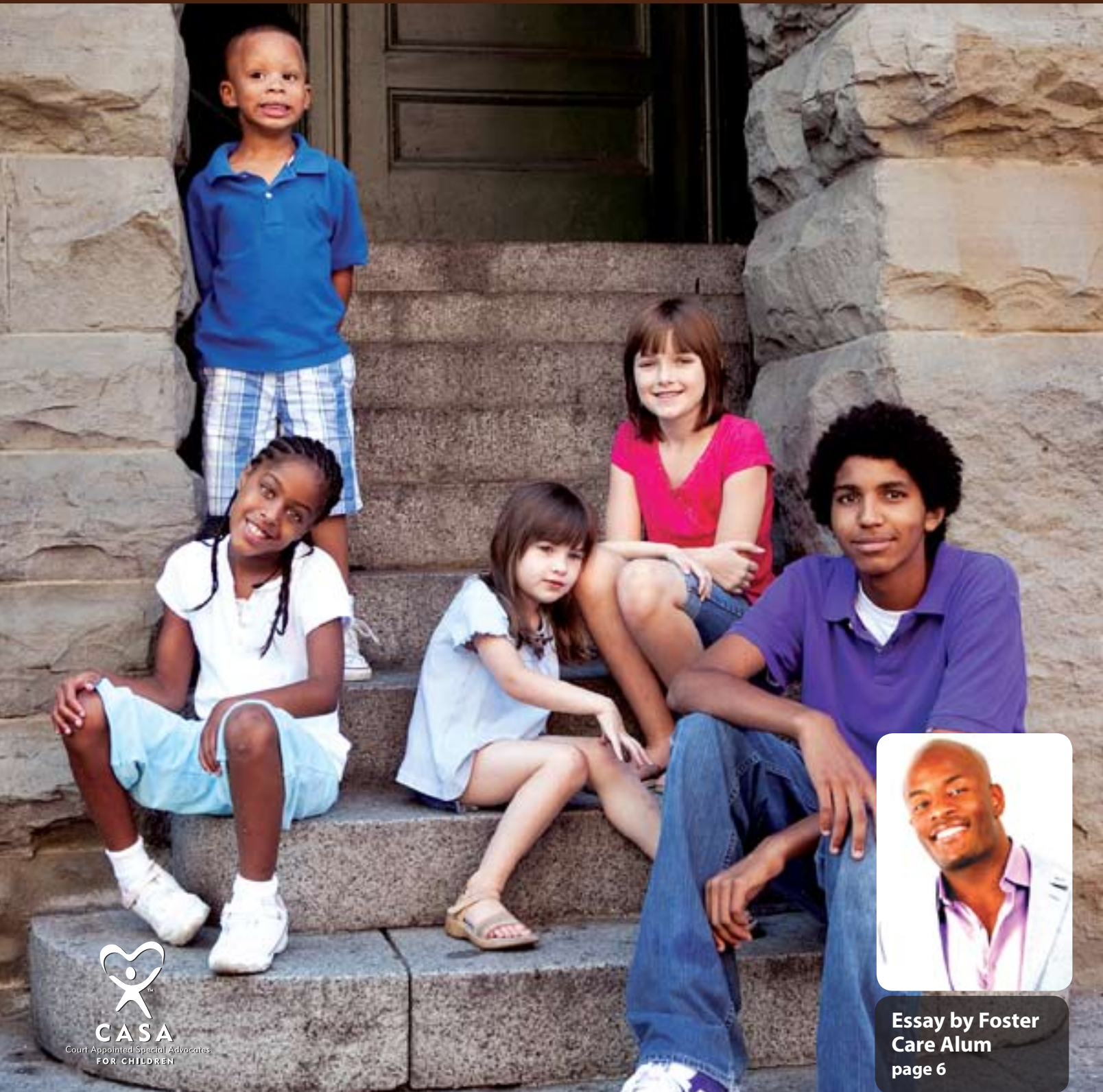


THE Connection

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association



CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN



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Judy Fortlage

2010 G.F. Bettineski Child Advocate of the Year
Clark County CASA Program
Vancouver, WA

Equity for Children With Disabilities

Over my past 20 years as a CASA volunteer, I have worked with 78 children and teens, many with severe mental health issues and educational deficits. As a mother of five and a former English teacher, I love talking to children. I enjoy their wisdom. It's amazing the kinds of answers you get when you ask children open-ended questions. When dealing with children who have been abused, it often takes a while to establish a relationship. They're understandably wary. But it's worth it to hang in there and get them to trust you and to understand that you really are there to help.

An Equal Chance to Be Heard

I believe that fairness, or equity, is a very important principle. Years ago I had a case involving a child who had a severe disability. She was developmentally challenged as well as nonverbal. In order to communicate, we found that she really needed a machine called VOCA (Voice Output Communication Aid). It would allow her to push a few buttons and say what she needed. The Department of Family Services didn't have the money for this technology. So I said, "Wait a minute—doesn't the school have to pay for that?" That was the solution. The school provided the VOCA, and the girl's life changed because she was finally able to communicate easily.

Fair Access to Mental Health Care

There's also the question of equity of care. I believe there should be mental health care for children and families in the dependency system equal to that available to people with private health insurance. I'm often very distressed to find that children and youth are given medication without any psychiatric diagnosis—and without any cognitive therapy. They just don't get better with this approach. And sometimes when we can arrange for therapy, we get someone who is not trained to work with the population.

In advocating for mental health care or other needed services, I'm thinking about what the children need—not what the Department of Family Services can afford. I tell kids, "I'm asking for the sun and the moon for you because you deserve it!"

My Motivation to Volunteer

Someone once asked me, "Why do you do this?" I do this work because it needs to be done, and someone needs to do it. And because I see that I've made a difference. Sometimes it takes a little longer to see the impact you're having, and sometimes it can get frustrating. But you have to persevere for the child's sake. You come to see the benefit of a child knowing that there's a person in their life who's just not going to give up on them.

I think my impetus to join the CASA program goes back to the 1960s, when I worked as a probation counselor at Los Angeles County Juvenile Hall. It was apparent that many of the youth we

were dealing with were victims of abuse of one kind or another. This was never addressed until they got into the criminal justice system. Many had learning disabilities that had never been dealt with either. Just listening to their stories and seeing how they could bloom once they got into a stable environment had a profound impact on me.

My fellow CASA volunteers are great people to work with as well. I've made some good friends over the years. I've also found that I'm learning constantly. It's challenging and never dull. In my book, volunteering as an advocate sure beats playing golf!

How Children Benefit from Advocacy

I have a friend who once worked in a war zone as a social worker. She describes what she refers to as the "orphan look." It's a look of bewilderment and pain and confusion. And CASA volunteers know that you don't have to go into a war zone to see that look. You can see it in children who have living parents. You see it in children whose homes are a war zone. And as CASAs, we want that look to go away. We will do what we can do to see that they have permanency, safety, love and a future.

Some of us have heard the statement, "Oh well, you can't save the world." But we can save the world of one child. One of my favorite sayings, which hangs on my wall, is, "Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt the people who are doing it!" 🗨️



Our Vision for Child Advocacy Through 2014

Britt Banks
Principal, NovaWest LLC, Denver, CO and
President, National CASA



It is a special privilege to have become the president of the National CASA Association Board of Trustees last April, after serving in various capacities on the board over the past eight years. Many thanks to our outgoing president, Judge Ernestine Gray of Louisiana, for her leadership and dedication over the last two years. Hers is an example I will strive to emulate.

The importance of our mission was recently brought home to me in a very personal way, when I attended the high school graduation of my sister's youngest child in May. As we greeted Kurt in the auditorium after the ceremony, I realized that among parents, stepparents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, there were nine adults there celebrating his accomplishment. Each of us was heavily invested in his upbringing and determined to help him in any way we can in the future.

As happy for and proud of my nephew as I was at that moment, I couldn't help but think of the many children who lack that type of support network or anything close to it. In some cases, children in foster care lack even one adult who is focused on their future success and development. Of course, that is where the work of our organization comes in. In many cases, our children do have one adult looking out for their interests—and that person is their CASA volunteer. My experience at graduation highlighted for me the urgent need to strengthen our efforts to ensure that each child who needs one has a CASA volunteer to look to for support and advocacy.

So how do we get there? It's a question that the staff and board of National CASA have spent a great deal of time on recently, culminating in the adoption of a five-year strategic plan in September 2009. This plan incorporates five strategic initiatives, each based on increased and more effective collaboration with our state organizations and local programs. The five initiatives can be summarized as follows:

Supporting and engaging our volunteers. This initiative focuses on steps National CASA can take to improve the level of engagement of and training opportunities for volunteers, to increase volunteer retention and recruitment as well as more generally to raise the level of collaboration and teamwork within the network. A key aspect of this initiative involves tapping into new technology practices and platforms, such as social networking sites. An important first step—improving the quality and functionality of the National CASA website—occurred almost a year ago with the rollout of the new CASAforChildren.org.

Building capacity at the program level. While the first initiative is focused on volunteers, the second is focused on how National CASA can better serve state and local programs as well as build capacity throughout the network. The initiative will focus on assisting state and local programs with strategic planning, leadership and governance, resource development, volunteer oversight and training, information technology and a host of other management-related issues. The more support National CASA can give to the network in running their organizations, the more time local programs can spend focusing on the core mission of advocating on behalf of children.

Reducing disproportionality and ensuring equitable outcomes. This initiative is the focus of this issue of *The Connection*, so you'll have the opportunity to learn more about it in the pages that follow. By sponsoring more detailed research and evaluation, providing training and resources on the issue to the network and actively collaborating with the child welfare community at the national and local levels, National CASA can make a difference in reducing disparate treatment based on race or other factors and in ensuring equitable outcomes.

Successful transitions into early adulthood. The fourth initiative focuses on developing advocacy tools for the network specific to young people preparing to transition out of the foster care system into early adulthood. National CASA will engage with other organizations focused on these youth so that our volunteers can benefit from their expertise as well. We are well on our way to implementing our new *Fostering Futures* initiative, which provides a curriculum specifically preparing our volunteers to work with youth in transition.

Raising awareness and developing resources. The fifth initiative is geared toward raising community support for our cause as well as increasing the level and diversity of funding for our network. We are focusing on further developing both the board and staff of National CASA with respect to fundraising. We seek to better leverage the assets and relationships of the entire network to develop these needed resources.

These goals are ambitious and require a tremendous amount of time and work from everyone involved. But with your help, five years from now we'll be much closer to achieving our mission: "to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused or neglected child can be safe, establish permanence and have the opportunity to thrive." 📣

THE Connection

News and Information from the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association



A publication of the National CASA Association, representing 1,055 program offices and 70,919 CASA volunteers serving 237,095 children nationwide.

The nationwide Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) movement mobilizes community volunteers to speak up for the best interests of abused and neglected children.

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

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

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

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Unless otherwise noted, children in *Connection* photos are not from actual abuse and neglect cases. Stock images are for illustrative purposes only, and all people depicted are models.



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 Phone (206) 270-0072 or (800) 628-3233
 Email: theconnection@nationalcasa.org
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Speak Up for a Child®

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The Connection
 National CASA Association
 100 W. Harrison
 North Tower, Suite 500
 Seattle, WA 98119
 Email: theconnection@nationalcasa.org

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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.

How Powerful Are Words?

Chadwick Sapenter

Words are so powerful that the two-letter word *no* can stop and start nations from going to war.

Words are so powerful that the “N-word” stirs up memories and emotions of pain, rage and embarrassment for some; and for others the “N-word” is a reminder of how you can take what was once meant to hurt you and use it as a term of endearment.

Words are so powerful that the “F-word” symbolizes a variety of images: an inappropriate four-letter word, a derogatory term towards the sexual preferences of another person or a label placed on children who are removed from their biological parents.

Of all the words, the “F-word” has had one of the most tremendous impacts on my life.

I was 17 years old and entering the last semester of what was supposed to be my senior year of high school. I walked into my high school guidance counselor’s office, and she immediately greeted me with open arms, a big smile and what I assumed was the willingness to give me *guidance*. Boy, was I wrong. The conversation went like this:

“Chad, it’s so good to see you. How can I help you?” she asked.

I began to explain to her that I was getting offers to go to college on an athletic scholarship, and I wanted to know what I needed to do to graduate on time. Because this was a small town in Texas and football is as important as air to some people here, she was initially excited to help me with whatever I needed. She told me that if I gave her some time to look at my file, she was certain she could help me.

As she began going through the file, I noticed her demeanor change. What was

initially a look of joy was turning into one of sorrow, doubt or disgust. Several minutes had passed, and the silence in the room was eating through me like a maggot through a carcass. Uncertain as to what she was reading that was causing this shift, I sat patiently, awaiting her guidance.

What seemed like an eternity had passed when she finally turned to me, pulling off her glasses. What came out of her mouth was totally unexpected; she dropped an F-bomb on me. My high school guidance counselor looked at me and said...

“You’re a foster kid...right?” she said with a look of disbelief and a sarcastic tone.

“Yes ma’am,” I replied, ashamed.

“Well you should just drop out right now; it’s not realistic for you to ever do anything,” she commanded.

I was confused, embarrassed and angry. I had no idea what happened. How could that “F-word” change so much? How could that “F-word” guarantee that I no longer had potential, that I no longer should dream and—worst of all—that my life was now worthless?

As I walked back to my class, the words of my CASA volunteer, Leslie Foster, echoed in my head. “Chad, don’t let this situation define you. You can do anything.” Over and over I heard his voice, and it began to drown out the conversation with my counselor. As soon as I stopped allowing the situation to define me, I was introduced to an opportunity to take as many classes as I wanted as fast as I wanted, with the only caveat being that I had to make at least a B in every class. I got the remaining 18 credits I needed and graduated on time.



As I was being handed my diploma, my guidance counselor looked at me as if she’d seen a ghost. The only thing she said was,

“Oh, you made it.”

We have to learn to appreciate one another’s differences whether we understand them or not. You have no idea what someone had to go through to get to where they are, and what you may assume based on your experiences with a particular group isn’t necessarily what applies to the whole group. The one word that we all deserve is the “L-word.” Love is a gift that we are all worthy of, and all are required to give. Words matter, what you say matters, and what you don’t say matters. Choose your words carefully, and use them wisely. 🗣️

Chadwick Sapenter, 29, entered foster care at the age of 15 along with his two younger brothers and aged out at 18. He went to college initially on a football scholarship and will graduate from Texas State University in the spring. Sapenter is the CEO and founder of Little Book of Words Publishing, LLC, based in Austin. He also authored the company’s first book, The Little Book of Words Every Foster Kid Should Know. One of his greatest joys is speaking to people involved in the child welfare system at all levels to provide hope, insight and inspiration. Visit chadwicksapenter.com and littlebookofwords.com.

Achieving Service Equity: Collaborative Efforts in Texas to Impact Disproportionality

Carolyn Rodriguez
Senior Director, Texas Strategic Consulting
Casey Family Programs, Austin, TX

Children of color are disproportionately represented in child welfare systems across the country, and they suffer disparately poor outcomes as a result. This does not have to happen, as Texas is proving in its efforts to confront the problem.

The Texas work to impact—and ultimately eliminate—disproportionality and improve disparate outcomes for youth in the child welfare system has been expanding at the state level since 2004. The results are promising, as several counties have narrowed the gap between children of color and white children in child welfare.

The Texas Community Engagement Model, originating in the Beaumont-Port Arthur Child Protective Services (CPS) region in the late 1990s, was expanded statewide when Joyce James became assistant commissioner for Texas CPS. This gave Casey Family Programs the opportunity to help spread the model to many Texas communities.

For Casey, reducing disproportionality is essential to safely reducing the number of children in foster care. Casey is the nation's largest operating foundation whose sole mission is to provide, improve—and ultimately eliminate the need for—foster care. Casey has a long history in Texas, providing direct service to youth and families since 1984 as well as systems improvement and strategic consulting support to the child welfare system since 2002.

The Texas model provides a successful foundation for addressing the systemic problems of disproportionality and

disparate outcomes for those most impacted by the lack of service equity. It operates through specific, strategically applied concepts that rely on strong engagement with partners at the community level as well as across numerous systems that serve children and families.

The community-based strategies at the regional and state levels have reduced disproportional child welfare involvement of African Americans, who are most overrepresented in Texas within all stages of CPS service. Findings from the Texas state-level disproportionality evaluation, published in a Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) report in March 2010, indicate an overall steady reduction in disparate removals statewide of African American children, relative to Caucasian children, over a four-year period.

Various factors, including the community engagement model efforts, account for a reduction in removal rates where the work originated and has had the longest foothold—counties including Tarrant (Fort Worth), Harris (Houston), Jefferson (Beaumont-Port Arthur) and Travis (Austin).

The Texas model relies on community advisory committees that partner through a co-leadership approach with CPS to lead the disproportionality work in their regions and systems. Casey helped to launch the advisory committees in several regions of the state, assisting with the development of charters to help guide their work, convening systems partners to consider community zip code areas to target the work as well



as providing technical assistance as the committees crafted their visions and values. The elevated voices of parents and young people who have experienced the child welfare system firsthand have helped guide the strategies needed for systems improvement.

CASA programs are among the many partners involved in the work in Texas. CASA staff and volunteers are serving on community advisory committees, and Texas CASA is among the members of the Texas Statewide Disproportionality Task Force. They are joining with others to identify opportunities and to define the direction for strategic efforts locally and regionally. Along with DFPS and Casey, Texas CASA is gathering tools, materials and training curricula that can advance proven disproportionality concepts to ensure that all partners are working in concert to address the issue.

Casey's *Knowing Who You Are* curriculum, designed with the recognition that youth in care must develop a healthy racial and ethnic identity, provides unique learning experiences for social workers and community stakeholders. The CASA network has embraced this curriculum and incorporated it into its repertoire of approaches with youth and families.

CASA programs have also joined Casey and DFPS in participating in a number of *Undoing Racism* workshops provided by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. This training focuses on "undoing" the many manifestations of institutional racism that combine

with other factors to perpetuate disproportionality.

The Casey-CASA partnership has elevated the need for strategies that use data-driven approaches, develop leadership and accountability, create cross-systems strategies and promote community-based co-leadership efforts. The Texas model (see sidebar at right) also values stories from families and young people, which are always the touchstone that authenticate the work and serve to make the data real.

Together, Casey Family Programs and the CASA network are uniting the strategic use of data with the stories of families to address disproportionality throughout our country. We hope you will join us in helping the child welfare system to continue its progress on this journey. 🚧

Steps and Principles Used in Texas

The Texas model has four interdependent stages defined as follows:

- **Community Awareness and Engagement**—When the problem is made visible, data are shared, the story is told to the community (as well as to its child welfare systems) and a compelling call to action is made.
- **Community Leadership**—When leadership within the organization expands to the community, co-leadership strategies begin to be identified, approaches are defined and guiding principles are embraced.
- **Community Organization**—When guidance from the community, the voice of parents and young people as well as anti-racist principles begin to shape the work. And when community strengths are recognized and inform the response to implement strategies and effect desired outcomes.
- **Community Accountability**—When results and outcomes are clarified and sustainability planning occurs, with accountability to and from the community as a natural response.

As Texas has found, successfully reducing disproportionality and disparities requires a strategic approach that embraces a set of principles:

- The work must be family-centered. To help children, we must help their families. Constituent voices must inform the work every step of the way—they know best because they have lived the experience of navigating the system.
- In facilitating this work, a message of hope is critical. There should be a passion for “making history,” a belief that a movement for change can emerge.
- Community members and partners must be able to participate in meaningful ways so that they will not lose their investment in the movement.
- Facilitative leaders must convey a belief that things can improve, that things can change and that disproportionality can be impacted.



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Justice for All: Ensuring Equity of Services for Children in Foster Care

by Lisette Austin

When 12-year-old Michelle Pacheco-Espinoza met her new CASA volunteer, Lynne Alper, she wasn't sure what to think. "It was the first time I'd had a Caucasian person in my life," Michelle, now 23, remembers. "I didn't trust her."

Michelle, who is Mexican American and grew up in Santa Cruz County, CA, had been in foster care for a year and had already experienced multiple placements. "That first day, Lynne took me for a walk," says Michelle. "I wasn't sure about her at first. But we hit it off."

Lynne soon became an important person in Michelle's life. A high school teacher for many years, Lynne knew that education would be key to Michelle's success. She also realized that as a minority child in foster care with learning disabilities, the odds were stacked against Michelle. So Lynne got to work.

"She was a huge advocate for me in the area of education," says Michelle. "She made sure that I was tested in school, and she would meet frequently with my teachers."

Lynne also encouraged Michelle to take Spanish in school to perfect her grammar and reading skills. Having learned Spanish while in the Peace Corps, Lynne was able to practice with her.

"This was important for my identity and heritage because in foster care I didn't live in Latino homes," says Michelle. "It made me feel more connected to my culture." Lynne also advocated for Michelle at the age of 16 to meet her father, who lived in Mexico, for the very first time.

As Michelle neared the end of high school, Lynne encouraged her to continue her education. "Nobody else in my life was encouraging me to go to college—the focus was on graduating high school," remembers Michelle. "Lynne helped me fill out a scholarship form, and I got enough money to attend college."

Michelle is working as a peer mentor and program assistant at the Santa Cruz County CASA office for the summer. She has experienced significant successes in her life—most of which she credits to her advocate. "I don't think I would have turned out the way I have without her," says Michelle. "She has been a huge influence."



Michelle Pacheco-Espinoza with her former CASA volunteer, Lynne Alper

Michelle's story could easily have ended up very differently. Statistically, children and families of color in the foster care system receive fewer and lower-quality services, less foster parent support, fewer contacts by caseworkers and less access to mental health and drug treatment.

"Everyone else I knew who was Latino and in foster care had outcomes that were not very good," says Michelle. "I've seen many fall through the cracks as they got older—and end up homeless and on drugs."

This inequity of services is framed by a general overrepresentation of children and families of color in the system. Research shows that a disproportionate number of minority children enter foster care and stay in care longer. For example, although African American children make up only 15% of the general child population, they represent 35% of children in foster care. According to the Child Welfare League of America, children of color are also more likely to be moved from one placement to another, are less likely to be reunified with their parents or close family and wait longer to be adopted.

When it comes to equity of services, families of color are not the only ones experiencing unequal treatment. Disability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and immigrant status can all be barriers to receiving resources

and having better outcomes. Many working within the child welfare system still have preconceived ideas about children who are living in poverty, have a disability, identify as gay or lesbian or come from immigrant families. These biases can negatively affect important decisions that define a child's future.

Inequity of services in the child welfare system is an issue that agencies and organizations across the country, including CASA programs, are tackling. National CASA's current strategic plan includes the goal to "reduce disproportionality and ensure equitable outcomes for children." More and more people are willing to discuss institutional racism and the influences of implicit bias. More are acknowledging the need to address disproportionality and ensure equity of services so that *all* children can have an equal chance to experience positive outcomes.

Leading Change in Texas

Joyce James at the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services is dedicated to reducing disproportionality within the child welfare system and sees this work as crucial to improving the system for all children, youth and families. Her focus began in 1996 after spending many years struggling with what she was witnessing, first as a caseworker and then as a supervisor and program director. James is now associate deputy commissioner of the department's Center for the Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities.

"As I became responsible for larger areas, I began to see more clearly the inequity and disproportionality in our system," remembers James. "About 14 years ago, I made the decision to really look at system data by race and ethnicity as a way to understand possible contributing factors to disproportionality for African American children and families. This would also help us understand whether there was an imbalance in how we provided services."

The data did not reflect a system of equity. "We brought many people to the table to discuss contributing factors," says James. "We used the data to guide discussions and raise questions about how we were doing business within our organization. We recognized that what we were seeing was not solely a CPS problem; however, we committed to holding ourselves accountable and examining our role."

James's department conducted research to find out which communities had the most child removals and what the characteristics were of the

families living in those communities. "Although we were seeing higher numbers of removals for African American children and families, at the time we didn't have any research showing that these families were neglecting and abusing their children at a higher rate," she recalls.

Now that they knew where to focus, James and her team developed a series of strategies that included making resources more accessible to families; learning more about community history and culture; engaging parents, youth and families in service delivery planning; and working to increase the number of children who could remain safely in their own homes. The result has been impressive.

[continued on page 8]



"There has been a definite decline in disproportionality of services," says James. Data show that between 2005 and 2008, there was a reduction in the disproportionate rate of removal. Over the same period, rates of reunification and kinship placement increased. "We developed a successful strategy to change the way we delivered services through a collaborative effort among families, youth, communities, CASA and other child- and family-serving systems," says James.

CASA New Orleans

Dellona Davis has also made it her mission to ensure equity of services for children in foster care. Davis first joined CASA New Orleans as a volunteer in 2001. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, devastating the city. By then Davis had left the CASA program. But she got back in touch in hopes of finding out how the youth she had worked with were doing. This in turn led to a career change.

"I had been working in hospital management, but after Katrina I realized that money was not the most important thing in the world," says Davis. "I needed to make a difference."

And she did. Davis became executive director of CASA New Orleans. She quickly saw the need to address the disproportionality in outcomes for youth. "When I took over, I looked at how we could better serve kids and make our board, volunteers and staff reflective of the children we were serving."

Davis began actively recruiting more African American, Latino and male volunteers. "We spent a lot of time

going out in the community spreading the word," says Davis. "We wanted people to know that we were not some exclusive club, that we were trying to make outcomes better for children in foster care."

The program also began to actively recruit people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. "I'm not sure why anyone thinks people with limited resources wouldn't want to volunteer," says Davis. "They *do* want to serve, and they make great advocates because they understand."

Recently Davis has focused on bringing in more gay and lesbian advocates—with some controversy. "Some people see it as encouraging gay behavior in children," explains Davis. However, she feels it is important to acknowledge that some of their youth identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. "When people come in the door—I don't care what their background is—they should feel understood," says Davis. "I don't want anyone to feel like they don't belong."

CASA New Orleans has also recruited younger members to the program's board as well as public relations and fundraising experts to help increase community awareness and fiscal resources. Davis offers regular diversity training to staff and volunteers.

Although CASA New Orleans is now being recognized as a model program in terms of ensuring equity of services, Davis remains realistic about the task in front of her. "Unfortunately the work is never done. It's a constant journey—there's always something we need to be working on to be sure we serve the needs of these kids," she says.

[continued on page 10]





Equity Resources

In addition to the following highlighted resources, you can find a robust list of organizations, publications and tools related to equity at **CASAforChildren.org/EquityResources**. This online page provides the most up-to-date list of resources and provides clickable links, eliminating the need to type long addresses into your browser. A separate list of national training resources can be found at **CASAforChildren.org/EquityTraining**.

Casey Family Programs

The Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare is a partnership between Casey and the Center for the Study of Social Policy. The alliance works to create a child welfare system that is free of structural racism and that benefits all children, families and communities. Visit bit.ly/casey-cssp. In addition, National CASA has been using Casey's *Knowing Who You Are* (KWYA) curriculum to train CASA/GAL board members, staff and volunteers on the impact of racial/ethnic identity development since 2007. This three-part learning experience includes an online video, an e-learning component and a two-day in-person training session. For more information, visit bit.ly/casey-kwya. If you are interested in bringing KWYA to your program or state, email training@nationalcasa.org.

Courts Catalyzing Change Initiative

This project of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges brings together judicial officers and other systems experts to set a national agenda for court-based training, research and reform initiatives to reduce the disproportionate representation of children of color in dependency court systems. Visit bit.ly/ncjfcjcc.

Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect

Information about the Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4), a report to Congress, is available at nis4.org. This research includes the latest demographics relating to disproportionality, including race and socioeconomic status.

Implicit Association Test

Project Implicit's website describes research measuring bias and implicit associations. It also allows you to take various versions of the Implicit Association Test. Visit implicit.harvard.edu.

National CASA Connection Articles of Interest

Past issues of *The Connection* dealing with specific equity topics are at CASAforChildren.org/ConnectionArchive:

- Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ Youth in Care (Fall 2009)
- Challenges Faced by Foster Youth with Chronic Illnesses and Severe Disabilities (Spring 2009)
- Serving American Indian/Alaska Native Children in Care (Winter 2009)
- Overrepresentation of Youth of Color in Foster Care (Summer 2007)
- Advocating for Foster Youth in Special Education (Winter 2007)
- The Interplay of Poverty and Child Welfare (Fall 2006)
- Immigrant Children and Families in the Foster Care System (Summer 2006)
- Multiracial Youth in Care (Summer 2004)

Courts Catalyzing Change

Another promising approach is being implemented by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges through a recent initiative called *Courts Catalyzing Change: Achieving Equity and Fairness in Foster Care* (CCC). The initiative brings together judicial officers and other systems experts to set a national agenda for court-based training, research and reform initiatives to reduce the disproportionate representation of children of color in dependency court systems.

In 2008, the CCC Steering Committee began the development of a Racial Equity Benchcard in hopes of reducing disparities by guiding and educating judges. A benchcard is a simple document judges have on hand with important questions regarding the child's life to keep in mind.

"Disproportionality is a clear issue in foster care across the country," says Hon. Nan Waller, a circuit court judge in Multnomah County, OR, who has over two decades of experience in the justice system. Judge Waller is involved in a pilot study of the new benchcard.

"No child comes into foster care without a judge approving it, and no child leaves care without judicial approval," says Waller. "We have a responsibility to understand disproportionality and how it influences who comes into and leaves foster care."

The CCC benchcard encourages judges to ask themselves important questions like, "What is the culture of the family in front of me? Do I have the right people in the room? Are the right questions being asked?" Judges are also encouraged to make sure parents are engaged and part of the planning.



"We want judges to check their own implicit bias. It's too easy to make quick decisions without obtaining sufficient information," says Waller.

The benchcard was piloted in three jurisdictions: Los Angeles, Omaha and Portland. There are both research and control groups—some judges use the card while others do not. Preliminary results are promising, with increased family placement and lowered rates of entry into foster care after implementation of the benchcard.

"The benchcard causes people to slow down and really think about who is in front of them," says Judge Waller. "By asking the right questions, we can create individually tailored plans that pull from the family's strengths and culture."

Call to Action

The good news is there is an increasing awareness of the issue of disproportionality. "This convergence of attention is going to have the result that we all want," says Judge Waller. "The justice and child welfare systems, and individual communities, will be better able to serve families."

But it's clear that there still is much work to be done. What can those involved with children in foster care do to work toward equity of services? Judge Waller recommends starting by taking the Implicit Association Test (see Resources sidebar) to understand how implicit bias influences our decisions about people.

"No one wants to think of themselves as biased," says Waller. "But we are all influenced by our culture, the media and our histories."

Joyce James offers additional recommendations. "Collaboration is key in understanding what is best



“Statistically I should have been homeless, pregnant and a high-school dropout, but I’m none of those things. My advocate was my voice—she gave me the power and strength to succeed.”

—Michelle Pacheco-Espinoza



for a child,” says James. Not only collaboration among social workers, advocates and others closely involved with the child—but also the family and community. “Community involvement is critical,” she says. “It’s about helping communities get back to the business of supporting families in keeping their children safe.”

James strongly encourages courageous conversations on race and institutionalized racism, learning about the history and culture of children’s families and communities as well as working toward kinship care placement when a child must be removed from home. She also stresses that each family is unique.

“We’ve moved away from our cookie-cutter approach and toward a model that meets each family’s individual need,” says James. “This grew out of a greater sense of cultural awareness and an understanding of the importance of family engagement—which in turn brought a greater feeling of mutual respect.”

Waller, James and Davis all agree that learning more about the issue of disproportionality is important, as is ongoing cultural training—including exploring one’s own background and biases.

“It’s also important that we include all areas of disparity—such as disability, poverty, sexual orientation and gender,” says James. “When we don’t, we are maintaining the system of inequity and further alienating youth who are looking to us for help.”

Simply being in foster care itself can be a barrier. “Equity of services doesn’t just mean addressing disproportionality within foster care,” says Davis. “It’s also helping youth in the

system obtain services and resources that children outside the system would receive. Being in foster care is a label that often results in discrimination and lack of services.”

Pursuing these strategies can yield tangible results. “We have seen a philosophical shift in our attitude toward the people we work with,” says James. “Early in this work we began to see people taking more factors into account when making important decisions about a child’s welfare—and making decisions reflective of what we would want for our own families and children.”

James also mentions that much of this work was supported by CASA programs. “We’ve worked together to increase the cultural competency of staff and volunteers—which is now reflected in improved outcomes for the children, youth and families we work with.”

In Michelle Pacheco-Espinoza’s case, she was lucky to have a CASA volunteer who pushed to ensure she received the same educational and medical services as other children.

“If more advocates gave that extra push—whether they are of the same culture or not—then there would be more kids with better outcomes,” says Pacheco-Espinoza. “Statistically I should have been homeless, pregnant and a high-school dropout, but I’m none of those things. My advocate was my voice—she gave me the power and strength to succeed.” 🗣️

Lisette Austin is a freelance writer who contributes regularly to local and national publications. Her areas of expertise include foster care, health disparities and multiethnic identity. She lives in Seattle with her husband and son.

Anthony Hamilton Raises Awareness of National CASA



Grammy Award-winning R&B recording artist Anthony Hamilton will serve as a new spokesman for National CASA. Hamilton will work alongside Judge Glenda Hatchett, who has been our spokesperson for the past seven years, to raise awareness of the organization and recruit volunteers. He will also represent volunteer advocacy at national child welfare conferences and events around the country to raise awareness of the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. Hamilton has produced a 30-second volunteer recruitment radio PSA, which is available to state and local member programs via download from CASAforChildren.org.

"We are honored and excited that Anthony Hamilton will serve as one of our national spokespeople," stated Michael Piraino, CEO of the National CASA Association. "His passion and dedication for children will go a long way to help us recruit much-needed African American male volunteers."

Theta Starlight Walk Benefits CASA Program

On June 25, more than 700 members of Kappa Alpha Theta and their special guests took a nighttime walk to benefit the CASA Support Council of Pima County, AZ. The first-ever CASA

Starlight Walk took place in conjunction with Theta's biannual Grand Convention in Tucson.

Leading the walk was Robin McGraw—a strong supporter of National CASA, a Theta member and a goodwill ambassador for the Dr. Phil Foundation. "Phil and I do this for the kids," McGraw told participants. "I am honored to be a part of Theta's exemplary commitment to CASA and supporting kids everywhere who need a voice in court to obtain a safe home."

Melissa Dunlap, community outreach specialist at CASA of Arizona, found the Starlight Walk to be a wonderful opportunity to experience the enthusiasm and commitment of Theta women. "Their collective passion about wanting to help children was inspiring," Dunlap said. "While listening to former foster youth Christa Drake tell her story, the room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. It was clear that the women of Theta were inspired and motivated to help make a difference for youth in foster care."

Pima County CASA Program Manager Ramona Panas was moved to see the collective energy of Theta women joining together for the cause. "We were fortunate to benefit locally from the awareness this convention brought to the CASA program," said Panas. "We look forward to having the Thetas back in Tucson for their 2012 convention."

Since 1989, National CASA and its network of programs have been the official philanthropy of the Kappa Alpha Theta fraternity. Each year, college and alumnae members dedicate countless hours of volunteer service and raise nearly \$500,000 in support of the mission of local CASA programs.



Left to right: Pima County CASA Program Manager Ramona Panas, Robin McGraw, CASA of Arizona Community Outreach Specialist Melissa Dunlap and National CASA CEO Michael Piraino

CASA Can: CASA of Travis County Launches New Web Campaign

CASA of Travis County in Austin, TX, has launched a new web-based advertising campaign. *CASA Can* was developed by Razorfish, an interactive advertising agency. Online advertising space—a total of 72 million impressions—is being donated to CASA of Travis County and National CASA by Razorfish's clients. Approximately 87% of the banner ads will appear on national blogs and websites primarily targeted to women, with content involving lifestyle topics and the charitable causes of celebrities.


CASA Can ads began appearing on websites on July 1. The campaign will run through December. Proceeds from ads appearing on Travis County-area websites will benefit the

Austin program. Donations from ads appearing on websites outside of Travis County will go to National CASA, with a portion passing through to the Austin program, consistent with National CASA's revenue-sharing protocol. This national partnership with network-wide benefit was initiated by CASA of Travis County.

Denise Conway, owner of Austin Sonic and a member of the CASA of Travis County Board of Directors for 18 years, helped bring this project to fruition. Conway joined the National CASA Board of Trustees in 2006. She had this to say about *CASA Can*: "As a trustee on the national board, I am thrilled to see this local project in the online space turn into a win-win for the entire CASA/GAL network."

New Marketing and Awareness Materials Provided to CASA Network

One of the primary roles of the National CASA Association is to increase awareness of the CASA cause. By conducting national media outreach and advertising campaigns, and providing customized resources to member programs, National CASA helps local CASA programs recruit volunteers and strengthen their image in the community.

In June, National CASA and its San Francisco-based agency, Amazon Advertising, provided the network with a new awareness campaign and related materials. Samples of two of the three customizable print ads, "Sammy" and "Hyla," are shown at right. Each ad uses background graphics to tell the child's story. Additional pieces of the media toolkit include new statistic sheets, a key messages document, a media relations guide as well as online communications and social media guidelines. 



6 Tips for Reducing Disparity in Child Welfare

Honorable Louis A. Trosch Jr.
District Court Judge
26th Judicial District of North Carolina
Charlotte, NC



Judge Trosch and daughter Pressley, 13

As a juvenile court judge, each day I see a disproportionate number of children of color in my courtroom. As a volunteer advocate, you are likely to have a similar experience. Disproportionality in the child welfare system refers to the over- or underrepresentation of children relative to their proportions in the general population. Across the country, children of color are overrepresented in all aspects of the child welfare system. Investigations are substantiated at higher rates for minority children, more children of color enter custody, and they tend to remain in custody longer than white children (*Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System: The Disproportionate Representation of Children of Color in Foster Care*, Casey Family Programs, 2007). Furthermore, these children face larger obstacles to attaining safe and permanent homes. For example, children of color face longer adoption wait times and are less likely to return home (for more details, go to bit.ly/AFCARS16).

This difference in outcomes for children of different races and ethnicities is known as disparity. Disproportionality and disparity are most often thought of in terms of race and ethnicity. However, children with disabilities and who identify as LGBTQ also face prejudices and barriers that prevent them from having successful outcomes in the child welfare system. CASA/GAL volunteers can play a vital role in helping to eliminate these disproportionalities and disparities by using the following six tips in their work.

1. Know Yourself.

Bias is everywhere. You and I are biased when we arrive in the courtroom each morning. Indeed, everyone involved in the child welfare system brings some type of bias to their work. All of us are aware of the history of purposeful discrimination in this country. Hopefully, few people continue to act upon such explicit prejudices. On the other hand, we are often not aware of the implicit biases that affect all of our perceptions of and interactions with others. This very real psychological phenomenon significantly impacts children of color, children with disabilities and LGBTQ children. Implicit bias is caused by processing shortcuts taken by all human brains, which then result in subconscious stereotypes. These biases color your perception of the children with whom you work, as well as of their families and cultural heritage. To better understand the pervasiveness of these implicit biases, I recommend taking one or more of the Implicit Association Tests (IAT) posted at implicit.harvard.edu. These tests can tell you a lot about your implicit bias that you may not even realize you possess. Recognizing our own biases is a critical first step to understanding the barriers faced by many children and then overcoming them.

2. Participate in Cultural Competency/Inclusion Training.

As a CASA volunteer, it is important to understand and respect diversity in all forms, whether it be race, ethnicity, gender issues, disabilities or sexual orientation. In order to assist children and families in overcoming these biases against them, volunteers should participate in equity training. When

implemented through best practices, training will help you recognize the impact that biases have. More importantly, you can learn strategies for dealing with unconscious biases. Several trainings are available, such as Casey Family Programs' *Knowing Who You Are* curriculum, which is specifically designed for workers in the child welfare field and has been used extensively by CASA programs across the country. In Charlotte we have a special initiative, *Race Matters for Juvenile Justice*, which we designed to meet local needs utilizing the nationally recognized *Race Matters* series. Through this initiative, we seek to educate our community and then work together to eliminate disparities and disproportionalities seen in our jurisdiction. Check out CASAforChildren.org/EquityTraining and casey.org for more information on these and other programs.

3. Know the Data.

In 2008, 53% of the children living in foster care were children of color, although children of color make up only 41% of the child population in the United States (the *AFCARS Report* and the Annie E. Casey Foundation 2008 Kids Count Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org). As we've seen, children of color are overrepresented in all aspects of the child welfare system nationwide. But it is also vital to know your local statistics because local disproportionality levels can vary widely from state to state, even from county to county. For instance in Santa Clara County, CA, 52% of child welfare cases were Hispanic/Latino children, but they made up only 30% of the population. Meanwhile, in other locales, Hispanic/Latino children

were significantly underrepresented (Congressional Research Service, August 2005, *Race/Ethnicity and Child Welfare*). Accurate statistics are critical to understanding the specific issues of your jurisdiction.

4. Know the Specific Issues Related to the Child You Serve.

As you are aware, each child with whom you work is an individual with unique challenges. Just as you learn about these individual challenges, you should also be aware of each child's culture and its impact upon her life. It is important to advocate for children to become and remain culturally competent. The following article has more tips related to cultural competence: CASA volunteer Nirja Kapoor, "4 Steps to Maintaining Cultural Connection," *The Connection*, Summer 2007, p. 13. It is also important to realize cultural competence extends beyond race and ethnicity. LGBTQ youth, for instance, often face special challenges and benefit from advocacy strategies tailored to them. See LaRae Oberloh, "12 Tips


for Advocating for LGBTQ Youth," *The Connection*, Fall 2009, p. 14. Finally, Krisan Walker provides the eye-opening article "7 Tips for Advocating for Children with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses" in the Spring 2009 issue of *The Connection*, p. 15.

5. Know the Resources Available in Your Community.

Good advocates always stay up to date on the latest and best resources in their communities. As a judge, I make sure to know of the new programs that show high success rates so that I can refer children to services that will improve their lives. A national collaboration that focuses on eliminating disproportionality is Courts Catalyzing Change (CCC), a joint initiative between NCJFCJ and Casey Family Programs. Most recently, CCC has created a racial equity benchcard, described in the cover story. It is also helpful to know the resources in your own community serving children of color, those with disabilities and youth who identify as LGBTQ. For example, in

Charlotte there is a program, the *Community Building Initiative*, focused on building bridges among people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Check with your local CASA/GAL office to stay up to date on the resources that work in your community and then recommend them to help the children you represent.

6. Be the Voice that Gets the Conversation Started.

All too often we ignore race, bias and prejudice because it is an uncomfortable topic. Once you've followed these tips, you will be able to recognize disparity and disproportionality and their devastating impact upon children. It is up to you to openly discuss cultural context, discrimination and bias—intentional or otherwise—with the judge and other members of your child and family team. You can be a powerful voice for bringing attention to the disparity of outcomes for children of color, children with disabilities and LGBTQ children in the child welfare system. 

A Holiday Gift that Also Benefits Children

Did you know that Jewelers for Children (JFC), the charitable arm of the jewelry industry, is one of the CASA network's largest contributors? And with your purchase of a CASA pendant from JFC member Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers, you are also supporting National CASA's nationwide recruitment and training of community volunteers. Please tell your friends and shop with our dedicated partner this holiday season.



Diamond CASA Heart Pendant in Sterling Silver—\$99.99

Heart pendant features an adult and child design with 1/6 ct. tw. round diamonds set in sterling silver. With every purchase, Fred Meyer/Littman Jewelers will donate \$10 to National CASA.

Fred Meyer JEWELERS

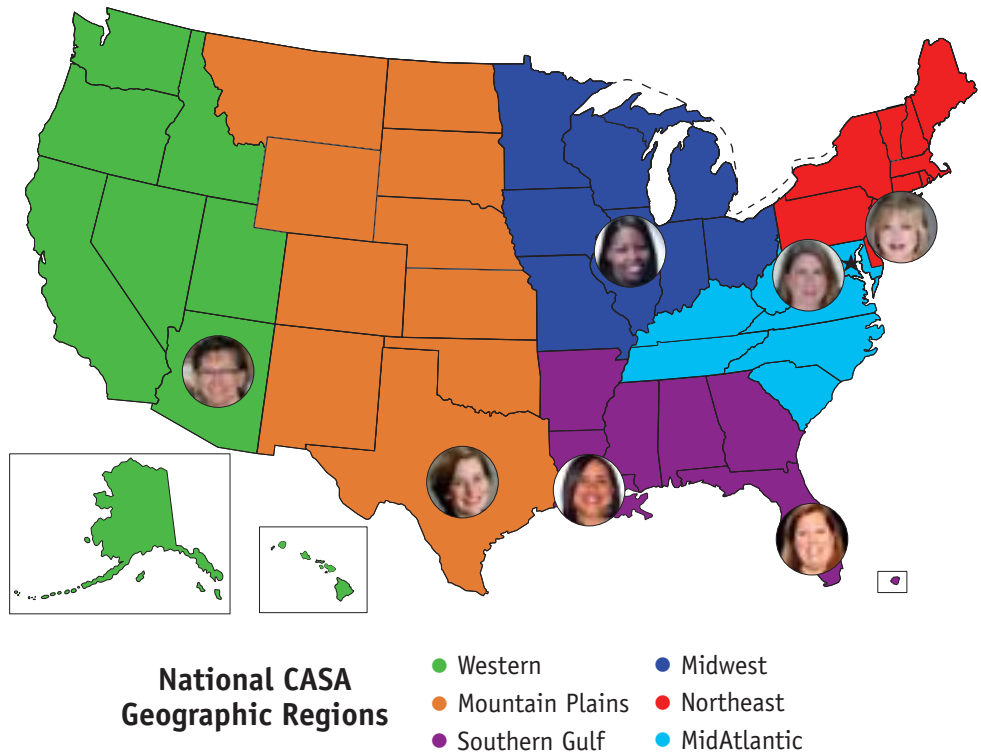
"For All Those Special Times"

Visit CASAforChildren.org/Jewelry to purchase your CASA jewelry gift today!

Equity Efforts Around the US

Program Spotlight normally features a full-page story about one CASA or GAL program's successful efforts to expand its reach or improve its effectiveness. In this issue, we thought it would be useful to look at equity-related initiatives of member programs around the country. The seven organizations featured below are themselves diverse in many ways, including staff size and community demographics. Included are the 2010 winner of the National CASA Inclusion Award and representatives of each of our six regions.

Together, these seven CASA programs illustrate how even modest efforts to create an inclusive environment and expand diversity of volunteers can pay off in terms of equity for children in care.



Winner of 2010 National CASA Association Inclusion Award

Why I Fight for Equity in New Orleans

Dellona D. Davis
Executive Director
CASA New Orleans, LA

I am motivated to address equity because we must ensure that outcomes for the children we serve as Court Appointed Special Advocates

are not predicted by race, poverty or lack of access to adequate community resources. As a results-driven individual who considers it an opportunity to serve children in the foster care system, I was pushed to take action when I realized the huge disproportionality of children of color in care and the fact that our children were facing disparities based on race and LGBTQ orientation.

One specific tactic I used was to engage and encourage our program's staff and volunteers to pursue reducing disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare

system as a top priority. This was done through the use of courageous conversations, as defined by Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton in their book *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. As advocates for children, the staff and volunteers use the four tenets of courageous conversations: 1) speak our truth, 2) expect and accept non-closure, 3) experience discomfort and 4) stay engaged. Everyone at CASA New Orleans is expected to confront institutional and individual issues that perpetuate disproportionality.

Incorporating inclusiveness has changed the culture of our program and increased the quality of advocacy. Recruitment of diverse volunteers has increased because we are seen as an inclusive agency. Our staff and volunteers identify theories about the causes of racial disproportionality as well as disparate treatment in the child welfare system and then address them consistently to ensure that the needs of all children are equitably and fairly met. CASA New Orleans's commitment to addressing equity has assisted us in understanding and better serving the children we encounter every day.



Western Region

Arizona's Diversity and Inclusiveness Journey—The Beginning

Bonnie Marcus
Program Manager
CASA of Arizona

In 2009, I attended a two-day workshop offered to state directors by National CASA. I had no idea what this training was—only that National CASA

had identified it as an important component of diversity work. I came to learn the power of *Knowing Who You Are (KWYA)*, a curriculum developed by Casey Family Programs that asks participants to explore their connection to their own racial and ethnic identities, with a goal of enabling us to be important catalysts in helping children in care maintain their own.

Too often in foster care, children lose the part of themselves that connected them to their history, the “who am I?” part that many of us take for granted. While intellectually I have always grasped the inequities in our systems, I had never thought about this particular personal loss that our children suffer when they are taken from their biological families. Thus began CASA of Arizona’s journey to explore where we, as individuals and as CASA programs, can affect how children feel about themselves—and perhaps affect the racial disparity that exists in our systems.

As a state office, we discussed at length what kind of involvement we should have with this topic. Was this a matter for local programs to deal with on their own? What kind of leadership could we offer? In the end, we decided to approach this on a statewide level, and that meant beginning dialogue with our 15 county programs on a topic that can be sensitive and challenging.

We set up five regional meetings over three months and asked all program staff to attend. We traveled to the programs and reviewed statistics. We talked about working with individual children. We discussed the benefits and challenges of this work. And most importantly, we discussed what diversity and inclusiveness mean. Discussion was lively and fascinating as we delved into issues that bring about myriad opinions. But in an open and safe atmosphere, we learned a lot about our staff’s concerns, fears and excitement for tackling a statewide diversity and inclusiveness project. These discussions were the beginning of ongoing communication among the state office and the local programs as well as a new Diversity and Inclusiveness Committee that will lead us into the future.

Concurrent with these regional meetings, CASA of Arizona began collaborating with Casey Family Programs, Child Protective Services and National CASA to facilitate training for all CASA staff in KWYA. With a grant from the

Governor’s Office and wonderful collaboration with our Court Improvement Program, we are presenting the KWYA workshop to county teams in five regions of the state. We are excited that the teams are made up of not only CASA staff but also the presiding juvenile court judge and Child Protective Services as well as representatives from behavioral health, juvenile probation and education. Our goal is to create champions and system teams in each county that will embrace the issues surrounding the racial and ethnic identity of children as well as the disparity that exists across our systems.



Mountain Plains Region

Austin Dedicates a Staff Position to Support Equity

Laura D. Wolf, JD
Executive Director
CASA of Travis County
Austin, TX

In our community, both Child Protective Services and our judges are focused on disproportionality.

We decided that we wanted to be a genuine partner with them on this issue. Furthermore, we recognized that we could not effectively advocate in the best interest of children of color if we did not understand the children’s needs, their cultures and the institutional biases that may have brought them into the state’s care in the first place.

Our staff began by participating in *Undoing Racism* workshops. As more staff went through this training, we were more motivated to ask ourselves hard questions about our own work and advocacy. Additionally, like many CASA programs, we have struggled to build a diverse volunteer base that would more closely reflect the demographics of the children we serve.

To focus our efforts and follow through on our good intentions, we created a new staff position: a community outreach liaison. This liaison is part of our volunteer recruitment team and focuses on building relationships within the African American and Hispanic communities, in particular. Additionally, this position acts as our lead—along with me—on disproportionality. She serves on the local Disproportionality Advisory Board and related committees and workgroups, building relationships with both CPS and community groups.

We created this position less than a year ago, but we are already seeing improvements in volunteer recruitment—more diversity among our new volunteers—as well as in our image in the African American and Hispanic communities. In addition, we are raising the awareness and education of our staff and volunteers on issues of equity for children

[continued on page 18]

in foster care by providing trainings and facilitated discussions, staff retreats, etc. The diversity of our staff and board are also improving.

With continued focus and the benefit of a staff position dedicated to these efforts, we believe that we will see a more inclusive organizational culture and a volunteer pool more reflective of our community. Ultimately, we want to ensure that CASA of Travis County is working to end disproportionality and is not inadvertently doing anything to maintain or exacerbate inequitable outcomes for children of color.



Southern Gulf Region

Even a Miami Latina Had Something to Learn About Diversity

Sonia L. Ferrer
Circuit Director
Guardian Ad Litem Program—
11th Judicial Circuit
Miami, FL (winner of 2009 National
CASA Association Inclusion Award)

In 2007, my program was one of five selected by National CASA to participate in an inclusion and diversity initiative. Coming from Miami, “the melting pot Mecca” of the nation, we thought that we were as diverse a program as one could ever be. As we started to go through the process, we learned all too quickly that we were not.

During this period, I attended National CASA’s annual conference in Orlando, where I heard the personal testimony of an incredible young lady named Lupe Tovar. Lupe may be reading this piece today, and I have never shared with her the impact that her story had on me.

Lupe grew up in foster care, always feeling like there was a part of her missing. While in care, she was placed in many foster homes. Some were Caucasian families, others were African American families, but never a Hispanic family. She never learned about her roots, her culture, her customs or her heritage. Lupe suffered the loss of her culture. The only culture that she could identify with was that of *foster care culture*. So she decided that when she went on to college, she would join a Hispanic/Latina sorority. After going through the sorority application process, Lupe received a letter of *denial*. The reason she was denied membership? Although she was Latina, she could not speak any Spanish.

Being a Latina myself, Lupe’s story greatly impacted me and made me realize that not only do the children we represent lose their families, their schools and their friends, they also often lose their cultural identity. If we do not advocate to ensure that the children we represent are not losing their cultural identity, we are doing them a disservice.

I knew that we needed to do something right away, so we started with a very simple tool. We added a section to all of our court reports called “Cultural Activities.” When our volunteers represent a child who is not culturally placed (not with a family of the same culture), we ensure that the child is involved in some sort of cultural activity. Whether it’s participating in a play at school during Black History Month for an African American child, or attending a Hispanic heritage festival during Hispanic Heritage Month for a Hispanic/Latino child, they need these connections. This information must now be captured on every single report for these children.

At the beginning, some of my staff may have seen this as just one more thing to do. However, everyone knew that I was passionate about equity and that this change needed to be made. Today, keeping these activities top of mind is a way of life for everyone in our program. I’m amazed at the courageous conversations that I hear constantly about cultural issues that we advocate for on our cases.



Midwest Region

Chicago CASA Program’s Journey Toward Equity

Lanetta Haynes Turner, Esq.
Executive Director
CASA of Cook County
Chicago, IL

CASA of Cook County began its journey of addressing equity in 2006 while I was still on our board of directors. Although the board talked about the importance of diversity, we did not make a commitment to advance our efforts until National CASA invited us to participate in a volunteer diversity strategy.

As a board member and an African American woman who truly understood the importance of diversity, I must admit that it was difficult at times for me to “fight the good fight” when there were so many other responsibilities that needed to be fulfilled. The turning point for me came when I asked myself one simple question: Could your priorities be reached quicker and more efficiently if you had a broader, more diverse audience helping you achieve your goals? The answer for CASA of Cook County was yes, and we have made diversity and inclusiveness the building blocks for a stable foundation.

By the time we started the diversity initiative, I had transitioned from board member to executive director. I knew that not everyone within our organization would place the same importance on equity as I did. Understanding that it would take time to engage the reluctant, I focused my efforts on establishing a diverse staff. I made sure that I was a part of every hiring decision

and that all job announcements were distributed within the communities we wanted representation from—not just the traditional venues. This tactic immediately widened our pool of candidates and helped us become a more diverse staff over time.

Today, CASA of Cook County has been able to increase its number of new African American volunteers by more than 10%. And our staff has become a group of diverse, talented individuals committed to sharing their knowledge and ensuring that inequity is addressed whenever necessary.



Northeast Region

Newark Uses Data to Fight Disproportionality

Karen L. Burns
Executive Director
Essex County CASA
Newark, NJ

With 80% of the children served by our program being African American and their prevalence in our county population at only 42%, we know

all too well the reality of disproportional representation of children of color in foster care. Fortunately, the Essex Vicinage is one of the model courts associated with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). So when the NCJFCJ adopted eliminating disproportionality as a mandatory model court goal two years ago, we were poised to jump into a cross-system solution. As the task is enormous, both research and education are needed to inform our long-term solutions.

Our Model Court Disproportionality Committee is the official work team. The wheels of research turn slowly, but with deliberate intention we believe we can gather the data we need to analyze and act upon. The committee built a logic model using the NCJFCJ's court performance measures of safety, permanency, due process and timeliness. The team applied these four measures to structure goals to reduce disproportionality. We identified inputs we needed and activities to get usable case-level race and ethnicity data at court process decision points.

We are still in the labor-intensive process of gathering data from both the court's and the child welfare system's databases. The court measures we think we can deploy for disproportionality reduction are permanency (time to legal permanency, reentry into care and multiple placements) and timeliness (expeditious processing of litigation). For cases involving reentry after case closure, we can use due process and safety court measures. We believe that when we know at which specific decision points Essex overrepresentation occurs, we will be able to formulate plans to address the

problem. We expect these plans to include reassessing existing activities and processes, training, advocating for increased services and expanding prevention resources.

The roadmap to "solving" disproportionality is very slow, intentional and not for the faint-hearted. But our judges and child welfare system partners have begun in earnest. We now have an organizing rubric to examine and address a condition that built up over decades.



Mid-Atlantic Region

Seeking Equity for Maryland's LGBTQ Youth in Care

Ann Marie Foley Binsner
Executive Director
CASA of Prince George's County
Hyattsville, MD

For several years, our CASA program received one complaint after another regarding the way lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth were being treated while they were in care. We heard about young people being thrown out of group homes, foster parents bringing youth to church so the congregation could pray over them and therapists who suggested ways that the child could "turn straight." With each new incident, we struggled with what to do, but we had no idea how to address the root of the problem.

Working in a socially conservative community, we hesitated to bring our concerns to the leadership at the local Department of Social Services because we were not confident that we would receive support. We were surprised to learn that they shared our outrage and were eager to work together to improve services for our youth. We began our partnership with joint training for our CASA volunteers and the child welfare staff. This helped us see that there were many young people who needed services and support in the county. Unfortunately, we also found that there was a huge gap in both available services and experienced service providers.

To address these needs, we created the Prince George's County LGBTQ Youth Task Force, a coalition of state and local government personnel, youth advocates and private citizens. We committed ourselves to improving community planning, coordination of strategies and the expansion of advocacy to ensure positive outcomes for LGBTQ youth. The task force set goals that addressed the areas of greatest concern. Since our initial meeting more than three years ago, we have provided training to hundreds of service providers, created a local resource directory of services available to LGBTQ youth and shared data that resulted in new policies at the state and local levels. Together, we are creating the supports that our youth need in order to achieve their full potential. 📣



Children of the Manse

By Lewis Richard Luchs;
childrenofthemanse.com; 2009; 306 pages

A retired foreign service officer who worked in Africa, Europe and Asia, Lewis Richard Luchs has had a lifelong interest in adoption and other children's issues. He served as a CASA volunteer for five years, at which point he left in order to finish his book, *Children of the Manse*. Luchs says that he wrote the book to honor his heroes—adoptive parents—and

What happens when the inability to truly love becomes generational? What does love look like behind the tears of an angry young boy? How does love conquer fear through the tender words and safe arms of a woman who yearned to be a mother? *Children of the Manse* is a story of love complicated by pain, of the power to heal a wounded child and lay the foundation for future promise. It is a story that every adoptive parent, social worker, foster parent and CASA volunteer should read.

—Megan Shultz, Executive Director
 CASA of Lane County
 from her review on Amazon.com

The work is an illustration of what thousands of neglected and abused children experience. Children who somehow manage to survive their circumstances to ultimately experience a world of love, security and opportunity are the fortunate and perhaps rare examples of the best that child services and adoption can provide.

It is a story about a caring child welfare worker who tirelessly champions the needs of children in their limbo years. The magic of her resolve and insight blends the children's hopes of which they are unaware to a couple who are seeking an opportunity to have children of their own.

Lewis Richard Luchs has walked the impossible path and survived to become accomplished in his career in the diplomatic service, as a musician and as a champion for children who benefit from caring and loving adoptive homes. His story exposes human frailties while it exalts human kindness and generosity. The road travelled by the four Luchs siblings leads to a triumph of the human spirit.

—Hon. Pierre L. Van Rysselberghe, Senior Judge
 State of Oregon Circuit Court, Retired and
 Board Member, CASA of Lane County, Springfield, OR
 from his review on Amazon.com

to counteract the stereotypes in literature and other media of unhappily adopted children and inept adoptive mothers.

Children of the Manse is an adoption success story in which Luchs shows that neglected and abused children do not have to follow in the footsteps of their failed parents. Luchs's biological father, an aunt and an uncle spent years in penal institutions while eight cousins grew up in children's homes. He and his siblings were spared this fate, he believes, because of the intervention of intelligent, responsible and loving adoptive parents.

Another reason that Luchs wrote *Children of the Manse* was to emphasize that an adoptive relationship can be as deep and loving as any biological relationship. He thought of Evelyn Luchs as his "true, forever and only mother." Later in life, Luchs's experience as a CASA volunteer made him come to the uncomfortable conclusion that "we are too tolerant of neglectful and abusive biological parents."

A secondary hero in the book is the social worker, a vital partner in

the child welfare system. As a CASA volunteer, Luchs worked with social workers who were all dedicated professionals. In one of the chapters in the book, "An Angel Arrives," he describes the social worker assigned to his case. She managed to place the boy, then 7 years old, in a family together with his siblings. As the author puts it, "It is unlikely the Luchs would have adopted the four of us instead of the one little girl they had asked for without [the social worker]." She was also instrumental in persuading Luchs's siblings to leave the familiar surroundings of the county children's home for the home of an unknown couple whose only guarantee was the social worker's word.

Children of the Manse depicts the transfiguration of abused children into strong, responsible and productive adults. It shows the importance of the social worker who was instrumental in changing the children's fate. But the focus is on the adoptive parents who, with love and intelligence, brought the children back to physical and emotional health. 📖

A Family for Every Child

Join us for National Adoption Day, a collective national effort to raise awareness of the 123,000 children waiting in foster care for permanent, loving families. Each year, hundreds of communities across the country host events to finalize adoptions of children from foster care and celebrate all adoptions. We invite you to get involved and be a part of this special day.

Visit www.nationaladoptionday.org to find an event near you or learn how to host one in your community.

NOVEMBER 20, 2010



Get Involved in an Event in Your Community

Visit www.nationaladoptionday.org



The Alliance for
Children's Rights



Robert Brown: An Unexpected Benefactor of the CASA Mission

Flora Beach Burlingame



Robert Brown learning the craft of small engine repair at Mt. Bullion Conservation Camp, where he finished a sentence in July for a theft he insists he did not commit. *Photo Credit: Captain Matt Arebalo, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation*

Inset photo: Brown and Mariposa County CASA Executive Director Janet Kottman at the camp. *Photo Credit: Flora Beach Burlingame*

Forty-nine-year-old Robert Brown is a generous man. He admits to giving away at least \$200,000 to charitable causes—mostly to those benefiting abused and neglected children. He wasn't born wealthy and doesn't live in a glamorous house. In fact, most of his giving has been conducted through a bank while he waited out a sentence in a minimum security prison.

CASA of Mariposa County, CA, has been a benefactor of Brown's giving and in accordance with his wishes makes sure that all of the funds benefit children and their families in ways that the program's budget could not otherwise afford. Brown's giving is a direct result of his own harsh childhood and eventual placement in foster care.

Brown was raised in rural Arkansas and Mississippi. His father was an abusive alcoholic, and Brown's mother died when he was 7. Years later, he had had enough and left home to live with his grandmother. When he learned his father was coming after him, Brown headed off to stay with a sister in California. She turned him in to the authorities, and he was placed in foster care at age 16.

While most foster parents give children needed love and stability, Brown's story holds a tragic twist. He was initially placed with a priest who proved to be a pedophile. Ironically, it was as a result of this abuse that Brown came into his money. Another teen, sexually abused by the same

priest, grew up to become a judge and in 2003 brought a class action lawsuit on behalf of 120 victims. Brown came away with a significant sum.

"I didn't really want the money," Brown said. "All I wanted was an apology." He says he has no bad feelings toward the church and is able to separate his faith from the sins of one man.

When Brown learned of the CASA program and its purpose, it triggered his interest in donating money to the cause. "If those kids need anything that is within my power to get, let me know and it will be done. I know what it's like to not be wanted, loved or needed," he wrote in a letter to Mariposa County CASA Executive Director Janet Kottman. He corresponds with her frequently, asking where there might be specific needs and then arranging for the money to be sent. His caring has led to a multitude of gifts for children in the CASA program, focusing on their readiness for school and college.

As an adult, Brown has held a wide variety of jobs, served in the Marine Corps and even worked the rodeo circuit. But he has also been in and out of trouble—worsened by escapism through drug and alcohol use. Consequently, he has served time more than once. He was released from the Mt. Bullion Conservation Camp in July. Brown is enjoying spending time with his son, daughter-

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New Research Reports from Chapin Hall

• Midwest Study on Transitioning Out of Care into Adulthood

The Midwest Study provides a comprehensive picture of how youth in foster care are faring since the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 became law. Young people who age out of care continue to face major challenges in their early 20s, often unable to complete their education and find housing and jobs. These new findings look at outcomes at ages 23 and 24. Find *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth* by Mark E. Courtney, Amy Dworsky, JoAnn S. Lee and Melissa Raap by going to bit.ly/midwesteval.

• Does Keeping Youth in Foster Care Beyond Age 18 Help Prevent Homelessness?

Allowing young people to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday may not prevent—but may delay—entry into homelessness. Foster youth in Illinois are about one-third as likely to become homeless by age 19 and about three-quarters as likely to become homeless by age 21 as foster youth in Wisconsin and Iowa. However by age 23 or 24, those differences have nearly disappeared. Find the report on homelessness among youth formerly in care by going to bit.ly/18homeless.

• Areas Where Transitioning Youth Need Services

In the effort to achieve independent adulthood, youth who age out of foster care have, in general, four possible avenues of life experience as they struggle to make it on their own long before the majority of their peers. These subgroups are identified in the latest issue brief from the Midwest Study: *Distinct Subgroups of Former Foster Youth During Young Adulthood: Implications for Policy and Practice*. The issue brief by Mark E. Courtney, Jennifer L. Hook and JoAnn S. Lee can be downloaded by going to bit.ly/fostersubgroups.

Researcher Finds Secure Attachments in Most Young Children in Care

Attachment relationships between 76 young children (mean age of 22 months) and their foster mothers were examined through interviews with

the women and home observational measures. The researchers found 58% of the children were securely attached, compared to 67% in the general population. “Attachment in Foster Care: The Role of Maternal Sensitivity, Adoption, and Foster Mother Experience,” by Leslie Ponciano of Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, is in the April issue of *Child and Adolescent Social Work* (volume 27, issue 2). Secure attachment was higher among children whose mothers were rated high in maternal sensitivity, had decided to adopt their children, had fewer children in the home and were new foster parents. The author concludes that the findings support the use of concurrent planning. To access an abstract, go to bit.ly/foster-attachment.

Adoption Quarterly: Transracial Adoption

“Influence of Age on Transracial Foster Adoptions and its Relation to Ethnic Identity Development,” by Joshua Padilla, Jose Vargas and Lyssette Chavez, explores the factors that increased the prospects of transracial adoption between 2000 and 2005. Researchers found that transracially adopted children were significantly younger than those in same-race adoptions. The report—in the current issue of *Adoption Quarterly* (volume 13, issue 1)—found biracial Caucasian/African American children had 29.5 times the odds of being adopted transracially as Caucasian children, whereas the odds for an African American child were 4.1 times greater and for a Hispanic child 15.7 times greater. Transracially adopted black children were 5.4 years old on average compared to 7.3 years for same-race adoptions. The authors conclude that since the central work of racial/ethnic identity development is in adolescence, and over 90% of transracial adoptions occur prior to that stage, more needs to be done to address the needs of these children

and families. To access an abstract, go to bit.ly/transracial-adoption.

Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute Reports on Tax Credit

On April 15, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute released a report on the Adoption Tax Credit, which was extended through December 2011. The tax credit applies to all types of adoptions. To access the report, go to bit.ly/adopt-tax-credit.

Child Trends Report Identifies Strategies for Youth Aging Out of Care

Child Trends published a report in March, *What Works for Older Youth During the Transition to Adulthood: Lessons from Experimental Evaluations of Programs and Interventions* by Alena Hadley, Kassim Mbwana and Elizabeth Hair. The report synthesizes findings from 31 experimental program evaluations addressing a wide range of needs and categorizes them as not proven to work, mixed findings and found to work. To access the report, go to bit.ly/older-youth.

The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on Child Welfare

An estimated 73% of the children of unauthorized immigrants are born in the United States and are therefore US citizens. When the parents of these children are arrested because of their immigration status, the children are at high risk of prolonged separation from their families and may end up in long-term foster care. A new report from First Focus, *The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on Child Welfare*, looks at how families are affected. Authors Wendy Cervantes and Yali Lincroft discuss the need for federal, state and local agencies to develop more humane protocols when conducting enforcement actions in order to minimize children’s trauma when a parent is detained. They also note that a detained parent is often hindered in meeting child welfare case plan

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Mt. Kilimanjaro Climb Benefits Nebraska and Iowa CASA Programs

Omaha, Sarpy County and Council Bluffs CASA Programs

John MacKenzie had never heard of the CASA cause when his local programs asked him to hold a *Dine to Donate* event at his restaurant. But the more he learned about the organizations' work for children, the more interested he became. When he started to make plans to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro in June to celebrate his 50th birthday, combining the climb with a benefit for the CASA programs seemed like a natural fit. "I set out two goals: to raise money and raise awareness," said MacKenzie. "I've raised about \$4,000 so far, but I am perhaps prouder of the increased awareness of CASA. Because the first time I heard about CASA, I thought, 'Why haven't I heard of such an important organization before?'" MacKenzie has brought attention to the CASA cause with a website (kiliismycasa.bbnow.org) as well as a presence on Facebook and YouTube. He also inspired the next generation by involving a local elementary school. "One of the students left a post on our Facebook page saying that when she grows up, she is going to climb Kilimanjaro and help CASA kids too," said MacKenzie.

Quilts Made With Love Go to CASA Children

CASA Program of Genesee County, Flint, MI

The Drankland Quilting Group presented 29 handmade quilts to the CASA Program of Genesee County in June. CASA volunteers in turn gave the quilts to the children for whom they advocate. The quilting group is made up of 38 members living across the US and Canada. Quilts were crafted by the members throughout the year and finished during a week-long retreat. Sheila Franklin of Almont, MI, is a member of the quilting group and a CASA volunteer. "It has been an honor to pick a worthwhile organization that does so much for Genesee County's children—and who know and appreciate the time and effort that goes into making a quilt," says Franklin. "While we quilt, we are thinking about the organization and the children who will receive them."



Jonquil S. Bertschi, Weiss Advocacy Center executive director (left), and Sheila Franklin, CASA volunteer and donor



Superhero Run Serves as Model for Other CASA Programs

Chesterfield CASA and Henrico CASA, Richmond, VA

Last spring, the Henrico and Chesterfield CASA programs in Richmond together held their first *CASA Superhero Run*. Hundreds of people participated in the family-friendly race, including a kids' mile for children 12 and under as well as a 5K open to all ages. The races were followed by a family fun event to raise community awareness of the victims of child abuse. The agencies were proud to team with Nike, the Superhero Foundation and St. Joseph's Villa to create this healthy event to benefit abused and neglected children. "We are very excited



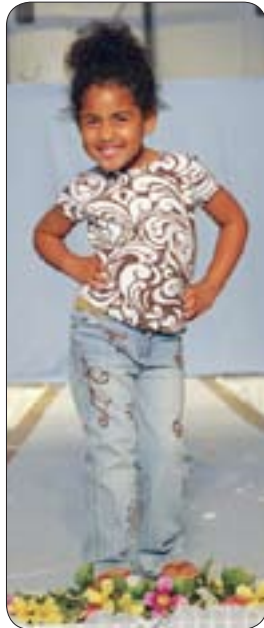
Patrick Andriano and son Marcus enjoying the *CASA Superhero Run*

that our success has led to CASA superhero runs being planned for Pittsburgh, PA, and Austin, TX, in the coming year!" says Barbara Herzog, executive director of Henrico CASA. "It is proving to be the perfect fit for CASA to promote community awareness and fundraising."

Children's Spring Fashion Show

CASA of the Southern Tier, Inc., Corning, NY

This year, CASA of the Southern Tier held its first *CASA Spring Fashion Show* featuring 37 children between the ages of 3 and 17. The children, several of whom had some involvement in the court system, were able to show their unique styles by creating, customizing or recycling their own outfits or wearing an outfit provided by the show's major sponsor, Hopps Customizing. Each model carried a picture of a child freed for adoption in New York state and said either "remember me" or "forget me not" as they held up the picture. Executive Director Amy Miller-Plumley said, "The best part for me was seeing the kids start shy and scared to walk down the runway at rehearsals and turn into shining stars at the event. The purpose was to show that every child is unique and not forgotten. Not only did we raise around \$3,000 for our CASA program, we increased the confidence level of the participating children."



Light of Hope: Walk a Mile for a Child Celebration

CASA of Monroe County, Temperance, MI

On a blustery day in May, CASA of Monroe County held its *Light of Hope: Walk a Mile for a Child* celebration. The awareness and fundraising event followed a five-mile path from the courthouse to a local park, where the relay torch was displayed for the remainder of the ceremony.



Dawn Rodriguez and her 3-year-old son, Nate, are joined by CASA volunteer Grant Garber as they carry the Light of Hope torch in the final stretch of the relay. Rodriguez also became a volunteer after her son was served by an advocate before his adoption.

The Monroe County Department of Human Services supported the event, as did children from nearly a dozen area schools. The result? A prominent article and a follow-up editorial in the *Monroe News* calling for more CASA volunteers; over a dozen inquiries from potential advocates; and proceeds of over \$7,000 in program support. Dot Stacy, associate director of the program, commented, "The best part of the event was the fact that we partnered with local schools. Children walked a mile for another child. The smiles on their faces after their walk told me how proud they were to be able to help other kids."

Founder of GAL Program Has Scholarship Named in Her Memory

Guardian ad Litem Program, District 19C, Salisbury, NC

Amy Collins began her distinguished career as a social worker in child protective services at the Davie County Department of Social Services in North Carolina. She went on to serve Rowan and Cabarrus Counties as the founder and district administrator of the area's Guardian ad Litem program for 24 years. Her outstanding leadership and caring commitment to youth advocacy earned Collins the state's highest honor, the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, which was awarded by the governor upon Collins' retirement in March. Sadly, Collins lost her fight against breast cancer just a few months later. But GAL staff and volunteers know Collins won the war to permanently



produce positive changes for others. Her devotion to making life better for children led her friends and family to create the Amy Collins Palmore Endowed Scholarship Fund at Catawba College. The scholarship will be awarded to sociology students, with the goal of encouraging them to enter social work and participate in GAL initiatives. Alma Brown, GAL program regional administrator, said in her nomination letter for the governor's award, "Amy was an active community member and was instrumental in pushing for the development of numerous child-focused projects. During her career with the Guardian ad Litem program, she touched the lives of more than 2,500 children."

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Ice Cream Olympics

CASA of Travis County, Austin, TX



At the Hill Country Galleria's Outdoor Amphitheater in Bee Cave, TX, "slingers" from 14 Amy's Ice Cream shops across Austin came together to showcase their skills and creativity while serving ice cream to benefit CASA of Travis County. Amy's Ice Cream is known for their friendly staff who perform ice cream "tricks" as they serve. Contestants were judged in best solo trick, best team trick and a decathlon testing the agility and speed of each ice cream athlete. Poet Powell, who has worked at Amy's for eight years, said on *News 8 Austin*, "Once we get all together and everybody does their crazy tricks, we up the ante. I mean everyone is doing something just to top each other."

Cowboys for CASA

CASA of North Texas, Gainesville, TX

CASA of North Texas recently held its sixth annual *Cowboys for CASA* fundraising auction, dinner and dance at the Gainesville Civic Center. The program featured Sonny Burgess, a popular performer whose hits include "Cowboy



Auctioneer Corgie Fisher in action

Cool." The dinner was prepared by Giles and Marlene Walterscheid and their crew from Superior Manufacturing. CASA Executive Director Vicki Robertson said, "We are blessed to be one of the groups Superior Manufacturing supports." She added that even during the tough economic times of the past several years, the community has been kind to the CASA program. This year's event netted \$31,000, an increase over prior years.

CASA Program Helps Complete Capital Campaign

Hudson County CASA, Jersey City, NJ

Hudson County CASA recently completed its part of a four-year project to create a new nonprofit center at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Jersey. With other organizations, the program helped raise more than \$650,000 to create the new CASA office, renovate the church basement and upgrade the parish hall. 📺



At the ribbon-cutting ceremony were (left to right) Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah Healy, Pastor Jessica Lambert, CASA-served youth Yosua Cordero, CASA Executive Director Beverly Savage, US Senator Robert Menendez and Hudson County Executive Tom DeGise.



Mark Ford, a former foster youth who received educational supplies and other support from Brown for being on the honor roll at school. The young man was deployed to Iraq in April 2010.

in-law and “two adorable granddaughters” while working alongside his son in the automobile towing business.

When talking about his past, Brown keeps coming back to his concern for 18-year-olds who are no longer eligible to be part of the foster care system. “When I ‘aged out,’ I was given nothing to assist me—no money, no social security number, nothing. I was on my own,” he said. “I am a living example of what happens when you don’t keep very close tabs on the people you’re helping.”

Fortunately, older youth in California now receive assistance through independent living programs. Many counties also provide transitional

housing, so youth don’t find themselves living on the street the day they turn 18.

Of the generous sharing of his settlement money, Brown simply says, “Remember, I am a former foster kid who had a really fouled-up life. And all I want is to be able to help other foster kids achieve the best that life has to offer.” 📌

Flora Beach Burlingame’s articles have appeared in Women’s World, Sierra Heritage Magazine, the Fresno Bee and other publications. A former foster parent, Burlingame wrote a series of articles for the Mariposa Gazette highlighting Mariposa County’s CASA volunteers. Search for the author’s name at mariposagazette.com.

requirements. The authors suggest that better coordination between law enforcement and child welfare systems is needed. The report includes humanitarian guidelines developed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and is available by going to bit.ly/ICE-impact.

Self-Assessment Tools for Programs Serving Young Children

Strengthening Families recently revised and expanded its *Online Self-Assessment Package* for use by programs serving young children and their families, including early care and education, home visitation, family support and child welfare. The tool helps programs make small but significant changes in their day-to-day practice to dramatically impact the lives of families. Programs first answer a series of questions about the services they provide. The results can be used to create an action plan for program areas needing improvement. To help programs measure the impact of their improvement efforts, the package also includes two survey tools for use with parents and staff to gauge changes in behaviors and attitudes over time. The surveys address staff interaction with families and parents’ perceived strengths related to five protective factors. View the materials, create an account or watch a webinar describing the *Online Self-Assessment Package* by going to bit.ly/SF-assess. 📌

GET CONNECTED!

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

CASAforChildren.org

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



CASAforChildren.org/JudgesPage

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

ShopCASA.org

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



CASA on Facebook and Twitter

National CASA is on Facebook. Connect with our community, read the latest news, and join ongoing discussions at [Facebook.com/CASAforChildren](https://www.facebook.com/CASAforChildren). Follow CEO Michael Piraino at [Twitter.com/CASAforChildren](https://twitter.com/CASAforChildren).



India



Jadditundi, Bihar

North Carolina guardian ad litem volunteer Carol Paes also gives her time to Rotary International, just as so many of our volunteers give their time to multiple child-friendly organizations. She is shown here distributing polio inoculations to children in the village of Jadditundi in the state of Bihar in far mid-eastern India. Paes says, "The need for people to help children is worldwide, as evidenced by the heart-wrenching conditions these children live in."

Carol Paes has been a volunteer with the Fourth Judicial District Guardian ad Litem Program in Duplin County for a year. Paes serves

as GAL for five children placed in foster homes across several rural counties. In spite of the lengthy travel required, she diligently and frequently meets with each child as well as the social workers, foster parents and mental health providers involved. Based on her excellent service, she was awarded a scholarship through the local Guardian ad Litem Volunteer Association to attend the National CASA Annual Conference in Atlanta this year.

According to her volunteer supervisor, Patrick Giddeons, "Carol's reports to the court are detailed, based on facts and always child-focused."

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

Send photos (min. 4" x 6") to:
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Leveling the Playing Field for Children in Foster Care

Judge Glenda A. Hatchett
National CASA Spokesperson

"CASA is an awesome program, and you can get our support. The problem is that CASA is a secret in this city. You have to figure out how we get the word out."

—Pastor John Hannah, New Life Covenant Church, Chicago, IL

"I think you need to get out some information about the percentage of kids who are African American coming into the system. In addition to the churches, you need to reach out to the sororities, fraternities and business organizations."

—Pastor Andrew Singleton, Victory Apostolic Church, Chicago, IL

I was in Chicago in June to do radio interviews on behalf of National CASA. While I was there, I also got a chance to meet with two prominent African American ministers. We wanted to talk to them about the fact that 80% of children in Chicago's foster care system are African American. 80%! When according to the 2000 census, fewer than 40% of Chicagoans as a whole are African American. Talk about disproportionate representation—double what you would expect from the general population. So what's wrong?

We gave these prominent men of faith not only the numbers but also powerful stories about CASA volunteers helping children. Then we asked for their help in reaching out to their congregations to recruit supporters for CASA. As their quotes above show, still not enough people know about CASA volunteers. If people understand our cause, they are ready to help. When I was on the radio in Chicago, the lines lit up with people calling to volunteer.

Historically, the faith-based African American community has been a strong nexus of volunteers. Churches were the backbone of the civil rights movement and have been key leaders in social change. So let's use that energy to meet the needs of children in foster care and to recruit volunteers.


Now that they know about us, pastors John Hannah and Andrew Singleton are going to be wonderful allies for our local programs. Besides the lack of awareness, what else did we learn from them? For one thing, many churches have active men's ministries. The pastors agreed that CASA representatives need to sit down with the heads of these ministries first. This would serve two purposes: to provide an inroad to busy pastors and to attract African American men as volunteers.

Having CASA volunteers who are sensitive to the overrepresentation of children of color ultimately helps

all children find their way out of care and into permanent homes as quickly as possible. I have seen so many wonderful situations where, because of the involvement of CASA volunteers, children found permanency faster—whether they were able to return safely to their biological parents, find a home with a relative or be adopted.

How do they do this? Primarily by raising questions. What can we do to avoid bringing this child into foster care? Are there some alternatives to keeping this child away from the family? Can we get a protective order so that the child continues to live at home but with some intense services supporting the parents?

CASA volunteers prevent inequity in many situations. For example, they find relatives nobody knew about who are willing to take guardianship. In some situations, the kin had no idea that the children were even in care. I love the story about the CASA volunteer who went online and found an uncle clear across the country, who in turn reached out to other family members. At the child's next hearing, 10 relatives showed up! They talked among themselves about who would have the privilege of taking custody of this child, and I made the final ruling. But for the CASA volunteer, we were unlikely to have that kind of outcome.

What would we do if we didn't have the CASA movement right now? Given the crisis that we are in with the number of children in care, we'd have to invent it. Advocates provide that extra pair of eyes and—very importantly—a loving and concerned heart that leads them to ask the hard questions. 

Hon. Glenda A. Hatchett is an authority on juvenile issues known for her award-winning television series Judge Hatchett. Her new book Dare to Take Charge came out recently. See Judge Hatchett's websites for more information: glendahatchett.com and parentpowernow.com.

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