

Ocmulgee Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) CASA CONNECTION

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2018

Three New CASAs Sworn in



Laurie Parisian was sworn in May 22, and will cover Putnam County court. Laurie is a retired attorney and judge from FL and brings a wealth of experience to her CASA role. Welcome, Laurie!

On June 12, **Polly Kopp** and **Patti Beucher** were sworn in. Pictured are (L-R): Polly, Judge Phil Spivey and Patti. Both Polly and Patti will cover Greene



County, advocating for the best interests of children in foster care. Welcome, ladies!

Upcoming Events:
New Volunteer Training begins September 11 at 5 pm at the CASA Office in Milledgeville

CASA Golf Tournament
Thursday, Oct. 11
Bears Best Atlanta in Suwanee, GA



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

OCMULGEE COURT APPOINTED
SPECIAL ADVOCATES

New Georgia CASA Executive Director Named

The Georgia CASA Board of Directors selected its next executive director, Jennifer “Jen” King, who currently serves as the Program Operations Director at Georgia CASA. She will succeed current executive director, Duaine Hathaway, upon his retirement on October 1, after 18 years of leading Georgia CASA. Jen is uniquely qualified to lead Georgia



CASA into the future. As program operations director, she works closely with and supports the statewide CASA network of 47 independent CASA affiliates. Her leadership over the past 20+ years has helped to propel the statewide CASA organization into a dynamic, well-respected network. Throughout her career with Georgia CASA, Jen has demonstrated

remarkable leadership, powerful communication and business acumen, and a strong commitment to quality advocacy for children, while making a difference in their lives. She is a tireless worker, champion for diversity and inclusion, and thoughtful mentor. She will serve Georgia CASA and the CASA network in the state extremely well as they prepare and execute an ambitious future vision and goals.

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Executive Director's Message

Volunteering Can Ease Loneliness

When loneliness strikes, volunteering can soothe a soul. People who were lonely after losing a spouse felt better if they volunteered two hours or more a week, a recent study published in the *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences* found. The research looked at widowed people over 51, but the results could apply to all age groups, said author Dawn Carr, assistant professor of sociology at Florida State University. It makes you feel better, and it's good for you.

"We face these important turning points in our lives where a big event occurs and we have to make a decision about 'How am I going to recover and move on?'" Carr said. "Any time we're faced with particularly negative events — where we're at risk for experiencing loneliness, regardless of age — it's likely an activity like this would be beneficial, helping us reconnect with things that matter and with people." The key was "higher intensity volunteering," which the study defined as volunteering 100 or more hours per year. It didn't matter what the activity

was, as long as people made it part of their regular routine. Many people feel lonely temporarily, but chronic loneliness can have serious health consequences including accelerated dementia, physical decline and increases in chronic depression, Carr said. People who are lonely report more severe symptoms and feel worse when battling a cold than less-lonely individuals, a 2017 study found. The mind and body are connected in many ways, so when faced with an illness, divorce or other traumatic event, lonely people fare worse than others, said co-author Christopher Fagundes, assistant professor of psychology at Rice University. Past research shows about one in five people over 50 are lonely, and Carr believes that's comparable to the younger population. "It's a growing problem for people of all ages," she said. Carr and her co-authors analyzed data from more than 5,000 adults over 51, which followed up with subjects every two years and measured their loneliness levels and volunteering activity. Not surprisingly, people who became widowed were more intensely lonely than those

who were still married. Losing a spouse is one of the most difficult transitions people face in later life, the study notes. The widows' and widowers' loneliness declined when they started volunteering, though it had to be two or more hours a week to make a difference — devoting less time than that didn't provide the same benefits. "These people recovered really quickly and that's impressive," Carr said. "It's important to go out and actively do something for someone else — that has many of benefits to our emotional and psychological health."

- Try to make volunteering part of your regular routine. Integrating it into your life will provide the most benefits, Carr said. If that's not feasible, any way you can fit it in will be useful.
- Find activities where you feel a sense of meaning and purpose, and connect to your interests.
- People who are highly introverted might struggle with volunteering if it involves lots of strangers. If that's you, try to find a group through a mutual friend who may ease you into the activity, Carr recommended.

-Lori Muggridge

**You just
have to
keep on
doing what
you do.
Keep
going.
Start by
starting.**

- Meryl Streep

Photos from the Arians Golf Tournament, July 8-9, 2018



Lori with UGA Head Football Coach Kirby Smart. Go Dawgs!!



L-R: Elaine, Ocmulgee CASA volunteer Nancy Tkaczuk, Bruce Arians and Lori at the Sunday evening reception.

Every day is
a fresh start.

You can
always say,
“Today we
are going to
try this.”



Country music artist Kane Brown was the featured entertainer at the benefit concert.



Bruce and Chris Arians, who host the tournament each year. Proceeds from the tournament benefit children's charities, including Ocmulgee CASA.



Elaine with Mary Sarah, who was runner-up on The Voice and now writes some songs for Blake Shelton. She opened the concert following the tournament.

- Jennifer Garner



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Volunteer Spotlight: Kerri Smith

Kerri Smith has been a CASA since 2014. “I had learned about CASA and the amazing work they do a while ago and decided to check into it once my children were all out on their own. I felt the hand of God leading me towards helping children in a couple of ways and CASA was an amazing opportunity to put this call into action,” says Kerri.



She previously worked as a teacher in Rockdale and Putnam counties and earned her teaching degree from Mercer University in 1982. As the Children’s Director at First Baptist Church in Eatonton for the past four years, Kerri has enjoyed teaching children in the church and has been given the opportunity to see God’s work being done. “Being a part of children’s lives as they learn and grow spiritually is a huge reward in itself,” she says.

“Being a CASA has been a continuous learning experience for me. Each child has their own individual needs and each family is different. Being in the courtroom can sometimes be intimidating, but when I realize that my purpose is for the benefit of the children I am serving, I am proud to be involved with the CASA program! With every new case, there is an opportunity to help a child have a better living situation. Making decisions that affect the children’s lives are decisions that also affect my own. My heart is with each and every child that I serve, and I gladly put my heart into the position to make their lives better. I see their smiles as my reward for the effort I put forth to make sure that they are being taken care of. I am grateful for the opportunity to be involved with CASA, and I praise God for giving me the strength and the knowledge to work hard for these children.

My husband Mark is very supportive of my role as a CASA. We have been married for 34 years and have four children and three grandchildren. Thanks for all you do, Kerri!

(Kerri is pictured with Christmas gifts that were donated by Eatonton’s First Baptist Church for several CASA families.)

Ocmulgee CASA Board of Directors

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