



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates

FOR CHILDREN

Day in the Life and Volunteer of the Month

June Speak Up!

Day in the Life: Mercedes Duplantis

My name is Mercedes Duplantis and I am a twenty-three year old graduate of Louisiana State University. I am a Youth CPST/ PSR worker for Start Corporation in Terrebonne Parish. I grew up in Raceland, Louisiana and always felt like I was stuck in a dead in town. When I moved to Baton Rouge for college, I became involved with as many different community activities and programs.

My passion for giving back to the community and desire to work with children led me to my work with CASA. I have been a volunteer for over a year and I am currently working on my first case. My case has been very rewarding and an eye opener on how the child welfare system really works.

Molly entered foster care due to neglect and food inadequacy in December 2015. She is one of four siblings in state custody and has a different placement than her three siblings. Molly's mother, Ms. Erin Adams, allegedly sold her WIC vouchers and milk; therefore, not providing sufficient nourishment to Molly. She was placed in the care of Mr. & Mrs. Jones and quickly formed attachments to her foster parents and her foster brother, Michael. In the beginning, I advocated for Molly to have supervised visits with her parents, Ms. Adams and Mr. Smith.

Molly's father, Mr. Wallace Smith, was incarcerated for a period of time during Molly's time in foster care. Unfortunately, Mr. Smith has not complied with the tasks outlined in his case plan during the seven hundred days that Molly has been in foster care. Through my observations from the visits, Ms. Adams has not been consistent with her weekly visits with Molly at the DCFS office and struggled with bonding with her. When the inconsistent visits became a pattern, I advocated for the visits with Molly's biological parents to be terminated until they were able to demonstrate interest in visiting with Molly. During Molly's time in foster care, she has not been able to visit with her three siblings. The Jones' are interested in adopting Molly if the opportunity arises.

The Jones' home flooded in August and so most of my efforts were helping them rebuild their life post storm. I helped them gather donations since they lost everything. I try to keep in close contact with Mrs. Jones being that Molly is two years old now. I receive tons of pictures from their family. Molly has been in care for over a year now and neither Ms. Adams nor Mr. Smith has made much progress with their case plans. In an effort to place Molly in a permanent home, I advocated for a change in the case plan to adoption.

It has been so rewarding to watch my child grow from a tiny baby to a walking and talking toddler. However, it has been most challenging to see her grow up with such a great and loving foster family knowing that the biological parents aren't putting in the effort but having to wait for the process of adoption to occur.

Names changed for confidentiality purposes.

June Speak Up!

Volunteer of the Month: Kaleigh Carroll

It is with great pleasure that I announce Kaleigh Carroll as June's Volunteer of the Month. Kaleigh completed her CASA training on October 21, 2016. She graciously accepted her first CASA case on November 8, 2016. Right away, I knew Kaleigh was going to be a great advocate and take her work seriously as a CASA volunteer. She was assigned to a newborn named Matthew. He came into foster care in October 2016 as a result of alleged neglect and dependency. He was born at 27 weeks, weighing 1 lb. 8oz. Although he didn't test positive for drugs, his mother was a drug abuser at the time of his birth which contributed to Matthew's early birth.

Initially, Kaleigh set out to meet the parties of the case. Matthew's father was incarcerated and his mother's whereabouts were unknown. Matthew remained in the hospital after birth. His mother was discharged from the hospital and she never returned to care for him. Kaleigh made contact with the DCFS case manager and hospital staff. She established a professional relationship with all of them. In addition to the court order allowing Kaleigh access to individuals and documents pertaining to Matthew, she made sure DCFS approved her as a visitor for Matthew during his hospitalization. Kaleigh received weekly updates regarding Matthew's overall health. She quickly realized the majority of her advocacy efforts would involve Matthew's health. Kaleigh did not allow Matthew's hospitalization to interfere with her role as a CASA. She continues to attend meetings and court hearings on Matthew's behalf to achieve permanence.

Throughout Kaleigh's visits at the hospital, she met Matthew's paternal relatives and discovered that they were visiting with him weekly. She established a rapport with them in hopes of creating a visiting resource for Matthew. As the holiday season passed, Matthew's room was decorated accordingly. Kaleigh was able to observe the unconditional love provided by the family.

At this juncture, Kaleigh worked towards achieving permanence for Matthew with his paternal relatives. Although Matthew was still in the hospital, Kaleigh prepared for his discharged date. She shared with the relatives the option of becoming certified foster parents. She discussed with the hospital staff the level of care Matthew would need once he was discharged. She advocated for Matthew's relatives to be trained to care for him. Kaleigh discussed with DCFS the possibility of terminating parental rights based on abandonment. She discussed with the relatives what permanence may mean for Matthew and they are willing and suitable to adopt Matthew.

To date, Matthew is making tremendous progress and has been discharged from the hospital. He is living with his paternal relatives who love him unconditionally. Kaleigh's advocacy efforts ensure that Matthew has all of his ongoing needs met while he is in foster care. Matthew's parents' whereabouts are unknown. His father was released from jail and has not made contact with him.

I am proud to be Kaleigh's Advocate Supervisor! It is rewarding to have her as part of the CASA team.

Sharon L. Norwood

Advocate Supervisor

Names changed for confidentiality purposes.

May 2017

[Day in the Life: Alexis Breedlove and Volunteer of the Month: Chester Burnett](#)

April 2017

[Day in the Life: Alex King and Volunteer of the Month: Gretchen Wroten](#)

March 2017

[Day in the Life: Candace Johnson and Volunteer of the Month: Kim Cupples](#)

February 2017

[Day in the Life: Brenda Redpath and Volunteer of the Month Patricia Beste](#)

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