Day in the Life and Volunteer of the Month

October Speak Up!
Day in the Life: Lea Ann Lieux

My name is Lea Ann Lieux and I have been a CASA volunteer since August 2016. I grew up in New Orleans, attended LSU, and graduated nursing school from the University of Texas Medical Branch. While in Texas, I was a nurse for four years in the cardiac care unit. My husband’s job brought us to Baton Rouge and we raised our four children in this community.

During Hurricane Katrina, my husband, who is an internist, provided medical care to evacuees at the PMAC. As a stay-at-home mom with four children, I wanted to help our neighbors but did not know how. My husband called one day and said that several Tulane medical students were assisting at the PMAC but had no place to go to rest, have a meal, or wash clothes. Several of the students stayed at our home and that is how I met Shawn. Shawn’s father was a CASA volunteer in a different state and shared his experiences with me.

My first case involved a three month old girl named Annalise. Her mother called 911 stating her baby had been bitten and would not stop crying. Paramedics brought Annalise to the hospital and a medical examination showed multiple broken bones. Law enforcement was called and Annalise’s mother, Linda, was arrested and charged with cruelty to a juvenile. During the first FTM, I learned that Linda had a history of severe mental health issues.

I was able to build a strong rapport with the foster mother and tried my best to visit Annalise weekly. I attended pediatrician visits, an Early Steps evaluation, court hearings, and family team meetings. The FTM is where I met Annalise’s maternal aunt who was interested in caring for her. Through a request to the DCFS case manager, I was able to observe Annalise with her aunt and felt positive about Annalise being placed with her. I’m happy to report that custody has been transferred and Annalise is now in a safe, permanent home.

I accepted my second case in April 2017 that involves a four-year-old boy named Oliver. He had been in care over two years. I am his second CASA. During DCFS visits, I observed that Oliver's mother, Bonnie, had difficulty bonding with him and her visits with Oliver were inconsistent. Bonnie has made progress by securing a job and attending parenting classes. In August, she planned a birthday party for Oliver which I attended; however, Bonnie did not show up for her scheduled visit last week and has not responded to my phone calls or text messages. One of the most challenging aspects of being a CASA volunteer is watching the parents take one step forward and three steps back. As a CASA volunteer, building a rapport with the parents and the foster parents is crucial in understanding the dynamics of the child’s situation.

During Oliver’s time in care, his biological father, Brad, was identified and he expressed interest in establishing a relationship with Oliver. Brad had various reasons for why he missed scheduled visits including transportation, a sick baby, and work. I understood these conflicts and scheduled a visit at a park that was convenient to Brad’s work schedule. The initial meeting went well so Brad and I scheduled a second visit; however, he did not show up after numerous attempts to contact him that day. At this point in time, the case plan is adoption/reunification.
While case frustrations persist, the relationship that I established with Annalise and Oliver is the most rewarding aspect of being a CASA volunteer.

*Names changed for confidentially purposes.*

**October Speak Up!**

**Volunteers of the Month: Betsy & Brian Buchert**

Betsy and Brian Buchert completed their pre-service training on April 4, 2014 and were assigned to their case on April 15, 2014. Betsy and Brian wanted to work a case together. I felt Gerald and Ned would be a perfect case for them. Betsy became a CASA volunteer because of her passion for child welfare and wanting every child to have a loving home. Her husband, Brian, wanted to be a CASA volunteer to speak up for children.

Gerald was eight years old and Ned was four years old when they came into foster care. Gerald, Ned and their older brother were outside on a very cold day with little clothing when the police went to the home to serve an eviction notice. Once the police entered the home, they found drug paraphernalia. The officer said that the children had access to the room where the drug paraphernalia was located. There was no running water or electricity in the home. The parents were arrested for possession of drug paraphernalia, contributing to the delinquency of minors, and improper supervision of juveniles. Although there were relatives in the area, none were able or willing to care for Gerald and Ned so they entered foster care.

Gerald and Ned were in two different placements. Betsy and Brian quickly reached out to the boys’ foster parents and coordinated monthly sibling visits. Since Ned was so young when he entered into care, he quickly bonded with his foster mother. Gerald, on the other hand, missed his biological family and hoped to be reunited with them.

After the boys were in care for several months, it became apparent that the parents had long-term substance abuse issues and that they were not going to work the case plan to reunify with their children. The boys’ maternal grandmother, Ms. Riley, came forth as a relative placement. Both Betsy and Brian had concerns because Ms. Riley was in and out of the hospital and did not appear stable enough to care for the children. There was also an adult sister who attended the hearings and was vocal that the boys needed to be with their family. Ned was too young to be influenced by his older sister, but Gerald held on to his belief that his family would be able to care for him.

In April of 2015, the agency made a hasty decision to move both boys into Ms. Riley’s home. Both parents remained incarcerated. Brian and Betsy made contact with Ms. Riley and visited the boys within the month. After the visit, Betsy and Brian shared their concerns. They told me that Gerald was not very communicative. Ms. Riley shared that Ned cried for his foster mother a lot. Brian and Betsy observed that Ms. Riley appeared to be in a great deal of pain and it was hard for her to walk around the house. Another concern was that Ms. Riley’s other son appeared to be
living in the home with his two children although she told the DCFS case manager that he was only visiting.

In March of 2016, DCFS removed Gerald and Ned from Ms. Riley’s home. While at Ms. Riley's home, the agency had issues maintaining contact with the children. When the DCFS case manager showed up for her monthly visit unannounced, she found the children unsupervised and suspected the parents were residing in the home. The agency placed Gerald and Ned back with Ned’s first foster mother due to safety concerns.

After the goal was changed to adoption, Betsy and Brian were anxious for both boys to find permanence. Ned was very happy to be back with his foster mother. Gerald did not adapt to the placement and told his case manager that he didn’t want to be there. DCFS removed Gerald and put him in a different placement. When Ned let his attorney know that he wanted to be adopted, a TPR was filed and granted. Ned had his permanent home and his case closed upon his adoption.

Gerald is now 11-years old. He finally understands that reunification with his family may not be possible. Brian and Betsy have been the most consistent people in his life for the past three years and they are a sounding board for him as he talks about his future. Betsy and Brian are CASA heroes as they have kept their commitment to Gerald for three years. Even though Betsy and Brian have their own young children and professions that require a lot of their time, they always make the time to keep their CASA commitment to Gerald. Gerald is currently residing in a stable, adoptive home. The foster parent would like to adopt Gerald but he is not quite ready to make that commitment.

Betsy and Brian are there for Gerald as he shares his feelings about his family and being in foster care. As Betsy and Brian’​s Advocate Supervisor, I am so thankful that they have established a trusting relationship with Gerald over the years. Gerald’s best interests are always their goal in working their case.

Advocate Supervisor,
Susan Murrell

*Names changed for confidentiality purposes.*

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