

Ocmulgee Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) CASA CONNECTION

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2019

Two New CASAs Sworn In

Ocmulgee CASA swore in two new volunteers on June 6, 2019. Pictured (L-R) are: Laura Terry, Judge Philip Spivey and Tonya Miller. Laura will cover Putnam and Baldwin counties and Tonya will cover Morgan, Greene and Putnam counties. Welcome, Laura and Tonya!



Ellen Torrance Joins CASA Board

We welcome Ellen Torrance joined the Ocmulgee CASA Board in June. She is a native of Monroe, GA and a graduate of Georgia College with a Bachelor of Business Administration. She has been married to Tom Torrance for 40 years and has moved all over the world supporting his 30-year Army career. Ellen was a stay at home Mom and active volunteer, supporting numerous Army spouse and soldier clubs and organizations, often in leader-

ship positions. She has two married daughters and 5 grandchildren. Ellen says, "I joined the CASA Board because I believe in supporting an organization that advocates for children in need. I had the opportunity to attend the National Conference recently and was impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment to advocating for children. I was touched by the time that each volunteer puts in for

the child they advocate for. It takes a special person to fill this role.

"I plan to support CASA as a board member who promotes this worthy organization through public awareness. I also plan to attend some of the court hearings to better understand how all the jobs within CASA work together," she concludes.



Upcoming Events:

New Volunteer Training begins

at the
CASA Office
September 9, 2019

CASA Golf Tournament

Sept. 26, 2019
Bear's Best in Suwanee



CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

OCMULGEE COURT APPOINTED
SPECIAL ADVOCATES

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Executive Director's Message

House Bill 472 Opens Doors for Family Preservation

Georgia's Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and its juvenile courts now have a new legislative tool that will help keep children safe while providing court oversight and keeping them with parents or extended family. Gov. Kemp recently signed into law HB 472, an administration bill carried through this year's General Assembly session by Rep. Bert Reeves and Sen. Blake Tillery. Under HB 472, when DFCS or other authorities ask the juvenile court to authorize an emergency removal of an allegedly dependent child, the court must first determine whether "Temporary Alternatives to Foster Care" (T AFC) could be implemented to keep the child safe, pending a preliminary hearing on the case. Rather than removing the child to foster care, the court may, *ex parte*, authorize a child to stay with a relative or neighbor; order an individual out of the family home; or enter a temporary protective order. The new law serves two important purposes. First, it will cut down on the unnecessary removal of

children when lesser alternatives would keep the child safe and secure while DFCS works to address the issues that presented a threat to the child. In many instances, we have found that children are removed to foster care on an emergency basis only to be returned to the family under a protective order or court-ordered case plan following the preliminary protective hearing. Second, this law will help us start the process of implementing our options under the federal Family First Prevention Services Act to provide IV-E eligible services to families of children who are not in state custody. By identifying family members and services that can keep the child safe while avoiding removal, we maintain the child's and family's eligibility for these federally-funded community-based services.

In addition to helping us find alternatives to foster care, this new law also promotes good outcomes for children by ensuring court oversight of these cases and of our agency's work. Whenever the court issues a T AFC, it will convene within five days a preliminary hearing to determine how to proceed on the case. At that hearing, parents will be afforded counsel and children will be appointed attorneys and guardi-

ans *ad litem*. We anticipate that most of these cases will continue under the court's jurisdiction as non-removal dependency cases, and the involvement of judges and attorneys will spur all those involved to ensure the well-being and success of the child and family. The requirements of HB 472 are also a natural extension of a legal requirement we have had in place for many years: that before removing a child, the court must determine whether DFCS used "reasonable efforts" to avoid removal and must find that remaining in the home is contrary to the child's welfare. Intake officers must be trained annually on the law and on best practices for making these alternative findings. By requiring judges and intake officers to actively explore these alternatives, the law encourages us all to ensure we follow the spirit as well as the letter of the reasonable efforts law. This innovative legal change will promote our State's efforts to protect children while respecting to the greatest extent possible the right of children to remain with their parents and family.

Source: Tom Rawlings,
DFCS State Director

*Lori Muggridge,
Executive Director*

**Having a
soft heart
in a cruel
world is
courage,
not
weakness.**

Georgia CASA Conference, August 3rd

Ocmulgee CASA volunteers are invited to the Georgia CASA Conference on **Saturday, August 3** at the Renaissance Waverly Hotel and Convention Center, 2450 Galleria Parkway, Atlanta. The registration fee is \$50 per person, and Ocmulgee CASA will reimburse volunteers for this fee.

The day begins at 8:30 am with registra-

tion, and the opening session starts at 9 a.m. with keynote speaker Judge Glenda Hatchett.

There are workshop blocks at 10:30 a.m., 1:45 p.m. and 3:15 pm, with lunch at noon. The conference adjourns at 4:30 p.m. The workshops at this conference are always beneficial to the work we all do on a daily basis, and this confer-

ence is always one of the best!

Conference information was emailed to volunteers in mid-June. If you are interested in attending, please register by the July 21 deadline and let Dana know.

We hope to see all of you at this conference on August 3.

Be who you
 were created
 to be, and
 you will set
 the world on
 fire.
 - St. Catherine
 de Sienna

Arians Family Foundation Golf Tournament

Lori and Elaine recently attended the annual Arians Family Foundation Golf Tournament at Reynolds Plantation. Hosted by Tampa Bay Buccaneers head coach, Bruce Arians, and his wife, Chris, who has been involved with CASA in each state in which they have lived, this tournament is one source of our funding. We appreciate the support of the Arians!

Top of next column:
Coach Dan Mullen

Bottom of next column:
Coach Steve Spurrier



(L-R): Chris and Bruce Arians, along with Dan and Megan Mullen. (Dan is the head coach at the University of Florida).



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Halls Donate to CASA

A special thank you to **Clint and Tina Hall** for their recent donation to Ocmulgee CASA. This donation will assist us to continue our mission of recruiting and training volunteers to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children.

Volunteer Spotlight: Lynn Brantley

Lynn Brantley had a desire to volunteer as a CASA for at least two decades, but career moves between states made it impossible to make the commitment necessary. After a lifetime of volunteer activities, Lynn wanted to do something that would be more than just personally rewarding. She says, "Being retired, I can now dedicate time as a CASA and advocate for the best interests of children in foster care. I am able to communicate with the children's schools, doctors, psychological counselors, DFCS case managers and attorneys to gather all the pieces of the child's life and make recommendations to the Judge. I enjoy being a cheerleader and advocate for children, and this gives me great satisfaction when I see them being successful and happy. I am their voice in a system where they feel they have no control."



Lynn comes to CASA with valuable experience and was fortunate to have two fabulous careers. "I was an Accounting instructor/department head at Savannah Technical College for 20 years and also assistant director of Lincoln Land Community College (Jacksonville, IL, campus). Additionally, I was a member of the Navy Reserve, retiring as a Captain in the Supply Corps (business side of the Navy). My teaching experience gave me great opportunities to mentor and influence many lives, and I loved every minute of it. My military experience gave me even more leadership and travel opportunities than I could've imagined, including a mobilization to Iraq, and I loved every minute of my military career, too!"

She says, "When I met the children from my first assignment, I was shocked to see how resilient, engaging and bright they were in spite of their previous life experiences. They are a joy to be around and are always appreciative of my efforts on their behalf. Being a part of the support system that advocates for children who have been removed from their parents' custody is a privilege, and I plan to be a part of my CASA children's lives for as long as they want me to be there. My prayer is that I might make a difference that gives them a better future. I am most happy when I know that my CASA children feel safe and are comfortable communicating with me because they trust that I will always act in their best interest and give them a voice in the legal system. I am a new CASA working my first case, and I am hopeful that these children will continue to thrive and succeed in school and life. The outcome of their custody case is still unknown, but I know that they have a permanent place in my heart."

Lynn is a wife, a mother of five daughters, and grandmother of five (4 grandsons and 1 granddaughter), originally from Savannah. She and her husband love having family and friends visit them at Lake Oconee, and they also enjoy traveling.

Thanks, Lynn, for all you do for CASA and the children we serve!