

# Ocmulgee Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) CASA CONNECTION

MAY/JUNE 2017

## *Two New CASA Volunteers Sworn In*

Ocmulgee CASA swore in two new volunteers on March 30, 2017. Melissa Ross and Terri Weaver will join you as the voice of abused and neglected children in the Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit. Pictured with Juvenile Court Judge Phil Spivey are (L-R): Melissa and Terri. Welcome, ladies!



Tell your friends and family:

New Volunteer Training begins in early August at the CASA Office, 100 S. ABC Street Milledgeville

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



## *Executive Director's Message*

### *Patience With the Children*

They train together, then work alone. A couple times a year the CASAs of La Salle County are brought together by their executive director, CiCi Chalus, for a meal and fellowship. Volunteers recently had a lunch with Chalus and retired circuit court judge James Brusatte,

a member of the volunteer La Salle CASA board of directors. "CASAs are supposed to be the eyes and ears of the court," said Brusatte. "They are the one caseworker — if you want to call them that — that can concentrate on the holistic family. They can talk not just to the kids and parents, but drop in at their school." His judicial experience has

made Brusatte a guardian angel liaison for the advocates, who can help decode the court system. "I think CASA is a great organization, with some wonderful people," he said. Advocate Julia Durango joined CASA in 2014 as part of a record training class that produced 14 advocates. The training was an eye-opener, she *Cont. on page 3*

### **INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

<i>Lunch &amp; Learn</i>	2
<i>Ga CASA Conference</i>	3
<i>Director's Message, cont.</i>	3
<i>Volunteer Spotlight</i>	4

## *FTC Lunch & Learn Held May 2*

The Family Treatment Court's (FTC) Jamie Gray, Court Coordinator, and Keyuna Redding, case manager, were the guest speakers at a recent Lunch & Learn for Ocmulgee CASAs. Everyone enjoyed learning more about the FTC and how participants are screened for the program. We plan to hold more of these events in the future, so stay tuned!



*"DON'T LET*

*YESTERDAY*

*TAKE UP TOO*

*MUCH OF*

*TODAY."*

*-WILL ROGERS*



## Georgia CASA Conference, April 22

Ocmulgee CASA was well represented at the Georgia CASA Conference in Stone Mountain on April 22. We enjoyed motivational speakers and learning more about our advocacy work with abused and neglected children. Pictured (L-R): Maggie Milner, Kathy Martin, Lori Muggridge, Gwen Foster, Wanda Zvanut, Frances Brooks and Dana Lowe.



**Director's Message, cont.**  
said. "A lot of people have instincts that they want to help children," Durango said. "But then you get in the training and you realize you have to be able to write well, to learn to deal with paperwork and bureaucracy and how the court systems work. There's a lot of jargon. I still have to ask a lot of questions."  
Durango thinks the most important quality for a CASA is patience. "I think patience is pretty much the big one," she said.  
"Certainly, you have to have patience with the system itself. It can be slow and frustrating." It is a sign of the longevity of advocate assignments that Durango is still with the two siblings

with whom she was originally matched. At one point the assignment seemed to be near conclusion with an adoption. Then the siblings were discovered to be Native American.  
"The federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) says that children with a Native American background are to be referred to their appropriate tribal council," said Chalus. "That set Julia back six months right there."  
"It sounds cliché," Durango says. "But the biggest joy I get out of it, why I keep doing it, even when I don't have a lot of time, things are frustrating, things are moving slow, is the kids that are in my care are really beautiful children.

They have been through extremely trying and difficult circumstances. There's great satisfaction in seeing them strive and move forward. They're very smart and talented kids. I do see good things for them in their future — even though they've been through the wringer from an early age. They've had many caseworkers and official people in and out of their lives," Durango said.  
"I've been with them consistently for 3 years. There is a bond there. I feel even when their case is closed, I will have done something important for that family, and will remain close to it," she concludes.  
*The Times (Ottawa, IL)*

IF YOU ARE  
WORKING ON  
SOMETHING THAT  
YOU REALLY CARE  
ABOUT, YOU DON'T  
HAVE TO BE  
PUSHED. THE  
VISION PULLS  
YOU."

- STEVE JOBS





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### *Volunteer Spotlight: Toni Wells*

Working in the Transportation Department with Jones County Schools, CASA volunteer **Toni Wells** is around children all day, but an experience with her daughter (who was on drugs) lead her to a personal understanding of children in foster care.

"I became a CASA because of the multitude of children left in the drug jungle is disheartening. The mothers, who have abused drugs, leave these little people to fend for themselves, which is unfair. These innocent children need a positive influence in their lives to help them have stability, better health and growth for a healthier mind, body and soul. I have a daughter that was a drug user for many years. She had 3 children that went through foster care, then I adopted them. They are all grown now and doing exceptionally well in their careers and daily living. I am so proud of them and what they have accomplished. If I can make a difference in one or several children's lives for a better life, then I know that these children will have a better chance at life," Toni says.

One of Toni's most memorable cases started in February of 2014. This mother had two young boys, when they were taken from her. The boys were in such disarray and living like wild animals. Just imagine two little boys, ages 3 and 5, taking care of themselves in the most worst conditions that you can imagine. As time went on, the mother was eventually incarcerated, and the children were placed in foster care. Now mom has her two boys back and is doing fantastic. The boys are excelling in school, speaking fluently, she works and is so heartbroken about what she put her babies through. She tells them every day how much she loves them and they tell her how much they love her. I couldn't be more proud of this mom. The entire family is doing so well. We still keep in touch to this day," she says.

Toni finds CASA rewarding because she can talk with these mothers so they can comprehend, if possible, what they are doing to their children. "To have an input into the children's lives for a better life is important. I can feel these children's angry emotions and lack of trust with people because of what my grandchildren went through. I am so fortunate to have been there for them. I find it rewarding to know that there are families that are willing to help these unfortunate children. Many, many thanks to foster homes," she adds.

In her spare time, Toni enjoys family, reading, TV, outdoor activities, traveling, brain games and eating. Thank you, Toni, for your advocacy. You are appreciated!

