



Connections from page 1

the third Monday of the month from noon to 1:00 pm to share success stories or any challenges a CASA may be experiencing. Anytime a CASA needs support in any way, staff is available in the office.

Kim has been teaching this program for a year now, and as she works to train all CASA volunteers this year, she hopes to begin to see how effective this program has become by monitoring and following up on assigned cases. Kim feels we must work with a sense of urgency as CASA volunteers to connect youth to these important people in their lives and to help build and maintain these relationships for them as soon as possible so they benefit from having family resources and begin to rely on them through young adulthood.

Kim believes that with the technology available today it is easier to locate missing family and important adults for youth in foster care, which means that many youth living in foster care without family support **may** have persons who want to, and are able to, raise and/or support them throughout their lives. Of special note, once CASA's receive this training **Voices For Children CASA will provide them with the internet service available for use to locate missing family.** At the closing of each case a file will be kept for the youth with the list of the present and newly found family members and caring adults and what support they can provide. Also included will be a diagram that shows all of the known connections to the youth and the quality of those relationships. A copy of these two documents will be sent to DHHS to keep in their file as well.

Lifelong Connection training will be included in the annual CASA training held each year in February. If you have any questions about the Lifelong Connection Program please contact Kim at kim@vfcasa.org or at 303-440-7059.

"The greatest disease is to be nobody to anybody." Mother Theresa

Terry Coble is a VFC CASA and our newsletter editor.



VOICES FOR CHILDREN



VFC CASA Serving Abused and Neglected Children in Boulder County Since 1985

Fall 2011

All Youth, No Matter What Age, Need Lifelong Connections

Interview with Kim Parr, Director, VFC CASA Lifelong Connections Program

by Terry Coble, CASA

Kim Parr runs the Lifelong Connection program for Voices For Children CASA. Kim has been a CASA volunteer for ten years. Her motivation for this program began with her personal experience as a CASA. She was assigned to a case with a thirteen-year-old girl who was residing in a residential treatment care facility and had no one visiting her. Her only connections were with the professionals involved with her case: staff, therapists, psychologists, caseworker from Department of Housing and Human Service (DHSS), IMPACT worker, and teachers. She was alone and struggling with behavioral and mental health issues. This young woman had been in the system since the age of eight, and had moved from placement to placement, in and out of foster homes, group homes and residential treatment care facilities. All of them failed. Kim shared that she couldn't imagine how sad and alone this young girl must have felt, having been separated from her siblings and mom at such a young age and how hard it must have been moving from place to place, never feeling the love and sense of belonging she needed and deserved.

As this young woman grew closer to the age of 18 Kim realized it was unlikely she would be adopted and because she had been in so many different placements she did not have any consistent or permanent connections. Her placements had not provided her with enough of a "normalized environment" to grow and mature. She would transition to adulthood alone. While Kim supported this young woman, she confides her transition to independence was and continues to be extremely difficult. She continues to lack the skills to take care of herself and the skills to maintain positive relationships.

Kim believes children and youth of all ages long for a loving and lifelong connection to family. The research shows that those who are separated and disconnected from family often experience frequent mental health and behavioral issues, placement disruptions, school failures and risks to health and safety. Many of these youth are alone, longing for a family, a home, a school with friends, and a neighborhood. All too often they have lost not only

their parents, but also brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Kim mused, "Imagine being 18 years old and not having family or caring adults in your life. No place to go home for the holidays, no one to offer a place to stay or to do laundry, no one to help you move into your first apartment, no one to talk to through the ups and downs of life." According to Kim, many youth today continue to have family support well into their 20's yet foster youth age out at 18 years old and many are alone and without the support of caring adults. Foster youth need guidance and positive encouragement as early on as possible continuing on as they move into adulthood and independent living. What many foster youth miss when aging out of the system are human connections.

So with this concern in mind, Kim worked with Voices For Children CASA to create a program to begin to meet this need. The **CASA Lifelong Connection Program** begins this process from the very start of the CASA being assigned a case. The program Kim developed teaches CASA volunteers how to locate and engage healthy relationships with family and caring adults designed to maintain lifelong connections and build support networks. In some cases family members may become a permanent placement for the youth, but the goal is not to find permanent placement, it is to **establish a permanent emotional connection for the youth with as many caring adults that have been found and who are willing to be a part of the youth's life.** CASA volunteers attend a Lifelong Connection training session to learn how to provide this service to youth. In addition, a monthly support group is held on

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VOICES FOR CHILDREN



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VOICES FOR CHILDREN CASA is a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the needs of abused and neglected children in Boulder County.

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From the Executive Director

In August I had the privilege of attending a six-hour workshop with Dr. Bruce Perry. He is a neurobiologist who has been studying brain development in children for 25 years, with an emphasis on abused and neglected children. I first heard him speak about 15 years ago and have been following his work ever since. If you want to learn more about Dr. Perry and his research visit www.childtraumaacademy.org.

Here are some of the interesting things Dr. Perry spoke about:

- The brain is the most complex system in the universe. During the nine months in utero, 100 billion neurons (nerve/action cells) and 10 trillion glial (supporting) cells are developing in the fetus.
- Brain size plateaus around the age of four.
- Brain functioning is a reflection of experience; the brain loves repetition. The infant makes associations which create neural networks. So Mom reads "dog" and points to a picture of a dog and the baby's brain makes and association, connecting neurons. It may take 100 repetitions to make the connection, but once made, it stays.
- All present experience is interpreted through brain templates created based on experiences and repetition. Different cultures have developed different templates.
- Outcomes for kids are best when there is relational permanence. Relational consistency means time to develop positive new associations with a variety of caring adults.

The Voices For Children CASA Growing Your Child (GYC) program provides information on infant development, activities to do with baby, and parent self-care. The program's goal is to help parents of newborns have realistic expectations about their baby's development, in an effort to reduce child abuse and neglect. Any parent of a newborn can enroll in GYC. There is no charge and all of the materials are available in either English or Spanish. For more information about GYC contact Nancy Miller at nancy@vfccasa.org.

Sincerely,
Marsha Caplan



Become a VOICES Ambassador

Announcing a new way to get involved with VFC CASA!

Mission: The VOICES Ambassador Program helps to sustain an effective CASA program by engaging and educating community members and raising awareness of the agency and its services.

What's Involved: VOICES Ambassadors work to share the mission of VFC CASA with community members through education and community outreach. Ambassadors serve as public advocates within Boulder County by volunteering service hours to a VFC CASA committee, event, program, community outreach and/or educational activity.

Short on time? The VOICES program was made for you! Volunteer as much or as little as you like. Ambassadors provide service that fits in busy work and family lifestyles.

Get Involved: For more information on the new VOICES Ambassador Program and opportunities to help, email nancy@vfccasa.org

VFC CASA Gets Involved: New Youth Advisory Board

Voices For Children CASA is teaming with the Department of Housing and Human Services (DHHS) to create the Youth Engagement Team at DHHS.

The Youth Engagement Team is comprised of a group from DHSS and Pam Pullen, Program Manager from Voices For Children CASA. Pam is the only representative not from the department and hopes to bring up more about **Voices For Children CASA** in the future. Melisa Maling, Division Director of Chaffee workers and other caseworkers are on the team. Each meeting includes invited youth involved in the DHHS system. Pam feels it is essential to hear what these youth have to say. They share their thoughts and feelings about their experiences in foster care and their wishes (driver's license for example).

The idea behind this program is to develop a youth board. This could be an advisory board to make suggestions to DHHS on how to improve what they do, or it could be a group that does community service. The board could also educate the community about foster care and foster kids.

Eventually a Youth Board will be established and youth on the board will be required to go through an eight-hour training through Mile High United Way's Bridging the Gap program.

After the Youth Board is formed, they will decide what direction to take. According to Mile High: "County departments are in a unique position to affect many programs and policies by bringing young people to the table and relying on them for activity development, advice and input, leadership, and even decision making roles. Youth and adults view issues from diverse perspectives and therefore provide invaluable insight for counties. Besides the positive development outcomes achieved for youth by involving them in leadership roles, there are numerous reasons to involve youth in county activities."

Youth serve as role models and peer educators. Young people listen to young people. Youth can be excellent teachers.

Youth diagnose problems and provide a reality check. Young people have first-hand knowledge of their environment. In a sense, they are the experts. Youth challenge conventional thinking. They have fresh perspectives and imaginative ideas. Youth capture the attention of decision-makers.

Pam says the program is still getting off the ground with most of the youth participants coming from Attention Homes where some were in foster care and one had aged out of the system and now works at DHHS. According to Pam, one girl who was there had never been a victim of child abuse but was interested in foster kids and she wanted to be on the Board to help. The Board will consist of youth ages 15-22 and ideally have some ages 8-12 as well.

The benefits to kids would be their leadership development, peer support and knowing that their voices were heard by DHHS and the community. The Youth Engagement Team will be working on other issues throughout the year. For further information, please contact Pam Pullen at Voices For Children CASA, 303-440-7059.



VOICES FOR CHILDREN Needs You!

Yes, I want to help!

- Yes, I am interested in becoming a CASA.
- No, I am not currently interested in becoming a CASA, but I would like to make a donation of \$_____.
- Yes, I want to do both! \$_____.
- Please put me on your mailing list for the VFC CASA quarterly newsletter.
- Please send me the monthly VFC CASA e-news.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone: Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Email _____

Please return to: VOICES FOR CHILDREN CASA, 2305 Canyon Blvd. #101, Boulder, CO 80302

Web: www.vfccasa.org Fax: 303-440-9960

Do You Have What It Takes To Be A CASA?

VOICES FOR CHILDREN CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteers come from varied backgrounds. Their ages span from 21 to over 70 years and their education ranges from high school to Ph.D. degrees. Some work full or part-time and some are students. The following is a composite picture drawn from the profiles of ninety active CASA volunteers.

Chris is 32, married, has a B.S. in chemistry and works as a chemist with a government agency. Wanting to give something back to the community and help children, Chris investigated several agencies before applying to Voices For Children (VFC) CASA to become a CASA.

Early in October, Chris received a multi-part application. Some of the questions pertained to personal life and ambitions, while others dealt with how one would respond in certain situations involving children. The completed application was returned with three forms: one for the Colorado Central Registry, an Authorization to Release Personal Information, and one for the Colorado Department of Motor Vehicles. VFC CASA screens every applicant through several agencies, and if an applicant cannot afford the fees, VFC CASA will pay them.

Attendance at all sessions of the 40-hour training is mandatory for becoming a CASA. Chris noted the training session dates.

The following month, after VFC CASA staff had reviewed the applications, a one-hour interview was scheduled. The interviewer asked many questions to learn more about Chris. The questions included topics such as childhood experiences, attitudes about abuse and neglect and experience in working with children. The interview was pleasant, and Chris departed with the feeling that important areas had been explored. It was understood that, because VFC CASA usually has more applicants than training slots, the interview was not a guarantee of a place in the program.

In early February, Chris was notified of acceptance into the training program. Having passed the written application, screening, and interview process, Chris felt quite proud and ready to accept the challenges of the rigorous training program that is presented only once each year. There would be 29 other trainees.

Chris enjoyed the training program with its mix of lecture and interactive activities, and got to know the others in the class. Several professionals from the community, the VFC CASA staff, CASA volunteers and members of the VFC CASA Board of Directors comprised the faculty. They helped the trainees to better understand child development, the dynamics of abuse and neglect, the legal system, communications skills, and other relevant subjects. The hefty training manual would be a handy review and reference tool when a case was ultimately assigned.

Several months after completing CASA training, Chris accepted a case involving two children, ages 8 and 4. Chris received a packet of information from VFC CASA, including the name of the guardian ad litem (GAL) attorney with whom Chris would be working and the experienced CASA mentor who would be contacting Chris. In the case documents, Chris learned that the boys were in a foster-adopt home after having been physically abused by their father.

Chris met with the GAL, who worked with Chris to develop a case plan and then went with Chris to meet the children at their foster home. After making an appointment to meet with the Department of Housing and Human Services caseworker Chris went to HHS and reviewed the case file.

As a CASA, Chris' primary job was to provide information to the Court as to the children's best interests. This would be done by talking with day care providers, foster parents, the caseworker and any others involved with the life of the boys. It was decided that Chris would also supervise one visit a week between the children and their parents.

Over the next few months, in an effort to get the best possible information to aid the Court in deciding what was best for the children, Chris saw the children regularly. They knew that Chris was there for them, to help guide them through a traumatic time in their lives. Chris also attended one court hearing and one placement review.

Ongoing support was received from the VFC CASA staff. Chris' monthly CASA reports were submitted, reviewed and sent on to the GAL. After working on the case for 90 days, Chris and the VFC CASA Program Manager met to discuss its progress. It seemed to Chris that the parents were complying with everything in their treatment plan and were sincere about wanting to get the children back. The parents were attending parenting classes and family therapy and Dad had a new job. At the weekly visits Chris had observed the children's eagerness to be with their parents and reported that both parents acted appropriately with the children. Chris felt that the parents were ready for unsupervised visits – perhaps even an overnight visit. The caseworker was resistant to this, believing that a few more observations were needed to make sure Dad's behavior was stable. It was decided that Chris should call the GAL and strongly urge to have a date set for unsupervised visits.

At one of the monthly inservice meetings at VFC CASA, Chris learned about some positive discipline techniques. These were suggested to the parents at the next visit Chris supervised, and they took the advice positively. To everyone's satisfaction the children were returned home in ten months. The case was still open with HHS and Chris continued to see the children weekly. Chris explained that because their family was doing so well, their time together would soon end. Shortly after HHS closed the case, the visits with Chris stopped.

VFC Announces 2012 CASA Training

Feb. 23, 25, 28 and March 1, 3, 6, 8, 10

Contact Pam at
303-440-7059 or
pam@vfccasa.org
for details and application.

From the President

Hope you are all enjoying the beautiful fall weather.

We were very excited to see so many of you at our annual Light of Hope Luncheon on October 7th at the St. Julien in Boulder. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet and I hope you all enjoyed hearing the Radliff Family story, truly an amazing journey and wonderful outcome. This is the happy ending we all want to see and sadly it is not always the case but it is our mission to do whatever we can.

Voices For Children CASA is vital to fulfilling society's most fundamental obligation – making sure a qualified, compassionate adult will fight for and protect a child's right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to learn and grow in the embrace of a loving family. We thank you for your support to fund CASA's

that help achieve this goal. Our upcoming Colorado Gives Day, December 6th is a wonderful time to give the gift of a CASA to a child in need. Please visit www.vfccasa.org for more details.

As always, if you would like volunteers from our VOICES Ambassadors to visit your meetings and share our mission, please let us know. There are many volunteer opportunities for both short and long term projects, we welcome you to the team. Our Business Partnership Program is very interested in working with companies in the community on multi-year support and joint marketing plans so please contact me directly (303-304-2136) if you would like our team to come speak with your organization.

Have a wonderful holiday season!

Sincerely,
Celia Krebs

Voices For Children CASA Celebrates New Milestones!

The annual Volunteer Recognition luncheon was donated by the Olive Garden restaurant in Boulder this year.

Thirty-five volunteers, including CASAs, board members and others enjoyed a delicious Italian lunch. CASA **Betty Baal** achieved her 15 year milestone! Five year milestones were reached by **Carol Baum, Karen Drazen, John Grady, Martha Montoya, Barbara Perdew and Elaine Schwenker**. VFC CASA would not exist without its corps of over 100 CASA volunteers and we are so grateful that more than 20% of our CASA volunteers have been helping abused and neglected children for five years or more.



Betty Baal, Elaine Schwenker, Martha Montoya

MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW! DECEMBER 6, 2011 - COLORADO GIVES DAY

Many of you like to make charitable donations toward the end of the year. Please consider making a donation to Voices For Children CASA on December 6 during Colorado Gives Day. Simply go to www.vfccasa.org and click on the "Donate Online Now" button. Similar to last year, credit card and processing fees will be covered by Community First Foundation and sponsors so that 100 percent of your Colorado Gives Day donation goes directly to VFC CASA. The \$300,000 FirstBank Incentive Fund will leverage donations made through GivingFirst.org on December 6. Like last year, dollars from the fund will be proportionally allocated across all donations received, increasing the value of each donation.

Help VFC CASA with High Five Prizes

FirstBank is sponsoring 12 prizes at \$5,000 each to encourage giving and reward nonprofits. In each of the prize categories below, they will award three winners:

- Most Dollars Raised
- Most Donors
- Most Dollars Raised through GivingFirst Fundraising Pages
- Largest Percent Increase in Dollars Compared to CO Gives Day 2010

Thank you for your support!

Voices For Children CASA Shines At The 2011 Light Of Hope Luncheon



On October 7 over 250 people enjoyed lunch at the St. Julien Hotel while learning more about Voices For Children CASA. CASA Nancy Birchmeier introduced adorable Karyssa and Asher Radliff and told how those children came into the child welfare system. Their adoptive parents, Cheri and Paul Radliff, spoke about how Nancy had made a huge difference in their lives.



Our Table Captains

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Wendy Ahrendt | Pauline Hasund | Charles Skala |
| Jacalyn Colt | Gina Ianneli | Janet & Tom Smalley |
| Maggie Cox | Katie Jensen | Rosalie Smith |
| Jennifer Crum | Alice Korenblat | Sharon Smith-Eisler |
| Tina Faatz | Dianne & Kyle Moller | Peggy Spiro |
| JoAnne Foster | Carol Morphew | Katie Wright |
| Ashley Giles | Barbara Park | Bettie & Wayne Wright |
| Hillary Hall | Sue Rehak | |
| Meg Harlow | Emily Sewell | |



Our Light of Hope Committee

- Wendy Ahrendt
- Nancy Birchmeier
- Trina Faatz
- Charles Skala
- Janet Smalley



Our Special Thanks To

Choir Director Jan Osburn and the Flatirons Elementary School 5th Grade Choir



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