



March 2023 CASA Connection

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CASA of Southeast Mississippi, Inc. will host its first **Light of Hope Community Celebration** on **Monday, April 3**, at the Pascagoula Round Island Lighthouse at **6 pm** as part of the program's observance of April being designated as **National Child Abuse Awareness Month**.

One goal of this community event is to raise awareness about the critical role local citizens have in supporting, nurturing, and celebrating the abused and neglected children in Jackson, George, and Greene Counties. All of us at **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** and those in the child welfare community at-large believe that one of the best ways to prevent child abuse and neglect is to build a solid relationship between children and safe, caring adults within the community. **CASA** (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect through the work of volunteers advocating for children currently in the foster care system. Advocates are trained community volunteers appointed by the youth court judges to serve as the voice for these children. Volunteers are selfless, compassionate individuals who provide children the light of hope to ensure they have the opportunity to become strong, successful adults. **CASA** volunteers fight for every child's right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to grow up in the embrace of a permanent family. The **CASA** mission strives to make people aware of current local statistics and provides information to help individuals recognize the signs and consequences of abuse and neglect. It stresses the importance of everyone working together daily in defense of society's most vulnerable – its children. During 2022, over 100 volunteers in Jackson County advocated for nearly 200 children. They have driven countless miles and devoted more than 3,300 hours to meet the needs of the children they serve.

Please mark this date on your calendar and make plans to attend this inspiring hope-filled event honoring the victims of child abuse and neglect. Share the moment with us as we light up the lighthouse in blue representing the bruises of abuse that these children have suffered. Pinwheels will be placed on the Lighthouse grounds representing the children currently in custody here in Jackson County. Pinwheels, representing playfulness, joy, and childhood, have become the uplifting national symbol for child abuse prevention serving as a physical reminder of the great childhood that each child deserves. Pinwheels tagged with ribbons will indicate those foster children who are currently being served by **CASA** volunteers. The pinwheel garden will remain a visible reminder for the next week. Guest speakers for the evening will include **Ken Taylor**, Jackson County District 3 Supervisor, **Dr. Jay Willis**, Mayor of the City of Pascagoula.



An agency of United Way for Jackson and George Counties since 1999



SUPPORTERS OF CASA

Keesler Federal Credit Union went the extra mile to assist local children in foster care. Volunteers in Gulfport recently spent several hours stuffing new rolling duffel bags with items including a snuggly blanket, a nightlight, a notebook and pen, and dental hygiene supplies. **CASA** governing board member **Samantha Bignell** serves as Community Development Officer for the Biloxi-based business and is very aware of the **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** program and its mission as well as the physical needs of children in the foster care system. In speaking at the packing party **Samantha** said, "Sometimes when children move, they don't have a bag. They have to put their items in a trash bag. So, it's important to help these children feel like they are important, like they have an identity. They can put their items in this bag and take it with them wherever they go. The blanket is only theirs; it's only been used by them. They also get a brand new toothbrush, a notebook to write down things they are feeling inside, and a nightlight to make sure they are not scared. These are all things that make these children feel like they matter. And we did the rolling part so that even the little ones can walk with their items by themselves and be independent." **Keesler Federal Credit Union** donated nearly 2,800 filled duffel bags to be distributed to children in foster care across Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. Pictured below are members of the **CASA** staff and volunteers along with Jackson County Youth Court Judge **Stacie Zorn** as **Samantha Bignell** and **Morgan Holloway**, Pascagoula Keesler **Federal Credit Union** Branch Manager, came by to deliver several of the rolling duffel bags for the **CASA** children in Jackson, George and Greene Counties and other foster children in CPS custody.



CASA of Southeast Mississippi, Inc. proudly welcomes its **2023 CASA Blues Presenting Sponsor, Bob Boyte Honda** of Moss Point. Pictured giving a big thumbs up during the February check presentation are **Rene' Shaw** (board member), **Bob Boyte**, **Teresa Jaye** (Outreach Coordinator), **Mollie Hillburn** (board member) and **Tiffany Boyte-West**. It is so exciting to receive this level of support from our newest community business partner!



CASA BLUES RESCHEDULED FOR JUNE 23

The **CASA Blues** eighth annual fundraiser has been rescheduled for **Friday, June 23**, at the **Grand Magnolia Ballroom** in Pascagoula from **6–10 pm**. The event will again feature a wonderful silent auction with a fantastic assortment of items to bid on from many local and coast vendors. Please mark your calendar for this evening of music, food, and fun to support **CASA of Southeast Mississippi**, now proudly serving the children of Jackson, George and Greene



Pictured at right—Greene County Chancery Clerk, **Shelley Eubanks**, proudly displays some of the many **Tucked-In-Tight** bags made by her daughter **Madelyn** to provide fun and personal comfort to some of the children who have been taken into the foster care system. The tradition of making the bags started with the oldest daughter, **Olivia**, who is now in college, and **Madelyn** has eagerly continued the mission to make the initial part of the journey through the system a little bit more comfortable for the boys and girls. The family was excited to share some of the bags with our Jackson County children and several have already found homes with the children thanks to our volunteers and CPS workers. Pictured below is **Madelyn** and some of the bags she has created. She knows how much this can mean to a child in foster care!



We could not make it without help from these fantastic tech-support team members. Thank you to **Rex Mohan**, IT Program Manager with MYKIDS Software, who recently installed updates on all computers and tablets that the staff currently uses, and **Chip Adams**, PC Technician with Jackson County Information System, who is always available to assist the staff with computer issues and answer any of their questions about system updates.



Thanks to our wonderful friends at the **Golden Nugget** for again donating several cases of bottled water. Pictured at left Advocate Manager, **Angela Lynn**, greets two children who dropped by the office on a warm February day. They enjoyed the cold water and a Valentine snack, and they were eager to see the Tucked-In-Tight bags, books, and some of the seasonal stuffed animals available to kids and volunteers who come by the **CASA**

Continuing Education Opportunities

Reminder— to maintain your active CASA standing, you are required to complete 12 hours of Continuing Education training each year. Be sure to include any completed Continuing Education hours on your monthly activity reports that are submitted in OPTIMA. We would like to add additional topics that would be beneficial to you as a volunteer. Please contact the CASA staff if you have special requests.

IEP Essentials—Family Navigation—You and any foster parents or parents you serve are invited to attend a free presentation and open discussion on how to get the best IEP for any child (ages 3-21) who might have special educational needs. The program will be on **Thursday, March 7**, at 10 am at the Arc of Mississippi, 3109 Gulf Avenue, Gulfport, MS. It will provide individuals an opportunity to network with others whose children and youth also have IEPs. Light snacks will be served. For more information, contact **Michett Ramos** @228-214-5405 (michett.ramos@usm.edu), **Hilary Colerick** office: 228-497-1035 (hilary@arms.org) or **Dr. Leslie LaVergne** at 601-266-6225 (Leslie.Lavergne@usm.edu)

Many independent opportunities for continuing education can be found on our webpage, jccasa.net. Go to **VOLUNTEERS** and then the drop-down menu to **CONTINUING EDUCATION**. These links provide an easy way to gain your **required** in-service hours. The in-service completion form is available to complete and email or hand deliver to your CASA supervisor. Check out the variety of materials and topics. The National CASA Podcasts offer a wide-range of items such as: permanency, outcomes for older youth, meeting emotional needs, poverty, bullying, autism, and parental incarceration, just to name a few. Most are short (30 minutes or less) and are a wonderful way to maintain your status as an active volunteer.

March Birthdays

March 2

Billy McCasland

March 13

Naomi Thomas

March 22

Craig Guy

March 7

Casey Bridley

Trey Lynn

March 14

Larry Fowler

Deidre Johnson

March 29

Bobbie Lankford

March 9

Aunderia Johnson

March 15

Sarah Young

March 30

Keith Delcambre



The duffle bags donated by **Keesler Federal Credit Union** are **now available** for all children in the foster care system! **CASA volunteers** — Please remember to contact your advocate supervisor and let him or her know the number of bags you will need for all of the children and youth on your case(s) and the best date and time for you to pick up the duffle bags since there is space for only a limited number of bags to be kept at the office.

Latest Program Statistics

As of January 31, 2023, 100 CASA volunteers served 119 children with 240 donated hours of service. Thank you to each dedicated volunteer who has worked to provide a voice for a child who is journeying through the Youth Court process. As the number of children in custody continues to grow, we are in need of additional advocate volunteers to serve in 2023!

March Court Dates



March Foster Care Review Dates

A Foster Care Review (aka County Conference) is held every six months to discuss and review the permanent plan of the child/children's in foster care. Your attendance and input is requested. The review is **NOT** a court hearing, however, the testimony delivered during the review will be provided to the Court to aid in making decisions about the child/children's best interests.

Please contact the CASA staff if you are not able to attend.



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