

Ocmulgee Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
CASA CONNECTION

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017

Education Advocate Volunteer Supervisor Hired

Ocmulgee CASA recently hired Wanda Zvanut as its new Education Advocate Volunteer Supervisor. Zvanut, a previous CASA volunteer, will serve foster children and their support system by coordinating educational resources for academic success. She begins this new role on January 1, 2018 and will work closely with schools, boards of education, DFCS and CASA volunteers to provide optimum academic opportunities.

Wanda comes to CASA with a wealth of experience as a former educator and principal. She is a Doctoral candidate in School Improvement (State University of West Georgia), holds a Specialist degree in Special Education Interrelated (State University of West Georgia), a Master of Education in Counseling and Human Resources (Boston University) and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Sociology (Middle



Tennessee State University). She is also certified in Educational Leadership and Administration and Special Education Emotional Behavior Disorders. She and her husband Bill have two grown children.

Tell your friends and family:

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

Please call us at 478-452-9170 or visit ocmulgeecasa.org for details.



Lunch, Learn and Shop, Friday, December 15

Ocmulgee CASA will host a Lunch and Learn on **Friday, December 15, from 11 am—1:30 pm** in the Baldwin Early Learning Center's training room (next to the computer lab). CASA will provide fried chicken and drinks. **Please bring a covered dish to share with the group.**

Wanda Zvanut, our new Education Ad-

ocate Volunteer Supervisor will present our program. She will discuss your role as a CASA in education advocacy and the role that she will play.

We will also have an assortment of Christmas gifts donated by John Milledge Academy and local civic clubs. You will be able to "shop" for your CASA child(ren) fol-

lowing our program. We look forward to seeing everyone for a time of learning, shopping and fellowship.

Please call 478-452-9170 by 12/13/2017 so that we know how much chicken to purchase.

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Executive Director's Message

Addiction & Childhood

There has been much in the news recently about the opioid crisis and how it is pushing more children into foster care. The 13,500 Georgia children in care has nearly doubled in just a few years, as more parents struggle with this all-too familiar scenario.

Bobby Cagle, the outgoing director of DFCS, says Georgia is in the grips of another crisis that is killing people nationwide in alarming numbers. "The opioid crisis has been as bad or worse than the crack of methamphetamine epidemics. It often begins with a person using prescribed drugs for pain. Once hooked, people eventually run into trouble finding more of the prescription drug and turn to the street in search of it or a cheaper alternative — heroin," says Cagle.

In 2014, about one quarter of children statewide were removed from their home because of drugs. This year, about 40 percent of them were. In some communities, that percentage is even higher.

As a result, children are spending more time in the system and adding to the disruption of their childhood. Many of these children wind up outside of their region due to lack of available nearby foster

homes. This also affects CASA because we have a difficult (if not often impossible) time placing a CASA volunteer with a child who is not in a nearby county.

The Youngest Victims

Statewide, there were 302 confirmed cases of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), which is the condition of a baby being born with drugs in their system. Opioids were the cause for nearly one quarter of these cases. Babies are treated for withdrawing from a range of drugs, and it's not uncommon for them to be addicted to multiple substances. Newborns can experience immediate problems such as premature birth, low birth rate and seizures. There is also potential for long-term damage, such as learning and developmental disabilities.

"When you look at national statistics, a normal term delivery and care is about \$3,500," says Dr. Mitch Rodriguez, the medical director of Navicent Health's NICU in Macon. "The cost of care for babies with NAS is approximately \$67,000." Rodriguez says his NICU, which cares for babies in more than 24 counties (including Baldwin, Jones, Putnam and Wilkinson) has seen a 60 percent increase in babies born with NAS in the last three years.

The cost of treating these babies through Medicaid,

which pays for about 1/2 the births in Georgia, has more than doubled in 4 years, according to the Georgia Department of Community Health. About 160 infants were treated in 2012, costing Medicaid about \$1.5 million. Last year, that had grown sharply to 483 babies that cost Medicaid about \$3.9 million. Other costs may still not be apparent.

State Senator Renee Unterman, R-Buford,, who chairs the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, says, "We know that if these babies are born addicted that we have to take care of them for 18 years, most likely . What is the cost of taking care of that child?"

There are no easy remedies to many of these concerns. As CASAs, each of you play a significant role in working with these children and their families. I applaud your efforts, and I know that together, we are making a difference in the lives of many.

I wish each of you a Merry Christmas and happy and healthy 2018.

Lori M. Muggridge,
Executive Director

Source: The Union-Recorder, November 14, 2017

Nurture your mind with great thoughts. To believe in the heroic makes heroes.

- Benjamin Disraeli

Volunteer Appreciation Banquet, October 30th

Ocmulgee CASA held their annual Volunteer Appreciation Banquet on October 30 at Rock Eagle. Attendees enjoyed a wonderful meal and heard from Mark and Cheryl Weaver, who spoke about their experience with CASA, almost 20 years ago!



You may find
your best
friend or your
worst enemy
in yourself.

- English
proverb



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* 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: Bettye Williams

CASA volunteer Bettye Williams has spent her entire career in education. As a retired assistant principal for the Jones County Ninth Grade Academy, Bettye previously worked as a high school teacher and a coordinator of the Jones County Achievements Academy. She earned degrees from Georgia College, Troy State and Nova Southeastern, and obtained a Bachelor of Science, Master of Education, Specialist in Education and Doctor of Education Leadership.

After retirement, Bettye says, "I desired to continue involvement with children. I prayed for direction and waited. During a retirement dinner, the person I was sitting beside suggested that I might be interested in CASA. After a brief discussion, I felt this may be the answer to my prayer, so I applied. Each case I have been involved with has ended in success. Whether the child was returned to the parents or adopted, the results were in the best interest of the children. My proudest moments are to see the children safely with people who appear to really care."

Bettye adds that her time with CASA has been both eye opening and faith renewing. "The things I find most rewarding are when I witness children's needs being met and sad faces replaced with happy smiles. I feel rewarded in court when I get a smile from the child on the other side as if to say, 'I am getting better.' I salute and have a greater respect for the service that CASA and DFCS give," she says.

As the third of nine children, Bettye enjoys gardening, playing sudoku, golfing, traveling and studying and sharing the word of God. A widow of 8 years, Bettye has one son (Donald) a daughter-in-law (Daphene) and three grandchildren (Jamaica, Madison and Jadon).

Thank you, Bettye, for your service to CASA and the children we serve. We appreciate you!

