenpregnancy.org and stayteen.org)

This national nonprofit organization seeks to improve the lives and prospects of children and families and particularly to help ensure that children are born into stable families ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Their specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single young adults. The campaign supports a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors. Highlighted resources:

Fostering Hope: Preventing Teen Pregnancy Among Youth in Foster Care
This report summarizes research on the high rates of teen pregnancy among youth in foster care, qualitative results from focus groups and a service provider survey as well as implications for the field. Available at teenpregnancy.org/fostercare.

Our Story, Our Words: Youth Speak Out on Sex, Love, and Teen Pregnancy
Teens get lots of advice from adults, but they usually are not asked to offer their own. The National Campaign asked teens growing up in foster care to tell them what they wanted to know about teen pregnancy prevention and what advice they would give to their peers. This brochure captures what teens have to say in their own words. Available at teenpregnancy.org/fostercare.

10 Tips for Foster Parents
This brief guide offers ideas to help foster parents strengthen their relationships with foster youth and advises how best to communicate about sex, love and relationships. It reflects input from foster parents as well as practitioners who work with them. Available at teenpregnancy.org/fostercare.

Science Says: Foster Care
This research brief highlights pregnancy and related data from a longitudinal survey of more than 700 youth in foster care from three midwest states. Authored by Mark Courtney and Lucy Bilaver of the Chapin Hall Center for Children, the brief provides data on sexual behavior, contraception, pregnancy and birth rates as well as the use of reproductive health services among youth in foster care. It also explores how foster youth compare to youth more generally as well as how older adolescents who remain in foster care fare compare with those who age out of the system. Available at teenpregnancy.org/fostercare.

What Works 2008
Newly revised in 2008, *What Works* is a 19-page pamphlet that examines curriculum-based programs to prevent teen pregnancy and explains what is known about carefully evaluated interventions.

What Helps in Providing Contraceptive Services for Teens?
What Helps is an overview of what is known about carefully evaluated clinical interventions that help prevent teen pregnancy.

Healthy Teen Network (healthyteennetwork.org)

This national nonprofit and membership network works to make a difference in the lives of teens and young families. The organization is focused on adolescent health and well-being, with an emphasis on teen pregnancy prevention, teen pregnancy and teen parenting. Highlighted resources:

Helping Teens Help Themselves
This national blueprint represents a multi-year, multidisciplinary approach to increase supportive housing options for pregnant and parenting teens exiting foster care.

Promoting Successful Transition from Foster Care to Independent Living
Based on original research, this report discusses the difficulties facing teenagers in foster care/group settings and the policy that surrounds independent living.

Provided by Shay Bilchik, director of the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University, and Kristen Tertzakian, assistant director of state and local outreach for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

Paying for the Dream: Finding Ways for Youth to Afford College

Continuing their education after leaving the foster care system is one of the biggest challenges young adults face. Many factors complicate the situation, such as securing a stable place to live, finding a way to earn a living and arranging for transportation. But the number-one obstacle to continuing education is financing it. Fortunately, there is a good deal of money available to help youth complete their education. However accessing this support can be a daunting process.

The first resource to explore is the **John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (statevoucher.org)**, which is funded at $140 million through the Foster Care Independence Act. This funding can be used to help youth make the transition from foster care to independent living by accessing the education, vocational and employment training necessary to obtain employment or prepare for post-secondary education. Every state has an independent living coordinator who can direct volunteer advocates and youth to applications for funding. For more information and to find your state coordinator as well as application forms, visit the website.

The **National Working Group on Foster Care and Education** is a coalition of 12 organizations working to ensure successful educational outcomes for youth. Members of the group include National CASA and Casey Family Programs. Along with efforts to improve policy, the working group offers a free resource guide for caregivers, advocates and judges (from casey.org, search for "National Working Group").

The **Orphan Foundation (orphan.org)** offers $1.5 million each year in scholarships for foster youth to attend college. Recipients are also assigned a dedicated mentor who works with them. Scholarship students in their last two years of college receive coaching in job readiness. The foundation also offers a paid internship opportunity in Washington, DC, which is being expanded nationally later this year. The scholarship application is available on their website from January 1 through March 31 each year.

Young adults in the foster care system do not have to limit themselves to finding funding designed specifically for them. According to Eileen McCaffery, executive director of the Orphan Foundation, there are hundreds of millions of dollars in unclaimed scholarship funds in America each year. Tapping into that resource is as simple as registering with **fastweb.com** and preparing to write a few essays. Students already in college can often take advantage of a wealth of on-campus resources including financial-aid counseling and tutoring programs, all of which are included in student fees.

[Cover Story continued from page 7]

"In the real world, you don't get paid for doing what you're supposed to do," she says. "That's a big jump for kids of that age."

Metivier says she was ready to move out when she turned 18, but her foster mother convinced her otherwise by sitting her down at the kitchen table and writing a sample budget.

"Once I saw those numbers on how much it would cost to live on my own, I started to panic," she says. "I was afraid of being on my own." Metivier extended foster care twice. She is now 23 and on her way to becoming a social worker.

Getting Ahead

One of the biggest practical hurdles youth must overcome is paying for school. The Orphan Foundation helps older foster youth and the adults who work with them do this. McCaffery explains that the Orphan Foundation administers the Chafee Act federal education training voucher program in nine states. The vouchers are worth up to $5,000 per year and are available in all 50 states. The foundation also awards $1.5 million in scholarships each year, including $1 million from the Casey Family Scholars Program.

McCaffery says the Orphan Foundation is a holistic program and offers family support. Each recipient gets a trained and supported mentor as well as three care packages a year and cards recognizing their birthday and other notable events.

"They hear from us when times are good and when they're bad," McCaffery says.

McCaffery stresses that a lot of money and other resources are available to students. Youth just need help looking for resources and understanding the long-term benefit of writing an essay for a scholarship versus taking out a loan.

"Arm them with real information, real consequences and real opportunities," she says. "Really be proactive. These are the things that make a difference."

While CASA and GAL volunteers carry out their mission of advocating for young people to find safe, permanent homes, they can also play an important role when a permanent home is not found and youth age out on their own. Advocates and other concerned adults can help make sure that young people do not leave the foster care system without permanent connections. After all, how many of us who grew up in much better circumstances could succeed in the long haul without ongoing support and encouragement from people who care about us?

Charles Redell is a Seattle-based writer and editor with almost 10 years' experience. He has worked as a journalist for a variety of publications and covering many different topics. His blog entries can be found at Seattlest.com and Charlesredell.com.

"Is it appropriate for CASA/GAL volunteers to provide mentorship as one aspect of their advocacy for children?"

"Should mentoring occur only after the volunteer's court-appointed involvement with the child has ended?"

"Can a volunteer maintain the role of independent advocate while mentoring a child?"

Mentorship is an ever-increasing activity in our society. Entrepreneurs seek out mentors to help them become better business leaders. Students look for successful community members to guide them. CASA program directors engage with their more-experienced peers in an effort to expand their programs and better serve children. It is not surprising then that the issue of mentoring arises in the context of child advocacy.

CASA programs across the county vary a great deal in their policies and practices regarding mentorship. Some consider mentorship to be an integral part of their program; others take a strong stand against it. An additional complexity is how people define the mentoring role, as you will see in the editorials below.

A look at the National CASA Association *Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs* provides some guidance. There is no prohibition of mentorship. On the other hand, mentoring a child is not the stated role or among the responsibilities outlined in our standards. In addition, a number of activities that sometimes occur in the context of a mentoring relationship are specifically prohibited. They include:

- Taking a child to the volunteer's home or any home other than the child's
- Giving legal advice or providing therapeutic counseling
- Giving money or expensive gifts to the child, child's family or caregiver

Among other issues a program needs to consider in providing mentorship is the desire of the youth to participate. When a youth has aged out of the child welfare system, he may seek out his former CASA volunteer to serve in an informal mentoring role. In this situation, the adult would be acting as mentor, with its incumbent responsibilities and potential liabilities, as an individual and at the behest of the youth rather than the court. When this happens, it is important that the former volunteer make it clear to the youth that her role has changed and that she will no longer be afforded court-granted access to case files, social services records, etc.

We turn to two respected directors of state CASA associations to find out their perspectives on incorporating an aspect of mentorship into volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children.

Is it appropriate to blend mentorship and advocacy? It depends on your definition of mentor.

Joan Jenkins
Connecticut State Director
Children in Placement/CASA

There are many theories about the origin of the word *mentor*. In ancient Africa, prior to the time of the Greek and Roman invasions, when a child was born each village shared the responsibility for rearing and educating the child to the customs and traditions associated with that village. While the child had contact with every member of the village, there was always one older child (not a family member) assigned the responsibility to ask questions and listen carefully to the younger child. In Swahili (one of the oldest languages on our planet), this questioning person was called "Habari gani menta," which in English means the person who asks "What's happening?"—much like the role of the CASA volunteer.

Throughout this issue you will see some dire statistics about youth who remain in foster care until they reach 18. They face major problems. Realistically speaking, is it wise for a volunteer advocate to wait until a child has aged out or nearly aged out of the system before offering collective wisdom?

When is it appropriate to offer a mentorship aspect to volunteer advocacy? Mentorship can take on broad meaning. I do not endorse CASA volunteers taking on the more modern-day role of mentor that would include such activities as taking foster youth to ball games, parks, on trips, etc. If a volunteer believes a youth would benefit from participating in those activities, I would encourage the inclusion of those recommendations in the court report with the appropriate factual foundation to support the

recommendation. It is certainly within the advocacy role, however, to know "What's happening?" or not happening. Thus, my definition of approved mentoring would be aligned to that of ancient Africa and Greek mythology where the mentor is portrayed as a "guide" with emphasis on education.

Connecticut volunteers use their influence and the influence of our program to help foster youth gain admission to private boarding and day schools where youth have remained on academic scholarships. A former foster youth currently attending Yale University joined our staff last summer to write *A Guide to Higher Education* specifically for our state's youth in care. Our volunteers are encouraged to get the *Guide* into the hands of youth in our caseload, with a particular focus on those aged 14+. Volunteers use their ability to access and review educational records as a way to provide information and encouragement to youth and as a guide to recommend resources to facilitate achievement of their goals. Recommendations for tutoring, participation in community service and research related to preparation for college and technical school are all a part of the role of our volunteers. Is this the role of mentor, advocate or both?

After listening and getting to know our youth, much like a mentor would do, volunteers make recommendations to social workers, attorneys and courts for services that will lead youth to increased resources and begin to prepare them for life outside of the system. Volunteers recommend education plans, transitional housing, college or technical training, employment, coping skills and other services related to aging out. Sometimes volunteers encourage youth to remain in the system so that their education will be paid for. Have we crossed the line into mentorship?

When youth reach 18, it is their choice to continue the presence of their CASA volunteer in their life, or not, and at that point, who cares whether the volunteer is called "CASA," "GAL," "mentor" or "advocate"? It is likely that they will just be called "friend."

We must stay focused and avoid "mission drift" into mentorship.

Rita Gulden
Executive Director
CASA of NJ, Inc.

CASA programs have a mission to advocate for the best interests of the child they serve and to serve the court by being their ears and eyes beyond the courtroom. This is to ensure a safe and permanent home as quickly as possible. If our programs were to include mentoring the children we serve, we would need to broaden our mission statement. I know that one attraction to mentoring programs is the availability of funding contrasted to the lack of funding for CASA programs. Mentoring, however, is not our mission, and the dreaded "mission drift" becomes a strong possibility.

Another negative aspect to mixing the mentor position and the CASA volunteer position would be the possibility of the child losing interest in having a mentor. If the CASA volunteer is serving both roles, this may hamper advocacy and it may become difficult if not impossible for the volunteer to continue to be effective. This would not serve the child, the court or the volunteer.

A strong mandate for our programs is to *do no harm*. The more reliance we expect a child to place on one individual, the greater the harm when and if that person can no longer remain in the prescribed roles. I would rather see the CASA program place another volunteer on the case while the former volunteer leaves the program and joins a mentoring program in order to serve the child in that capacity.

My last argument against having CASA volunteers also hold the role of mentor is the cost of the setup, training and supervision of mentors as opposed to advocates. In New Jersey, our nonprofit programs do not allow a volunteer to drive a child anywhere or to be alone with a child, both of which are bound to happen with a mentoring program. These tasks would at the very least increase our screening and liability insurance costs. At the present time, we do not have enough funding to supply case supervisors for all the volunteers who want to advocate for our children, and we have a waiting list of children who need a CASA volunteer. We need to fulfill our primary mission before we can even consider carrying out a cost/benefit analysis on a mentoring program or expanding our mission.

What CASA volunteers accomplish cannot be done by any other organization in New Jersey. Our unique role is to advocate for necessary service delivery and permanency for each child in out-of-home placement to whom we are assigned. In our role, we can advocate for the child we serve to be assigned a mentor. On the flip side, we cannot advocate for another program to take over the CASA role.

I realize it is sometimes hard for a volunteer to remain an advocate when it might be more rewarding to mentor a child. However, our role is to provide advocacy to ensure that the needed systems step in and work with our children and that they reach a safe and permanent home as quickly as possible.

4 Tips for Saying a "Good" Good-Bye

Susan Packwood, LCSW

Susan Packwood with grandson Cameron

How can we say good-bye to a child who has already suffered so many losses? What is the best way to terminate our relationship with children we have gotten to know while advocating for them? Will saying good-bye cause more grief? Should we just quietly slip away?

These are questions that often worry the volunteer child advocate. The children I have seen as a therapist are very attached to their CASA or GAL volunteer. But what do we do when that relationship must come to an end when cases are complete? Here are some tips to remember when saying good-bye:

1. **Make termination an important part of the process.**
   Too often in our culture, people walk away without saying good-bye. The children we see who have been in the protective services system have often gone through many losses and many good-byes. Most of those have been abrupt or without closure. As the child's CASA volunteer, usually a very important person in the child's life, you have a unique opportunity to help the child to both develop an important skill and heal from past losses. *Be a person in the child's life who models the skill of saying good-bye rather than running from uncomfortable feelings.*

2. **Prepare the child for closure well in advance.**
   We can help children and youth by letting them know at the beginning that the relationship will end at a certain point. Tell the child what the parameters of the relationship will be. For example, "I'll be helping you until we find you a permanent home (or until your court case is over)." Continue to bring this up from time to time.

   As termination approaches, you can briefly share some of your feelings with the child—remember to keep it simple and not cause the child to worry or feel guilty. A few weeks before saying good-bye, let the child know what to expect. Tell her how the process will work so that she can be prepared. Consider planning a small good-bye celebration together.

   Courts and CASA programs vary in terms of whether continuing contact is encouraged—or even allowed—once a case closes. If your program does allow an ongoing relationship—and it is acceptable to the child and his placement—discuss appropriate ways to maintain that contact with your volunteer supervisor. For example, you might say, "After we have our good-bye party, I'll call you on the phone once in a while to see how you're doing."

   If continued contact is not appropriate, be honest with the child about what to expect. The child is likely to go through the normal process associated with terminating a relationship. These might be the usual stages of grief: denial, anger, depression and finally acceptance, although the sequence may vary by child. Keep in mind that some children might not start their grieving process until after you are gone.

3. **Give the child strengths and memories to take with them.**
   Many children have heard few positive statements made about them. The volunteer advocate is in a special position to help the child begin to develop his own cheering section and plans for the future. Talk to the child about how to find people who believe in him. These could be foster parents, teachers, coaches and friends. Remind the child that he never deserves to be hurt or treated badly and can surround himself with people who support him as you have.

   Help the child to see the future as a positive time, a time when she will be able to make good choices for herself. I like to remind children of people who have overcome adversity: young Clark Kent was adopted and went on to become Superman; Marilyn Van Berber was sexually abused but was later chosen as Miss America; and Lance Armstrong overcame cancer and won the Tour de France.

4. **Remember that listening and being present is "doing something."**
   On your last visit, encourage the child to draw or write you a good-bye letter as you draw or write one for her. Don't be afraid or shut down if she expresses sadness. One of the greatest gifts we can give a person is our presence with their pain. Let the child know that you are sad too and will miss her.

   I try to tell children at termination that I will always carry them in my heart, and they can do the same with me. I give an example of something special about them that I like. For instance, "I will always remember the cute way you lose your breath when you laugh hard."

When the time comes, following these recommendations—and the advice of your volunteer supervisor—will make for a better good-bye for the children you serve.

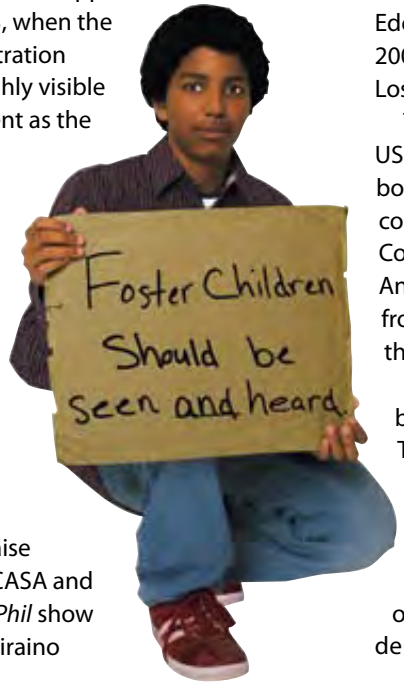
Susan Packwood is a licensed clinical social worker practicing in Sugar Land, TX and has been working with abused and neglected children for 28 years. Packwood has treated foster children and abusive families through contracts with Child Protective Services and helped develop the Children's Assessment Center in Houston and the Fort Bend County Children's Advocacy Center.

Dr. Phil Speaks Up for National CASA's *Forgotten Children* Campaign

For too many Americans, children in foster care are all but forgotten. National CASA intends to change that by launching a national event titled *Forgotten Children* to raise awareness of foster children. Dr. Phil McGraw of TV's *Dr. Phil* show and his wife Robin are the official spokespersons for the *Forgotten Children* campaign.

National CASA will kick off the campaign with a dramatic media event in the nation's capital to put a face to foster care and encourage caring citizens to stand up for these children so they can stand a chance.

On Monday, May 19, 850 life-sized, stand-up displays of foster children holding placards illustrating their situation and their dreams will appear at the Washington Monument. These displays of children represent the children who enter foster care *each day.* An additional 850 displays will appear every morning until Friday, May 23, when the total will reach 4,250. The demonstration will be located at a high-traffic, highly visible site with the Washington Monument as the backdrop.



The *Forgotten Children* event will provide a powerful location for media coverage. Members of Congress will be encouraged to participate in interviews accompanied by a foster youth.

Dr. Phil and Robin McGraw have a long-standing interest in improving the lives of foster children. He sees this campaign not only as a dramatic awareness opportunity but also as a way to raise significant funds to support local CASA and GAL programs. He has taped a *Dr. Phil* show with National CASA CEO Michael Piraino to air on May 29. During that show, Dr. Phil will kick off the *Forgotten Children* campaign with a $50,000 contribution, which he will use to challenge viewers to donate.

The overall goal is to help raise $2.9 million that will go to fund local program growth and sustainability. Ultimately, National CASA hopes to use these funds to help provide a caring volunteer advocate to an additional 75,000 abused and neglected children.

National CASA Board Members Visit Specialized Children's Court

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Michael Nash and National CASA Director of Strategic Initiatives & Inclusion Veronica Montaño-Pilch in the child-friendly courthouse

On February 1, the National CASA Board of Trustees held its winter meeting in Los Angeles. Members were welcomed by Los Angeles CASA with a tour of the county's innovative Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court. Their guide was Judge Michael Nash, 2006 National CASA Judge of the Year and presiding judge of Los Angeles Superior Court, Juvenile Division.

The Edelman Children's Court is the first courthouse in the US dedicated exclusively to child abuse hearings. Unique in both its design and its specialized programs, it is also the first courthouse to be built from a child's perspective. The Children's Court is a state-of-the-art example of a child-friendly building. An awareness of the needs of children is evident throughout, from the cloud-shaped light fixtures to the teddy-bear clocks on the walls of every courtroom.

The courthouse was designed to nurture children and begin the healing process for them and their families. The facility design reminds the court staff, parents and programs housed within that children are important. Judge Nash is justifiably proud of the facility, telling the National CASA board, "We are all very fortunate to work in a courthouse that recognizes the importance of the presence of children, the most important parties in dependency proceedings."

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Stewart, Estes & Donnell PLC present unclaimed funds from steakhouse lawsuit to National CASA CEO Michael Piraino.

Funds from Steakhouse Suit Benefit Abused Children

Unclaimed money from a class-action lawsuit against Ryan's Family Steak House has been donated to the Nashville/Davidson County CASA program and the National CASA Association. The suit compensates company employees in 23 states for unpaid hourly wages over a three-and-a-half-year period. The plaintiffs in the suit chose volunteer advocacy as the beneficiary of the unclaimed funds. CASA of Nashville/Davidson County will receive $40,000, and a $100,000 award will go to National CASA.

As counsel for the class-action plaintiffs, Stewart, Estes & Donnell PLC was pleased to facilitate the gift of the unclaimed funds: "We strongly support CASA's efforts on behalf of abused and neglected children both here in Nashville and nationally and feel that this is an excellent way to use these unclaimed funds," said lead counsel M. Reid Estes, Jr.

Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation Helps National CASA Reach Hispanic/Latino Audience

A grant from the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation will help National CASA reduce the discrepancy between the number of Hispanic children in the foster care system and the number of Hispanic volunteers. Currently 17% of children in the foster care system are Hispanic/Latino, in contrast to only 4% of volunteers nationwide.

The grant will fund a national satellite television tour with Danny Pino, star of the CBS television series *Cold Case*. Audiences of both general-interest and Spanish television will learn about the work of CASA and GAL programs and how they can get involved as volunteers. The Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation has supported National CASA for nearly 20 years, while local chapters have contributed financial and volunteer support to CASA programs around the country for even longer.

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GET CONNECTED!

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

NationalCASA.org

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

CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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

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

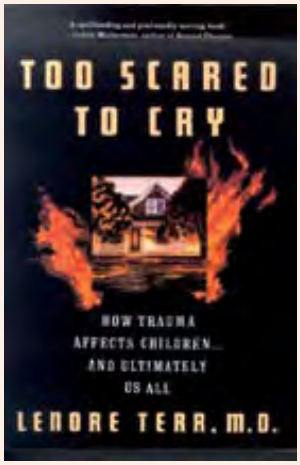
ShopCASA.org

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

Shop CASA

Too Scared to Cry

By Lenore Terr, MD
Nonfiction; Basic Books (Perseus); 372 pages, including index and notes; 1990



Our review of *Too Scared to Cry* was prompted by an email from CASA volunteer Jean Lavalley of New Hampshire, who wrote the following:

> *My experience as a CASA volunteer has taught me that the reactions of children to traumatic events vary considerably and that all children do not experience the same patterns or intensity of symptoms. Reading this book helped me to understand the underlying mechanism of psychic trauma and how it affects children.*

In *Too Scared to Cry*, Dr. Lenore Terr introduces readers to dozens of traumatized children whom she has worked with during decades of study and private practice. She also shares anecdotes of well known writers, artists and filmmakers who suffered as children and relays her hypotheses of the effect of their traumas on their popular works. These personal histories provide a rich context for the centerpiece of Terr's book: the Chowchilla school bus kidnapping.

On a hot day in July 1975, 26 children were kidnapped on their bus ride home from summer school. The kidnappers transferred the children into cramped passenger vans and transported them nearly 100 miles from their homes in Chowchilla, CA to a rock quarry, where they were forced into a subterranean cavity. When the children heard dirt being shoveled onto the ceiling of the enclosure, they thought they would be buried alive or left to die.

Exactly what the kidnappers had in mind for them was never made clear. During the second day of their captivity, a few of the children found a way to tunnel up and out of the hole (which turned out to be a buried truck-trailer). All of the children escaped, ostensibly unharmed.

Their ordeal presented the opportunity Terr had been seeking for more than eight years: to do a controlled field study of the varying effects of childhood trauma. She summarizes the situation as follows:

> *The children had spent about 38 hours away from their community and at least 48 hours away from home. They had been driven in blackened vans for 11 hours and then had been buried alive for 17 or 18 hours. They had suffered a terrible shock.*

Terr contacted parents and the school district and in December 1976—five months after the school bus kidnapping—conducted her first round of interviews of the 23 children and families who were still living in Chowchilla. They ranged in age from 5 to 14 years old. Four years later, she returned to Chowchilla to hold a second round of interviews. Terr also interviewed a control group of 25 children from neighboring communities.

Not surprisingly, Terr found that every one of the Chowchilla children she interviewed had been altered by the trauma in some way. She observed and was informed by others of changes in the children's behavior, play and outlook. Some effects were obvious: having bad dreams or becoming withdrawn. Others were more subtle and potentially more severe. For example, Terr found that four or five years later, 23 of the 26 children who had been on the bus that July day exhibited a sense of "futurelessness" that is not typically felt by children:

> *They expected shortened life spans and new disasters. Many were unable to envision marriage, raising children or finding a career. One boy said that he did not expect to have children—"in case of an emergency there will only be time for me," he said. An 11-year-old girl thought she'd die at 12: "Somebody will come along and shoot me," she said.... When these traumatized children considered the possibility of future disaster or personal bad luck, it seemed less a question of "if" than "when."*

In sharing such powerful, first-hand observations throughout her book, Terr brings the reader along on her quest to increase her knowledge of the effects of childhood trauma on children and on society. *Too Scared to Cry* offers everyone—from the seasoned child welfare professional to the new volunteer—an engaging and comprehensive look into the world of childhood trauma.

What books are you reading? Have you read a book that inspired, motivated or enlightened you about issues in child welfare? Do as Jean Lavalley did and 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.

Stevie

Directed by Steve James
Produced by Steve James, Adam D. Singer and Gordon Quinn
Running time: 145 Minutes
Lionsgate Films
steviethemovie.com
Available at Amazon.com and other retail vendors

The documentary *Stevie* follows its director Steve James's attempt to reconnect with Stevie Fielding, the "little brother" he had been paired with 10 years earlier through the Big Brothers program. The film answers for one person the question we all might ponder when working with children, "What kind of an adult did the child become?"

What James discovers when reconnecting with Stevie Fielding is heartbreaking: A child who was given up by his family and failed by the child welfare and mental health systems became an adult who continues to struggle and suffer, only now the responsibility is all his. After their reunion, the director follows Fielding for a four-and-a-half-year period, covering Fielding's day-to-day life in his community and, most explicitly, his experience with the criminal justice system after he is charged with a serious crime.

The film does a superb job of presenting Fielding's past. We learn about his early life, which included severe beatings by his mother and rejection by his stepfather and mother. Fielding spends his early childhood with his step-grandparents in a home just 50 yards away from his mother, stepfather and half-sister. When his aging step-grandmother is no longer able to care for him, his mother places him in foster care.

Thus begins Fielding's childhood in the Illinois child welfare and mental health systems. He spends three years in a group home where he is cared for by sound, loving foster parents. However, after they leave to pursue new careers, Fielding never again experiences stability. Shortly after the caring foster parents' departure, he is abused by other boys in the home and begins to present severely challenging behavior. It is during this time that Fielding is assigned his "big brother."

James recalls his first encounter with Stevie in the classroom setting of the institution for boys. Fielding is isolated from the class because of his disruptive behaviors; his desk is walled off behind filing cabinets and shelves, and he uses a bell to summon the teacher. His teacher from that period recalls that Fielding "had a lot of intelligent people working with him," but he did not seem to benefit. She feels that his is one of the most severe cases she has seen.

After failing to adjust to a series of group homes, Fielding spends the last years of his childhood in a state mental health institution. After his release, he returns to his step-grandmother's home in the rural Illinois community he left as a child.

While Fielding has a familial relationship with his half-sister and grandmother, and successfully maintains a romantic relationship with a girlfriend, he struggles. His ultimate arrest and criminal charge severely affect his relationships with the people who have tried to support him.

One of the difficulties in watching the film is that there really is no closure, no knowing how things will turn out for Fielding. The documentary's impact does not come from its ability to inspire hope. Rather it provides an occasion for the viewer to contemplate the obvious opportunities in a child's life when the intervention of a caring adult or a positive change in the child's situation would have made an enormous difference. The fact that missed opportunities for constructive interventions greatly affect the future for any child is certainly evident when viewing Fielding as an adult.

What type of life would Stevie Fielding have had if something had been different in his childhood? What if the clock could be turned back and key opportunities could have been acted on: positive placements, family therapy and stability in Fielding's childhood? While the film offers no "feel good" moments, it is highly recommended because it presents a unique challenge to contemplate the future of the children whose paths we cross today.

Health Care

"Health is the place where all the social forces converge."

—Reed Tuckson, MD, Senior Vice President of the American Medical Association

The child welfare system is responsible for the health, welfare and education of more than 500,000 children in this country every year. While nearly all foster children are automatically enrolled in Medicaid (a federal-state partnership that helps states provide medical services to low-income individuals), they still face unique medical challenges. A report published by the US General Accounting Office in 1995 states that children in foster care, as a group, are "sicker than homeless children or children living in the poorest sections of inner cities." They have higher than expected rates of chronic illness and face obstacles presented by changes in placement, with uncoordinated medical record systems resulting in errors in immunization and under-treatment of chronic conditions.

The following resources address some of the special needs of youth in the dependency system related to medical care.

Foster Children's Health Care Rights

American Academy of Pediatrics

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (aap.org): "Every child entering foster care should have a health screening evaluation before or shortly after placement. The purpose of this examination is to identify any immediate medical, urgent mental health, or dental needs the child may have and any additional health conditions of which the foster parents and caseworker should be aware." Additional health care components which the academy believes foster children are entitled to are "comprehensive medical and dental assessment, developmental and mental health evaluation and ongoing primary care and monitoring of health status."

Ensuring the Healthy Development of Foster Children: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals

This booklet, published by the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, was created to help judges, advocates and child welfare professionals identify children's health needs and the services that can address them. View the PDF online at courts.state.ny.us by searching for "Ensuring Healthy Development."

Medical Passports/Health Passport System

To increase the continuity of care for children who may move from home to home, several states have developed an abbreviated health record often referred to as a "medical passport" or a "health passport." Held by the foster parent and transferred to children or their families at emancipation or adoption, these documents—in electronic or paper form—facilitate the transfer of essential information among physical and mental health professionals. Passports include a listing of the child's medical problems, allergies, chronic medications and immunization history as well as basic social service and family history. Many states provide foster parents with passports. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission is scheduled to launch an online passport this spring.

PEATC

View a PDF sample of a "Child Health Profile" from the Virginia-based Caring Communities for Children in Foster Care by going to peatc.org/fostercare/healthprofile.pdf. This project is directed through the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center in Virginia and funded by the Maternal Child Health Bureau Integrated Services Initiative with the American Academy of Pediatrics. In collaboration with child welfare agencies in Fairfax County, VA, the project has developed strategies and identified best practices to increase comprehensive health-care services for children in foster care. To see their *Checklist for the Healthy Development of Foster Children*, go to peatc.org/FosterCare and click on "Checklists."

Guides for Kinship Caregivers

Children's Defense Fund

The Children's Defense Fund, whose mission includes ensuring that every child has a healthy start in life and successful passage to adulthood, fights for health care coverage for all children in America. The fund publishes a series of guides for kinship caregivers, rich resources that provide information on topics including accessing mental and physical health care. The organization estimates that one-third of children in the dependency system are in the care of grandparents or other family

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Chapin Hall Report Supports Youth Remaining in Foster Care Until 21

A report on 591 youth who aged out of foster care in three Midwestern states was published in December 2007 by the Chapin Hall Center for Children. *The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21* found that former foster youth, when compared with a national sample of 21-year-olds, were less likely to finish high school, attend college or earn a living wage. An issue brief, *When Should the State Cease Parenting? Evidence from the Midwest Study*, compared former Illinois foster youth (who can choose to remain in care until age 21) with former foster youth in Wisconsin and Iowa (who must leave care at age 18). It found that Illinois youth were 2.2 times more likely to have completed at least one year of college, and Illinois girls were less likely to have become pregnant. To access these reports, go to chapinhall.org and search for "Leave State Care."

Many Behaviors of Foster Children Linked to Unresolved Grief

A qualitative study involving interviews with 23 foster children, along with studies of projective tests of 182 foster children, analyzed the symptoms of ambiguous loss in the children's stories—including frozen grief, intense anger, confusion, guilt, helplessness and depression. "Foster Children's Expressions of Ambiguous Loss," by Robert Lee and Jason Whiting, was published in *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, volume 35, issue 5. The authors encourage professionals to recognize that many foster children's disturbing behaviors are symptoms of unresolved grief and that youth need help to understand their losses and to express their feelings verbally. To access an abstract, go to tandf.co.uk/journals/authors/uaftauth.asp and click on "Online Contents" in the right-hand menu.

Human Rights Campaign Guide for Working with LGBTQ Families

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has published a guide to effective practice strategies for working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning foster and adoptive parents. The *Promising Practices Guide* can be requested online at the website below. Other resources available at the HRC site include an index of state laws related to LGBTQ foster and adoptive parents, criteria for LGBTQ cultural competence, a resource list and a list of trainers and consultants. To access the guide and index, go to hrc.org and search for "Promising Practices."

Editor's Note: *National CASA's extensive bibliography of resources for working with LGBTQ youth and family members can be found at casanet.org/download/diversity/.*

Chapin Hall Panels Address Improving Services

A series of panels hosted at Chapin Hall in November 2007 addressed how to apply the data from the *National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being* to the improvement of services to children in the child welfare system. Audio recordings of the panels are available, including the topics "Service Needs and Interventions for Infants and Children" and "Child Protection and Parent Training Programs." To access the recordings, go to about.chapinhall.org/conferences/bridging2007/presentations.html.

Dave Thomas Survey: Many Want to Adopt but Have Misconceptions

An online survey of 1,660 adults reported that 30% of Americans have considered adopting and that adoption from foster care is considered by 71% of those interested in the process. However, the research conducted by Harris Interactive for the Dave Thomas Foundation in November showed widespread mistaken perceptions about adoptions from foster care. For example, 45% erroneously believed that children enter foster care because of juvenile delinquency; 66% believed that a biological parent could reclaim the child after adoption; and 46% believed that adopting from foster care was expensive. To access an executive summary of the survey results, go to davethomasfoundation.org.

Promoting Healthy Families

Free copies of *Promoting Healthy Families in Your Community: 2008 Resource Packet* are now available. Developed for service providers, the packet highlights strategies to strengthen families by promoting key protective factors that prevent child abuse and neglect. It also includes tip sheets in both English and Spanish to share with parents. The resource packet is produced annually by the Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, Child Welfare Information Gateway and the Friends National Resource Center on Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention. The *2008 Resource Packet* was developed with input from more than 30 national organizations that work to promote healthy families. You may download or order the packet at childwelfare.gov/preventing/res_packet_2008.

Grassroots Action Leads Louisville Program to Expand to Five New Counties

Dawn Lee, Executive Director, CASA of Jefferson County, Louisville, KY

"Jessica" and "Jennifer" were pre-teen adolescents who suffered from neglect. The sisters were behind a grade in school because of excessive absences, and they continued to miss school. They often came to school wearing the same clothes as the previous day, and many times they had not eaten. As the problem worsened, Child Protective Services got involved. In court, the judge decided to appoint Carolyn, a new CASA volunteer, to the case.

A year later, the sisters are doing well in school, they are still at home, and their mom is sober, having worked hard to stop abusing drugs. At the last court hearing, the judge praised Carolyn for helping this family turn around. While Carolyn's focus remained on the girls, the byproduct was their mom getting clean. The mother gave Carolyn an emotional thank you, grateful to have someone involved in her girls' lives when she was unable to be a good parent. This happy ending would not have been possible two years ago, when there was no CASA program in the area.

Judge John David Myles, presiding over the court most recently to benefit from CASA of Jefferson County's expansion, gives the oath of confidentiality to volunteers Beverly Hilger and Teresa Roberson.

In 2004, Claudia Brewer, Elizabeth Senn-Alvey and Heather Simpson wanted a CASA program in their community. They realized that children in neighboring Jefferson County had hardworking advocates who made a big difference in their lives. These women wanted to bring volunteer advocacy to Henry, Oldham and Trimble counties, which are served by one family court judge. They approached our CASA program for help. Our board of directors was immediately interested in exploring ways to serve children in neighboring counties, but members were also determined to make sure the venture would be successful. They created a board advisory committee to conduct a feasibility study to establish need and gauge community interest.

The first step for the advisory committee was meeting with National CASA Chief Program Officer Sally Erny, who happens to have been the founder of our program. She was an ideal resource, combining National CASA experience with local history. The advisory committee also met with our state director, Alex Blevins, to ensure that every possibility was considered as the plan evolved. These meetings helped our board create an effective strategic plan for the first year of operation in the three new counties.

Our biggest lesson was the importance of creating a collaborative venture through grassroots interest and involvement. With an advisory committee representing the three counties, the board became more confident as members realized how much the community wanted a CASA program. The advisory committee elects a representative from each county to sit on our board of directors. Everyone involved has been thrilled to exceed our expectations and have 26 volunteers serve 75 children from the three counties in our first full year of expanded service.

The success of the expanded program caught the attention of another family court judge, the Honorable John David Myles, who presides in nearby Shelby and Spencer counties. After we presented the volunteer advocacy model to him, he immediately set about determining grassroots interest. An advisory committee was formed in record time. Again, this group selected representatives to have a voice on our board, and we began serving children in these counties on January 1.

While it has been rewarding to see our success replicated, we know that it would not be possible without the desire of the community and the cooperation of the judges. The two local advisory boards are also crucial in generating ideas, raising funds and recruiting volunteers.

A program firmly rooted in the community has the best opportunity for growth. The Jefferson County CASA program is fortunate to have a system in place to help nurture this growth. The board of directors, under the leadership of Barbara Grosso, continues to look for ways to serve more children. Another asset is Program Director Shari Christoff, who has been doing this work for over 12 years. Her experience has brought a wealth of knowledge to these newly served counties. While this support system is incredibly valuable, we know the true heroes are the individuals willing to become CASA volunteers and help children like Jennifer and Jessica.

Left to right: Belinda Raczka, program director, Crawford County CASA; Christine Doty, volunteer coordinator, CASA of Lycoming County; Dennis Hockensmith, executive director, Pennsylvania CASA; Judy Jones, program director, CASA of Lycoming County; and Michael Piraino, National CASA Association CEO

Partnership Between CASA Program and College Yields Results

Crawford County CASA, Meadville, PA

Crawford County CASA held its 5th annual *Champions for Children Breakfast* at Allegheny College. The keynote speaker was National CASA CEO and college alumnus Michael Piraino, who combined the engagement with meeting local CASA program directors as well as students interested in law and nonprofit organizations. The *Champions for Children Breakfast* was organized to inspire and educate guests so that when asked for their support it felt natural to give. The event's success relied largely on the personal invitation each guest received from a friend who was a table captain. The emphasis was on building life-long donors who give of their time or of their money and sometimes both. This fundraising model is based on Terry Axelrod's program, Raising More Money, now known as Benevon (benevon.com). Impressed by Piraino's presentation and with the preponderance of college alumni who support Crawford County CASA, the college invited the program to hold its annual breakfast on campus in future years.

Men in Tights, Under the Lights

CASA: A Voice for Children, Inc., Newton, KS

Beginning with the grand entrée of contestants and judges who arrived in limousines and walked into the auditorium on a red carpet, the third annual *Men in Tights, Under the Lights* fundraiser for the CASA program was an instant hit. Well known men from Newton County participated in pageant activities including evening gown and talent competitions. Through their efforts, along with a silent auction and sales of child-themed items, the event raised almost $10,000. Highlights included a performance by the new Miss CASA, a Newton police officer; a Harvey County sheriff deputy lip-synching and dancing to Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive;* the director of the Newton City Water and Waste Water Management Plant performing Billy Idol's *White Wedding*; and Hesston High School's principal singing Loretta Lynn's *You Ain't Woman Enough to Take My Man*. Speaking to the crowd, CASA program Executive Director Melanie Watkins called the pageant "a vital piece of our organization; it is an excellent public relations event, helps with our volunteer recruitment and spreads the word about CASA while raising funds for our organization. I can't imagine not doing it!" Watkins later said, "The sky is pretty much the limit on what they want to do—all that is required is that it is appropriate for an audience to see: nothing risqué."

From left: First runner-up and people's choice winner Larry Thompson, CASA Executive Director Melanie Watkins and Miss CASA 2008 Craig Douglass

Running for a Cause

CASA of Tarrant County, Fort Worth, TX

Kappa Alpha Theta of Texas Christian University (TCU) held its 11th annual *Fall Breakaway* 5K run/walk recently to benefit CASA of Tarrant County, formerly known as Child Advocates. It was the fifth year that Theta held this race in conjunction with the TCU Family Weekend, enabling alumni and students' parents and siblings to be involved. With some 1,500 participants, the race raised $30,000. CASA of Tarrant County Executive Director Nancy Fisher said, "The Thetas at TCU have raised over $160,000 for our program in the last 11 years. They are an outstanding group of young women

Left to right: Kappa Alpha Theta Alumni Advisor Lisa Queralt with runners Caitlin Lippert, Caitlin Grainger, Caitlin Shaughnessy, CASA of Tarrant County Executive Director Nancy Fisher and runners Stephanie Spearman and Ayla Landry

committed to helping our CASA program give a voice to those who need it most—abused and neglected children." The TCU sorority is believed to be among the nation's top fundraisers for a local CASA program.

A Year with Frog and Toad
CASA of Mercer County, Ewing, NJ

The centerpiece of the latest benefit of CASA of Mercer County (NJ) was an afternoon spent with tried and true friends Frog and Toad as they navigated through an adventure-filled year with some colorful companions. Set to a jazzy score, this charming, Tony-nominated musical lovingly captures the spirit of Arnold Lobel's whimsical stories. The benefit included a child-friendly luncheon with food by Ultimate Catering, a silent auction and a performance by magician Anthony Salazar. As Executive Director Lori Morris explained, "We always wanted to have a child-friendly event since our mission is to help children. Everything from the food that was served (appetizers of peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a dessert party with root beer floats and warm chocolate chip cookies) to the activities (a magician and fun photos with frogs during the pre-performance party) was kid-focused. Everyone left the event feeling wonderful—they had an old-fashioned good time with the added bonus of knowing that they have helped other children who are less fortunate."

Right to left: CASA supporter Ivy Weitzman, her son Will Benethem de Grave, CASA program Executive Director Lori Morris and her daughter, Alanna McGill

Off the Newswire

Lake County Sunday-News carried an article about **Montarae Henton**, the 2007 Volunteer Advocate of the Year for CASA Lake County, IL. Formerly a teacher and site director for Lake County Head Start, Henton had worked as a master teacher for Waukegan Park District before suffering a brain aneurysm. After much therapy and the care of many people, she embarked on a new direction as a CASA volunteer. She says, "I've always been interested in our children and the court system. …I viewed this as an opportunity to give back by helping to create a generation of victors instead of victims."

Best of New Orleans.com carried an article about CASA New Orleans and their 2007 CASA Volunteer of the Year **Caroline Cody**. A former University of New Orleans professor, Cody explained why she volunteers: "I think of it as being an extra grandparent. Some of these children have no family. …They need somebody who is dependably loving and dependably caring, somebody who talks to them and asks them what they need and what they want, how life's going." The article also described the need for volunteers and the continued suffering in New Orleans after the hurricane.

Kathy Clay-Little, publisher of *African-American Reflections* and a columnist for the ***San Antonio Express-News,*** wrote "Saving the Small," an article about the importance of CASA volunteers in saving America's neglected children. She noted that while every garment sold in the US is legally required to have a care tag on it, babies have

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[Field Notes continued from page 21]

none. As a result, many children are abused by unprepared parents and caretakers. In the article, she urged readers to get involved: "[I]t is incumbent upon us to protect the children who are here. Volunteer with CASA, help a struggling, young mom become a good mother and don't hesitate to call authorities when you see a child being abused."

As noted in ***The State*** of South Carolina, men are usually an anomaly in local volunteer-driven organizations. However Richland County CASA is different. After vigorous and imaginative campaigning, more than 80 of the 300 volunteers are now men. One of them is **Nate Barber,** a community reinvestment and development officer for S.C. Bank and Trust. Now on his third case, he has made personal donations as well as allocated some of the bank's charitable gifts to the program. A father of two, Barber says the most important quality a volunteer needs is a love of children: "A lot of these kids have been in bad situations. They know right off if your heart is in the right place."

Eighty-seven-year-old **Wilford Deeds "W.D." Lewis** has consistently provided gifts to CASA children in need since he came in touch with

CASA of Trinity Valley, TX six years ago. He chose this route to support the program rather than volunteering as an advocate. Lewis told ***The Chandler and Brownsboro Statesman*** that his faith has had a profound impact on his desire to help others, explaining "These CASA kids really need help. They were born into a family that didn't want them."

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Study Shows Growing Name Recognition for Volunteer Advocacy

In September 2007, National CASA commissioned a phone survey by TRD Frameworks to determine the state of awareness of CASA and GAL programs nationwide. Two types of awareness were studied among 500 adults who have supported at least one private nonprofit program in the past two years. The survey tested both "unaided" awareness, by asking respondents to name all the nonprofit agencies benefiting foster children that came to mind, and "aided" awareness, by asking people whether they were aware of specific agencies read from a list.

Between 1998 and 2007, unaided awareness of CASA programs increased from 2% to 6%. While this is a threefold increase, the percentage remains low. However this is not surprising given that 48% of consumers could not come up with a single name of an agency serving foster children. When asked, nearly half (46%) reported having heard of court appointed special advocates or CASA, up from 27% in 1998. Aided awareness of guardian ad litem or GAL programs grew over the same period from 6% to 15%.

The survey also tested messages to potential donors. When told that their gift could help abused and neglected children find safe and permanent homes, 47% of respondents said they would be likely to support volunteer advocacy.

"Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, his mind is being developed. To him we cannot say tomorrow, his name is today."

—Gabriela Mistral, Chilean Poet, Educator, Nobel Laureate

[Resources for Foster Youth continued from page 17]

members. Downloadable publications in this series include a kinship caregivers' guide to food and nutrition programs for children and raising children with disabilities. Go to childrensdefensefund.org and click on "Publications," then "Caregiver Guides."

The Children's Defense Fund site also offers state fact sheets that include contact information about accessing public benefits including Medicaid or low-cost health insurance for grandparents and other relatives raising children. Go to childrensdefense.org and search for "state fact sheets grandparents."

Finding Doctors Who Accept Medicaid

CMS Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Medicaid is a state-administered program, and each state sets its own guidelines regarding eligibility and services. It can be a challenge to find doctors who accept Medicaid. For more information, such as a list of providers, call your local Medicaid office, or visit cms.hhs.gov/ContactCMS/ to find your state health department or regional Medicaid contact. Online forums such as those available at adoption.com can also be helpful in seeking a doctor.

CASA Diamond Heart Pendant

Available through July

For a limited time, the CASA Diamond Heart Pendant continues to be available online and in Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers stores nationwide.

This beautiful pendant features diamond accents set in 10k white gold and sells for $119. From the sale of each pendant, $10 will be donated to National CASA to support our nationwide efforts on behalf of abused and neglected children.

Visit nationalcasa.org and click on "Shop" throughout the year to find products that benefit our work.

Fred Meyer JEWELERS LITTMAN JEWELERS

As a CASA volunteer, you understand more than anyone what it means for children to have advocates in their lives.

Please consider a gift in your will and help ensure that future generations of children benefit from your legacy. To find out how you can give for the future, contact us today.

National CASA Association
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Seattle, WA 98119 | 800-628-3233, ext. 267
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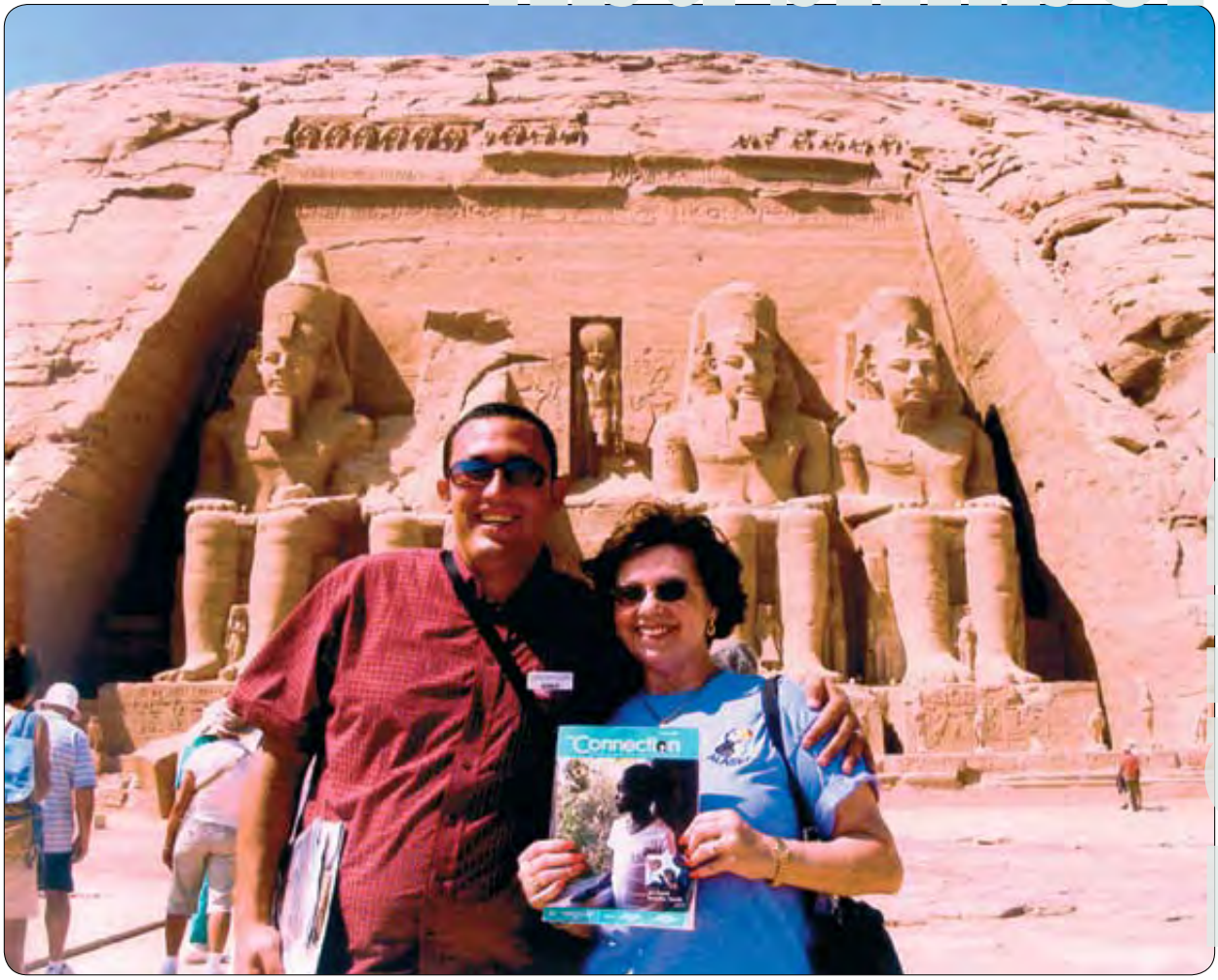
Abu Simbel EGYPT



With her tour guide, Carroll County CASA (GA) advocate supervisor and former volunteer Muriel Rafferty holds *The Connection* in front of the Ramesses II Temple, finished in 1265 BC. She says her visit to Abu Simbel, Egypt was "absolutely fantastic, historically informative and awe-inspiring."

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

Send photos (min. 4" x 6") 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 4" x 6" size) to theconnection@nationalcasa.org. Include your name, address, phone number, email address and photo location.

What Would *You* Do?

Judge Glenda A. Hatchett
National CASA Spokesperson

Imagine for a moment that you come home one day and all of your possessions are piled on the front porch of your house in garbage bags. When you turn to your family—the people you counted on yesterday for shelter and support—they tell you that they won't be there for you anymore. Then one of them hands you a check for a small amount of money and says, "Go, make your way in the world."

Even as an adult with rich life experiences to draw on, *what would you do*?

Now think of an 18-year-old being put in that position because he is exiting the foster care system. Unlike you or me, he hasn't been given the best of what our society has to offer. His education has been interrupted by frequent moves, and his résumé comprises a short list of low-wage jobs. He has no credit history, no car and—as of today—no home. All the family that this young person has ever known have been affiliated with the foster care system, and now they are gone.

Each year, nearly 25,000 children age out of the foster care system when they turn 18 (21 in some states). The legal term for this occurrence is *emancipation*. But to me, the word that really describes the situation of these youth is *uncertainty*. They have been so preoccupied with—and sometimes overwhelmed by—their day-to-day survival that they have not had an opportunity to plan for their future. These youth are facing one of the most difficult and defining moments in their lives without a clear understanding of their options.

Sadly, national statistics show us that a few options are exercised regularly: Nearly 60% of foster youth drop out or fail out of high school; 25% face jail terms within two years of their emancipation from foster care; 20% experience homelessness; and less than 3% earn college degrees by the age of 25.

That's why it is so important to have CASA and GAL volunteers involved in our young peoples' lives leading up to this critical juncture. These and other caring adults can prevent teenagers from becoming another statistic. CASA volunteers can work with youth to help them chart a course and create a plan. Volunteers can ask teens the critical questions that need to be asked and offer them the advice that most of us took for granted growing up: "If you want to go to college, these are the tests that you need to take"; "If you want to go to vocational school, these are the organizations you need to contact"; and so on. CASA volunteers can—and do—help youth look at aging out as a next step toward a wonderful new chapter in their lives rather than a dead end.

When I think of a foster youth succeeding against all odds, I think of Conception Cuevas. I met Conception when she appeared on my show to share her story of succeeding despite tremendous challenges. Growing up, she was separated from her siblings, lived in 11 foster homes and attended 8 high schools. Her CASA volunteer, Erica, ensured that Conception remained in contact with her siblings and stayed on track to pursue her dream of obtaining a degree in criminal justice. Erica rolled up her sleeves and worked hard to get Conception into school and helped her obtain the scholarships she needed to complete her education.

Judge Hatchett with former foster youth Conception Cuevas at the 2004 Light of Hope event in Washington, DC

Conception persevered, and she succeeded. And if you ask her, she will tell you that she beat the foster-care odds because a CASA volunteer who believed in her would not let her become another statistic. Like Conception, I am grateful for the efforts of Erica and of every CASA volunteer who is helping to guide a young person along the path to greatness.

The Honorable Glenda A. Hatchett is a nationally recognized authority on juvenile issues perhaps best known for her award-winning television series Judge Hatchett *and her book* Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say!

GOING PLACES

CASA Business Brief

With its slender, multi-pocketed design, this brief lets you carry your files, electronics and accessories. It's perfect for professionals on the go. Featuring the CASA logo stitched in silver, each brief has a zippered main compartment and a zippered front pocket with organizer for pens and business cards. Other features include a quick-access mesh water bottle pocket, an open back pocket with velcro closure and a detachable, adjustable shoulder strap as well as haul handles. Measures 12.5" x 3.5" x 16.5".

Item #	Description	Price
7030	Business Brief	$25.00

CASA Postage Stamps

Get noticed with every letter—use a CASA custom postage stamp! Featuring the art of Max Grover, each stamp colorfully depicts kids being kids—playing sports and having fun. Designed to inspire smiles and donations, these stamps are available by the sheet at 20 stamps per sheet.

Item #	Description	Price
7031C	USPS Postage Stamps	$19.95 per sheet

CASA Travel Wallet

Gain peace of mind when you travel by keeping all of your essentials in one easy-to-carry wallet. Beautifully debossed with the CASA logo, this wallet is designed to hold your passport, driver's license, cash and credit cards, business cards and travel itineraries—and includes a handy pen loop. Each gift-boxed wallet measures 6" x 1.2" x 5". Don't leave home without it!

Item #	Description	Price
7029	Travel Wallet	$25.00 each

Shop CASA

To order or see more items, visit ShopCASA.org

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