

Abused children can't wait

Do you have one moment that showed you the true value of a CASA volunteer?

I was assigned to a three-year-old boy in a family placement. He'd been removed from his mother due to neglectful supervision, but he was a really sweet, energetic, funny boy – a very typical crazy three-year-old. He was living with his aunt and uncle, and one day the aunt sent me a text telling me she couldn't keep him anymore. She said she couldn't afford to quit work and stay home with him, and the local daycare wouldn't take him anymore without shot records. She'd requested the records multiple times from several different parties in the case, but she'd had no luck. I told her I'd take care of it.

All it needed was a few emails and voicemails, and the shot records were taken care of. My CASA kiddo got to stay in a placement where he was happy and comfortable, and his aunt got to continue working.

I can be a listening ear for foster parents and someone they know who can get something done if they ask. It's not always some big discovery you make that changes the course of a child's case. Most of the time, the value of my role is in the small things I can do - like getting shot records - to support a family, a child or a foster parent as they struggle through a really tough time in their lives.

Is there one case that's stayed with you?

My first case was a 15-year-old girl whose mother just gave up and abandoned her in a police station one day. She'd been in and out of foster care her whole life. As you can imagine, she was prickly. Everyone in her life had given up on her. I made sure that every time I saw her, talked to her, wrote her a letter or even thought about her, she knew she was valued and important and had a chance.

Unfortunately, the case didn't turn out as well as I'd hoped it would because she ran away, but I believe even today that my role as her CASA was essential. I still think about her and I hope she absorbed at least some of the times I tried to make her feel valued.

What do you tell friends who say being a CASA is too hard or demanding?

Wrong! You can! The time commitment is not as hefty as it first seems. Being a CASA pays emotional returns I never, ever would have expected and far outweighs the time factor. I have three small boys, all of whom I've had since becoming a CASA volunteer, plus a full-time, demanding job. Almost everyone I know could find a few hours a week to devote to someone else. There are kids and foster parents out there who so badly need an advocate to focus on their case.

You've been an advocate for several years. What keeps you going?

I really don't know how I could NOT be a CASA volunteer. Being an advocate fulfills a desire that my job, my husband, even my kids can't fulfill for me. CASA is the outlet I need to really feel like I'm making a difference, even on a very small scale, in the world. I love the relationships I have with the kids and their foster parents. And I love the idea that I've helped shape some children's lives. I assist in big ways, like helping figure out who is going to raise them. But I also help in little ways, like offering encouragement or advice when they're having a tough time. I love it and I wouldn't give it up for anything.

