

# Ocmulgee Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) CASA CONNECTION

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017

## *CASA is Making a Difference Everyday!*

Change not only a child's life, but yours as well. I have been a CASA since 2009 and it is a rewarding volunteer experience. Knowing I am helping a child (who may not be able to speak up for themselves) have a voice in their own lives, is a great feeling! - *Kim Johnson*

Becoming a CASA is one of the greatest acts of volunteering! I'm a new CASA, and have just taken my first case. I am looking forward to enriching lives spiritually, emotionally and physically! CASA's are angels

from above!  
- *Tracey Brown*

I met my CASA worker while placed in a foster home at the age of 6. She was the most amazing woman ever! She cared for my siblings and I like her own family and to this day, I love her dearly. When we had no one to turn to, our CASA worker was there! Five star organization in my book.  
- *Alicia Lazzeri*

After volunteering as a CASA since 2008, I can honestly say that I've received more than what I've given.

Working with the kids and their families has been a truly rewarding experience, both emotionally and professionally. I volunteered as a CASA during college to gain experience working in the legal field and learned so much in court. I enjoyed working with families and learning about the dependency system that I am still a CASA to this day!  
- *Scarlett Duyen Mai*

Tell your friends and family:

New Volunteer Training begins **Tuesday, January 17**  
5:30 pm  
CASA Office,  
100 S. ABC Street  
Milledgeville

Please call us at  
478-452-9170 or visit  
[ocmulgeecasa.org](http://ocmulgeecasa.org)



## *Executive Director's Message*

### *5 States Struggle with Surging Numbers of Foster Children*

The number of U.S. children in foster care is climbing after a sustained decline, but just five states account for nearly two-thirds of the recent increase. Reasons range from creation of a new child abuse hotline to widespread outrage over the deaths of children who'd been repeatedly abused. Addictions

among parents are another major factor.

The most dramatic increase has been in **Georgia**, where the foster-care population skyrocketed from about 7,600 in September 2013 to 13,266 last month. The state is struggling to provide enough foster homes for these children and keep caseloads at a manageable level for child-protection workers.

Along with Georgia,

the states with big increases are Arizona, Florida, Indiana and Minnesota. According to federal figures, the nationwide foster-care population went up from 401,213 to 427,910 between September 2013 and September 2015, and these five states accounted for 65 percent of that rise.

In Georgia, parental substance abuse now accounts for about 38 percent of foster care entries. That was the focus of a recent brief-

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### *John Milledge Academy Donates Toys for CASA Children*

Students in Ms. Massey and Ms. Smart's classes donated gifts to be given to Ocmulgee CASA children. These gifts sure made the holidays brighter for our children in foster care this Christmas season.

Thank you, JMA, for your generosity!



LIFE IS 10%  
WHAT  
HAPPENS TO  
US, AND  
90% HOW  
WE REACT  
TO IT.  
~ DENNIS  
KIMBRO

### *Director's Message, continued*

ing in the state Senate, where a county child-welfare official reported, "We recently rescued an 8-year-old boy who graphically disclosed being raped on a regular basis in his home where he lived with his father in a 'drug house'."

The increase in heroin, meth, cocaine and prescription medication abuse, compounded by mental health issues, has brought many more children into the system. Sadly, many adults are addicted, and their disease is keeping them from caring for their children.

Bobby Cagle, the director of Georgia's Division of Family and Child Services, has toughened the procedure for investigating al-

leged abuse. He also helped add more than 600 new positions for his agency, but division spokeswoman Susan Boatwright said personnel problems persist because of high turnover linked in part to starting salaries for caseworkers that range as low as \$28,000.

While many of these factors are beyond our control, Ocmulgee CASAs are instrumental in stepping in the gap and advocating for children in foster care. Thanks for all that you do!

Ocmulgee CASA's goal is to recruit, train and supervise volunteers to advocate for the best interest of abused children in the court, social service system and community. Our ultimate purpose is to advocate for a safe, permanent home for each child.

### *CASA Volunteer Appreciation Banquet*



We had a wonderful time at our Volunteer Appreciation Banquet on December 5th. Thanks to all who came and braved the cold, rainy night!



WHEN I STAND  
BEFORE GOD AT  
THE END OF MY  
LIFE, I WOULD  
HOPE THAT I  
WOULD NOT HAVE  
A SINGLE BIT OF  
TALENT LEFT AND  
COULD SAY, I USED  
EVERYTHING YOU  
GAVE ME.

~ ERMA BOMBECK



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## *Volunteers Are Needed*

Ocmulgee CASA is always seeking volunteers from our community who will say “yes” to helping foster children by becoming a CASA volunteer. It’s amazing to consider that with the advocacy of a CASA volunteer, a child is half as likely to languish in foster care, and that much more likely to find a safe and permanent home where he or she can thrive!

Every child has the right to be treated with dignity and respect...to have their best interests advocated for so they have a fighting chance to live in a safe, loving home.

## *Amazon Smiles Benefits Ocmulgee CASA*

### *You shop. Amazon gives.*

\* Amazon donates 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to the charitable organization of your choice. Go to [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com) and select Ocmulgee Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) as your organization, and we will receive this donation each time you shop.

\* Bookmark **smile.amazon.com** and use it each time you need Amazon. It is the same Amazon you know (products, prices, and service).

## *Volunteer Spotlight: Sharon Byner*

CASA volunteer **Sharon Byner** has a passion for helping others, specifically children. As a Social Service Technician 2 at the Oconee Center for 30 years, Sharon currently supervises the Day Program at the Center.

“I have been volunteering with CASA for 7 years, and I feel I am a great advocate for children in making sure their needs are met,” she says.

When asked about CASA success stories, Sharon quickly has two come to mind. “I had a parent work their case plan to the fullest, and she did whatever it took to get her kids back. They were eventually placed back together, and seeing the joy on the parent’s and children’s faces really made it a success.

“I had another case where a teenager advocated strongly for herself regarding where she wanted to be placed. The teen spoke to the judge and was eventually placed where she desired, and that made the teen very happy,” she says proudly.

Sharon also often speaks to new CASAs going through training, and offers to assist them if they have any questions or concerns while working their first case.

Sharon has been married for 30 years and has 3 children — 2 daughters and 1 son, and is now blessed with 2 granddaughters.

Thanks, Sharon! We appreciate you!



## Ocmulgee CASA Board of Directors

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