

CASA Weekly Happenings

Dear CASA Volunteers:



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. CASA has a number of activities during April -- Child Abuse Prevention Month. Thank you for spreading the news about the following events:

- April 1 – 30. CASA Kids Display and Brochures at Nibbley’s Café, 2650 Washburn Way
- April 1. 6,000 CASA Coloring Sheets and Crossword Puzzles will be distributed to city, county and private grade schools and preschools with information about CASA and how our volunteers help foster children in Klamath County.
- April 15. CASA Booth and Participation at Child Neglect and Substance Abuse Summit
- April 1 – 16. CASA Volunteer Recruitment for Spring CASA Certification Training.

Of course, we know child abuse prevention is important year round. Thank you for your commitment to these children.

Volunteer Recruitment for CASA Spring Training - May 7, 8, 15 and 17, 2010.

<http://www.klamathfallscasa.org/volunteer/training>. Thank you for letting your friends, family and colleagues know there are foster children in Klamath County waiting for an advocate. Applications are due on April 16.

In-Service Training Opportunities. The following trainings qualify for in-service training. If you see a training in the community that would benefit CASA volunteers, please let us know.

Going from Good to Great: Klamath Cares. Child Neglect and Substance Abuse Summit

- **Date:** April 15, 2010.
- **Time:** 8:00 am to 4:00 pm
- **Location:** United Evangelical Free Church, 3333 Beverly Drive, Klamath Falls
- **Registration:** Registration Form is attached (via e-mail). Please fax registration form to Commission on Children & Families at 541-885-3336 by April 12.

Residential Placements for Foster Children

- **Date:** April 29, 2010
- **Time:** 12:00 to 1:00 pm
- **Location:** Child Welfare, Department of Human Services Offices
- **Speakers:** Greg Billingsley (Medford), DHS Residential Resource Consultant, Southern Region and Jackie Robison, DHS Residential Case Worker
- **Bring:** Brown Bag Luncheon
- **Information:** Topics to be covered include types of residential placements in Oregon, the difference between BRS (behavioral rehabilitation services), mental health placements, and group homes, etc., residential placement availabilities; referral process and target committee.
- **RSVP:** Lana Dingman, ldingman@klamathfallscasa.org

Modeling the Behavior We Want Our Children to Emulate, Parent and Caregiver Seminar

- **Date:** April 24, 2010
- **Time:** 9:00 to 11:00 am
- **Location:** Children's Museum, 711 E. Main Street
- **Information:** Brochure is attached via e-mail. Although this seminar is geared toward parents and caregivers, CASA volunteers will receive training credit. Thank you for sharing this information with parents and caregivers. The seminar is free and childcare is provided by the Children's Museum staff.
- **Registration:** Please register by April 14 with Michael Kaibel, Prevention Coordinator, Klamath Child Abuse Prevention, at michaelkaibel@centurytel.net.

Foster Care Adoption: America's Waiting Children.

When children are permanently removed from their families, we make what should be an unbreakable promise—that we will quickly find an adoptive family for them. Embedded in that promise is that we will find a family that cherishes their childhood, recognizes the challenges that have coincided with their movement into foster care and responds appropriately to their developmental needs. This is critical so that children can grow and thrive while obtaining their birthright—a safe and secure family of their own.

Yet each year in this country, more children in the foster care system are freed for adoption than leave it to adoptive families. In 2008, while 55,000 children were adopted from public child welfare systems, another 75,000 were legally freed but not adopted. And even with decades of groundbreaking federal and state legislation and an increase in adoption incentives awarded to states, challenges within the very systems created to move children into homes often keep them in transient care.

Children in foster care waiting to be adopted have been there an average of 24 months after their parents' rights are legally terminated, and that is in addition to the months leading up to that point. Many children wait five years or more. Too many are separated from their siblings,

and 20%—last year more than 20,000 children—experience their 18th birthday while in foster care and then leave the system without a family of their own.

The consequences of youth aging out of care are well documented. According to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative:

- While 13% of the general population neither graduate from high school nor receive a GED by age 21, that figure is 25% for youth aging out of foster care.
- 71% of females aging out of foster care become pregnant at least once before age 21, while this is true for only 34% of the general population.
- Males in foster care are four times more likely to have been arrested than a comparison group, while females are nearly ten times as likely to have been arrested.

The differences in outcomes result in costs to individuals and to society related to welfare, Medicaid, incarceration and lost wages, among others. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative estimates that “the outcome differences between youth aging out of [foster care] and the general population is nearly \$5,700,000,000 for each annual cohort of youth leaving care.”

Challenge: The Agency and Court Process

The stages of the child welfare system—from entry to termination of parental rights (TPR) and adoption—make up a complex legal and social services route through which children and families must navigate. At every stage, child welfare agencies and the courts work in tandem for the best interests of the children through hearings, service provision, appeals, termination of parental rights and adoption finalization.

Barriers and challenges, even in the most efficient of agencies or courts, can delay moving a child through each stage from foster care to adoptive home. In many states, for example, courts are reluctant to terminate parental rights until a family resource is identified and must exhaust all legal appeals prior to termination. Additionally, in most jurisdictions across the nation, agencies are challenged to find families willing to adopt special needs children. It can also be difficult to find homes that reflect the diversity of the children waiting. Additionally, many families are reluctant to tackle the complicated systems inherent in the process.

Challenge: Recruitment Myths and Misperceptions

Adding to the system challenges are the myriad myths and misperceptions that surround children and the systems in which they reside, resulting in a child welfare landscape that may cause potential adoptive families to self-select out of the process—or keep adoption professionals from actively matching some children with families. Some common misperceptions that CASA volunteers should be aware of:

1. *It is too expensive to adopt.* In reality, foster care adoption is not expensive—typically averaging \$0 to \$1,500—and financial support is available to families who adopt from

foster care. Subsidies follow most of the children in foster care until they are 18 years old; many employers provide adoption benefits; federal and state tax credits are available; and assistance for college expenses of older youth is available.

2. *Children in foster care are juvenile delinquents.* Nothing could be further from the truth. Children enter the foster care system through no fault of their own and as a result of abuse, neglect or abandonment. More than half of the children waiting in foster care for adoptive homes are age 7 or older, and nearly 30% are age 12 or older. Unfortunately, each year about 20% of the children waiting to be adopted turn 18 and leave the system without a family. These new adults are at risk of falling into poverty, homelessness or even the criminal justice system without the supports needed to thrive.
3. *The biological parents can fight to have the children returned.* Once a child has been made legally free for adoption, birthparents cannot claim a child or petition for their return. Foster care adoption is permanent. The adoptive parents may decide to maintain contact with the child's extended biological family, based on what is best for the child, but that is a choice of the adoptive family.
4. *Single individuals cannot adopt.* Unmarried individuals are legally able to adopt in all 50 states. Nearly 30% of the children adopted from foster care last year were adopted by single parents.

Source: *National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey*, November 2007;
Harris Interactive, commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

CASA Volunteers Are Key When Parental Rights Must Be Terminated

As children make their journey through the foster care adoption system, CASA volunteers can provide a consistent and knowledgeable voice on their behalf. Termination of parental rights does not end the need for CASA advocacy but rather elevates its importance in ensuring permanence for children.

Rita L. Soronen
Executive Director
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption