

CASA* FOR KIDS

* court appointed special advocate



Casa Volunteers Bring A Unique Perspective

by Ted O. Lympus

For almost 19 years, I have been a District Court Judge here in Flathead County presiding over cases that are some of the most painful and difficult, because they involve abused and neglected children.

There are many aspects of these cases that require a great deal of time to investigate and report. The children have often been subjected to unspeakable emotional and physical pain. They can have extensive needs, ranging from poor health, emotional distress and educational challenges.

When I first began hearing child abuse and neglect cases, I relied upon the reports and testimony from the assigned social workers, testimony from the birth parents (if available) and arguments from the attorneys representing the birth parents, based upon their visits with the child and the parents, respectively. Since the CASA program had not been initiated at that time, no report was available, nor testimony presented, strictly on behalf of the child. My decision was then made based, therefore, upon facts thus presented, without any outside input concerning the child. While the reports by the social workers were and continue to be an integral part of the decision making process, the one piece that was missing was the “independent voice” for the child.

Since the CASA program has been initiated in Flathead County, the Court’s decisions concerning placement for the child now have an additional and unique perspective based upon the CASA’s report. The CASA will have spent a significant amount of time with the child, as well as the parents, relatives, teachers, clergy and others who have first hand knowledge of the child’s needs. The CASA will also have been in contact with appropriate agencies to facilitate the needs of the child, whether they be nutritional, tutoring for academic performance or basic health needs. When a hearing is then held, I greatly value the detailed report and personal testimony given by the CASA. The cases at times can be overwhelming due to their complexity. I believe I can speak on behalf of all of the District Judges in Flathead County in saying that the CASA volunteer is a uniquely invaluable and powerful voice for the children.

As I finish another day presiding over these cases, I want to personally thank not only the CASA volunteers, but the foster parents, attorneys and other agencies who dedicate themselves to protecting these precious, innocent and often long-suffering children.



We Advocate

for Abused

and Neglected

Children in Court

q u o t e

“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say “It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.” Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”

~ Fred Rogers



You can be a hero in the life of a child through your financial support or by becoming a CASA volunteer.

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A Poem by Dorothy Nolte

*A child who lives with Criticism
Learns to condemn*

*A child who lives with Hostility
Learns to fight*

*A child who lives with ridicule
Learns to be shy*

*A child who lives with shame
Learns to feel guilty*

*A child who lives with tolerance
Learns to be patient*

*A child who lives with
encouragement
Learns confidence*

*A child who lives with Praise
Learns to appreciate*

*A child who lives with fairness
Learns justice*

*A child who lives with security
Learns faith*

*A child who lives with approval
Learns to like their self*

*A child who lives with
acceptance & friendship
Learns to find love in the world*



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www.flatheadcasa.org

Spirit Of Christmas Concert Success

Our annual Spirit of Christmas Concert was held December 9, 2010 at the Flathead High School Auditorium, featuring the talents of area performers including Penni Chisholm, Pastor David Merkel, the Latin jazz band Cocinando, women's quartet Hi Jinx, Flathead High School's Choral-Aires and Glacier High School's Echoes, as well as other young musicians.

On December 19th during a Sunday morning presentation at the United Methodist Church of Columbia Falls, members of the CASA Advisory Council, along with CASA Director Jamie Campbell, were presented a check in the amount of \$8,007 collected from corporate sponsors, donations and concert ticket sales.

We were deeply touched by the presentation. Without the efforts of Penni Chisholm and Pastor Merkel, along with the volunteers from United Methodist Church of Columbia Falls and many other dedicated people, this event would not have been possible.

11th Annual Light of Hope Ceremony

The 11th annual Light of Hope Ceremony will be May 17, 2011 at 3:30 P.M. at the Gateway Community Center in the United Way Conference Room, 1203 Highway 2 West, in Kalispell. The ceremony is held to honor and celebrate our CASA Youth, CASA Volunteers, Foster Parents & siblings, Social Workers, Therapists, Educators, Donors, Program Directors, Court Officials and all others who have advocated on behalf of abused and neglected children. This year our key note speaker will be Rev. David Merkel, pastor of the United Methodist Church of Columbia Falls.



Five year old Eddie Mae Chisholm's Twinkle Twinkle Little Star drew wild applause from the audience.



David Merkel's rendition of 'My Grownup Christmas List' reminds us of children's deepest needs and desires.



A service of the



Annual Benefit

Monday, April 25th, 2011, Doug and Vonnie Day, owners of Capers Restaurant, are pleased to host the annual CASA for Kids Dinner at Capers. Tickets are \$100 and can be purchased at the CASA for Kids office located in the Gateway Community Center. Space is limited and advance ticket purchase is required.

A Reception and Silent Auction will be held at the Noice Studio and Gallery beginning at 5:30 P.M. followed by dinner at 6:30 P.M. Proceeds from this wonderful evening help to support the training of CASA volunteers: the voice for abused and neglected children. For further information contact CASA for Kids at 755-7208.

Cole's Story

Cole was placed in foster care when his father was arrested on outstanding warrants. The foster parent reported that he was covered with bruises and had a complete melt-down when it came time to bathe. Night terrors were a regular ordeal for him, even 2 years into the case, and the stories he told about his life with dad sounded like a script from a poorly written drama – it seemed too outlandish to be true. For the most part, he and his father had lived as transients, traveling from state to state, involved in numerous violent incidents and petty crimes.

His father insisted he had been awarded sole custody of his son at the age of two because Cole's mother, Veronica, was incompetent and dangerous. He even had a video of Veronica that reinforced this view. Cole expressed tremendous fear of her as well, although he could only recall stories his father had told him about her.



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active CASAs

Lynne Beauclair	Mary Levitt
Debbie Biggar	Chris Lindsay
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Rex Boller	Shannon Lund
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thanks for all that you do!

Support CASA for Kids, a child's voice in court.

SPONSORSHIP: CASA for Kids spends \$1,083 per year, per each match of volunteer and abused or neglected child

Philanthropist, \$1083 and up

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Enclosed is a check to CASA for Kids in the amount of \$ _____

VOLUNTEER: **Yes, I am interested in learning more about the CASA for Kids Program.**

OTHER: **Use your imagination and let us know what you can do**

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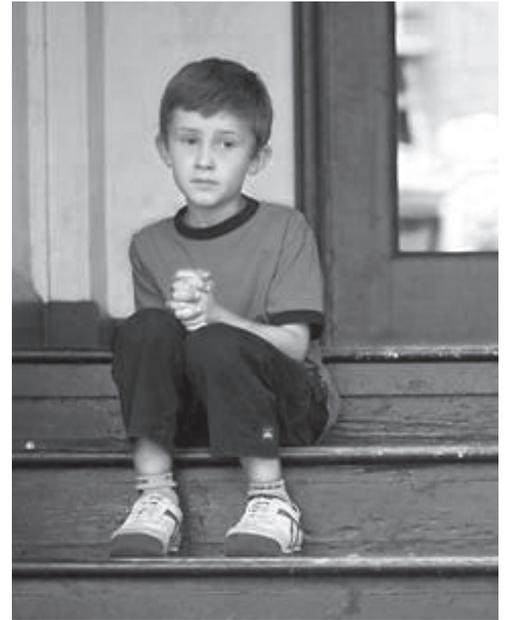
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Mail to: CASA for Kids, Gateway Community Center,
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As the volunteer worked the case she began to question the accuracy of the information about Veronica. Cole's social worker was over-extended. She did not have time to pursue an investigation of a mother who had lost custody of her son. Despite her reservations about Cole's father she felt compelled to work toward reunification with him. Despite this, the CASA tracked down Cole's mom. After a few conversations with her it became obvious to the CASA that the father had not provided accurate information to the social worker. Veronica had been paying child support for Cole and he was on her medical insurance. She also provided information that gave quite a different picture of the custody agreement. The CASA connected Veronica with Cole's social worker. After listening to the mother's side of the story and reviewing the legal documents in her possession it was clear to the Social Worker that Cole's father had fabricated a great deal of his information. Further investigation revealed the mother as the best placement option. Much work was needed to rebuild a trusting relationship between mother and son. This was difficult, particularly because Veronica lived out of state. However she rose to the occasion.



It often takes the collaboration of many to bring these challenging cases to a successful conclusion. In this case two social workers, two attorneys, multiple therapists, various other service providers and one diligent CASA volunteer worked together for almost 3 years to help Cole find a safe, permanent home. Ultimately he was happily reunified with his mother.

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