



April 2023 CASA Connection

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National Child Abuse Awareness Month

National Child Abuse Awareness Month recognizes the importance of families and communities working together to strengthen families to prevent child abuse and neglect. Through this collaboration, prevention services and supports help protect children and produce thriving families. **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's month-long designation to call attention to this critical issue. In the event of inclement weather, the ceremony will be moved to the Pascagoula Senior Center, 1912 Live Oak Avenue. The **Jackson County Board of Supervisors** is the evening's presenting sponsor and the keynote speaker will be District 4 supervisor, **Troy Ross** who also serves as an honorary Governing Board member for **CASA of Southeast Mississippi**. **Tee McCovey** with **United Way for Jackson and George Counties** will serve as master of ceremonies and speakers will include **Jay Willis**, mayor of the city of Pascagoula, and the **Honorable Stacie Zorn**, Jackson County Youth Court judge.

Throughout the month of April, individuals are encouraged to wear blue looped ribbons to help draw attention to the many programs aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect which touches people from all walks of life throughout the country and worldwide. Wearing these blue ribbons serves as a daily reminder that it takes dedicated community efforts and commitment to protect these vulnerable children. During the month, **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** Governing Board members and staff will travel to speak with the city leaders and county supervisors throughout George, Greene and Jackson Counties to spotlight the problem and raise awareness of child abuse and neglect here in Mississippi. They will obtain signed proclamations from these groups recognizing April as **Child Abuse Awareness Month**. In addition, nutrition stores from Ocean Springs to Greene County have been encouraged to feature a specialty blue drink to increase public awareness of the month's significance to the victims of abuse and neglect.



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2023 CASA BLUES

The **CASA Blues** 8th annual fundraiser is set for **Friday, June 23**, at the **Grand Magnolia Ballroom** in Pascagoula, from **6—10 pm**. The evening 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 food and fun to support **CASA of Southeast Mississippi, Inc.** now proudly serving the children of Jackson, George, and Greene Counties. Music will be again be provided by the awesome band **N2 Blues**. The recipient of **CASA's Champion for Children Award** will be announced during the program. Tickets are now available at the CASA office.

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



2023 CHANGES IN THE CASA STAFF

Jonathan Mills will now officially take on the role of **Program Manager** which gives him a role in the employment and screening of direct service staff and the selection and screening of qualified volunteers. He will have a limited number of local cases to give him time to ensure that both staff and all volunteers are in full compliance with the the program's policies and procedures. He will also be involved in overseeing training, recruitment, and continuing education opportunities.

Angela Lynn will serve as **Advocate Manager** and her new position will allow her more time to assist with onboarding and training the new advocate supervisors. She will have a smaller number of Jackson County cases and will have an expanded role in collecting and reporting data for the required monthly and grant reports. In addition, she will be attending all court hearings with staff and volunteers. She will continue to be the go-to person to send out timely information of any upcoming events and training opportunities to all volunteers. She will also serve staff, volunteers, and families in her TBRI training role.

Beverly Goff will continue to serve as **Advocate Supervisor** with her area of service including volunteers in George and Greene Counties. She has been attending court in the new counties and is now accepting cases for the volunteers serving these new areas. Hopefully, she will have a satellite office available there in the not-too-distant future. She still continues to serve some of her Jackson County volunteers.

CASA of Southeast Mississippi is proud to welcome on board three new advocate supervisors: **Amber Ehlers, Zoey Lamkin, and Brianna Ricks.**

Amber Ehlers is a native of the Jackson County area with a background primarily in retail. **Amber** is one of seven children and has sixteen nieces and nephews who keep her extremely busy. She has been very involved in activities at Grand Bay Community Church and especially enjoys working with the youth groups there. She is excited to begin her work with the **CASA** program and looks forward to making a difference in the lives of the children the program serves. For her, the biggest challenge will be the unknown and dealing with the unique situations and circumstances that go along with each of the cases. **Amber's** interests include playing the guitar, photography, reading, and any type of nature and outdoor activities.

Zoey Lamkin has also spent most of her life in the Jackson County area. Zoey received her associate degree in business from MGCCC. She has most recently worked as an intern at the WIN Job Center and for the City of Ocean Springs in the Parks and Recreation Department. She is from a large, blended family and enjoys reading and writing in her spare time. She is excited that her new job will allow her to serve the local community by being the voice for those kids who often need to be heard and validated. Her only concern, because of the nature of the work, is not being able to leave this very demanding job at the office at the end of the workday.

Brianna Ricks is not a stranger to the **CASA** office since she has been very active in her volunteer role over the past two years, not only working her own personal cases but also helping out with various events and fundraising activities. Born and reared in Alabama, **Brianna** and her fiancé Zak now proudly call Mississippi home. Her work background includes experience in management and sales. She refers to herself as a "cat mama" to Sabbath and Molly and enjoys baking, cooking, collecting crystals, watching TV, and napping in her spare time. She is excited with her expanded role in the local **CASA** mission as she strives to make a difference in a child's life and bring good into the world. **Brianna** sees the task of being able to step aside and leave the results of the second-hand trauma advocates witness daily as a major challenge she will face in her new role. She knows from her own cases emotional involvement and attachment will also be an issue. She is super excited to meet and learn more about all of the **CASA** volunteers and to be available as a resource person for volunteers, families, and the children the program serves.



Amber Ehlers



Zoey Lamkin



Brianna Ricks

SUPPORTERS OF CASA

A huge shout out and thank you to **Robert and Christina Cumbest**, owners of **South Coast Storage**, for providing **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** the free use of a storage unit for three months to store the duffle bags donated by **Keesler Federal Credit Union** and some of the **CASA Blues** silent auction items. With limited office space, the program was definitely in need of a much bigger closet! Volunteers—please remember to contact your advocate supervisor and let him or her know the number of bags you will need for the children and youth on your case(s) and the best date and time for you to pick up the duffle bags since we will keep only a limited number of bags available at the office.



What a wonderful gift — these sets of new baby clothes in all sizes from newborn to 24 months! The members of the **Junior Auxiliary of Pascagoula-Moss Point** went shopping and **Blake Firmin** brought these cute outfits by the **CASA** office. Several CPS workers and volunteers have already dropped by to pick up a new outfit or two for their children along with one of the new rolling duffle bags to carry their be-



At the invitation of **Stephanie Kellum Blocker, Teresa Jaye**, Outreach Coordinator, had the pleasure of speaking to the wonderful group of ladies with **Zonta of Pascagoula** about the **CASA** mission. Thank you to the members of **Zonta** for the very generous donation of \$1000 to support the **CASA** program.

NEW CASA VOLUNTEERS

Congratulations to our newest volunteers: **Vera Johnson, Monica Norris** and **Danny Le Batard**. They finished winter training in late February and early March and were sworn in by **Jackson County Youth Court Judge Honorable Stacie Zorn** on March 21st. Also sworn in at that time were **Amber Ehlers** and **Zoe Lamkin**, two of the program's newest advocate supervisors, who have been participating in the required pre-service training. We are so proud to have all of these folks join the **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** family. Pictured below are **Amber, Vera, Zoe, Judge Zorn, Monica** and **Danny** with their **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 re-

MANDATORY TRAINING FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS

During this training, volunteers will receive the newly revised volunteer handbook with updated policies and procedures implemented when **CASA of Southeast Mississippi, Inc.** 2022 local standards were adopted. Volunteers will also have the opportunity to have new photos made for the **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** id which is now required in all court proceedings. Learn about some new procedures instituted by the Jackson County Youth Court in an effort to make their facilities more secure for staff, volunteers, and families. For some, get to meet your new advocate supervisor and spend some time networking with other dedicated CASA volunteers. Several opportunities for this required informative training will be offered. Specific dates and times for these sessions will be sent out well in advance once the Youth Court confirms availability of the court room for training. Sessions are planned for morning (10 am), afternoon (2 pm), and evening (6 pm).

CASA WEBINAR—ADVANCING EDUCATION RIGHTS, ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS, AND ADDRESSING BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS IN CARE: TIPS FOR ADVOCATES AND VOLUNTEERS

Wednesday, April 19 (1—2 pm) Click and copy the link below to register. The requested CASA code is 10304. https://nationalcasagal.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_T1CHYiUeSoeyjn5_7t7ejA

This webinar will discuss educational barriers that children in foster care face including educational instability, special education programming, and roadblocks to graduation

April Birthdays

April 2
Ricky Wolbrecht

April 7
Aaliyah Dock

April 25
Ollie Ruth Jefferson

April 4
Cathy Groff

April 20
Maribel Barberi

April 26
Mark Roberts

April 5
Tim Billings
Avonne Polk

April 24
Regina Krebs

April 27
Denise King
Bridget Pickett

Happy Birthday



Volunteers Are Needed

Latest Program Statistics

As of February 28, 2023, 100 CASA volunteers served 132 children with 476 donated hours of service for the calendar year. 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!

April Court Dates

*We currently have **13 cases** in need of a volunteer. if you are interested in learning more about one of these available cases, please call one of the advocate supervisors. *



Easter at the Jackson County Youth Court

The Youth Court is hosting an **Easter Egg Hunt** and party for all children in the foster care system on Tuesday, **April 4th** from **3:30—5:30 pm** at the Jackson County Youth Court! BYOB and come enjoy the fun!

Easter Egg-Stravaganza

Please make sure you share the date and time with your foster families and encourage them to bring the children out for some spring fun!

April 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 a member of the CASA staff if you are not able to attend.



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CHILD'S STORY.™**