Winter 2015 CASA e-News

Anchorage CASA Kudos

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude and well-wishes to long-time CASA Volunteer **Eric Lespin**. Eric has been a dedicated and effective volunteer for several years and we wish him all the best in his future endeavors. Eric will be retiring as a CASA at the end of January to move out of the country. He has made incredible contributions to his families and has been an essential member of the team throughout. Our children will miss him and so will we. Thank you for everything, Eric! Here is what guardian ad litem, Susan Heuer has to say about Eric:

“I have had the privilege of working with Eric Lespin on five challenging Spanish-speaking cases since he first started in 2008 that involved over 15 children. As a fluent Spanish interpreter, he has been invaluable in helping parents and children understand and navigate the confusing and overwhelming world of OCS custody and legal decisions. He has been equally helpful in helping the legal parties to understand different cultural beliefs and practices that impact families’ ability to respond to case plan requirements. He has been the most helpful to me, permitting me, with his help, to have individual dialogs with family members to gather important history and explain difficult information. As a team, we have been very effective advocates for these children.”

**Kudos to Volunteer GAL Kim Burnett** for doing a fantastic job advocating for a baby boy on her caseload:

If it were not for Kim it is highly likely that this little boy would not have been able to be reunited with his father. The baby was born with many medical needs and Kim was very proactive in making sure all of his needs were met. Kim was instrumental in making sure the father was always considered as a placement even though the odds were against him. The father fought a hard battle to complete treatment and fought hard to keep his son. Kim made sure the baby and the father had a voice throughout the case and ultimately the baby was reunified with his father and the case is closed.

**Shannan Baergen** has the following to say about CASA Volunteer **Dianne Horbochuk**:

“Dianne just finalized her very first CASA case which began in April of 2012 that involved two children. After a very emotional first visit with the children, Dianne worked tirelessly to establish a great relationship with them. The oldest child became very close to Dianne and enjoyed spending time with her. The youngest child learned to trust Dianne and looked forward to all her visits and the activities they did together. Dianne was an aggressive advocate for mental health and developmental services for both children, ensuring their needs were met in these areas of growth. She also provided a tremendous amount of support towards the foster parents who eventually became the adoptive parents of the children. On October 28th, Dianne
participated in a very happy adoption with a courtroom full of family and friends. Congratulations Dianne on a successful outcome in your first CASA case and THANK YOU for all your advocacy.”

GAL Caitlyn McFadden would like to thank Holly Rogers:

“Holly has provided ongoing support and demonstrated great effectiveness in helping a youth transition from residential treatment to a therapeutic foster home. Holly’s advocacy has gone a long way in ensuring that the youth’s best interests remained at the forefront during this transition.”

GAL Marika Athens is grateful for all of the hard work that Harley Hedlund puts into their shared case:

“Harley has been an amazing CASA to work with. When she agreed to work with this family, she had three young children to advocate for. While the case has been pending, a fourth baby was born and Harley eagerly accepted the challenge of adding another child to the mix. Even though the children are placed in two separate homes (including a home in Kenai), Harley is able to stay connected with the children and the relative care-givers. She always knows what is going on with the children and keeps me informed as well. It has been such a pleasure working with her and seeing how well she advocates for these young children.”

LeeAnn Reicks would like to acknowledge Beaty Graves for her outstanding work:

“Beaty Graves stopped in Washington both on the way to and the way back from her vacation destination to visit her two CASA children. The children were thrilled to see her and were happy to have her as their connection to Alaska. Beaty was also able to meet their relative placement with whom she’d had numerous telephone conversations. One of the children is a teenage girl who had recently gone through some tough times. Beaty has a positive connection with this young woman and they were able to have meaningful conversations.”

Shawn McConnell has kudos for three CASA volunteers:

“Gena O’Neal works with family of 6 kids. She is diligent in seeing the kids/taking them on outings/seeing them at school and has helped guide the family through the OCS licensing process. The family will now receive a supplement to their income which may allow for the family to move to a bigger more suitable home.

Heather Handyside works with a 4 sibling group and has maintained contact with the children, foster care providers, and mother. She has recently provided the GAL with 20 pages of information regarding the kid’s journey through state’s custody. Her frequent contact and rapport with the parties in the case formulated our position and a reunification will hopefully be taking place in the near future for these kids.
Sandy Taha has made a consistent effort in supporting the grandmother/placement in this case as well as being a familiar face to the young child in care. She has participated in treatment team meetings, court hearings, and helped write the disposition report. She continues to update the GAL via emails to report interactions with the family and provide reports regarding the child’s progress.

Becky Griffin and Sarah Hanson have the following praise for Tina Johnson-Stair and Gayle White:

“Tina and Gayle have been working as a team on a 6 kid case for the past year. In that time they have been instrumental in keeping the children’s best interests at the forefront of the case. They have advocated for an ICPC to be conducted so that the eldest youth could begin a trial home visit with his father out of state. When efforts to obtain the ICPC stalled, Tina and Gayle were there to continue to push and make sure that this need did not fall through the cracks. Tina and Gayle applied for funding through Friends of Alaska CASA to ensure that these youth all had meaningful extracurricular activities. One child was so successful in his afterschool sports team that he just had the opportunity to travel to Las Vegas to compete in a championship event. When the children’s mother died unexpectedly last month, Tina and Gayle leapt into action to make sure that the children were able to attend out of state funeral services and to make sure that grief counseling would be available to the family upon the children’s return.”

Becky and Sarah are also thankful for Roseanne Voyles’ commitment and passion on her case:

“Becky and Sarah have now worked with Roseanne on two separate cases. When Roseanne was approached about taking on a second case, she jumped in with both feet. She has been extremely helpful in reviewing and summarizing lengthy medical and court records for the GALs and maintaining a consistent flow of communication with the children’s foster families. Roseanne recently spent an afternoon obtaining intake assessments for two of her CASA youth to ensure that they would be able to receive counseling services. The process has been confusing and difficult and Roseanne continues to work towards getting these youth the services that they need. Her perseverance in the face of systemic dysfunction has been a valuable asset to the children and to Becky and Sarah.”