

# Meet Andrea Beatriz Arango, Newbery Honor Winner and Piedmont CASA Volunteer

by Cathy Eberly, retired CASA Supervisor  
and current CASA Volunteer



It's not every day that a winner of the Newbery Honor for children's literature decides to become a volunteer for Piedmont CASA. But that's exactly what Andrea Arango has done. A 2023 honoree for her debut book, [\*Iveliz Explains It All\*](#), Andrea balances writing for a living with the demands of her first CASA case.

"I'm honored and humbled," says Andrea of the Newbery, which is awarded by a committee of librarians who, she says, "read every children's book that comes out that year and choose their favorites." She believes it's "lucky" not only that her book, geared toward middle-school readers, got published, but also that it appeared on so many committee members' list of favorites for the year.



The book is drawn from Andrea's own experiences growing up in Puerto Rico, and those she's seen in her years as a teacher. "Iveliz's grandmother, whom Iveliz loves very much, doesn't understand why her granddaughter needs therapy and medication, as she thinks therapy is only for 'crazy people,'" Andrea explains. "In this book, I wanted to be sure that therapy would be normalized, instead of frowned upon. There shouldn't be any stigma or shame associated with having mental health needs."

Andrea is no stranger to challenges that children face. She has nearly a decade of experience teaching English as a Second Language, much of that time in local public schools. A former CAFF foster parent to teenaged girls, she earned her Ed.S. in reading education from UVa's School of Education and Human Development. "I wanted to more fully understand how children read, especially children with learning disabilities."

Feeling "burned out" during the pandemic, she says, "I was ready to take a break from the classroom." While teaching full-time, she crafted Iveliz's story, outlined a second book, and looked for an agent. She landed a two-book deal with Random House in 2021, and after teaching for one more year, left the classroom summer of 2022. Her second book, *Something Like Home*, is due out in September.

Andrea's stint as a foster parent introduced her to the work of Piedmont CASA Volunteers, including legendary volunteer Janet Stack, who advocated for one of the children she fostered. "I was so impressed with her that I knew I wanted to do this work, too," she explains.

She completed CASA training last fall. "I got my first case immediately," she laughs. "Not surprisingly, I'm advocating for three children who speak Spanish."

She believes her experiences as foster parent and CASA Volunteer have made her a more accurate storyteller. "Typically, books in which foster care is featured portray birth parents as bad parents," she says. "That's simply not true. In my second book, which deals with kinship care, every adult is simply trying their best."

Andrea hasn't ruled out a return to the classroom, where she enjoys interacting with students. But right now, she says, she's focused on "writing the books that weren't around when I was a kid."



*Cathy Eberly served as a Piedmont CASA Supervisor for 4 years, retiring in 2021. She is currently a Piedmont CASA Volunteer.*

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