

Ocmulgee Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)  
**CASA CONNECTION**

APRIL – JUNE 2019

*Five New CASAs Sworn In*

Ocmulgee CASA swore in five new volunteers on February 21, 2019. These volunteers will advocate for the best interests of children in foster care. Pictured with Judge Philip Spivey are (L-R): Dianne Parker (covering Baldwin and Jones), Rachel Odom (covering Baldwin), Lynn Brantley (covering Greene and Putnam), Carrie Sherman (covering Baldwin) and Connie Bloodworth (covering Baldwin and Jones).



*Suzanne Mathis Joins CASA Staff*

**Suzanne Mathis** has been hired as our new Volunteer Supervisor to cover Jasper, Jones and Putnam counties.

She was previously a CASA volunteer and has a bachelor's degree in Social Work from Auburn University. Suzanne and her husband live in Milledgeville and have four children three grandchildren.

Her email is [ocasasm@baldwin.k12.ga.us](mailto:ocasasm@baldwin.k12.ga.us) and her cell is 770-378-2454

We know you will enjoy working with Suzanne, and we welcome her to our staff!



Upcoming Events:

**New Volunteer Training** begins at the CASA Office May 2019



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

OCMULGEE COURT APPOINTED  
SPECIAL ADVOCATES

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

<i>Executive Director's Message</i>	2
<i>Bash at the Briarpatch</i>	3
<i>Volunteer Spotlight</i>	4

## *Executive Director's Message*

### **End Human Trafficking Summit**

The City of Atlanta hosted the “End Human Trafficking ATL Summit 2019” in March. It was an educational and inspiring day that included performing arts, stories from survivors, and discussion around efforts underway to detect, rescue, and prevent trafficking of persons. Given that youth involved in the child welfare system tend to be at higher risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, we have a responsibility to be educated and aware of resources available to prevent, intervene, and treat victims of trafficking. YouthSpark is one such resource.

They spoke of the need to disrupt the social connections that have been shown, through research, to increase a youth's vulnerability regarding both sexual and labor trafficking. Those connections include drug abuse, truancy and running away.

Several suggestions on solving the problems include building partnerships with high-risk youth organizations, educating these organizations on how to “look,” and to make buying risky.

Several agencies in Georgia, including the Attorney General's Office, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and the Statewide Human Trafficking Taskforce supported by the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council have all taken significant efforts on these issues. The Georgia General Assembly has also worked diligently to establish laws to protect and support victims of trafficking. With representatives from Peru, Belgium, Canada and the Bahamas attending this Summit, there is not only collaboration here in Georgia, but there is also a global effort to end human trafficking. Each of these countries spoke about their efforts and shared their appreciation of the opportunity to learn from the efforts within Georgia and the U.S.

One great resource shared during this conference was established by the airline industry. Airline Ambassadors International has a Tip Line App available for travelers to report suspected victims on an anonymous basis.

One very poignant and enlightening moment of the day came from a performance by the Positive Arts Movement labeled “The Pimp.” An actor described trafficking

from a pimp's perspective, lamenting that it seemed as though no one wanted to prevent a person from becoming a pimp or otherwise help that person out of that lifestyle. The performance underscored an aspect of human trafficking not commonly discussed among advocates: the need to build among men and within the culture in general a respect for women and a rejection of the idea that a person should ever be for sale.

For the children in Georgia, and beyond, it is imperative that we acknowledge the intersectionality that exists and continue to improve our current systems, while also implementing new opportunities for prevention and intervention for youth, their families, and their communities.

Source: Office of the Child Advocate

*- Lori Muggridge,  
Executive Director*

**Free the  
child's  
potential,  
and you will  
transform  
him into the  
world.**

**- Maria  
Montessori**

## *Bash at the Briarpatch*

Ocmulgee CASA hosted its 2nd annual Bash at the Briarpatch, featuring the Jake Bartley Band. This year's event, held on March 23, was well attended and so much fun. Plans are already underway for next year's event, planned for **March 28, 2020.**



Always leave  
people better  
than you found  
them. Love the  
lonely, kiss the  
broken, hug the  
hurt and  
befriend the  
lost.



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## *Volunteer Spotlight: Melissa Ross*



**Melissa Ross** got involved with Ocmulgee CASA following a personal experience with DFCS. “My husband and I adopted a sibling group through DFCS. Although we knew we wouldn’t be able to foster after our adoption was final, I felt lead to still be part of the process in a different way. I have a heart for the children who are in the foster care system and the families affected by them being there,” Melissa says.

She adds, “The most rewarding is seeing the children being in the best environment possible. Children need stability, nurturing, safety, and to be able to have a voice in this process. That is what volunteering is all about. Giving your time and abilities, no matter how small, to help the children in need.”

As the Mom of three young children who are all involved in sports and other extra curriculums, Melissa stays extremely busy. “As a CASA volunteer, the most challenging for me was feeling ‘Am I doing enough? Am I enough?’ Shortly after getting my first case, I took on some volunteering needs at our church and began working part-time while my kids were in school, so often I feel pulled juggling multiple things,” Melissa says.

With her first case winding down, Melissa has advocated for four children in this family, and the TPR process has been long and drawn out. She says, “I was surprised at how long it sometimes takes once a TPR date has been set until the time it is actually finished. There are so many elements and people involved that you don’t realize it until it continues for several dates to follow. This process is needed, however, to ensure the children are in the best environment for them to thrive and grow.”

Melissa is passionate about her family and community. She is a Radiologic Technologist, competitive gymnastics coach and very involved with her local church. She loves to run, hike, read, coach gymnastics and spend time with her family. “I have been married for 14 years to a wonderful husband. We are blessed to be parents to three amazing children who God chose for our family. I have a love for animals and have 5 dogs and 1 cat.”

We appreciate you, Melissa! Thanks for all you do for Ocmulgee CASA.