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# *the* CONNECTION

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

Stand Up

for an

Abused

Child®



## **Immigrant Children and Families in the Foster Care System**

*Also in This Issue:*

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status

Art and Children in Foster Care

2006 National Conference Recap



**CASA**  
FOR CHILDREN

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

# Volunteer VOICE

by Michael Hackett

2006 G.F. Bettineski Child Advocate of the Year  
CASA Jefferson, Harvey, LA

I was introduced to the CASA program in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, when my wife, Jan, was getting ready to retire. She started investigating different programs and settled on CASA. As classes were about to begin, we realized they were being held in an area where Jan didn't drive at the time. I started some investigations of my own and went to all the classes. A little over three years ago, I was sworn in with Jan.

Working with Court Appointed Special Advocates fulfills many of my ordination vows as a deacon in the Episcopal Church. Deacons were charged in the early Church with caring for widows, orphans and the poor. When I think of CASA, I think "What a natural match!" I am still surprised that more deacons of every faith are not working with CASA.

So far I have advocated for seven children, ranging from six months to kids aging out of the system. Some of the issues we have dealt with have been parental substance abuse as well as sexually abused children who are now perpetrators. Many of my CASA children have to deal with family members who are incarcerated.

The CASA community in Jefferson Parish—pre-Hurricane Katrina—was a growing, vibrant, healthy organization with a staff of 12 and 105 active advocates. CASA Jefferson is supported by three very caring juvenile court judges. Everything was going just fine, with classes for new advocates being held about once per quarter.

The evacuation that preceded Katrina was unprecedented. The storm came, and it went. We all prepared to go home after three days. But then there were breaks in the levee system, and the pumps were shut down for 24 hours. My house, which had never flooded in 35 years, had four inches of water. The water is

not so bad in itself, but then it becomes polluted and stands for three weeks.

We watched the rescues on TV day after day, along with the rest of America, as well as the growing crowds at the Superdome and the Convention Center. With the complete evacuation, our CASA kids, staff and advocates were scattered in all directions. The children in institutions were believed to be secure. Our kids in foster homes got a lot of prayers as we did not know where they were.

Through cell phone text messaging, the only technology that was working, we learned that our CASA program staff were spread throughout Louisiana and Mississippi. A nucleus of staff and volunteers scheduled a meeting in Baton Rouge at the Louisiana CASA office. At our first meeting, we identified tasks: locate as many advocates as possible, research shelter locations and put in place public service announcements of our 800 number for reporting the location of CASA kids and their foster parents.

We risked arrest for violating curfew to gather important records from our damaged offices. We called advocates and visited kids in shelters and institutions. At that point, we had about 500 children we were looking for. Over time: success! We found advocates, and we found our kids.

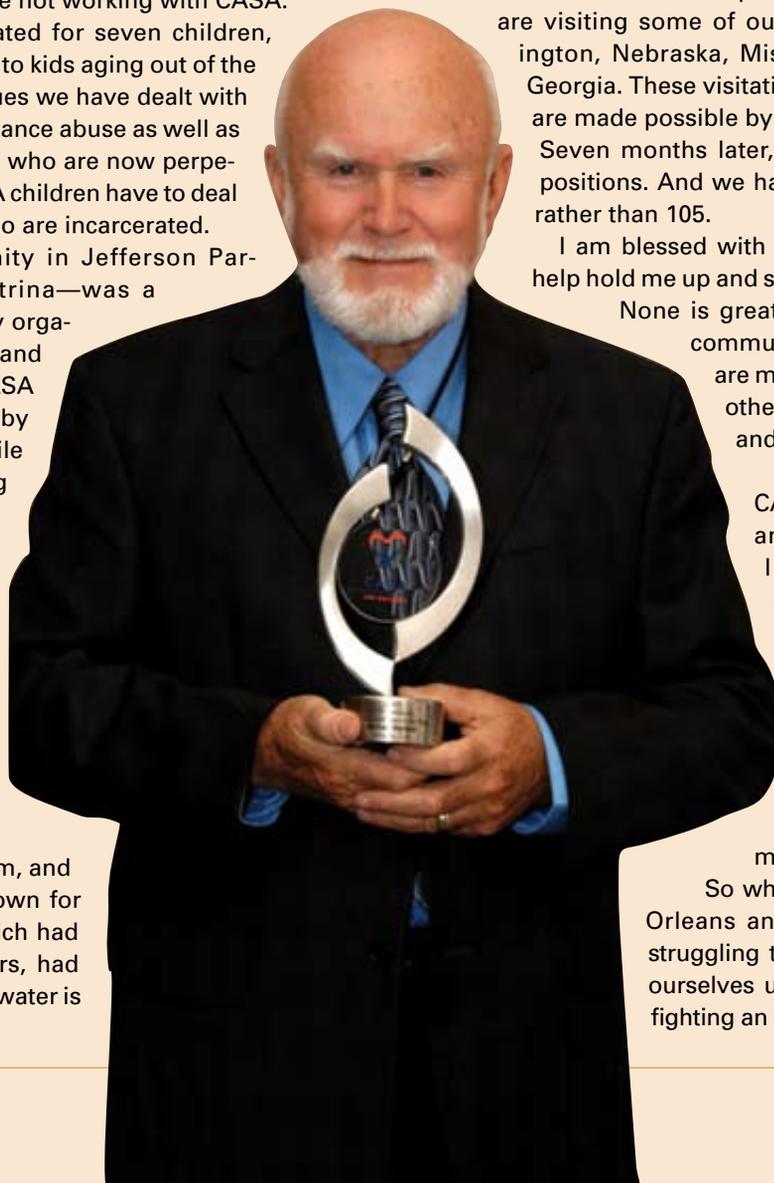
Now we come to the present. Seven months later we are visiting some of our kids in Mississippi, Washington, Nebraska, Missouri, Texas, Alabama and Georgia. These visitations of our displaced children are made possible by a grant from National CASA. Seven months later, we are three short on staff positions. And we have a little over 30 advocates rather than 105.

I am blessed with numerous communities that help hold me up and support me in all of my efforts.

None is greater than my family. It is this community that most of our children are missing. I benefit from so many others, such as my CASA family and my church family.

Now think of the children CASA volunteers advocate for and what is missing in their lives. Without the primary community of family, it is very difficult to connect with other positive communities. We cannot replace the family unit for the children we represent; it would be a mistake for us to try. But we can fulfill some of the missing functions.

So where are we in Louisiana, New Orleans and Jefferson Parish? We are struggling to come back. We are pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We are fighting an uphill battle, but we will win.



## A Message from THE PRESIDENT



### You Beat Me to it!

*Mimi Feller, President*

When I was in my late 20s (if I said that was just a few years ago, I'd be lying), my life revolved around working for US Senator John Chafee and getting a law degree at night. There wasn't any one particular goal for my legal studies. I thought the degree would prove useful in legislative and, eventually, corporate work.

But one idea especially appealed to me. I hoped that someday I could start a children's legal assistance clinic, through which abused and displaced youth could have a say in their futures. A place where someone could help to tell a judge what the child wants and needs and then try to make it happen. Great idea, right?

Except, you beat me to it!

Imagine my surprise when sometime around 1990 a grant request came into the Gannett Foundation (my department at the time) from Los Angeles CASA. I still remember the photograph that came with the request. Taken from behind, the picture showed a CASA volunteer with her arm around a very young child, both of them facing the judge. How tiny and afraid that little boy would have felt without this friend by his side.

I was hooked. What was CASA? How long had it been in existence? Were there programs in other cities and rural areas? How could I get involved?

So I started nosing around on behalf of our foundation. It didn't take long for Michael Piraino and Marty Braniff (National CASA board chair 1998-2001) to sense my interest. After serving in a corporate advisory role, I was honored to be invited to join the National CASA board.

That is how I got here.

Sometimes the horror stories of child abuse in the US and overseas can be overwhelming. As we search for a solution, the mantra "one child at a time" can sometimes bring clarity to our pursuit. This is what you do as CASA volunteers—look into each child's heart with a depth and consistency often never experienced by that child.

I have attended several CASA national conferences and have met volunteers and directors from around the country. At times, National CASA board meetings have also

provided opportunities to see CASA volunteers in various meeting locations. But I fall far short in getting to talk with more of you about your lives, advocacy, frustrations and goals for serving children. Hopefully, my record will improve!

I believe that National CASA can and must be a partner with our volunteers. Because we can't go every direction at once, Michael Piraino and the National CASA board went through a rigorous strategic planning session this past fall, and it proved to be an amazing exercise. Not surprisingly, we decided that our overall objective is that in the US every child involved in a court action as a result of abuse or neglect has an effective Court Appointed Special Advocate. Building from that, our goals are: growth in the number of children served and needs met; diversity in volunteers and program organization; quality of programs; and capacity (more dollars from more sources).

So we have our objective and specific goals. Zeroing in on specific strategies to accomplish these goals is where the hard work ensued. We decided to concentrate for the next year on African-American recruiting; targeted marketing efforts to attract volunteers in certain cities (including tools for local programs); improved, expanded fundraising (surprise!); a new system for volunteers to communicate with each other; and, finally, a hard look at National CASA operations and its board to look for needed changes.

National CASA must constantly think about how our approach affects local and state programs. Then we can truly offer something valuable. I'm very proud of recent recruiting and fundraising efforts such as the *CBS Cares* Danny Pino CASA PSA, the Jewelers for Children-sponsored donor video and the Hispanic volunteer recruitment video. But all of this effort only pays off if the resulting inquiries flood into local programs and then programs are able to *convert* the inquiries into volunteers or funding prospects. And if they have the capacity to *train* these new volunteers...and then *retain* them.

In other words, National CASA's continuing partnership with our member programs is absolutely critical to making sure that our activities make a difference for America's abused children.

# inside the CONNECTION



A publication of the National CASA Association, representing 948 program offices and 53,847 CASA volunteers nationwide.

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

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

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

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



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**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**  
**National CASA's  
 30th Anniversary Conference**  
 will be held  
**June 9-12, 2007**  
 at the  
**Caribe Royale Resort  
 in Orlando, FL.**

# Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Is Key to Advocating for Immigrant Youth

Guest Editorial

By Michael Biggs

Director of Policy, US Citizenship and Immigration Services

To be alone.

To be alone and lost.

To be alone and lost in a foreign country.

To be alone, abandoned or abused, lost and in a foreign country.

And to be a child. This is the terrifying scenario that happens all too often.

Many of you have had the experience of encountering an immigrant child in a shelter or a foster care situation and most likely felt at a loss about how to meet the needs of that child. I can think of nothing more disheartening than to encounter such a child, not knowing what you can do and learning, too late, that there was a way to help. I want to share one important immigration concept that you might not be aware of: **special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS)**.

In some cases, federal immigration law provides support for a foreign child who is alone and abandoned. Special immigrant juvenile status provides legal status in the US to children who are under the jurisdiction of a juvenile court and will not be reunified with their parents due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. Applications for SIJS are adjudicated by US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This status provides immediate employment authorization, the ability to remain in the US and eventual lawful permanent resident status (a “green card”).

The requirements for special immigrant juvenile status are set out in federal statute and regulations. In order to be eligible, a state juvenile court must find the following:

- 1) The child is a dependent of the court or legally committed to a state department or agency.
- 2) The child is eligible for long-term foster care because of abuse, neglect or abandonment.
- 3) Parental reunification is not a viable option.

The court, or an administrative agency, must also determine that it is not in the child’s best interest to return to the country of origin. Finally, the child must not come within certain “grounds of inadmissibility.”

Regulations define “eligible for long-term foster care” to mean that family reunification is no longer a viable option and that the child “will normally be expected to remain in foster care until reaching the age of majority, unless the child is adopted or placed in a guardianship situation.” A finding that it is not in the child’s best interest to be returned to the home country may be determined in several ways, such as a home study conducted by a foreign social service agency, an interview with the child revealing that there are no known appropriate family in the home country or an analysis of the child welfare system in the home country.

To apply for SIJS, the child, or any “responsible adult,” must file Form I-360 (Petition for Amerasian, Widow[er], or Special Immigrant) and Form I-485 (Application to Adjust Status) with USCIS.

So the next time you encounter an immigrant child in need of help, ask yourself: Is the child illegally present in the US? Is the child eligible for long-term foster care due to abuse, neglect or abandonment? If the answer to these questions is “yes,” please look further into the possibility that the child can qualify as a special immigrant juvenile. You could create a window into a positive future for an abused or abandoned immigrant child in America.

*Michael Biggs is the director of policy for the US Citizenship and Immigration Services. He provides direction and leadership in initiating, developing and implementing policies designed to improve immigration programs in the US. Biggs has served as a US delegate to both the International Organization for Migration and the Hague Special Commission on Adoption. He previously managed the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s international adoption and special immigrant juvenile programs.*

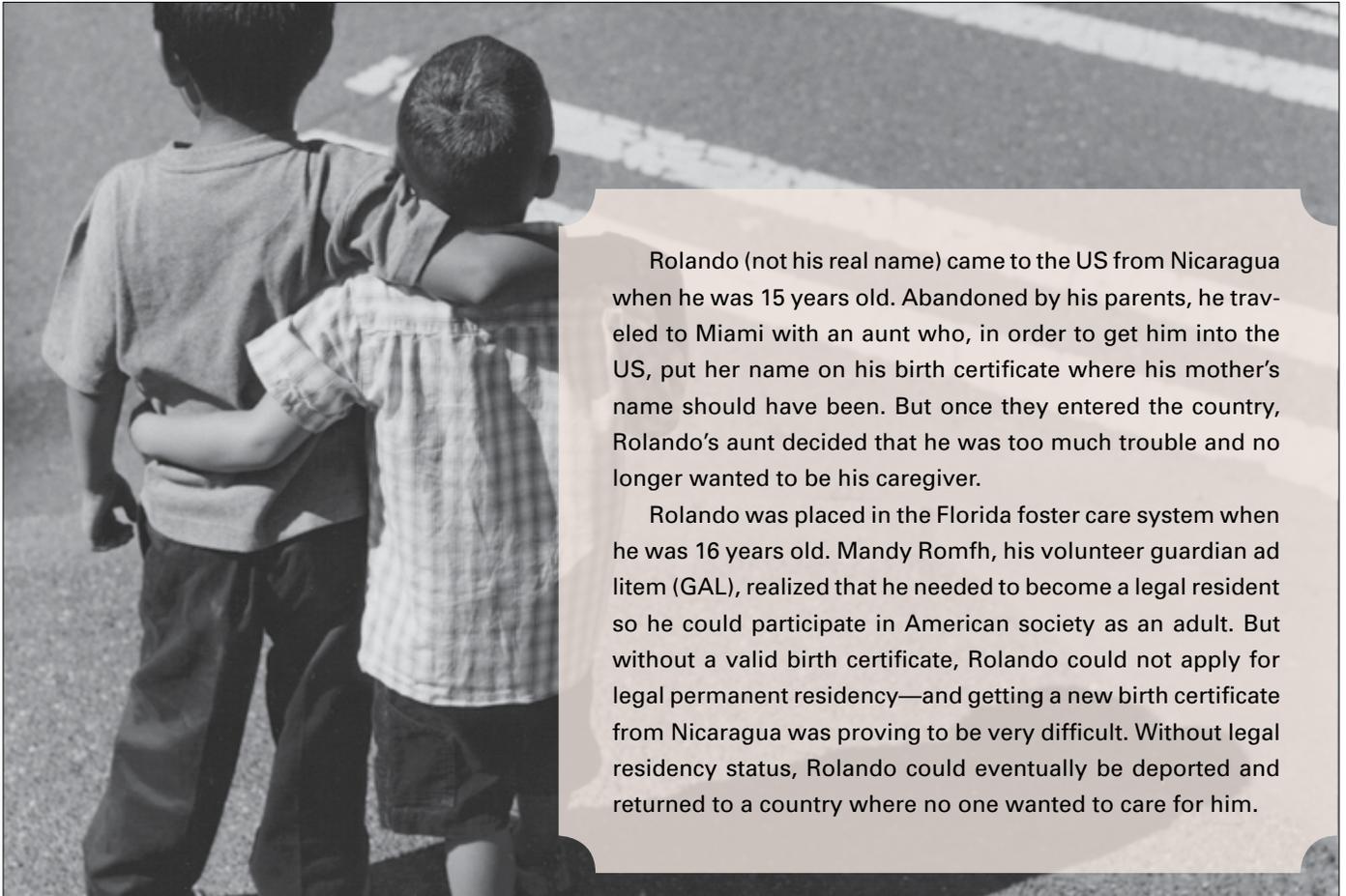
## Special Immigrant Juvenile Status: Questions for the Bench

- Is the child or unmarried youth under 21 not lawfully present in the US? If so, SIJS may be the route to legal status.
- Is the minor in federal custody for reasons of his/her immigration status? If so, the state court may not have jurisdiction. Has the Department of Homeland Security consented to the state court jurisdiction?
- Is it in the minor’s best interests to return to the country of origin? SIJS requires that it *not* be. Does the child have relatives there to care for him/her? Are those relatives able to care for the child? Is there an adequate child welfare system in the home country?
- Is the child or youth inadmissible to the US pursuant to 8 USC 1182(a)? If so, is there a waiver to the ground of inadmissibility available for the child?

Once minors have SIJS, they can apply for lawful permanent residency. Permanent residency can be denied if the minor has a record of drug involvement or certain felony crimes, tests HIV-positive, has committed immigration visa fraud or was previously deported. In these cases, the minor will need an immigration attorney.

# Immigrant Children and Families in the Foster Care System

By Lisette Austin



Rolando (not his real name) came to the US from Nicaragua when he was 15 years old. Abandoned by his parents, he traveled to Miami with an aunt who, in order to get him into the US, put her name on his birth certificate where his mother's name should have been. But once they entered the country, Rolando's aunt decided that he was too much trouble and no longer wanted to be his caregiver.

Rolando was placed in the Florida foster care system when he was 16 years old. Mandy Romfh, his volunteer guardian ad litem (GAL), realized that he needed to become a legal resident so he could participate in American society as an adult. But without a valid birth certificate, Rolando could not apply for legal permanent residency—and getting a new birth certificate from Nicaragua was proving to be very difficult. Without legal residency status, Rolando could eventually be deported and returned to a country where no one wanted to care for him.

The number of immigrant children and youth has grown dramatically across the US. According to the Urban Institute, the US foreign-born population was 35.7 million in 2004, or nearly 12% of the total US population, with the largest numbers coming from Latin America and Southeast Asia. According to the Census Bureau, children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the US child population—roughly one of every five children in the US is an immigrant or a child of immigrant parents.

As the number of immigrants in the US continues to increase, so does the number of immigrant children entering foster care. The challenges that immigrant children and youth already face are often compounded once they enter the child welfare system. As illustrated in Rolando's case, they frequently have complicated needs that can be difficult to address. Unfortunately, with limited information and resources, child welfare workers are often poorly equipped to address immigration-related needs. Cultural

differences and language barriers only further complicate the issue.

Similarly, CASA programs across the country are struggling to understand and meet the needs of the immigrant children that enter their caseloads. With very little literature or research available about this topic, it is often hard to know where to begin. However, an increasing awareness about the issues that immigrant children face, coupled with the growing experience of many CASA programs, is leading to more information for CASA volunteers. The goal

of this article is to provide an overview of these issues along with tips and resources for the most effective advocacy.

### Challenges for Immigrant Families and Children

Immigrant families and children face numerous challenges once they arrive in the US. There are language barriers and cultural differences to navigate. Many face psychosocial and mental health problems due to traumatic migration experiences and adjusting to a new environment. Some immigrants also have special health problems and educational needs. All of these issues can make it difficult for immigrants to find work and create stable living arrangements.

One of the greatest barriers that immigrants frequently have to navigate is their

own immigration status. In 1996, Congress enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, which, among other things, created the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. It also established that only “qualified” immigrants could get help from federal programs. Generally speaking, this means that immigrants must be legally authorized for permanent residence, or have been granted refugee or asylee status, in order to qualify for benefits. This however does not include many individuals who are legally in the US but whose status is in transition, such as students, visitors and temporary workers. And when someone does obtain legal permanent status, they now have to wait five years before they can access federally funded benefits.

This policy means that “unqualified” immigrants are effectively cut off from benefits that could help them meet basic needs. According to the US Census, roughly 60% of immigrants in the US are either legal permanent residents or naturalized citizens, 7% are refugees and asylees, and nearly 29% are undocumented immigrants. This translates to over 10 million immigrants being unable under any circumstances to access federal benefits such as TANF, Medicaid and the Child Health Insurance program.

There are some limited exceptions where TANF provides benefits regardless of status (e.g., emergency disaster relief or treatment for emergency medical conditions), but for the most part, individual states are left to decide what they will provide for undocumented immigrants.

*(continued on page 8)*

## Immigration Status Definitions

Following is a list of common immigration status definitions that child welfare workers may encounter with children and youth in care. Also included are descriptions of how each status impacts services.

**Legal Permanent Resident:** These are immigrants who have been granted permission to live and work in the US permanently; they possess a “green card” and have a social security number. They are still citizens of their country of origin but can exercise most of the rights of American citizenship. They can be deported or denied permission to re-enter the country if they are convicted of certain felony crimes or in other special circumstances. They may be considered “qualified aliens” and be eligible for federally funded government benefits after they have had a green card for five years. This status has no implications for permanency planning.

**Refugee/Asylee:** Individuals who must flee their country to avoid persecution may be granted refugee or asylee status. The difference is that refugee status is conferred upon individuals while they are still outside of the US; asylees are granted status after arrival. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a division of the US Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for resettlement of refugees, including unaccompanied refu-

gee minors who receive foster care and other services and benefits. Because of their status and the special circumstances surrounding their entrance to the US, these individuals are entitled to certain services not otherwise available to other immigrants in foster care. The Office of Refugee Resettlement should be notified when individuals with this type of status are identified.

**Trafficked Person:** US law recognizes an individual as having been a victim of “trafficking” if they can prove that they were brought across international borders for the purpose of forced labor or prostitution. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 grants these individuals the possibility of obtaining legal permanent status if they met these criteria and agree to cooperate in criminal investigations of their traffickers. Presently there are only ad hoc procedures in place to address the needs of minor children who are identified as victims of trafficking, including placing them in state foster care rather than federal immigration detention facilities. The Office of Refugee Resettlement has been designated as the lead organization to address this situation and should be contacted if you suspect you are dealing with someone who meets the criteria of a trafficked person.

**Undocumented Alien:** These are individuals who either entered the US unlawfully or overstayed a visa. Undocumented minors often may not know their status because their parents or relatives never told them. Undocu-

mented immigrants are eligible for limited services and benefits, such as emergency Medicaid and some state-funded programs. Undocumented immigrants, especially children, may be eligible to apply for lawful immigration status and should be referred to appropriate immigration legal services as soon as possible. Undocumented immigration status has significant implications for permanency planning because of the limits it places on an individual’s ability to live independently upon leaving out-of-home care.

**VAWA:** Under a collection of federal laws known generally as the “Violence Against Women Act” of 1994, battered immigrant spouses or their children can obtain legal immigrant status without the abuser’s knowledge or permission. In order to be eligible, the batterer must either be a legal permanent resident or a US citizen. If you think a child or parent might qualify, make a referral for domestic violence-related legal services immediately. Each state has an Office on Violence Against Women, and further information can be accessed from the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE.

*Excerpted with permission of the author from “Immigrant Children and Youth in the Child Welfare System,” by Ilze Earner, PhD, a chapter in Child Welfare in the 21st Century: A Handbook of Practices, Policies and Programs.*

Although some states do provide benefits to “unqualified” immigrants, such as prenatal care or other medical assistance, benefit eligibility varies by state and sometimes even county—making it difficult for immigrants to understand and access services.

Dr. Ilze Earner, assistant professor at the Hunter College School of Social Work in New York and director of the Immigrants and Child Welfare Project, feels that these restrictions are a serious problem often overlooked by immigration policy makers. Earner has spent much of her academic career researching and exploring the issues that immigrant children and youth face in the child welfare system in particular.

“While a great deal of attention is often given to laws and systems governing

the entrance of new immigrants into the US, there is little coordination between federal and state policies for addressing the human service needs of these newcomers,” Earner writes in a recent book chapter on immigration status and special needs in permanency planning. “The result is an ad hoc, patchwork approach to federal, state and local services that can leave new immigrants, especially children and youth, falling between the cracks,” she explains.

Indeed, children of immigrant families are particularly vulnerable to having unmet needs. Undocumented parents and caregivers cannot legally work or access federal services. As a result, many immigrant children live in poverty. “According to some studies, immigrant families and their children are

disproportionately poor and lack adequate health care, food and shelter,” says Earner. Statistics from the Urban Institute show that nearly 22% of children of immigrants do not have health care and that 25% live in poverty, as compared to 14% of children in US-born families. And although many immigrant families have US-born children who are entitled to benefits as US citizens, they frequently do not take advantage of these programs. This is usually due to fear of bringing attention to undocumented family members or lack of knowledge about eligibility criteria.

### **Immigrant Children and Youth in the Foster Care System**

Although solid data is scarce, Earner says there is evidence that an increasing number of children of immigrant families are entering the foster care system. Under federal law, any abused or neglected child is eligible for short-term emergency medical care, shelter or other services necessary to address an emergency—regardless of immigration status. This includes placement in foster care.

The reasons these children end up in foster care are similar to children of US-born families: neglect, abandonment, violence, substance abuse and other issues. “However, in the case of immigrant children and youth, family and environmental stressors may be exacerbated by a number of experiences unique to this population,” says Earner. The trauma of migration and adjusting to a new culture can add to family stress. Undocumented immigrants have the added element of fearing discovery and cannot access services that could help them positively cope with stress, such as mental health counseling.

When immigrant parents lack resources to properly care for themselves or their children, there is an increased risk that their children will be placed in foster care. Sometimes cultural misunderstandings lead to immigrant children being removed from their families. A small

## **Web Resources for Foster Youth Immigration Issues**

### **National Organizations**

#### **American Immigration Lawyers Association ([aila.org](http://aila.org))**

National association of over 8,000 attorneys and law professors who practice and teach immigrant law. Look on the AILA home page for a project they co-sponsor along with the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants: the National Center for Refugee and Immigrant Children project aims to provide pro bono services to unaccompanied children released from detention in the United States.

#### **Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services ([brycs.org](http://brycs.org))**

Advocacy group’s website has extensive resources, including archives of numerous articles related to foster care.

#### **National Immigration Law Center ([nilc.org](http://nilc.org))**

NILC’s mission is to protect and promote the rights and opportunities of low-income immigrants and their family members. Their website contains links to sites maintained by government agencies, other advocacy organizations and research institutes that may interest immigrant rights advocates and social service agency staff.

#### **National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning ([hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp](http://hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp))**

Website contains information devoted to immigration and child welfare.

#### **Office of Refugee Resettlement ([acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr](http://acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr))**

The mission of the Office of Refugee Resettlement is to help refugees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, asylees and other beneficiaries to establish a new life founded on economic self-support and building upon refugees’ aspirations.

#### **US Citizenship and Immigration Services ([uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov))**

The USCIS bureau supports the Department of Homeland Security in improving the administration of benefits and immigration services for applicants by focusing on immigration and citizenship services.

### **Resources in Specific States**

#### **Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (WA) ([nwirp.org](http://nwirp.org))**

#### **The Door (NY) ([door.org](http://door.org))**

#### **Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FL) ([fiacfla.org](http://fiacfla.org))**



awareness about the needs of immigrant families and youth in the child welfare system and to develop training programs and policy initiatives to promote their well-being. In 2002, the project conducted a needs assessment of immigrant families in the child welfare system in East Harlem and found that most of them reported a lack of access to interpreters, cultural insensitivity and an inability to access resources due to their immigration status.

“These factors combined to promote the separation of families and resulted in what appeared to be longer stays in foster care,” says Earner. Although the ICWP study was conducted in New York, she believes the findings suggest similar situations in other states.

### **Special Immigrant Juvenile Status**

A very serious issue for undocumented immigrant children in foster care is the lack of attention given to immigration status. While in foster care, undocumented children will usually receive all necessary services, but once they age out of the system they lose all benefits. As undocumented adults, they cannot live permanently in the States, travel freely, get financial aid for college or be legally employed—even if they have lived in the US for most of their lives.

Because many child welfare service providers are unfamiliar with immigration laws, they may fail to recognize the importance of this issue. Judge Linda Chew of El Paso, Texas, a former immigration attorney, has seen many of these cases over the years. “Immigration status is something that people often wouldn’t ask about,” she remembers. “So many kids go through the system without anyone realizing they don’t have legal resident status. Then what happens is when these kids age out of foster care, they have no legal status at all and can even be deported.” The threat of deportation can be traumatic for a young adult who may not be familiar with the language and culture of their native country—or even remember living there.

number of cases involve unaccompanied minors who entered the US without an adult caregiver. An even smaller number are identified as victims of prostitution or employment trafficking.

Regardless of how they get to foster care, once immigrant children and families are in the system they face a host of unique barriers. Some immigrant parents cannot meet service plan requirements because they are ineligible for necessary services like mental health or substance abuse treatment. In some cases, parents may even be ordered to become a citizen before having their child returned to them—the idea being that they can only provide a stable home if they are able to work legally.

Another major issue is kinship care. Although a child can legally be placed with undocumented relatives, negotiating the requirements for kinship care (for example, obtaining income verification documents) can often be insurmountable because of immigration status. Family members without legal residency status are sometimes afraid

to step forward for fear of being deported. In these cases, immigration status alone can lead to permanent separation from family—even if that family could provide a stable and loving environment.

To further compound the situation, non-English-speaking children are rarely placed with foster parents who speak their native language. The child’s stress and anxiety at being separated from their biological family may be further augmented by their inability to communicate with their foster parent. Language barriers can make it difficult to find the proper educational setting for the child. Other potential barriers include cultural insensitivity on the part of child welfare workers, lack of access to interpreters and lack of funding to cover immigration-related expenses such as specialized lawyers or obtaining documents across international boundaries.

The Immigrants and Child Welfare Project (ICWP), housed at the Hunter College School of Social Work, is a coalition of family service providers who seek to raise

*(continued on page 10)*

If a child welfare worker discovers that a child is undocumented, there are steps they can take to obtain legal status. If they can show it is in the best interest of the child to stay in the US, they can submit an application for special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS) to US Citizenship and Immigration Services. The SIJS law was created in 1990 as a way for immigrant children in long-term foster care to legally participate in American society. "SIJS allows the child to eventually receive permanent legal resident status," explains Judge Chew. "Then they can get all the benefits that go along with being a legal permanent resident." (See the editorial on page 5 for more information about special immigrant juvenile status.)

Children who age out of the foster care system at 18 have until the end of their 20th year to apply for SIJS; however, the process is costly, complicated and can take up to 36 months. "Even if the child has enough time, where are they going to get the money?" asks Judge Chew. Finding resources to help with the process can be difficult for service providers, let alone for the youth in question. This is why it is important to begin the process well before the child leaves foster care.

### **Challenges of Advocating for Immigrant Children in Foster Care**

Clearly the barriers that immigrant children and families face in foster care are numerous and complex. How can CASA volunteers best advocate for these children? Advocates and program directors may find it difficult to know where to start—especially if immigrant children are a recent addition to their caseloads. "Unfortunately, there is no handbook for how to find resources or for what to do," says Earner.

Stacie Arends, program director of the 15th Judicial Circuit CASA program in Marshall, Missouri, knows first hand about the challenges. After many years as a primarily Caucasian rural community, Marshall's demographics are changing with a recent influx of mostly Latino immigrants.

## **Tips for Advocates Working With Immigrant Families**

The Immigrant Child Welfare Project (ICWP) recommends the following for successful advocacy by child welfare service providers when working with immigrant families:

1. Ensure that immigration status is not used as a reason to deny families and children preventive services or kinship placement of children in foster care.
2. Permanency planning for undocumented youth in foster care placement must include legalization of immigration status.
3. Translators who speak the family's native language must be made available during child protection investigations, family court proceedings, and meetings between service providers and families.
4. Minor children must never be used as translators for their parents or guardians.
5. Family, youth and children's services providers must ensure that staff receives training on immigration and immigration status and how they affect families' ability to access services.
6. Family, youth and children's services providers must ensure that staff receives cultural sensitivity training in order to work effectively with immigrant populations.
7. Family and children's services providers must make greater efforts to recruit and hire bilingual and bicultural staff representative of immigrant populations served.
8. Additional community based outreach must be done to recruit foster families from diverse immigrant populations.
9. Family, youth and children's services providers must develop programs and services to meet the needs of immigrant families.
10. Greater outreach must be made to immigrant families to make them aware of what services are available to them.

*Reprinted with permission from the Winter 2002 issue of the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning Newsletter.*

## **Additional Tips for CASA Volunteers**

- When starting a case, talk with your supervisor about potential barriers—particularly those related to immigration status.
- If pursuing legal resident status, help children and youth stay out of trouble (through counseling, support, education, etc.). Getting into legal trouble can greatly jeopardize obtaining permanent residency.
- Find an immigration attorney who fully understands the issues involved. If a child cannot obtain special immigrant juvenile status, a qualified legal expert may be able to obtain legal status another way (see editorial on page 5 for more information on this status).
- Develop relationships with organizations that deal with immigration issues. Explore various resources.
- Talk to families about their pre-migration life, their experiences and their current family situation. Discover family strengths.
- Stress confidentiality. Inquiring about immigration can bring up fear and confusion in the child's family—undocumented family members could be exposed.
- Research available services for undocumented immigrants in your county and state. Encourage families to seek services if needed.
- Be patient—trying to solve immigration status issues can often take months or years.

Their program is now working with two immigrant children. “The language barrier has been a big issue—things sometimes get lost in the translation,” Arends explains. “When we are assessing parents who don’t speak English, we have to find a psychologist who knows their culture and can assess them in their language. It’s hard to get a good evaluation or even find an immigration attorney when you live in a rural community,” she says.

Aprile Goodman, program director of the 8th Judicial District CASA program in Ottumwa, Iowa, is also struggling to understand how to best serve the growing number of immigrant children in their program. “It’s more than just trying to understand another culture,” says Goodman. “Many of the families are undocumented, which adds another dimension to the whole case.” Goodman gives the example of one mother, living in a rural area without adequate public transportation, who could not legally drive due to her undocumented status. “If this were a non-immigrant case and mom was driving illegally, we would automatically tell her not to do it,” says Goodman. “But how do we handle this case?

There are many unique problems created by immigration status that are very hard to navigate.”

The sheer complexity of some immigrant cases can also be daunting. In 1997, Bob Wegrzen, a CASA volunteer in El Paso, took a unique case involving a 6-year-old boy who was born in Germany but who ended up living in homeless shelters across the US with his US-born, schizophrenic mother. The case quickly became very complex, with extended family in Germany who wanted to adopt him, a Jamaican father who could not easily be found, Native American parentage that meant he might be eligible for tribal custody and a mother who did not want to relinquish custody to any of these parties.

Figuring out the best placement for this child involved immigration and international family lawyers, embassies, German and American psychologists, international travel, treaty law and countless hours of detective work to locate people and documents in foreign countries. Meanwhile there were difficulties finding the proper educational setting for the young boy, who spoke a unique blend of Jamaican patois,

German and English. He also had been traumatized by his experience with his mother and needed counseling and other special services.

Ultimately the boy was adopted by a family in El Paso and is now a happy, well adjusted 15-year-old. This positive ending was due in large part to Wegrzen’s dedication to the case and willingness to expend a tremendous amount of time and energy to explore all possible placements. For many CASA volunteers, a case like this would be overwhelming; volunteers may not always have the necessary resources to navigate such a complex and expensive process.

### Where to Start

The good news is that there are a growing number of individuals and organizations dedicated to the immigration issue—as well as an increasing number of experienced CASA volunteers and programs, particularly in border states. Advocates located in rural communities, or areas newer to immigration issues, can begin to learn from these resources and experiences.

Mandy Romfh, the Miami volunteer mentioned at the beginning of this article

*(continued on page 12)*



and now a GAL supervisor, feels the most important advice she can give is to find out about immigration status and take immediate action if needed. “There is nothing more important for many of these kids than getting special immigrant juvenile status—and you don’t know how long it’s going to take,” she says. “Even if the case manager is being 100% cooperative, these things just take time.”

Earner agrees and adds that immigration status issues may not initially be obvious. “Even if the child thinks they know if they are legal or not—do they know the truth? If you aren’t sure where the child was born, you need to look into it. This is primary information—and has very serious implications for the child.”

It is also important to seek help from a knowledgeable immigration attorney. “There are a lot of agencies that do immigration work, but that doesn’t mean they know everything they need to benefit the child,” says Judge Chew. “It is preferable to find someone who is a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) and who can do pro bono work,” she advises. Since the child welfare system is rarely able to cover legal expenses, finding an attorney who will waive fees can be crucial. “AILA is a wealth of information and can help find someone to work with,” says Chew.

Whether or not immigration status is an issue, it is essential to learn as much as possible about the family’s history and culture. “One of the first things I want my advocates to do is sit down and talk with the family about their life in their native country,” says Goodman of Iowa. “This is incredibly important—as it gives a context to their current situation.” She also encourages advocates to find out about the family’s long-term plans. “Do they plan to remain in the US? Or do they plan to make money and return to their native country?” she asks. “Their plans can shift what our advocacy priorities are.”

## **Publications Related to Immigration and Foster Youth**

### ***Immigration Benchbook for Juvenile and Family Court Judges***

By Sally Kinoshita and Katherine Brady, Immigrant Legal Resource Center

Although state court judges do not have jurisdiction to make decisions on immigration issues, the decisions they make can affect a person’s immigration status and have implications for children adopted through inter-country adoptions. This January 2005 publication provides guidance to state court judges and other legal professionals on the intersection of federal immigration law with many of the cases a state court may decide.

Free download: [ilrc.org/resources/sijs/](http://ilrc.org/resources/sijs/) (from this web page, click on the link “2005 SIJS benchbook.pdf”)

### ***Serving Foreign-Born Foster Children: A Resource for Meeting the Special Needs of Refugee Youth and Children***

By staff from Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services

This guidebook emphasizes the need for refugee families to serve as foster parents. Such families may be challenging for public agencies to locate or develop as foster care resources, but they may provide an unequalled service to refugee foster children with special linguistic and cultural needs.

Free download: [brycs.org/documents/fostercare.pdf](http://brycs.org/documents/fostercare.pdf)

### ***Cultural Sensitivity with Immigrant Families and their Children***

By Inga Feldman, MSW, National Resource Center for Foster Care & Permanency Planning

This information packet provides fact sheets, best practices, model programs, websites, references and suggested readings.

Free download: [hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/cultural-sensitivity-with-immigrants2.pdf](http://hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/cultural-sensitivity-with-immigrants2.pdf)

### ***Child Welfare for the 21st Century: A Handbook of Practices, Policies, & Programs***

By Gerald P. Mallon and Peg McCartt Hess

This comprehensive resource by leaders in child welfare reflects the impact of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997. The October 2005 publication serves as a single-source reference for a wide array of professionals who work in children, youth and family services in the United States—policymakers, social workers, psychologists, educators, attorneys, guardians ad litem, CASA volunteers and family court judges—and as a text for students of child welfare practice and policy. The chapter “Immigrant Children and Youth in the Child Welfare System—Immigration Status and Special Needs in Permanency Planning” was written by Ilze Earner, PhD.

To purchase: \$95.00, Columbia University Press, [columbia.edu/cu/cup/catalog](http://columbia.edu/cu/cup/catalog)



Education is another key piece. Getting connected to resources and supportive organizations will help advocates build knowledge about these issues. Advocates should also research what local resources, if any, are available to undocumented immigrants and educate families about available services. They can also help child welfare workers understand barriers that may prevent families from meeting service plan requirements as well as how immigration status could seriously impact the child's future.

Rolando, the boy from Nicaragua, is one of the more fortunate cases. His immigration status case is pending, and it looks as if he will have enough time to resolve it. He has knowledgeable providers who are working to address the needs that stem from his immigration experience. But not every child is so lucky. It is easy for the needs of immigrant children to go unmet in a system that frequently does not recognize the difficulties of being in a new country or barriers within the system itself.

This is where CASA volunteers can help to shift the tide. By educating themselves about the issues that immigrant children face in this country and in the foster care system, advocates can become more effective for this population and edu-



cate others. "There are things you can do, and there are things that are beyond your scope," says Romfh. "But being educated about what needs to be done can help you to move things forward more quickly." And for a child caught between cultures and families, with their future hanging in the balance, that can make all the difference in the world.

*Lisette Austin is a freelance writer who regularly contributes to local and national publications on a wide range of topics. She also works part-time as a communications specialist for Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center. She lives in Seattle with her husband and 4-year-old son.*

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The Urban Institute (urban.org)

## GET CONNECTED!

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

### NationalCASA.org

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



### CASAnet.org

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

### NationalCASA.org/JudgesPage

A webpage dedicated to judges who hear child welfare cases.

### ShopCASA.org

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



# 2006 National CASA Awards of Excellence Presented in San Diego

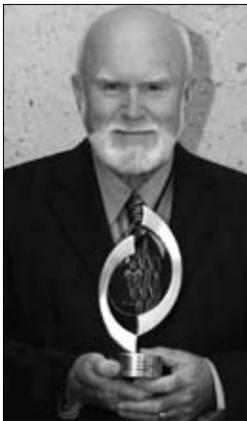
Extraordinary people in the CASA and volunteer GAL network help provide hope to abused and neglected children in communities across the country. The Awards of Excellence are presented each year at the National CASA annual conference to recognize the exceptional contributions and dedication of child advocates, program directors, judges, board members and CASA/GAL programs excelling in diversity efforts. Awards were presented during the conference banquet held on April 2nd in San Diego, California.

## Michael Hackett

**G.F. Bettineski Child Advocate of the Year  
CASA Jefferson, Harvey, LA**

*Please see "Volunteer Voice" on page 2 for an essay by Michael Hackett.*

Michael Hackett has been described as having an endless capacity to serve children. Volunteering for cases involving children the farthest away from their homes, he has provided 680 hours of advocacy, driven over 10,000 miles and accrued 113 hours of training.



Hackett's dedication is inspiring to other advocates and the judiciary. He serves as a volunteer advocate mediation mentor, attends mediation sessions and provides support to his fellow volunteers.

Hackett also serves as the chair of the program's Diligent Search Committee, which locates potential family resources and interested persons for children in the system. This committee has facilitated successful placements of children with their biological families.

Following Hurricane Katrina and despite a family death, flooded home and being a displaced victim himself, Hackett volunteered to serve the CASA Jefferson Search Committee. His wife, Jan, is also a CASA volunteer, and the two were named the program's 2004 Light of Hope Award recipients.

## Cyndy Bailes

**Kappa Alpha Theta Program Director  
of the Year  
CASA of the Tennessee Heartland**

Cyndy Bailes has served as executive director of CASA of the Tennessee Heartland since 1992. In response to community needs and under Bailes' direction, the agency has grown from a one-county agency serving 60 children in 1993 into a five-county agency serving 484 children in 2004. The CASA program's service area covers more than 2,000 square miles.



"Each one of us in the agency, each one of us in this room, has our own special, unique role," said Bailes as she accepted her award. "But together, we are those who make it happen for the kids who so need us. ... Together, we do make a difference."

Highlights of Bailes' tenure:

- Establishing successful annual fundraisers in four of the counties served
- Ensuring diversity among program staff and volunteer pool
- Working closely with the Department of Children's Services at the state level to improve services to foster children

After receiving a board development grant, Bailes set out to develop the agency board of directors into an even more power-

ful asset. Trainers worked with the board to elevate its fundraising and agency promotion skills. For the past two years, all board members have made personal financial gifts. Bailes has been the driving force behind seeing that the board's expansion goal was implemented. She also worked tirelessly with the expansion counties and judges to establish formal agreements with the courts.

## Amy Prenda

**National CASA Association Board  
Member of the Year  
Nebraska CASA Association**

Amy Prenda has served on the board of directors of Nebraska CASA Association since 2001, but her involvement with CASA goes back to 1999 when she helped establish the CASA for Lancaster County program. At that time, Prenda organized the planning committee, met



with county judges and wrote proposals to start the new program. She served as the director of CASA for Lancaster County for two years and agreed to join the board of the Nebraska CASA Association after her tenure. This prior experience shaping and directing a new program enables Prenda to assist local planning committees in developing and starting programs.

For the past two years, Prenda has served as the president of the Nebraska CASA Association's board. Under her leadership, the state organization continues to grow and respond to the needs of Nebraska's 18 CASA programs. She is a key player in creating plans for the development and support of new programs as well as plans for the long-term stability and viability of the state organization. Prenda has organized a strong and dedicated board of directors and is spearheading an effort to create long-range business plans.

Prenda has made significant contributions toward advancing CASA programs' name recognition and mission on a statewide level. She represents Nebraska CASA on the Nebraska Supreme Courts Commission on Children and the Courts and on the commission's subcommittee to create guidelines for training guardians ad litem. She was also instrumental in the effort to secure the legislative support necessary to pass the state's CASA statute.

**The Honorable Michael Nash  
National CASA Association Judge  
of the Year  
Juvenile Court of the Los Angeles  
Superior Court, CA**

An active and steadfast advocate for children and for CASA of Los Angeles for more than a decade, Judge Michael Nash was first appointed to the Los Angeles Municipal Court in 1985. Since



1989, he has held the position of either supervising judge of Dependency Court or presiding judge of the Juvenile Division with the L.A. Superior Court. As presiding judge of the largest trial court and the largest dependency system in the nation, Judge Nash faces unique challenges and extraordinary op-

portunities. He has made the most of these, proving himself to be a tireless advocate for children, a creative thinker and a person with the skills to bring about real change.

Accepting the award, Judge Nash said, "This can be tough work, and we need all the help we can get. And no one does a better job of providing that help than those special people called 'CASAs.' CASA volunteers provide that extra set of eyes and ears to help us make many of the difficult decisions that we must make. And at the same time, these special people become special friends to each child that they work with."

Judge Nash demonstrates his commitment to CASA of Los Angeles by supporting local outreach efforts and making it a priority to personally swear in new volunteers. His leadership in Los Angeles County has had a marked effect on the quality of the child welfare system. Among other accomplishments, he was instrumental in driving collaborative and innovative efforts such as the court's first juvenile mental health and drug courts, improving services offered to delinquent youth and their families and improving access to quality counsel for children.

Adoption Saturday was pioneered by Judge Nash in 1998, a program which has now expanded into a national effort. He consistently urges the continued support of children's agencies in tough budget times.

**CASA/Prince George's County, Inc.  
National CASA Association  
Diversity Leadership Award  
Hyattsville, MD**

In 2003, after receiving a diversity grant from National CASA, CASA/Prince George's County, Inc. was able to hire case supervisor Naemah Carter. Carter brought to the position her experience as a certified diversity trainer and a deep recognition of the value diversity efforts can have on CASA and GAL programs. Discussions about diversity soon became commonplace. In a predominately African-American community, diversity issues had traditionally centered on race. The definition of diversity began to expand.

Accepting the award for CASA/Prince George's County was executive director Ann Marie Foley Binsner, who had this to say:

"The first thing I learned was to step outside of my recruitment comfort zone and really examine my role in making diversity at CASA of Prince George's



*Ann Marie Foley Binsner*

County a reality. ... Supporting and encouraging dialog is the most important thing that we can do in leading our CASA and GAL programs. Learning from each other will lead to diversity in our programs. Because we will become comfortable with ourselves and each other—comfortable enough to seek out and embrace the diversity in others."

Armed with the diversity grant funds and insights from early conversations, CASA/Prince George's County began training the staff. Training led to a greater understanding of the importance of diversity in CASA advocacy and the awareness that recognizing a child's diversity is serving the best interests of that child. Providing volunteers and staff reflecting the children became paramount.

CASA/Prince George's County began taking important steps to increase diversity with their staff, volunteer pool and board members through a number of initiatives:

- Implementing a volunteer advisory committee to help recruit new volunteers—particularly men, seniors/retirees and LGBTQ individuals
- Including diversity statements and goals in the strategic planning process
- Building ongoing relationships with African-American groups in the community

The program is now seeing the results of a commitment to diversity. Most notable is that the racial make-up of the volunteer pool now reflects the children served.

## Conference Farewell Remarks From Marcia Sink, Departing President of National CASA

My experience as president of the national board has been truly awesome.

Eighteen years ago, I was a foster parent and reading an article in *Parade* magazine about children lost in our foster care system. At the end of the article was a little bit about organizations doing creative things and making a difference in the lives of children. It talked about CASA. I knew as a foster parent that the children I had seen had little to no representation. And people were going into court making recommendations about what's in their best interest without ever having met them or met me as their foster parent.

I read about CASA and thought "I want to be a CASA volunteer." I called the office in Seattle, which was much smaller then, and they let me know very quickly that New Hampshire was one of those states in the country that didn't have a program. But wouldn't I be interested in seeing if I could get something started. Be careful what you wish for, right?!

Now 18 years later, and thousands and thousands of New Hampshire's children later that have been touched by CASA, it's a privilege to address our caring volunteers. You touch so many lives across this country. I don't think there's any other work like it. I feel honored to be part of this, and I know many of you feel honored to be able to wear that CASA volunteer identification or sit behind your desk or sit on that board or sit in that courtroom and hear these complex and challenging cases.

We know that every day that we do this work we make a huge difference. I know how challenging our days can be. I would say to all of

you, whether you're a staff person or volunteer, when you're on, you're really *on*. When we're doing this work, we have to pay such close attention to everything we do, making sure we're accurate and doing what we need to do. We know that we're accomplishing things that will have a "forever" impact on a child.



Joyce Honeyman (left) receives President's Award from outgoing president Marcia Sink.

But know that when you're off, when you're not on, you need to be *you*. You need to take care of yourself, and you need to take the time and consciously separate yourself from the sorrow, from the anger and from the other things that we live every day as we do this very important work. When you leave that office at the end of the day, turn off the lights, and really turn them off. And go home to the people that love you. And let them nurture you. Because we all need that. We're giving so much every day.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as president of your board. It's been an amazing honor and one that I will always cherish very dearly.

## Longtime Board Member Joyce Honeyman Honored With President's Award

Marcia Sink presented a special award to Joyce Honeyman at the annual conference. In San Diego, Honeyman completed 14 years of service as a National CASA board member and liaison to the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation. She continues to serve on the National CASA Diversity Committee.

In presenting the award, Sink remarked, "It was in 1997 that I walked on the stage to receive the Kappa Alpha Theta Program Director of the Year award. At that time, I was handed the award by Joyce Honeyman. I now have the pleasure, almost 10 years later, to give to Joyce a small token of our appreciation, the National CASA President's Award, in recognition of her continuous service as our liaison to Kappa Alpha Theta since 1992. We so appreciate all you have done for National CASA and the network, and we look forward to continuing to work with you for years to come."

Ann Budill, president of the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation, also recognized Honeyman from the conference podium, commenting

"We are very proud of our relationship with CASA, which we look forward to continuing. Joyce has represented not only Kappa Alpha Theta but done incredible work with CASA itself. I cannot tell you how proud we are of her and how much we say thank you."

Accepting the award, Honeyman had this to say in thanks: "It's a wonderful honor. I couldn't have done it without my husband's support. For 14 years, I never missed a meeting. It was important for me to be there and support you in every way, and I will continue to do so as long as I can. It's been a wonderful opportunity for me. I've loved every moment of it."

# Youth “Digital Storytellers” Speak Out at Conference



Michael Piraino (third from left) greets the eight youth storytellers who attended the conference: (left to right) Robert Beach, 19, of Mountain View, CA; Kadia Edwards, 22, of Durham, NC; Jose Lopez, 18, of Las Cruces, NM; Michelle Holbrook, 20, of San Diego; Peter Gillette, 18, of Visalia, CA; John Taylor, 19, of Miami; Daniel Perry, 17, of Escondido, CA; and Jose Diaz, 19, of Miami.

In January, National CASA invited ten young people to gather from across the United States. These current and former foster youth, all of whom had a CASA or GAL volunteer, came together in Berkeley, California at the Center for Digital Storytelling. The youth came to learn the technical skills involved in the creative process of digital storytelling. But they also say they learned a lot about themselves and each other. The results of their work were first shown publicly

at National CASA’s annual conference in San Diego.

Introducing the session, training director Tracy Flynn explained that National CASA wants to better inform its work with youth voice and perspective. These stories also offer youth the opportunity to share their wisdom. National CASA will use the videos to educate individuals and communities about advocacy needs for children and youth in the child welfare system. We will also incorporate them into our core

and continuing volunteer training materials over the coming year.

“It’s particularly useful to hear the voice of older youth who will soon transition out of foster care,” Michael Piraino, CEO of National CASA, remarked from the podium.

Creating the short videos took four days, during which the young people shared their stories in a group scripting process; wrote and recorded short personal narratives; selected still images, video clips and music; and learned to edit these materials into the digital videos presented at the conference.

During a question-and-answer session that followed the screening, Daniel Perry told of her hopes for the result of the digital storytelling process. “The thing that I would want volunteer CASAs and GALs to take from our stories would be don’t give up on us. We push you away because we don’t know who to trust. When you’re in the foster system, people come and go like the wind. We need somebody to stay there and be there for us. We’ll push and push and push you away because we want to know that you’re going to stay.”

Sonia Ferrer of the Miami/Dade County GAL Program in Florida accompanied two youth during the making of the stories. “The connections the youth are making are so important,” said Ferrer. “I think it’s therapeutic for them, both when sharing in their videos and with the other participants.”

## From the Digital Story of Daniel, Age 17

My mother was never really around, which meant I had to take care of my younger siblings. After we got into the system, my siblings were sent to live in another state with some distant relatives. I missed them *so much* because I was so used to parenting them in that last stretch. How was I supposed to know if they were safe or healthy or happy?

I became depressed, and I had low self-esteem. I had nowhere to turn. I had to reach up to touch rock bottom. So much that I started to hurt myself. Cutting myself was the only way I knew how to stay sane. It wasn’t for suicide or anything like that; it was a venting system I used to stay alive.

I have known my CASA for about a year and a half now. And knowing Anita has been the single most awesome experience of my life. She has helped me with so many things, like advocating for me to be able to travel half-way across the country to visit my little brother and sister.

Because of Anita believing in me and proving that someone in my life would actually stay, I’ve got my own bank account with some savings. Anita is someone I can see myself keeping in touch with for the rest of my life. I can even see her at my wedding.



# CASA Conference Gallery



Conference speaker Dorothy Roberts signs her latest book for conference participants.



Former foster youth Kiaya Combs inspires the crowd along with her CASA volunteer, Jane Hegstrom of CASA of the Pikes Peak Region, CO.



National CASA CEO Michael Piraino greets Gina James of CASA of the Pikes Peak Region, CO.



Members of Music in Motion entertained the audience at the annual awards banquet. This award-winning group is composed of 8th- and 9th-grade honor students from Granger Junior High School in National City, California.



David Rocha, executive director of Jewelers for Children, explains his organization's support for CASA programs.



One of the plenary meals gave these three a chance to engage in lively discussion: Joan Jenkins of CIP/CASA, CT; Isabel Morales of National CASA's Hispanic/Latino Advisory Committee; and Michele Morgan, National CASA's foundation relations manager.



Enjoying the conference exhibits are Gayle McCoy and Pete Zesidger of Erie County CASA (PA), flanking youth "Digital Storyteller" John Taylor.



Celebrating CASA of Prince George's County's Diversity Leadership Award are the program's Naeemah Carter (left) and executive director Ann Marie Foley Binsner (right). Joining them in the center is Seanté Hatcher of CASA Baltimore, MD.

## The National CASA Association Extends its Grateful Appreciation to These 2006 Conference Sponsors:



- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), US Department of Justice
- Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
- Wendy's International Foundation
- Newmont Mining Corporation



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**OJJDP** Office of Juvenile Justice  
and Delinquency Prevention  
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## Scholarship Money Available

“Foster youth,” wrote Thomas R. Wolanin in his report, *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth: A Primer for Policy Makers*, “are among America’s most disadvantaged in terms of opportunities for higher education.” He estimates that of the current 300,000 youth between the ages of 18 and 25 who passed through at least one year of foster care after age 13, perhaps 50% (150,000) graduated from high school. However, of these, only 20% (30,000) are currently participating in postsecondary education. This rate is considerably lower than that of their peers. Of the many possible causes, one undoubtedly is the financial challenge. Several organizations aim to overcome that challenge by making scholarships to foster youth as they pursue higher education.

### **Chafee Education and Training Vouchers ([statevoucher.org](http://statevoucher.org))**

Under the Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) program, established by Congress in 2001, funding is provided to states to support youth transitioning out of foster care. Current and former foster youth can receive up to \$5,000 per year to attend higher education institutions or accredited postsecondary training programs. The application and all recordkeeping are online and available to appropriate state staff for oversight purposes, and training is provided via teleconferencing and site visits as necessary. Nonprofit partners in this effort are the National Foster Care Coalition ([natl-fostercare.org](http://natl-fostercare.org)) and the Orphan Foundation of America (see next).

### **Orphan Foundation of America ([orphan.org](http://orphan.org))**

One leading voice for older foster teens is the Orphan Foundation of America (OFA). Since its beginnings in 1981, it has served thousands of foster teens all across the United States. From teaching youth how to balance a checkbook, write a resume and apply for that first big job, to testifying before Congress and state legislatures, OFA has long been a vocal champion of foster teens. The Casey Family Scholars Program, which is administered by OFA, provides scholarships of up to \$10,000 to young people under age 25 (30 for graduate level) who have spent at least 12 months in foster care and were not subsequently adopted. The scholarships are awarded for the pursuit of postsecondary education, including vocational/technical training, and are renewable each year based on satisfactory progress and financial need. OFA also offers summer internships, particularly the OLIVER Project and Public Service Foster Youth Internship Program.

### **MI FERN ([foster-education.org](http://foster-education.org))**

This student-run organization is devoted to assisting current and former foster youth in their pursuit of a postsecondary education. Among other services, their website offers the *Annual Student Guide*, which provides detailed information and general advice for youth who are planning to attend college. The guide includes information on college admittance tests, college applications and financial aid as well as contact information for other agencies that assist foster youth in going to college.

### **National Foster Parent Association ([nfpainc.org](http://nfpainc.org))**

This national organization strives to support foster parents and remains a consistently strong voice on behalf of all children. The association offers scholarships for foster youth who wish to further their education beyond high school, including college or university studies, vocational and job training, and correspondence courses (including the GED).

### **Quick List of Other Scholarship-Related Links for All Youth**

**FastWeb ([fastweb.com](http://fastweb.com))** is the largest source of local, national and college-specific scholarships. It allows the browser to search and compare colleges, find colleges offering appropriate scholarships and locate jobs and internship opportunities.

**Scholarship Resource Network Express ([srnexpress.com](http://srnexpress.com))** contains a database of over 8,000 programs with over 150,000 awards for undergraduate and postgraduate students. This database also includes student loan forgiveness programs for those who have graduated from college and need alternatives for repayment.

**The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid ([finaid.com](http://finaid.com))** was established as a public service. This award-winning site has grown into the most comprehensive annotated collection of information about student financial aid on the web. The site makes it easy for students to look for ways to finance their education.

**QuestBridge ([questbridge.org](http://questbridge.org))** is a program that links bright, motivated low-income students with educational and scholarship opportunities at some of the nation’s best colleges. It also offers college prep scholarships for high school juniors, providing a way to learn about college and to prepare for the admissions process, including SAT prep courses. QuestBridge also matches students with full, four-year scholarships to 14 colleges and universities.

# The Novel Volunteer

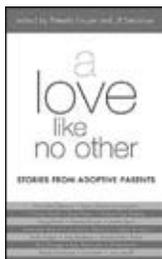


## BOOK CLUB

### **A Love Like No Other: Stories From Adoptive Parents**

Edited by Pamela Kruger and Jill Smolowe  
Riverhead Books, Penguin Group, 262 pages  
penguin.com

Adoption now affects more American families than ever before, with 1.5 million adopted children living in the United States and 60% of Americans reporting some kind of personal connection to adoption.



Happily, this surge has coincided with an increasing acceptance of adoption as just another way to form a family, complete with its own frustrations and joys that deserve to be discussed and celebrated.

*A Love Like No Other* features 20 leading writers, all of whom are adoptive parents, discussing their personal experiences. They include:

- Adoptive parents of children of other races, like Emily Prager, who grapples with how best to keep her daughter connected to her Chinese roots
- Parents whose families blend biological children and adopted children, like best-selling author Jacquelyn Mitchard

- Single mothers of only children, like journalist Sheila Stainback
- Same-sex adoptive parents, like Jesse Green, who wonders how his sons will feel when instructed to make a Mother's Day card

This collection spans many family styles and configurations, with children adopted via almost every imaginable process, including the child welfare system, relative placement, open adoption and international adoption. What this book reveals is the beauty, the difficulty and the joy in creating family. Parenting is tough no matter what. Adoption has its own challenges that are unique to each child and family. And all families share the universal themes of love, kinship, place and belonging.

*A Love Like No Other* reveals and informs, challenges and inspires both adoptive and non-adoptive families. Through the authors' honesty, sometimes painful and sometimes humorous, we learn of the realities of adopting and raising children. The struggles these families face are both expected and unexpected. Parents' efforts to understand their children and themselves reveal a transformation that speaks to the power of family.

Reading this book may well expand your understanding of adoption.

### **Sample Discussion Questions for *A Love Like No Other***

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

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



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

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**Photo Submission Requirements:** Please submit your best original photos. Digital photos are often not acceptable for print purposes. Connection staff will make every effort to return photos but cannot guarantee their return.

# Child Welfare News

## **Congress Authorizes \$100 Million in New Funding for Courts**

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (PL 109-171), approved by Congress in early 2006, included a new section for strengthening abuse and neglect courts. Grant funding to the highest state court was both authorized and appropriated for the next five years for the following areas:

- Training of judges, court personnel and attorneys handling abuse and neglect cases (\$10 million in each fiscal year)
- Assistance for the courts to improve timely decision-making in abuse and neglect cases (\$10 million in each fiscal year)

Eligible state high courts will receive \$85,000 for each grant category, and the balance will be disseminated on a formula basis. To qualify for funding, state courts must demonstrate ongoing collaboration between courts and public child welfare agencies.

These new grant programs address two of the recommendations of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care for court improvement. The third recommendation by the Commission, to ensure that children and parents have a voice in court hearings, was not included in the new legislation. This would have involved an increase in federal funding for CASA and volunteer GAL advocacy. National CASA continues to work with the Pew Commission and Congressional representatives to address this need.

## **New Report Outlines Steps Toward Child Welfare Reform**

*Changing Lives by Changing Systems* is an important report just published by the National Center for State Courts. The report summarizes the National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children that was held September 20-23, 2005, sponsored by the Conference of

Chief Justices, the Conference of State Court Administrators, the National Center for State Courts and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. The report is available on the website of the National Center for State Courts ([ncsconline.org](http://ncsconline.org)). In their "search our site" box, type in "Changing Lives by Changing Systems."

For three days, summit participants from each state participated in workshops and then developed state action plans to effect fundamental improvements in judicial child protection proceedings. Four key strategies were articulated, similar to the court improvement strategies recommended by the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. Eight action steps were then identified for implementation of the strategies.

Among the action steps agreed upon is one to increase the availability of trained representatives—including expansion of CASA and volunteer GAL programs. The report indicates that at least 12 states explicitly adopted the Pew Commission recommendations for their state-specific action plans. *Changing Lives by Changing Systems* includes a listing of the key strategy areas that each state has committed to implement to improve court oversight of child welfare cases.

## **Home At Last Reports on State-by-State Reform Efforts**

Detailed information on state court commissions and task forces engaged in reform efforts is provided in a new report produced by Home At Last, an organization dedicated to encouraging action on the recommendations of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. The report provides a state-by-state summary of those states where collaboration between the courts and child welfare agencies is occur-

ring. CASA programs participate on the commissions of at least five states—California, Indiana, Nebraska, Texas and Washington. To see the Home at Last report, go to [fostercarehomeatlast.org](http://fostercarehomeatlast.org), scroll down to March 15, 2006 in the right-hand column and then click "view list."

## **Research Examines How Children Cope after Parents Lose Rights**

The coping strategies of 60 children in residential treatment whose parents' rights have been terminated were analyzed in a recent study. The research found that "avoidant coping" was the most common technique children used, followed by "emotion-focused coping." "Problem-focused coping," which involves the child believing that changing or managing the situation might be possible, was the least common. "Coping with Parental Loss Because of Termination of Parental Rights," by Kerri Schneider and Vicky Phares, published in the final 2005 issue of *Child Welfare* (Volume 84, Issue 6), found that children using emotion-focused coping strategies had higher levels of internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Children in acute emotional distress were found to need help in treatment to understand their loss and increase problem-solving coping strategies. To subscribe to this journal, visit [cwla.org/pubs/periodicals.htm](http://cwla.org/pubs/periodicals.htm).

## **Center Offers List of Resources on Education and Foster Children**

An annotated listing of resources, research reports, bibliographies and websites related to the educational needs of foster children and strategies for addressing these needs was compiled in March by the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. To access, go to

hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp, then click on “Information Services,” followed by “Education and Foster Care.” (National CASA’s e-learning series on educational advocacy is available to CASA volunteers nationwide in the password-protected area of casanet.org. Contact your local program staff to request an invitation.)

### Youth Permanency

The Children’s Bureau and the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information have developed a section of the Children’s Bureau website devoted to youth permanency, with subsections on strategies and programs, spotlight on adoption, supporting youth in foster care, youth perspectives and outcomes for emancipated youth. See [nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/responding/youth](http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/responding/youth).

### Treatment for Meth Addiction Rises Sharply Across the US— New Resource Available

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration says that admissions to treatment for methamphetamine addiction increased nationally between 1993 and 2003—from 13 admissions per 100,000 people age 12 or older to 56 admissions per 100,000. The highest rates were in Oregon, Hawaii, Iowa, California, Wyoming and Utah; the lowest were in the northeast.

*Reunited—A Video for Parents Affected by Meth* is currently being distributed to all child welfare agencies throughout Oregon. It captures frank talk from parents who were able to overcome their problems and work with the child welfare agency to be reunited with their children. Most of the parents in the 25-minute video were using methamphetamines when their children entered the child welfare system. Other agencies or

individuals can purchase the video at cost through [accbo.com/asfavideo](http://accbo.com/asfavideo).

### Tribal-State Relations Publication Available

The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information has released a new publication on how states and tribes can work together more effectively to protect the safety, permanency and well-being of American Indian/Alaska Native children. The issue brief, which was developed in partnership with the National Indian Child Welfare Association, examines factors affecting tribal-state relations in child welfare and components of successful tribal-state relations as well as providing examples of promising practices. Find the publication at [nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/issue\\_briefs/tribal\\_state](http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/tribal_state).

### Working With Traumatized Children

The understanding and treatment of traumatized children in out-of-home care is the focus of a new book, *Working With*

*Traumatized Children in Child Welfare*. The book provides a framework for understanding childhood separation, loss and trauma as well as a variety of helping interventions that focus on specific populations or treatments. *Working with Traumatized Children in Child Welfare* was published by Guilford Publications and is available through [guilford.com](http://guilford.com).

### Assisting Youth With Serious Mental Health Conditions

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law has analyzed 57 federal programs that address the needs of youth with serious mental health conditions who are transitioning into adulthood. Their *Moving On* series of fact sheets offers information about each program’s purpose, services, funded activities, the administering federal agency and a brief assessment of the program’s impact. Twelve types of programs are included. More information is available at [bazelon.org/publications/movingon](http://bazelon.org/publications/movingon).





## Pointers from PROGRAMS

### Riding for CASA! Northern Hills Area CASA Program, Spearfish, SD



The Black Hills Horse Expo is becoming one of the most exciting and popular events in South Dakota. Thousands of visitors from across the nation attend to check out the exhibits, attend the clinics and enjoy the entertainment. But while visitors enjoy the family-friendly events, they are also helping special children in the Northern Hills area. “Our area has a great passion for horses as well as for children,” said CASA executive director Gypsy Petz. “This unique event allows community volunteers to provide for both areas of interest and make a difference in the community.”

Initiated in 2003, the Expo was conceived as a fun and creative fundraiser for the Northern Hills Area CASA Program. At the time, the CASA program served four counties in South Dakota, which includes miles of ranchland and hobby farms. The first annual Black Hills Horse Expo was attended by about 300 people. Since then, the CASA program has grown to include eight counties, while the recent Expo attracted more than 1,600 attendees. Ac-

tivities included demonstrations of various horse breeds, parades featuring showcased stallions, a petting zoo and a Kids’ Korral with a posse of Cowboy Clowns. One of the most popular events was the “Trainer’s Challenge,” where three noted area horse trainers each worked with a young, spirited, unbroken horse for one hour in front of the audience. After a break, the trainers returned to work their horses for another hour and then put them through an obstacle course in front of a panel of judges.

### Rock for CASA Kids Athens-Oconee CASA Program, Inc., Athens, GA



Since 1998, the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus has provided free, hands-on programs to hundreds of high schools, colleges, Boys and Girls Clubs, music festivals, concerts, conventions and community organizations. The nonprofit, mobile recording studio is outfitted with traditional musical instruments as well as current technological advances. Working with some of the biggest names in music, the Lennon Bus encourages students to



*Timber, winner of the Battle of the Bands*

play music, write songs, engineer recording sessions and produce music video projects using the latest audio, video and live sound equipment. Now embarking on its National Battle of the Bands tour, the Bus is traveling around the nation in search of the best high school bands in the country. The winner in each market will later compete for the title of National Battle of the Bands winner and get to play on their local Warped Tour '06 stop.

Christian Orobello, executive director of the Athens-Oconee CASA Program, thought that Athens’ thriving music scene and concern for children would make the Bus an effective way to bring awareness to the mission of CASA and raise funds to support the children in the community. Orobello contacted the Tour Bus and moved them by explaining the mission of CASA. In late May, a battle of the bands was held involving six bands competing for a free recording session, iPods, music equipment and other prizes in the University of Georgia’s Hugh Hodgson Hall.

**Condors Jersey Auction for CASA**  
**CASA of Kern County, Bakersfield, CA**



*The jersey "Condors for CASA," modeled by CASA volunteer Doug Rife. The design features the Condor mascot watching over three small condors in a nest.*

CASA of Kern County executive director Colleen A. McGauley offers this advice to CASA program directors: "As each CASA program looks for partners in your community, don't forget your local sports teams! The local hockey team, the Bakersfield Condors, hosts annual jersey auction events a few times each year. And their recent April 1st auction grossed over \$32,000 for our program!" Since 1998, the Bakersfield Condors have generously raised



*Recruiter/training coordinator Kate Kenney with her son, Justin, and CASA volunteer John Malloy drop the ceremonial puck before the game.*

more than \$300,000 in jersey auctions for nonprofit organizations. This auction brought in the highest amount in team history. As several stellar CASA volunteers are loyal hockey fans, the relationship between CASA of Kern County and the Condors grew naturally from opening a CASA booth to manning tables during the games to becoming part of their jersey auctions.

**Comedy Benefit for CASA**  
**Essex County CASA, Montclair, NJ**

The hip Diva Lounge in Montclair, NJ presented an evening of top-notch standup comedy to benefit Essex County CASA. The show featured Nick at Nite's "Funniest Mom in America" semi-finalist Eileen Kelly as well as Leighann Lord and Vijai Nathan, who have appeared on many television shows.



Kelly, whose solo show, *My Pony's in the Garage*, received rave reviews at the 2005 NY International Fringe Festival, has been featured on NBC's *Live at Five* as one of the "momics" performing in "Mom's Cracking Up." As a writer, Kelly's work is featured in *She's So Funny - 1,001 Jokes from the Best Female Comics* and *Squeaky Clean Comedy*. But she also finds time to serve as one of the "Friends of CASA," volunteers who are not advocates but help in areas like special events, fundraising and public relations. Kelly suggested the idea of a comedy benefit for CASA and was responsible for bringing the whole night together. She recruited the other comics, found the venue and produced the show in addition to performing herself. The event went a long way in helping give Essex County CASA name recognition, with articles appearing in several local papers. The event was also filmed and featured on New Jersey public television and radio news.



*Eileen Kelly*

Everything used to create the garden had been donated by the community. The

**CASA Children's Garden Dedicated**  
**Roanoke Valley CASA Foundation,**  
**Roanoke, VA**

Hundreds of people each day visit the Jefferson Center in Roanoke, VA. They now pass by the recently dedicated CASA Children's Garden. On what used to be a bare stretch of dirt at the entrance



*Executive director Anne Grove, Virginia first lady Anne Holton and Judge Philip Trompeter, who helped create the program, cut the ribbon to the Children's Garden.*

to the Center, site of the CASA offices, the garden was created with three goals in mind: it honors all the children served by CASA, gives children a therapeutic place to experience and nurture plants and flowers and further develops public awareness of the CASA cause. Virginia's first lady Anne Holton, herself a juvenile and domestic relations judge, helped cut the ribbon and spoke at the dedication before attending the In the Garden Art Show and Sale. The sale featured some 100 garden-themed paintings and raised almost \$10,000 for the Roanoke Valley CASA Foundation.

Everything used to create the garden had been donated by the community. The



*The stainless steel sculptures of frolicking children*

land, originally contaminated by hydraulic fluid, had to be excavated; then 10 truck-loads of fresh soil were brought in. Local businesses contributed plants and equipment, while college students volunteered their labor. Maintenance of the garden will also be done by volunteers. A group of high school students, observing National Youth Service Day, took on the garden as their service project. Program director Anne C. Grove said, "It is a welcoming and happy garden: children are fascinated by it." Prominent in the garden are three stainless steel sculptures of tumbling children.

## Awards & Recognition

The Liberty Bell, presented annually by the Leavenworth County Bar Association in Kansas, was recently given to **Jennifer Swartz**, executive director of CASA of Leavenworth. The Liberty Bell award is presented to someone “who has participated in exceptional community

service in the Leavenworth County area, and in doing so encouraged greater respect for law and the courts, promoted better understanding of the rule of law and contributed to good government.”

**Melissa Protzek**, executive director of CASA of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh,

PA, is a recipient of the Marjorie Matson Day Woman of the Year Award from the University of Pittsburgh Women’s Law Association and the Allegheny County Bar Association. The award is named for a 1937 graduate of Pitt’s School of Law who was known as a civil rights champion.

## Light of Hope Events

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, during which CASA and GAL volunteers throughout the nation remember children suffering from abuse and neglect. The annual Light of Hope events focus public attention on abused children and are held in various guises, ranging from simply holding candles to hanging a blue ribbon around the local courthouse to putting on a rodeo. Highlights from the many Light of Hope events held around the nation in 2006:

**Volunteers for Youth Justice (Shreveport, LA)** held its fourth annual Light of Hope child abuse awareness event at the Louisiana Boardwalk. More than 4,000 participants enjoyed live music and entertainment and had the opportunity to visit

more than 30 educational and activity booths from organizations such as the Office of Community Services, the Gingerbread House, Think-First of the Ark-La-Tex, Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana and Bossier KIDS.

This year’s event concluded with the symbolic lighting of hundreds of candles in honor of the 1,400 abused and neglected children in their community.



*Passing the flame: (left to right) Maryann Frodge, VISTA volunteer; Kacey Bevier, family court specialist; and the Honorable Catherine Holderfield, Warren Family Court Judge Division II. (Courtesy of Joshua McCoy/Bowling Green Daily News)*



*Shoes represent the number of children who died as a result of abuse in Louisiana over the past year.*

An unusual event promoting awareness of Child Abuse Prevention Month took place in **Sulphur Springs, TX**. The second annual Ranch Rodeo, organized by the Texas Heritage Association, raised money for the **Lake County CASA** program. Proceeds from the event “will be especially helpful to recruit, serve and train CASA volunteers because of the increasing number of children we serve,” executive director Gina Law said. Volunteers as

well as foster families and children were given free tickets to attend the occasion, which combined family fun and a venue



for cowboys to show off their skills. The highlight of the rodeo, held at the Hopkins County Regional Civic Center before about 1,000 spectators, was the competition among 10 teams of four cowboys each who showed the crowd what transpires at a real working cattle ranch.

# For Children in Foster Care, Art Is More Than Fun

By Tracy Bier

Ask a youngster to name their favorite time in school and many will say “recess” or “lunch.” Often they say: “art.” And it is easy to understand why. Remember the fun of splashing paint on paper? Or making a shape come alive from a lump of clay?

Aside from bringing joy to young artists, mental health professionals believe using art to communicate with children and young people can have profoundly positive effects, especially for a child who has witnessed trauma and experienced stress beyond their years. Art is frequently used in therapeutic settings with victims of tragedies or disasters such as 9/11 and the hurricanes of 2005.

Whether or not a child or young adult has experienced trauma or witnessed violence, drawing or writing poetry can help ease emotional pain and open new doors to healing. The traumatic events foster children experience, such as being separated from parents or changing homes, can have a huge emotional impact. Experts say that children in care experience the same emotions as those surviving natural disasters: abandonment, loss, rejection and unresolved grief.



Marshelle Long poses with her creation.

National art therapy expert Donna J. Betts, PhD has extensively studied using art with children who are adopted or in foster care. Betts teaches art education and art therapy at Florida State University and recently published *Creative Arts Therapies: Approaches in Adoption and Foster Care*. This book documents art therapy methods that can

be used in helping children who are adopted or in foster care.

According to Betts, using art can have major positive effects on behavior, especially for foster children. She points out that “children learn to build trust, express their emotions and develop healthy self-esteem. In addition, making something concrete with their hands helps with identity formation.”

## National CASA Sponsors Art Events for Foster Youth

Believing that creative arts can help heal the hurt of children in foster care, the National CASA Association recently joined with others around the country to sponsor art workshops specifically tailored to youth in foster care. “When children are able to express their feelings, remarkable transformations of hopes and dreams happen as a result,” according to Jim Clune, National CASA’s chief communications officer.

Over the past two years, four art events were held around the country in Miami, Los Angeles and Atlanta. Each workshop involved teaming up with local CASA programs, related community groups and a professional art educator. The events used different art materials but promoted similar developmental themes of self-esteem and identity formation. Art therapist Betts believes the National CASA-sponsored workshops are likely to be the first ones aimed specifically at helping children in foster care.

Atlanta hosted the most recent event with the theme “Our Stories Matter: Who I Am and Where I Am Headed.” The all-day session featured a local artist who coached the youth on telling their personal stories by creating collages using cut paper, fabric and other items. Their final collages were bold and personalized with photographs, drawings and words.

Each national event also provided the artists with an opportunity to showcase their



Youth artist Julian Cordero

work at a reception and art exhibit with several hundred people from the community and media attending.

Following the Atlanta workshop, one foster mother of a participant shared a revealing story. Her foster daughter had recently experienced a difficult placement, and consequently the girl was struggling with low self-esteem. After participating in the art event where her art was showcased and applauded, she shared, “It felt so good for people to see who I have become. Today is a *good* day.”

The theme in Los Angeles was “Using My Hands, My Voice and My Life to Secure the Future.” By the end of the event, each child had created a larger-than-life self-portrait using a variety of media. The art pieces were featured at a fundraising banquet held in the spring, and the youth art was published in a book as well.

Cindy Nasser is an advocate who participated in the Los Angeles art event with her 11-year-old CASA child. A former foster child herself, Nasser has a special appreciation for the outcomes she noticed over several sessions. “What was so satisfying to me about this activity was seeing the improvements in Raoul and all the children,” Nasser says. “It was truly amazing to watch them connect with each other and talk freely about their lives and the difficulties they had. Over time, I saw Raoul relax and open up in a way that was so good for him; it was very moving.”

Tracy Bier is a Seattle-based writer.



# Is Your Community a Great Place to Grow Up?

**We're Looking for America's '100 Best Communities for Young People.' Join the Competition!**

Last year's winners spanned from Maine to Hawaii, from big cities to rural towns. They earned national recognition for their coordinated, innovative efforts on behalf of their young people – and assistance to make those efforts even stronger.

Now, once again, America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth will showcase the 100 most outstanding, difference-making efforts. We're looking for the communities that are working hardest together to make their young people safe, healthy and successful.



Applications available September 5th and due November 3rd. Visit [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org) to get your community in the running.

## Join the National CASA Association

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

### Your Member Benefits:

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

**Thank you!**

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

### Membership Information Form:

Please check any of the following that apply:

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Title \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

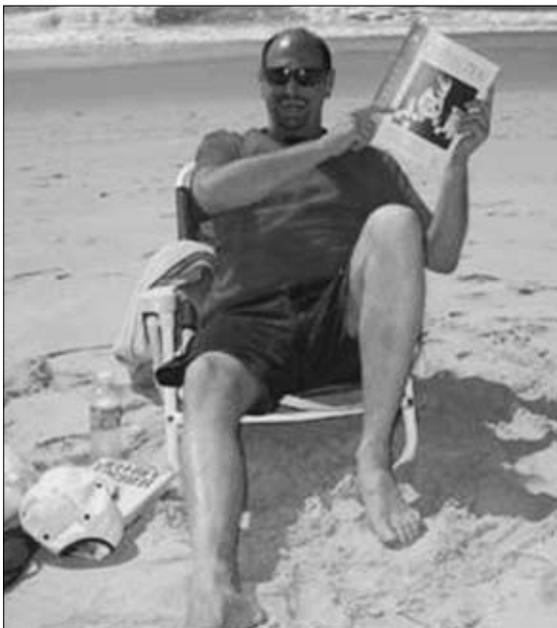
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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## Connection Sightings

*"I love your magazine and recently carried it to Peru and Ecuador where I visited the Charles Darwin Research Center on Santa Cruz Island. I have been a CASA for about 8 years here in Santa Fe and can't say enough about our great executive director Janice Quinn."*

CASA volunteer Mary Cay Hollander-Russell from CASA, First Judicial District (Santa Fe, NM)



*"The Spring 2006 issue of the Connection was an awesome issue with a topic near to my heart, birth to three. The state of Arizona has seen the need for specialized services for the kids and has reacted with great new programs and policies to benefit them."*

What a difference from rural cattle country in Arizona to Surf City, Topsail Island off North Carolina! But after two years non-stop on the job, Kirk Grugel, coordinator of the Navajo County CASA Program, AZ, takes a day off on the beach.

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

Send photos (min. 4x6) to:

*The Connection*  
National CASA Association  
100 W. Harrison  
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or email high resolution photos (300 dpi scanned at 4x6 size) to [theconnection@nationalcasa.org](mailto:theconnection@nationalcasa.org). Include your name, address, phone number, email address and photo location.

Closing words

from

JUDGE HATCHETT



by Judge Glenda A. Hatchett

## The Voices of Our Foster Children: Their Stories *Do* Matter!

In the media today, we learn of numerous issues that affect each and every person in some way. Whether the issue is immigration or the war in Iraq, the voices and feelings of the children involved are often overlooked. This is also true for the more than 500,000 children in the United States who are currently in foster care as a result of abuse or neglect. We must ask ourselves, what do those children have to say? And who is listening?

From the time we enter this world as infants, we have the desire to be heard. When we cry, it is to let someone know that we want to be fed or held. As toddlers, we learn to use our small voices to express our needs and desires. As adults, the motivation to have our opinions and feelings validated is a driving force in most of our interaction with others. Unfortunately, while every person deserves this, many times children in foster care are not given the opportunity to be heard. These children have very important stories to tell, but in the midst of court hearings and numerous placements, their voices may often be stifled and in some cases silenced.

Though this is the case for many foster children today, I recently had the opportunity to host a celebration reception for the National CASA Association's Art of Life program in Atlanta, GA. I witnessed first hand the commanding expression of the voices of 10 current and former foster youth. The event, Art of Life—Our Stories Matter: Who I Am, and Where I Am

Headed, was an opportunity to not only bring awareness to the circumstances of children in Atlanta's foster care system but to give foster youth an opportunity to tell their stories and prove that their opinions and feelings do indeed matter!

Artistic expression has long been considered an effective means of communication, and through the development of collages with the help of K. Joy Ballard Peters, a talented local artist, these youth shared their past experiences and visions of their future. The stories were amazing! Listening to the voices of *our* children were judges, community leaders, politicians and teachers as well as CASA staff and volunteers.

The youth told stories of their trials and tribulations and how they have succeeded despite their circumstances. They shared their journeys towards peace and harmony—striving to discover their dreams—and their desires to join the fight against prejudices. They explained how images of old cars signify a preservation of their past, while images of windows represent their views of the future with brighter days ahead. You could see the pride in their eyes and confidence in their voices as they expressed thanks to those who have helped them along the way as well as gratitude for the art experience. They finally had the chance to tell their stories and have hundreds there to listen.

I applaud all of the CASA volunteers who take time out to not only find safe, permanent and loving homes for foster

children but also take the time to listen. Your efforts are making a major impact in the lives of children who have wanted their voices to be heard but had no one to lend an ear or felt no one even cared to listen. While there are more than 50,000 dedicated CASA volunteers throughout the country, there are over 500,000 children in foster care systems nationally. This means that there may be more than 225,000 voices that are still not being heard.

As CASA volunteers, I challenge you to not only listen to the voices of the children that you work with but to also use your own voices to encourage other committed adults to stand up and make a difference in the lives of abused or neglected children. They all have a story to tell, and we must do our part to ensure that when they speak, someone is there to listen.

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*The Honorable Glenda A. Hatchett is a nationally recognized authority on juvenile issues. While perhaps best known by the public because of her award-winning, nationally syndicated television series Judge Hatchett and recent book Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say!, Judge Hatchett has also gained deep respect from her peers. She is the former chief presiding judge of the Fulton County Juvenile Court in Atlanta. Among her numerous awards are both the NAACP Thurgood Marshall Award and Emory University's School of Law Outstanding Alumni of the Year Award.*

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➤ [nationalcasa.org](http://nationalcasa.org)

*the*  
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