
ADVOCATE ALLEY

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October 2008

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.” – Marianne Williamson

CASA Corner

Greetings Advocates,

Fall is in the air and for most of us this conjures up memories of apple cider, brightly colored leaves, and of course, the always anticipated night of disguise and mystery...Halloween! Activities start flowing as we plan to launch our favorite traditions. Yet, as we all, know for many of our children the fall can be a time of ambivalence—the very things we anticipate with excitement may create concern or anxiety for the children. They describe feeling lost, having trepidations about new teachers, classmates, and unknown amounts of homework. So many kids can't put this worry into words, but their actions reflect their distress. They withdraw, appear sullen, have difficulty focusing on tasks, and sometimes can be argumentative. If school has not been a positive experience, the challenges and apprehensions result in complex transitions for our children and youth. As their advocate, you can do a great deal to help with this process... meeting with teachers, talking with the child about homework and progress, exploring after-school programs and activities. Modeling for children is an important teacher. Showing them how to approach teachers for support, how to speak up in class, or how to tackle a new assignment in an organized manner is a great gift you can offer. We will talk about these issues and so much more during our Educational Advocacy workshop on Oct. 25th. See pg. 4 for details. Look forward to seeing you then. Thank you so much!

With appreciation, Siobhan Greene

Ginger at Valley Center Bowl has decided to give CASA a discount for bowling if they take their CASA child bowling. The child and the advocate can both bowl at the child rate of 3.45 per game. So this is \$6.90 instead of the normal price of a child and then an adult fee.



In addition, she will not charge the advocate or the child for bowling shoes. The advocate will need to take in their letter of appointment to show that they are a CASA.

Event Expressway

October 4-

The Farm's Apple Day- 11am

Free- 455-2575

Earthbound Farm Bug Walk- 11am

\$5 per child, adults free

Earthbound Farm Corn Husk Doll Workshop-12:30

Free- 625-6219 ext. 11 or farmstand@ebfarm.com

October 11-

Earthbound Farm Flower Walk- 10am to Noon

\$20 adults, \$5 children under 13 (contact info above)

October 18-

The Farm's Fall Festival- 11am (contact info above)

Earthbound Farm Harvest Festival- 11am-3pm



Get Crafty at Michael's! (Northridge Center Salinas) 442-3506

Make Your Own Book- October 4, 2008, 10:00am - Noon

Ages 5-12 will create their own fun craft. Only \$5 per child, including supplies. 30-minute sessions at 10, 10:30, 11 and 11:30. Project especially designed for ages 3-5, all ages welcome! \$5 per child- supplies included

Great Pumpkin Event- October 11, 10:00am - 3:00pm

Create your own craft pumpkin for Halloween at the Great Pumpkin Event. Only \$5 and supplies and pumpkin are included. \$5- supplies included

Haunted House Frame- October 18, 10:00am - Noon

Ages 5-12 will create their own fun craft. Only \$5 per child, including supplies. 30-minute sessions at 10, 10:30, 11 and 11:30. \$5 per child- supplies included

Mini Scrapbook- October 25, 2008, 10:00am - Noon

Ages 5-12 will create their own fun craft. Only \$5 per child, including supplies. 30-minute sessions at 10, 10:30, 11 and 11:30. \$5 per child- supplies included

Did you know...

Who is eligible for ILP (Independent Living Program)?

Youth eligible for ILP are those youth who are in foster care placement at the age of 16 and who are dependants within the Monterey County Child Welfare System. Probation youth who are eligible for ILP services are those youth who are in out-of-home placement on their 16th birthday. The ILP program may allow youth who are 15 ½ to participate if they are in placement and likely to remain after their 16th birthday and to “age out” of the foster care system at age 18. Generally, Foster care youth must be referred from Social Services or Probation, but, anyone can make a referral for a child to receive these services.

What services available through ILP?

Services available to eligible youth enrolled in ILP are determined by the needs identified through the assessment and the individual youth’s *Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP)*. The TILP is a plan completed by the youth and his/her social worker outlining the goals for successful emancipation. All foster youth aged 16 and above are required to have a TILP. A youth may choose to not participate in other ILP services and activities, but must have a completed TILP. While participation in ILP is voluntary, examples of services available through ILP may include assistance with:

- Assessing needs and emancipation planning
- Community college classes
- Education and related expense
- Employment and work-related expenses
- Transportation
- Health insurance and health-related expenses
- Housing assistance
- Other expenses related to helping youth live on their own

For more information contact Raymond A. Gonzales, Independent Living Program Coordinator 831-755-4475 or email at gonzarh@cws.state.ca.us

Advocate Avenue



We would like to wish the following advocates a very happy birthday during the month of October...

Jodi Harskamp	10/1
Lisa Barkalow	10/2
Barbara Singer	10/5
Edna Chinn	10/6
Morgan Gilman	10/9
Kathy Ruiz	10/9
Yvette Michelle Villareal	10/13
Esther Curtice	10/14
Ruben Urzua	10/14
Nancy Ann Aimola	10/16
Brianne Dani	10/19
Sonya Splane-Wilson	10/21
Julie Taylor	10/25
John Burdick	10/27
Nikki Gillette	10/29
Rosalie Ann Gray	10/30
Peggy Norris	10/31

Donations of Teddy Bears have been brought into the office. Feel free to come and get a Teddy Bear to take to your CASA child. They have been slightly used but most are in good condition.



Dear Advocates:

I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself since I am the newest employee at CASA of Monterey County. I came to CASA in the middle of June. I am a case supervisor and will provide support to you. I have met several of you and I look forward to meeting the rest of you.

I have been here for a few months now and I love CASA! What great things we are all doing to help keep the best of the interest of the children in the forefront. I am very passionate about what I do. I love helping children. CASA is such an important organization and I am so blessed to be part of CASA.

I would describe myself as a 26 year old with a lot of ambition and drive. I love to get involved and keep busy. When I am not working, I enjoy participating in one of my many hobbies or working with community organizations. I am a 4-H leader for youth as well as a CASA. I love to waterski, run, cross-stitch, bake, take pictures, play Pedro, and attend rodeos/ropings. My newest hobby is learning to ride horses. I love to be outdoors and enjoy the country. I also love football! Yes, I work hard but I also play hard.

I was born and raised in the Salinas Valley. I moved away to go to college right after high school. I attended CSU Sacramento and obtained my bachelors in Family and Consumer Science with an emphasis in family relations and a minor in criminal justice. I worked for the Sacramento County Probation Department. Although, I did impact youth in a positive way while with the Probation Department, I wanted to do more. I wanted to make change in larger numbers. I left the Department and worked at a Foster Family Agency in adoptions. I loved finding permanency for the children. Each child deserves permanency!

I loved working in Social Services and I knew it would take more education to get all of the goals I set for myself accomplished in life. I decided to go back to school for my masters. I left Sacramento and moved to San Diego. While I was working on my Masters of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy I had to do a 300 hour internship. I decided to do my internship at a residential treatment facility for dually-diagnosed women with addictions. This gave me a ton of insight about the struggle with addictions. All of these experiences have reinforced my drive and passions to give 150% to children by ensuring decisions are in their best interest.

I loved the community I grew up in and decided once I finished school I would move back and work my passion to help children in the community I was raised in. It is my turn to give back. I am so happy to be back. I love the sense of community here and am really glad that I made the move. I am so thankful to be working at a place I can honestly say I love coming to each and every day!

I look forward to working with you. I also want to thank each and every one of your for the support and dedication you provide to your CASA child(ren). Let us all continue to advocate for the children!

Respectfully,
Brienne Dani



Some of my photography!

San Benito Street

San Benito County is in the midst of a training session with 6 Advocates ready to be sworn in on October 6. We are continuously recruiting community members to join our CASA team and building our volunteer base is a major component especially for a new organization to be successful. Our volunteers are the living advertisement for our organization; they are the ambassadors who talk about CASA to their families, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Two of the current trainees heard about CASA from their friends and were interested enough to come to an Info Session and decided to become an Advocate. I often get asked what the heart pin is that I wear to the grocery store, the car wash, my hair dresser, etc. it is a perfect opportunity for me to get on my soap box and talk about CASA. I encourage you to keep spreading the word about CASA and wear those CASA pins!

Traffic School: Extended Education Opportunities New Avenues: Explore your extended education opportunities!

Educational Advocacy Seminar – Saturday, OCT. 25– 10:00am – 3:00pm

Location: Monterey Peninsula College – Classroom BC107 (Bldg #2: Business & Computer Science Building)

There is a great deal of emphasis being placed on monitoring the children's and youth's education. The system partners (social workers, attorneys, and judges) with much greater frequency are looking to us for information and support for the children educationally. Our Educational Advocacy Seminar focuses on understanding the laws related to foster youth's educational rights, the basics of school support for youth, special education, graduation requirements, and interfacing with school personnel. Some fun, interactive activities will keep you engaged the entire time! If you have not participated in Educational Advocacy training from us in the past, this is critical. Please plan to attend as it is our goal to have 100% advocate participation in this training.

When it's Hard to be a CASA - A four-week session begins Monday, Sept. 29th - 6 - 8pm

Location: Carmel Presbyterian Church, downtown Carmel

We all know that some days it is hard to be a CASA. We read stories that are sad, we see difficult situations, and interact with kids in pain. Sometimes the outcomes are simply not what we hoped for. We are hosting a four week session on Monday nights offering advocates a more in-depth look at what transpires on when you get involved with a CASA child. This supportive group will examine some of the emotions, feelings, and reactions that are stirred up as a CASA advocate. The facilitator is Laura Robinson Harbert, PhD; a wonderfully skilled, compassionate psychologist from whom you will learn a great deal. Dr. Robinson Harbert practices in Pacific Grove and has conducted a similar workshop for us in the past. All the participants reported it to be a wonderful experience. Limited space is still available. Participants should commit to all remaining sessions; it is far more effective when you do so. Call your direct case supervisor to sign up.

Peer Review w/ Bree Nakashima- Wednesday, Oct. 29th 6pm to 8pm



RSVP: to Ruben at 455-6800 or ruben@casamonterey.org If you have any ideas, suggestions, etc regarding our continuing education program, consider joining the Continuing Education planning committee. Call or email Ruben for more information!

5 Ways to Maintain Perspective

Dorothy Whitcomb
CASA Volunteer
CASA of Talbot County, Easton, MD



I was sworn in as a CASA volunteer in March 2001. A month later I received my first case, an 8-year-old girl we'll call Debbie. Debbie had come into care when she was 6. She had been abused, neglected and ultimately abandoned. Both of her natal parents had been incarcerated, and she was found living alone with three siblings in the care of her 11-year-old brother. Debbie was then adopted by a couple who in turn abused her. We met for the first time when she was removed from that home and placed again in foster care.

Debbie just celebrated her 15th birthday in a residential treatment center. Change has come very slowly for Debbie, who has been diagnosed with a range of significant mental health issues. She has spent more than half of her life as a ward of the court and unfortunately is likely to remain in the system until she ages out of care. Her situation, and as a result mine, is somewhat unusual. In my CASA program, most cases last an average of 26 months, and some cases close in as little as six. It's been seven years for us. As Debbie's CASA volunteer, I have learned that I have to keep my hopes high, my expectations realistic and my perspective clear, which can admittedly be a challenge at times. Here are some tips that have helped along the way.

1. Find tangible ways to measure progress.

Debbie and I share a journal. We take turns writing in it and—since she lives an hour and half away—mail it back and forth. It is a terrific tool for staying in touch, sharing thoughts and keeping track of progress. Because Debbie has a hard time talking about her feelings, the fact that the journal has become so important to her is

progress in and of itself. The dated entries help me chart her ups and downs as well as ferret out areas of growth that I might not be aware of otherwise. The journal's secret pocket is the repository for the little gifts we include. For example, Debbie draws pictures, cuts things out of magazines and once included her report card.

2. Seek out the perspective of others.

Debbie came into care along with an older brother who was also assigned a CASA volunteer. The fact that I trained with this gentleman was a real bonus. We quickly decided to team up with both children, an arrangement that allowed us to work to our strengths and ensured continuity when one of us was out of town. This arrangement was also tailor made to bolster perspective. Not only did we both have a thorough knowledge of the children and their cases, but we had also come to know each other well. When one of us faltered, became frustrated or slumped under the weight of these children's problems, the other was there to say: "Now wait a minute. Let's take another look at this."

Of course most CASAs don't have the advantage of a teammate, but we all have others to whom we can turn when our own perspective begins to get shaky. The first person to call upon is your case supervisor, who in my situation is worth her weight in gold. Other volunteers who have faced similar challenges can also offer valuable insight. These individuals are not as close to the situation as you are and can therefore come at it from a much more objective angle. The empathetic ears and practical advice they offer broaden your perspective and get you back on track again.

Talk to the child's teachers, foster parents and social workers as frequently as possible. They not

only give you the facts you need to advocate effectively for her best interests but can also provide another point of view. Sometimes that's all it takes to start seeing possibilities rather than problems.

3. Listen to your family.

Although confidentiality and privacy concerns prevent volunteers from sharing case information with others, family members seem to get a pretty good idea of how a case is going. I've learned to listen when my husband suggests that perhaps I'm getting too close to the situation or spending too much time trying to sort out problems that are not my job to solve. He's not callous or cynical; he just knows me well and is offering a reality check. His perspective comes from 40 years of watching how I function. He knows when I'm on my game and when I'm not.

4. Take a break.

Take a walk, go for a run, do whatever works for you, but find a way to separate yourself from your concerns about the child. For me it's gardening. There's something about digging in the dirt that centers me. Since I tend to work problems out subconsciously, the reflective state that gardening seems to induce invariably freshens my perspective. I have a friend who says that fishing does the same for him and another who gets the same result by playing the piano.

5. Be thankful.

Remember to celebrate the fact that the glass is half full rather than half empty. Acknowledge that your gifts of time, energy, advocacy, compassion and consistency may very well be the reasons why the child you advocate for still has hope for the future. 🐦

Dorothy Whitcomb is a journalist and editor who has served as a CASA volunteer in Talbot County, MD since 2001.