
ADVOCATE ALLEY

Volume 2, Issue 12

December 2008

As we struggle with shopping lists and invitations, compounded by December's bad weather, it is good to be reminded that there are people in our lives who are worth this aggravation, and people to whom we are worth the same. - Donald E. Westlake

CASA Corner

Greetings Advocates,

I can't believe it is December already! I hope the holiday season didn't sneak up on each of you as much as it did on me... Nevertheless, I am excited to welcome the holiday season and all that it brings.

As stressful and as overly-scheduled as this time of year can be, I hope we can all take the time to realize how incredibly fortunate we all are and find small ways to pass that message on to others. Especially with children, the holiday season often inspires incredible excitement and high expectations. Unfortunately, these expectations are not ones that cannot always be met for ANY child, let alone a child in the dependency system. Add in an understanding of today's economy, and one could envision a fairly bleak holiday season.

We sent a questionnaire out to some of the older youth in the system this year to ask what holiday traditions they hold dear and what gifts they would give to others if they had the means to do so. We also asked, if given the opportunity to give to a charity, to which they would wish to contribute. The answers were truly touching. They were ALL thoughtful, emotional and incredibly generous. I would argue that each child put more thought into what they would give others than to what they would want themselves.

My point in telling this story comes in that despite the situations these children find themselves in, despite the unfairness they experience, despite the hurt they endure and the resilience they must develop, they still want to give. I see this as a strong and meaningful connection for advocates and CASA youth- wanting to give back and understanding the feelings you get in return... I know that is why I am an advocate, and I think many of you would agree. I welcome you to celebrate the season with this in mind, and to honor the resilient, thoughtful and generous kids that CASA serves.

Happy Holidays,
Michelle Arnold
Recruitment & Training Coordinator



The ILP Holiday Dinner will take place on Saturday, December 13th. If your child is enrolled in the Independent Living Program, please make sure that they plan to attend this incredibly special event. Look forward to photos in January's issue of Advocate Alley!

Event Expressway

• **Dec. 4 -- 7th Annual Holiday Parade of Lights**
Holiday, Family Fun: Lighted parade will feature marching bands, holiday floats, dance teams, equestrian groups, and of course, Santa Claus. After the parade, stores will remain open for Holiday shopping & wagon rides, photos with Santa & carolers. Pacific Grove **Fee:** Free 373.3304

• **Dec. 5 -- Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony**
Holiday, Family Fun: Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony in front of Colton Hall. Carolers, music, refreshments and a visit from Santa. 580 Pacific Street, Monterey **Fee:** Free 646.5648

December 11-13 -- Christmas in the Adobes
Holiday, Celebration: This community-wide event features 20 of Monterey's historic adobes lit by luminarias, and a variety of musical entertainment, refreshments, and decorations to get everyone in the holiday spirit.
Fee: \$17-20 Adults/\$2 Ages 6-17/Under 5 free 649.7118

December 31 -- First Night Monterey 2009
Festival, Family Fun: First Night Monterey's theme for this year is 'Blazing the Trail for Cultural Diversity through the Arts'. Join the celebration for a family New Year's Eve in Downtown Monterey with a celebration of the arts, music, dance, poetry and exhibits. 373.4778
Fee: \$12 until Dec 13/Youth \$10 until Dec 13

"Ice Skating By the Bay" Nov 26- Jan 4

Join in on the fun and excitement of the 3rd Annual Monterey On Ice at the Old Fisherman's Wharf. Open 12pm to 10pm on weekdays, 10am to 10pm on weekends.

Fee: 12 & under \$10 Adults \$12 Skate Rental \$3



The Gift of Giving!

Keep checking your email for updates about our Gift of Giving event that will be going on this month.

We'll be inviting you to bring your CASA children into the office to select and wrap gifts for their foster parents, care givers, or whoever is special in their lives.

If you're interested in donating items, helping procure items or participating in some other way, please let us know!

Did you know...

Grandfamilies State Law and Policy Resource Center launched Casey Family Programs, the ABA Center on Children and the Law, and Generations United are proud to launch this new Website that provides information on state laws and legislation in support of grandfamilies. The easy-to-use database allows for a search of laws and legislation that address common legal questions surrounding relative care giving both within and outside the child welfare system.

www.grandfamilies.org

National Philanthropy Day 2008



Congratulations to Susan Gardner, CASA of Monterey County's recipient at National Philanthropy Day this year. Susan was honored because of her tireless efforts to transform the CASA training room into the beautiful, welcoming, kid-friendly space that we all enjoy today. From designs to donations, Susan spearheaded this project with grace and generosity, all the while serving as an advocate as well!

Thank you, Susan, so much for all you do!

Advocate Avenue

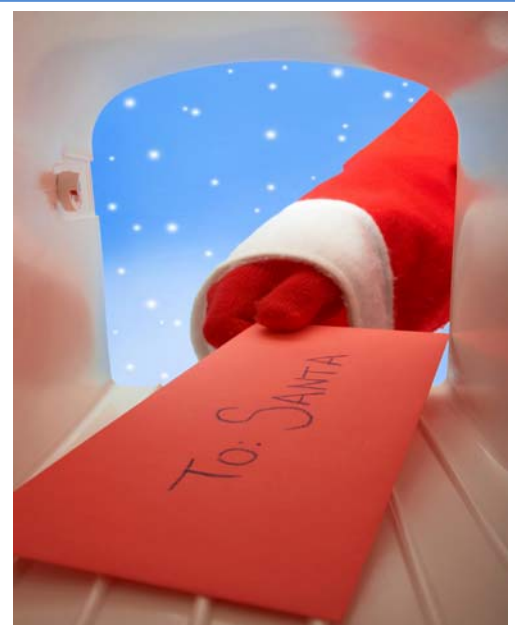


We would like to wish the following advocates a very happy birthday during the month of December...

Miriam Gonzaléz	12/2
Becky Skrdla	12/2
Juliet Gonzalez	12/7
Mel Spehn	12/13
Kristin Snowden	12/27
Lloyd Schwimmer	12/28
Sandy Mraule	12/30

The CASA office will be closed on Thursday, December 18th for an all day CASA board/staff retreat.

Please make a note of it, and we will look forward to responding to your calls and emails the next day!





Meet Theta Class, Sworn in on November 7th!

Top: Joe Pursel, Wendy Grim, Jeff Erickson, Jennifer Christian, Sarah Greiser, Mercy Galarza, Adriana Garcia, Marje Perkins, Sharon Osgood, Art Kessler

Bottom: Brianne Dani, Stacey Montoya, Michelle Arnold, Tine DeMaria, Siobhan Greene



CASA's First Cake Decorating Class



At the Annual Friends of CASA Luncheon, old Case Supervisor, Kylie Kelly, graced us with her beautiful family's presence.





What if CASA earned a penny every time you searched the Internet? Or how about if a percentage of every purchase you made online went to support our cause? Well, now it can!

GoodSearch.com is a new Yahoo-powered search engine that donates half its advertising revenue, about a penny per search, to the charities its users designate. Use it just as you would any search engine, get quality search results from Yahoo, and watch the donations add up!

GoodShop.com is a new online shopping mall which donates up to 37 percent of each purchase to your favorite cause! Hundreds of great stores including Amazon, Target, Gap, Best Buy, ebay, Macy's and Barnes & Noble have teamed up with GoodShop and every time you place an order, you'll be supporting your favorite cause.

Just go to www.goodsearch.com and be sure to enter CASA - Monterey County or CASA – San Benito County as the charity you want to support. And, be sure to spread the word!

- Search the web with GoodSearch.com and each time you do a search, GoodSearch will donate a penny to our cause!
- Shop online at GoodShop.com and a percentage of each purchase will be donated to our cause! More than 600 top stores are participating including Amazon, Target, Staples, Best Buy and more!

The New York Times

Giving without Giving In today's troubled economy, Ken Ramberg's recipe for fund-raising is simple: give people at all income levels a tool for benefiting charity without spending a dime. GoodSearch, the Los Angeles-based company that he and his sister JJ founded in 2005, tries to do just that.

Their vehicle is an Internet search engine called GoodSearch (goodsearch.com), powered by Yahoo. A visitor to the site can both initiate a search and specify a charity; GoodSearch donates a penny to the charity for each search. A charity with 1,000 supporters searching the Internet twice a day will receive \$7,300 in a year.

Since the company started, users have chosen to benefit more than 68,000 nonprofits and schools. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, for example, has received \$18,800 in donations, Mr. Ramberg said. GoodSearch adds 100 charities each day, drawn from users' request, after vetting them to make sure they are legitimate, Mr. Ramberg said.

The charities pay nothing to participate, and at first thought "it was too good to be true," said Ms. Ramberg, 38, who was previously a television reporter. "In the beginning they vetted us, too."

Mr. Ramberg, 43, was already a successful entrepreneur when he started GoodSearch. The founder of Jobtrak — a job listing and résumé database for college students — he presumably made his fortune (he would not discuss financial matters) in the dot-com era when he sold the company to Monster.com in 2000.

Like other search engines, GoodSearch generates revenues from display ads that visitors may click on after they see the search results. Yahoo and GoodSearch split these fees, and GoodSearch, in turn, donates half of what it receives. Mr. Ramberg said his company was profitable.

A year ago, a sister site, GoodShop, was added. It donates half the commissions the company receives when it links visitors to online retailers. Visitors to GoodSearch remain anonymous, and they get the same results as if they had initiated the query from Yahoo.com, Mr. Ramberg said. So far, the biggest challenge is getting people who rely on other search engines, like Google, to use GoodSearch instead.

Young adults find hope after foster care

by C.W. Nevius

When 19-year-old Greg Clayborn walked into the Salvation Army's new Railton Place group residence on Turk Street on Monday afternoon, a member of the staff told him his father had stopped by to see him. Clayborn shrugged. "I don't really know how to feel about that," Clayborn said later. "I don't really need a father right now. I don't really have a family. I understand that. Sad as it sounds, that's just the way it is."

Clayborn left home at 13. He bounced through three foster homes in three years, then landed in a group home where the only thing that was consistent was the revolving door of tenants and staff. That was rough, but not as bad as what happened when he turned 18.

The only thing worse than being a child in a foster home is to be an "aged out" foster child. That's when you reach the age of 18, state and federal funding shuts down, and you are "emancipated." In a lot of cases, that means being put out the door.

"The minute they turn 18, the funding ends," said Maj. George Rocheleau of the Salvation Army. "Unless the foster family has personal funds, the child has to leave."

The numbers for those turned-away kids are staggering. A 2007 study by the Pew Charitable Trust found that the number of kids aging out each year has grown by 41 percent since 1998 - to roughly 20,000 annually across the country. One in 5 will become homeless, a third have no high school diploma, and nearly half of the young women who had been in foster care become pregnant at least once by age 19.

What should be done? Well, a comprehensive, well-funded program to stabilize the housing for these youths would be a start. A large-scale bridge program that would take aged-out foster kids through the transition to adulthood would be another. It would be easy to say that the Salvation Army's new center, with only 27 apartments for aged-out foster kids, won't make much of a dent. But helping make the foster care system work will take a series of baby steps, small victories and individual efforts.

"This isn't a shelter," Rocheleau said. "There are other programs for people who just want to sit around and not do anything. This is for highly motivated people." The Salvation Army took some care to find the right candidates for the center, which opened in June with funding from the McDonald's hamburger fortune. I spoke to three of them, and each was poised and outgoing. If only there hadn't been such an undercurrent of untouchable sadness.

Imraz Ali, 19, was put in foster homes when he was 2. He jokes that he can't remember how many he cycled through, but once he starts counting them up, you realize he isn't kidding. He finally settles on eight foster homes and "five or six" group homes. Ali used to ache for some kind of connection, a sense of family.

"On my birthday every year, my only wish was for my mom and dad to come back and take me away," he said. But when his mother did return, it was a disaster. He's never met his father. At first, he says, he bonded with the young staff at the group homes, who seemed helpful and supportive. And they were. But Ali realized that, although they were interested in him, they also often were working on their college theses.

"I really trusted some of them," he said. "But it is like you're an experiment. They go out and work in this field, but then they (get their data and) leave." "Once one person leaves, you realize it is sort of like a business," Clayborn said. "Someone would live there a year, and then all of a sudden they would disappear and there would be a new person the next night."

The Salvation Army program may not salvage the lives of the thousands of aged-out foster kids, but it would take a cold soul not to appreciate the strides Clayborn, Ali and 18-year-old Shakema Stoney have made. For two years, they will live in their own apartment, get job training and learn to cook and balance a checkbook. For three teenagers whose previous personal space was no more than a bed and a drawer in a dresser, having an apartment with a kitchen, private bath and furniture is almost overwhelming.


"My sister cried when she saw it," Stoney said. "That lounge chair - I just said nobody better sit in that." Clayborn and Stoney are taking classes at City College, with an eye toward transferring to a state school. Ali will start in January. It isn't that their futures look so bright as it is that they have one.

Seeing Stoney's smile, or Ali's enthusiasm when he rattles off favorite books and authors - " 'Lord of the Flies,' 'Of Mice and Men,' Hemingway!" he said - it is easy to think that this is a problem solved. Clayborn, who may be the most centered of the group, is thinking of a career in business or marine biology. And yet, you wonder how he will ever put aside a life of promises unkept.

"I sort of learned not to expect anything," he said. "Not to assume I was going to be in one place for any time or to think that the people there were going to be there to take care of me. What I had to do is set myself up to be a successful, responsible adult."

A group like the Salvation Army can't make that happen. They can only create the space and offer the opportunity to people like Ali, Clayborn and Stoney.

C.W. Nevius' column runs Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. E-mail him at cwnevius@sfchronicle.com. Copyright 2008 SF Chronicle



This story was originally published in the December 14, 1982 issue of Woman's Day magazine. It was the first place winner out of thousands of entries in the magazine's "My Most Moving Holiday Tradition" contest in which readers were asked to share their favorite holiday tradition and the story behind it. Woman's Day continues to support this tradition and The White Envelope Project today.

This story brings to mind the idea of creating your own traditions, as well as the gift of giving being as valuable as receiving (if not more so). As our CASA children face the holiday season without being surrounded with their family, friends and traditions, maybe take the opportunity to share this story with them. Happy holidays!

"For the Man Who Hated Christmas"

by Nancy W. Gavin

(courtesy of WhiteEnvelopeProject.org)

It's just a small, white envelope stuck among the branches of our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past ten years or so.

It all began because my husband Mike hated Christmas--oh, not the true meaning of Christmas, but the commercial aspects of it--overspending... the frantic running around at the last minute to get a tie for Uncle Harry and the dusting powder for Grandma--- the gifts given in desperation because you couldn't think of anything else.

Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts, sweaters, ties and so forth. I reached for something special just for Mike. The inspiration came in an unusual way.

Our son Kevin, who was 12 that year, was wrestling at the junior level at the school he attended; and shortly before Christmas, there was a non-league match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church. These youngsters, dressed in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together, presented a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes. As the match began, I was alarmed to see that the other team was wrestling without headgear, a kind of light helmet designed to protect a wrestler's ears.

It was a luxury the ragtag team obviously could not afford. Well, we ended up walloping them. We took every weight class. And as each of their boys got up from the mat, he swaggered around in his tatters with false bravado, a kind of street pride that couldn't acknowledge defeat.

Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly, "I wish just one of them could have won," he said. "They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them." Mike loved kids - all kids - and he knew them, having coached little league football, baseball and lacrosse. That's when the idea for his present came. That afternoon, I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church. On Christmas Eve, I placed the envelope on the tree, the note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me. His smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year and in succeeding years. For each Christmas, I followed the tradition--one year sending a group of mentally handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, another year a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground the week before Christmas, and on and on.

The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning and our children, ignoring their new toys, would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents.

As the children grew, the toys gave way to more practical presents, but the envelope never lost its allure. The story doesn't end there.

You see, we lost Mike last year due to dreaded cancer. When Christmas rolled around, I was still so wrapped in grief that I barely got the tree up. But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree, and in the morning, it was joined by three more.

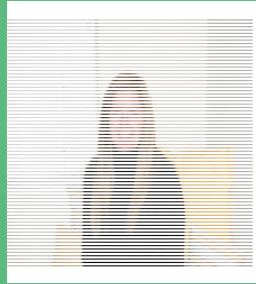
Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition has grown and someday will expand even further with our grandchildren standing to take down the envelope.

Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit will always be with us.



San Benito Street

CASA San Benito is pleased to honor **Pattie Saso**.



As a member of the CASA San Benito Fundraiser Committee, Pattie played a huge role in the planning and execution of CASA's inaugural fundraiser in May of this year. Pattie's generosity of time and commitment to our organization was instrumental in the success of our first fundraiser. Pattie has an infectious personality that inspires those around her to do more and give more to those members in our community who need it the most. She does not do it for notoriety or recognition, Pattie does it because she truly believes in making a difference in her community. Pattie is full of energy and great ideas and is not afraid to pitch in to do whatever it takes to get the job done. Thank you, Pattie, for your hard work, commitment and dedication to the CASA organization, and in particular the foster youth of San Benito County. Because of you, we strive to be better community members and help those in need. You are a true inspiration to all of us.

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

Kim Batiste (from Mentor Mons): Talking to Kids about AIDS

Date: Tuesday, DEC. 9

Time: 6:00pm – 8:00pm

Location: CASA Office

Peer Review w/ Bree Nakashima

Date: Wednesday, DEC. 17

Time: 12:00pm- 2:00pm

Location: CASA Office



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!