

**June Speak Up**  
**Day in the Life: Ellen Bush**

My name is Ellen Bush. I'm a 'lots of irons in the fire' kind of person. I am 62, a retired engineer, computer consultant, and high school math teacher, now working in the dual enrollment math program at LSU. I've been married to a wonderful man for 33 years, and we have two grown sons. I keep myself physically healthy with triathlons, and mentally healthy with my knitting needles, aka "sanity sticks."

I'd considered becoming a CASA volunteer previously but chose to become a crisis line volunteer. When the organization I was with closed, I began CASA training and also joined Crisistextline as a volunteer crisis counselor. This past weekend, my rabbi spoke of how helping others through crises helps us put our own lives and issues in perspective and bring good to ourselves and the world. I couldn't agree more. I also love children, so here I am.

I received my CASA case in July 2018, shortly after completing the training. Mary was six, and Connor was not quite four. They had come into care about a month prior when their mom went to work, leaving them with their disabled grandmother in an inadequate house that had no indoor plumbing or electricity. The grandmother was also taken into protective custody. Dad was incarcerated at the time. The children were placed in a foster home with another sibling pair who had been there for almost two years, and the foster mom was hoping to adopt. The children bonded with their foster mom and siblings, but I was concerned about the amount of time she was at work and left them with other relatives. In October, the foster mom reported inappropriate play between the two children. Investigating this along with a drawing that Mary's teacher brought to my attention, we learned that there was sexual activity between Mary, and an older child in the home. After a visit to the ER and interviews at the Children's Advocacy Center, Mary and Connor were moved that evening to the home of their mom's aunt. More than 18 months later, they are happy, healthy, and loved in that same home and waiting for adoption by their great aunt and uncle, who completed foster/adoptive parent training about a year ago.

Dad was released from prison early on in this process. As separate individuals, the parents were sporadic in visitation, often not showing up even as the children waited for them at DCFS. Both spoke of wanting their children, but neither followed any of the steps put forth in their parenting plan. Despite the efforts of myself and the case manager, neither seemed to understand the importance of commitment and consistency. Ultimately, the case goal was changed to adoption. The Termination of Parental Rights paperwork seems to be dragging for many reasons. We all want permanence for the children, but at least they seem to have it in every way so far, except legally.

With the children in a long-term safe place, my biggest role has been to monitor and advocate for educational opportunities. With the change of placements, Connor moved from a small daycare to a head-start program. In the first six months of his being in care, he went from not knowing any letters, shapes, or colors, and being difficult to understand, to topping out on standardized assessments for a four-year-old. He is an exceedingly bright child. Before COVID-19, I had recommended that he be evaluated for the gifted program. Mary has continued to make progress in school, though not as rapidly. She has some behavioral issues, most of which seem to involve dealing with boys and her use of sometimes inappropriate language. She doesn't share trauma with her counselor, but she does seem to

be a happy child. Counseling in a non-crisis situation is something that has been tabled due to the pandemic.

One of the things I have found most challenging is figuring out the children's educational situation under trying circumstances. They seem to have only worksheets from school which their uncle is diligent about. While before we went to parks, bike riding, soccer games, and libraries, now we zoom. We share virtual field trips, and they ask when I'll visit them again.

My favorite moments... telling Mary that the letter her aunt had received that she had failed both reading and math was an error. After many phone calls, I discovered that the school had a computer error, and many first graders got this letter. I was able to say in court that she had a B in reading and a C in math, and she glowed as Judge Haney led the applause. And then there's the hug from Connor with an "I love you, Ms. Ellen." What more could I ask for?