



# CASA of Stanislaus County

MARCH — APRIL 2009

## Keeping up with CASA

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### COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES of STANISLAUS COUNTY

Volunteer advocates are needed to be the voice of dependent children during court hearings. They'll conduct case fact finding and produce court reports for all hearings based on what is in the best interest of the children.

CASA training includes the following topics: family dynamics; the court process; report writing; domestic violence; cultural diversity; and mental health. Advocates volunteer an average of 10 to 15 hours per month and commit themselves to being available until the end of the case assigned (usually 18 months). This commitment is essential so the volunteer can build and maintain trusting, stable relationships with the children they are appointed to in order to speak exclusively for those children in court.

Volunteers are provided training, supervision and support. 30 hours of in-house training and 10 hours of court observation is provided. Volunteer Requirements: Advocates must be at least 21 years of age; computer literate with access to e-mail; pass a fingerprint background check (paid for by CASA); possess a California driver's license; provide a DMV printout; and show proof of insurance.

*Bilingual individuals and males are especially encouraged to apply.*

If you are interested in joining us, please call:  
Cindy Julsgard at (209) 567.4230  
casacm@stanct.org

### CASA CONTACT INFORMATION

Our office will be *closed* on *March* in observance of the birth of Cesar Chavez.

Our Mailing Address: P.O. Box 3488 Modesto, CA 95353  
Our Phone: (209) 567.4230  
Our Fax: (209) 567.4231  
Our Website: [www.casaofstanco.org](http://www.casaofstanco.org)

Our E-mails:  
casaed@stanct.org -Steve Ashman, Executive Director  
casacm@stanct.org -Cindy Julsgard, Case Manager



The mission of the Court Appointed Special Advocates of Stanislaus County is to provide quality advocacy services for all abused and neglected children in the dependency system through the use of trained volunteers.

*CASA is a non profit 501 (c) 3  
Tax ID # 91-2168629*

Our next orientation for potential NEW Advocates will be on  
**May 27, 2009 at 6pm** at our CASA office ...  
with **training** for those new advocates **beginning** on  
**June 8, 2009 at 6pm** at our CASA office .



Please **SAVE** the **DATE!**  
The 6th annual **KIWANIS** of North Modesto Golf  
Tournament benefitting **CASA** of Stanislaus County will  
be held at **SPRING CREEK** Golf & Country Club  
in Ripon, CA on Monday; August 31, 2009



*As of March 1, 2009 there were over 500 children in need of an CASA (advocate) in Stanislaus County ...  
Please help us secure a safe future for a child in need by sending your 100% tax deductible donation to:*

*CASA of Stanislaus County  
Post Office Box 3488  
Modesto, California 95353*

*We are also happy to speak directly with you  
and will gladly accept your credit card payment for any donation you wish to give.*

*CASA is a non profit 501 (c) 3 -  
Our Tax ID is 91-2168629.*

*Your generosity and support is appreciated!*

## **UPCOMING TRAININGS at CASA**

**(for current trainees and available as a  
Continuing Education Opportunity for established advocates)**

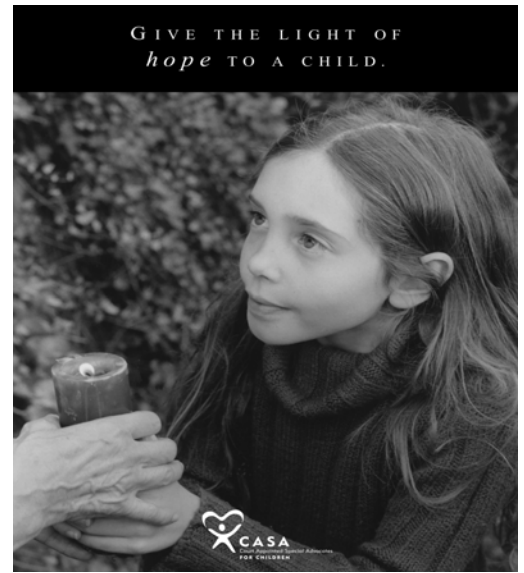
- March 4; Wednesday ... Writing Court Reports with Commissioner Nancy Williamsen (7pm>9pm)**
- March 11; Wednesday ... AB 490 ; School Discipline and Education Rights**
- March 16; Monday ... Youth Centered Advocacy**
- March 19; Thursday ... Building Strength, Building Family**
- March 24; Tuesday ... Courtroom Protocols and Courtroom Visit**
- March 26; Thursday ... Putting Theory Into Practice**

*All above trainings are from 5:30 > 8:30 pm and are held at the CASA office unless otherwise noted.  
All dates and topics subject to change depending on our guest speakers' availability.*

*Check out our new (and we think improved)  
Secure website:*

**<http://www.casaofstanco.org/index.asp>**

for more information about our program; training and general advocate information;  
upcoming events; sponsorship information; links and much more!



## **Continuing Education opportunities for our *Current Advocates* include:**



The following listed classes (No pre-registration necessary) will be held at the Family Partnership Center, 421 E. Morris Avenue, Modesto from 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

- Date:** 2 Mar (Monday)  
**Topic:** Caring for Special Needs Children  
This class will provide information for caring for infants/children who have been exposed to drugs/alcohol in utero.  
**Trainer:** Melissa Cisneros & Susan Crawford
- Date:** 16 Mar (Monday)  
**Topic:** Parenting Teens Part I  
You will understand what it is like being a teen today and becoming familiar with their problems.  
**Trainer:** Peggy Stepro
- Date:** 23 Mar (Monday)  
**Topic:** Parenting Teens Part II  
How to identify four ways you can encourage teens and build encouragement skills.  
**Trainer:** Peggy Stepro
- Date:** 30 Mar (Monday)  
**Topic:** Parenting Teens Part III  
In this class you will learn the five goals of teen behavior along with their positive and negative approaches.  
**Trainer:** Peggy Stepro



The following listed workshop will be held at the Community Services Agency, 251 E. Hackett Road, Modesto from 9:00 a.m. to approximately 3:30 p.m.

**Note:** Please pre-register not later than **17 March** by calling one of the phone numbers indicated below and leaving your name and phone number. (Calls will not be returned). Lunch will be provided; therefore please **pre-register** to ensure enough food is available for all attendees.

- Date:** 21 Mar (Saturday Workshop)  
**Topic:** Trauma and Its Effects on Children  
This workshop will explore the behavioral changes that often come about in children due to traumatic experiences and how the caregiver can understand and cope with those effects.  
**Trainer:** Jennifer Johnson LCSW

# A PATH TO PERMANENCY — LYSSA'S STORY

Lyssa Trujillo emancipated from Santa Clara County. For her first few years of college she struggled, as most youth do, in trying to maintain a secure living condition while balancing work, school and other financial issues. As Lyssa explains, *"School was sometimes on the back burner, having somewhere to live took precedence."*

Within the first five months of living on her own, at the age of 18, Lyssa moved three times.

Lyssa's first living arrangement was her cousin's cabin in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Half of the cabin had electricity; the other half was Lyssa's bedroom. Even with the benefit of having attended Independent Living Program (ILP) workshops on budgeting, Lyssa did not have the finances to budget. There were times when in order to get to and from class Lyssa borrowed money from friends to purchase gas. Sometimes gas was more important than eating.

While struggling to keep a good academic standing Lyssa was forced to leave her cousin's cabin and moved in with a friend to sleep on her couch. Lyssa reflects on this choice, *"It was probably the most unrealistic move I could make. I was always distracted and my friend was a source of procrastination. I felt like I was waiting to move again."* When asked why she did not move back with her former foster parents (an aunt and uncle) Lyssa replied, *"I think it was a sense of pride. I didn't want their help. I wanted to do it on my own. I wanted help, but not from them. I would rather starve and stumble on my own than have them help me and have a debt I could not return or repay. I was ashamed of my failure. I saw struggling as failing. I know it seems foolish, but that was my thinking."*

After having slept on her friend's couch for a few months and being placed on academic probation, she decided to move out. During this time, she worked two jobs and attended school at night to stabilize her living situation. Financial aid just was not enough.

It was not until her last two years of college at University of California, Santa Cruz did she become a recipient of Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP+). Through a mentorship Lyssa was able to gain the stability she had been striving for. *"It was a great relief. I knew I was going to be ok. I would have a safe a secure place to stay the rest of my undergraduate experience."*

After graduation the summer of 2008 and her contract with THP+ ended, Lyssa searched for employment in the realm of foster care reform. It was her mentor who informed her of the Youth Alumni Technical Assistant (TA) position for CC25I. Lyssa's mentor remains an important part of her life. *"She stretched me to think outside of the now or even near future. She was preparing me for life after THP+ and how to be truly independent."*

Lyssa was hired in October 2008 as the new Youth Alumni Technical Assistant for the CC25I and F2F sites. Her major source of motivation has been her younger twin siblings, who emancipated over a year ago. Lyssa's sister is currently a recipient of the THP+ program while attending San Jose State University.

Lyssa still sees herself as a source of positive encouragement, not only for her siblings but also for all foster youth, and hopes to provide this support through her work. As a Youth Engagement Technical Assistant for CC25I Lyssa will have the opportunity to help counties develop and organize events; help counties develop Youth Advisory Boards; help to bring focus on youth voice, youth experience, and youth leadership; as well as collaborate with other initiatives.

Although Lyssa now holds a job she could only have *"dreamed"* of having, she is still in a state of transition. After the THP+ opportunity ended and she no longer received financial aid, Lyssa was not able to afford her own apartment. Shortly after graduation Lyssa moved in with the friend she had lived with at the age of 18. *"It was really hard. I felt like in these five years, nothing had changed. I was in the same position."*

Lyssa's aunt and uncle had offered her the option of returning to live with them. When asked why she hesitated on the offer her response was, *"Up front it was my pride. But really deep down, I was afraid. I was afraid of ruining my relationship with them. That it would be like it was when I had been in their care, I would be a 'child' again, and it would end bitterly."*

However after sleeping on her friend's couch for a few months, she decided to accept her aunt and uncle's offer. How is it going? *"It's been great. I have come into the situation older, understanding what it means to be respectful and they return the respect. I have a living situation that honors my work life, as well as two individuals who are more than willing to be supportive and provide guidance. A part of my job has been to attend trainings about various topics, a recurring one being permanency. And one day I realized, 'goodness, I HAVE permanency!'"*

*Editor's Note: Special thanks to Lyssa Trujillo for permission to share her story with our readers. The original publication for this article appeared in the March 2009 CC25I Newsletter.*

The CASA of STANISLAUS COUNTY Vision:

*CASA of Stanislaus County is a passionate community organization that provides every child received through the court system with personalized advocacy and support.*

*Our goal is to provide a safe, permanent, nurturing environment for every child served.*

## Advocate's Corner

### By Carolyn Whited; Stanislaus CASA

*“Often a vicious cycle of senseless crime and self loathing led to imprisonments and eventually long or even life sentences. Surprisingly, seldom had these men seen any connection between their situation and its roots in their early lives.”*

“I’m just so angry all the time!”

Those words, in a desperate plea for self understanding, often burst out from the men who turned up at my office door. As chaplain in a state prison, much of my time was spent in listening and counseling. At these times, all too often, a sad history would unfold.

The themes which came to light generally included abandonment and/or abuse by parents or other caretakers, multiple foster homes, self medication with drugs and alcohol. Often a vicious cycle of senseless crime and self loathing led to imprisonments and eventually long or even life sentences. Surprisingly, seldom had these men seen any connection between their situation and its roots in their early lives. It was my experience with these stories,



repeated in so many ways by so many men, that initially drew me to volunteer as a CASA. For the men I came to know, the harm done to themselves and to others could not be undone. I was attracted by the possibility of in some way helping even one child through the labyrinth of traumatic situations at the time when that help was most needed.

I am so grateful for CASA! I know of no other volunteer organization that can be so effective in helping the children who must face so many difficult challenges.

*Editor's Note: Carolyn Whited has been an advocate for CASA for over five years; first in Tulare County and currently in Stanislaus County. Her passion and (compassion) for all of her clients is astounding ... and reflects the same commitment of all of her fellow advocates.*



# THANK YOU TO OUR ADVOCATES !!!


Maisha Adams ... John Arnold ... Alice Bechard ...  
 Jamie Bertolotti ... Sherry Bertolotti ... Linda Bush ...  
 Angie Cherry ... Sharon Clark ... Jolene Daly ...  
 Holly Feebeck ... Veronica Fernandez ...  
 Barbara Fontaine ... Rob Gleeson ...  
 Charlotte Hernandez ... Laurie Jamison ...  
 Cindy Julsgard ... Donnajean Kabella ...  
 Michelle Keener ... Sherrie Keener ... Yolanda King ...  
 Synthia Lofton ... Veronica Napier ... Nancy O'Reilly ...  
 Bill Parks ... Carol Perry ... Jerry Rhine ...  
 Michelle Sales ... Kathy Schmitt ...  
 Karen Sederquist ... Stacy Spieller ... Angela Timpone ...  
 Vivian Valentine ... Joanne Wallace ...  
 Carolyn Whited ... Lois Wilson

Without YOUR commitment and efforts we would not be here ...



Advertise in the CASA Newsletter for \$25.00 an issue or \$250.00 for two years. Your advertisement can include your company logo and a short profile highlighting your services. Contact CASA at 567.4230 to reserve your advertisement space.

**ELIZABETH A. DEMICHELIS, D.D.S.**  
*Family Dental Practice*



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 Modesto  
 California • 95355  
 Tel: 209•522•2348  
 Fax: 209•522•2342

**Our Current CASA statistics:**

- Current Available & Active Advocates: 35
- Current Advocates on Leave: 5
- Average Advocate Age: 46.7
- Current Children Being Served: 61

Current Advocates by Gender:  
 Female - 36      Male - 4

Current Advocates in Training: 15  
 Advocates in Training by Gender:  
 Female - 13      Male - 2

All Statistics as of March 1, 2009

# Identity Theft and Kids in Care

By Phil Ladew

Identity theft is a huge issue facing our youth. It can take educated, experienced adults months or years to clear themselves from identity theft – so why do we think our youth can handle it any easier? So, what do we do about it...

1. Inform all of your staff and volunteers that there is a law (AB 2985 chaptered in 2006) which adds section 10618.6 to the Welfare & Institutions Code. This law simply says that when a child turns 16 and is in foster care, then the social worker has to request the free annual credit report that is allowed for everyone. (So, if you didn't know this, go get your free annual credit report from each of the three credit bureaus!) If the credit report shows something negative, then the social worker has to refer the youth to an "approved" credit counseling organization. The social worker only has to do this once, and that's all that is legally required. (Not a lot of accountability or effort needed here...but it rarely gets done!)

2. A CASA can really help. First, the volunteer can ensure that the social worker actually does this when the child is 16 years old. And get the court to make appropriate orders when necessary. Doing the check early gives a couple more years to be under court supervision while the youth struggles to get their credit fixed. The child has an attorney, though not charged with this sort of outside legal help, might do it pro bono or might help get the child referred for help and/or push the court to provide help.

Second, a CASA can help the youth request additional reports in the following years, and even show the youth how to do it so that they can make a habit of it.

Third, the volunteer can help, or can find help to clear a record when it is difficult to fix.

Also note, that if nothing comes back or the credit bureau reports that there is no file – that is GOOD! Children should not have files. Also, all three credit bureaus need to be checked: Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion.

3. On another front, I have been in conversations with the Young Lawyers group of the California State Bar Association. They called me a bit ago asking for ways to provide legal services to foster youth. I suggested that a project to provide legal representation for foster youth who have their identity stolen was an ideal, way to help, and look really good while doing it. I emailed this Newsweek article to them in an effort to keep the discussion going on their end. So, let's see if they pick it up – it would be great if they did.

The place we can all go to get our free credit report is: <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/cra/index.jsp>  
But BEWARE! there are imposter websites. There is more info here: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/credit/cre34.shtm>  
And here: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/menus/consumer/data/idt.shtm>

For now, that's all I got. We need to keep working on this, and all the other things that torpedo our youths' futures.

## *Welfare & Institutions Code*

*10618.6. When a youth in a foster care placement reaches his or her 16th birthday, the county welfare department shall request a consumer disclosure, pursuant to the free annual disclosure provision of the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, on the youth's behalf, notwithstanding any other provision of law, to ascertain whether or not identity theft has occurred. If there is a disclosure for the youth and if the consumer disclosure reveals any negative items, or any evidence that some form of identity theft has occurred, the county welfare department shall refer the youth to an approved counseling organization that provides services to victims of identity theft. The State Department of Social Services, in consultation with the County Welfare Directors Association, consumer credit reporting agencies, and other relevant stakeholders, shall develop a list of approved organizations to which youth may be referred for assistance in responding to an instance of suspected identity theft. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require the county welfare department to request more than one consumer disclosure on behalf of a youth in care, or to take steps beyond referring the youth to an approved organization.*

*SEC. 2. If the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.*

