



APRIL 2024 CASA CONNECTION

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APRIL 2024

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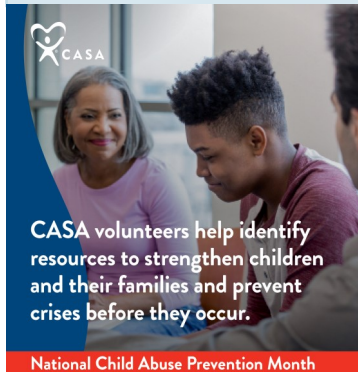
National Child Abuse Awareness Month

April is **National Child Abuse Awareness Month**. It offers an opportunity to raise public awareness of child neglect and abuse while rededicating the community's efforts, actions and resources - all aimed at protecting our children, strengthening our families, and engaging the community through involvement. The **2024 National CASA Child Abuse Prevention Month** theme is **"Doing Things Differently: Moving from the Challenge to the Change."**

Each year, millions of instances of child maltreatment are reported, often propelling families into dependency court and the child welfare system. This sometimes leads to children entering the foster care system. The instability inherent in the temporary nature of foster care can have lasting effects, often subjecting children to turmoil and inconsistency as they move between multiple homes and various schools. All of this causes additional trauma which has been linked to a higher risk of health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes and other chronic illnesses and can impact cognitive skills, cause attachment and social difficulties, posttraumatic stress and behavioral issues - even after the maltreatment ends.

In Pascagoula, the Round Island Lighthouse will again be lighted in blue to call attention to the critical issue of abuse and neglect. The pinwheel gardens will also be set up in Jackson, George and Greene Counties to represent each of the 366 children in custody in these counties as of March 1, 2024. **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** staff and Governing Board members will travel and speak with city and county leaders to spotlight the problem in an effort to raise public awareness in the local communities. They will also obtain signed proclamations from these groups recognizing April as **Child Abuse Awareness Month**. Throughout the month, individuals are encouraged to wear blue looped ribbons to help draw attention to the many programs and resources aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect which touches people from all walks of life throughout the state and country.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers play a key role in keeping a watchful eye over the children for whom they are providing best interest advocacy. These volunteers tend to be assigned to the most difficult and complex cases. It is our goal that increasing awareness will positively influence and drive additional volunteer recruitment and provide more positive outcomes of family reunification, legal guardianship, adoption, placement with relatives or continued care at home by parents.



CASA volunteers help identify resources to strengthen children and their families and prevent crises before they occur.

National Child Abuse Prevention Month



There are over 93,000 dedicated CASA/GAL volunteers nationwide who work tirelessly to advocate for children and families.

National Child Abuse Prevention Month



Meeting a family's basic needs like housing and food security can help prevent child abuse.

National Child Abuse Prevention Month

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



Welcome to our newest CASA staff members

During the month of March, **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** welcomed two new advocate supervisors, **Lynn Lemoine** and **Abbey Price**. **Lynn** will be a full-time supervisor serving volunteers in the Pascagoula office and **Abbey** will be a part-time supervisor working with volunteers in the Lucedale satellite office which serves George and Greene Counties.

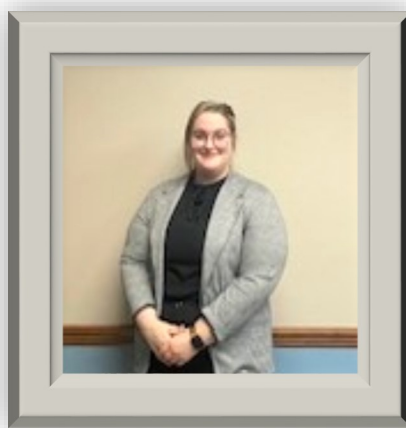
Lynn Lemoine is a native of Louisiana and currently lives in the Lucedale community. **Lynn** has extensive experience working in retail as a store manager. She has served Judge Kathy King Jackson as a drug court Christian counselor with Celebrate Recovery. As a lifelong learner, she is anxious to learn about the area, everything associated with her new job, and the volunteers she will be working with. She comes from a very large extended family and is eager to give back and help children in the foster care system. As a volunteer, she has found working her personal case to not be terribly time consuming. In addition to spending time with her family, **Lynn** enjoys working with a variety of plants in her house, garden and yard.

Abbey Price has real-life experience serving as a foster parent for 3 1/2 years and adopting her daughter through the foster care system. **Abbey** hopes she can use the information she learned from these experiences to assist the volunteers and other children who might find themselves placed in the youth court system. She was drawn to **CASA** since her daughter had an amazing, dedicated **CASA** volunteer to accompany her on the journey, **Debbie Gill**. **Abbey** is a graduate of William Carey University and has worked with Community Care Network, Mission Jackson County and the Jackson County Baptist Association. She is especially drawn to helping children who are medically fragile and those with special needs. **Abbey** lives in Moss Point and enjoys spending time outdoors and taking her daughter to lots of outdoor activities and events.

Haley Aziz comes to **CASA** as a new general administrative assistant whose main duty will be to shadow the executive director, **Frances Allsup**, and assist to make **Frances's** office work load lighter. **Haley** has already gotten involved by preparing thank you notes and receipts and working on time sheets. She has started working on preparing the program for the upcoming **CASA Blues** event and helping set up some of the pinwheel gardens at the various locations. **Haley** is a native of Illinois and came to Mississippi over 10 years ago. She trained at MTI in the school's pharmacy tech program and has worked in that field for the past 11 years. While she misses her patients there, she is looking forward to using her people skills in her new job. Reared by her grandparents in her early childhood, she knows from her own experience how valuable being with extended family can be to a child growing up. She is the proud mom to two children. Her daughter **Annabelle** keeps her busy with arts and crafts activities and gymnastic sessions. While her son **Jeremiah** allows her the experience of being a devoted soccer mom. In her free time, **Haley** enjoys making and decorating custom sugar cookies and is currently perfecting the art of bread making. With her new role at **CASA**, she looks forward to being able to assist children who may not be doing well and helping out with **CASA's** many community events.



Lynn Lemoine
Advocate Supervisor
Jackson County Office



Abbey Price
Advocate Supervisor
Lucedale Office



Haley Aziz
General Administrative
Assistant



Pictured at left: **Karen Horn**, Training Coordinator, and **Brenda Lancaster**, Senior Advocate Supervisor, represented **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** at the inaugural **Communities of Hope Fostering Hope Call to Action** event that was held at First Baptist Church in Gulfport. Jackson County Youth Court **Judge Stacie Zorn** and Harrison County Youth Court **Judge Michael Dickenson** headed up this event to make individuals and community agencies aware of the needs of foster children and foster families. Coastal Mississippi now has over 800 children in CPS (Child Protection Services) custody, and foster families often struggle finding resources for themselves and the children they are fostering. This event was a wonderful way to focus on support services and identify resources available to help children in the foster care system.



Pictured at left: **Frances Allsup**, **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** Executive Director, and **Rep. Jimmy Fondren**. **Frances** and **Doug Adams**, governing board president, traveled to Jackson to join **Judge Trent Farve** from Hancock County Youth Court, **Cynthia Chauvin**, executive director with **CASA of South Mississippi**, and **Mindy Brown**, **CASA** State Growth Coordinator, witness **HB 1624** sponsored by **Rep. Fondren** being passed unanimously by the Judiciary A committee of the state House of Representatives. This was a huge step since only approximately 300 of the 4000 bills introduced make it to this stage. The bill has since been unanimously approved by the members of the House and now moves on to the Senate. If approved, the bill would create a network to establish and expand **CASA** programs into more areas of the state.

Pictured at right: **Brandi Fayard** with the wonderful group **JABOS** brought by some of the group's most recent collection of items to help the children **CASA** serves. Included in the drop off were an assortment of diapers and wipes for the babies who may come into custody. Also, it is never too early to plan for back to school, so the members also collected donations of new backpacks, binders and packs of paper. These useful items come in handy to have on hand for foster children may need just a few basic items when they find themselves unexpectedly placed in a new school situation. This group's year-round support means so much to our ability to help supply the basic needs for some of the children and families in the foster care system.



Pictured below are several of the individuals who participated in the March 21 continuing education event. New Advocate Supervisors **Lynn Lemoine** and **Abbey Price** are shown with **CASA** volunteer **Vera Johnson** and the session's presenter **Gwendolyn Stallworth**, Director of Special Education with the Jackson County School District. **Ms. Stallworth's** informative program provided those in attendance with an improved understanding of the detailed information available in a student's IEP.



Pictured below is **Brenda Lancaster**, **CASA** Director of Advocate Supervisors, as she shows off some of the Easter iced sugar cookies donated by **JABOS**. A tasty treat with everything needed to decorate and customize before eating.



Pictured above are some of ladies with the Christian Education Department (**VGLAMS**) from **Solomon Temple A.M.E. Zion Church** who prepared beautiful filled Easter baskets for 14 of our very special youngsters. **Linda Taylor**, **Gloria Harmon**, and **Judy K. Martin** delivered them to **Frances Allsup**, **CASA of Southeast Mississippi** executive director.



CASA of Southeast Mississippi
presents

SPRING TRAINING 2024

OVERVIEW

April 2 6:00 pm -7:30 pm
THE BLEUX CASE

*April 9 6:00 pm -7:30 pm**
THE GREEN CASE

*April 16 6:00 pm -7:30 pm**
THE AMARILLO CASE

*April 23 6:00 pm -7:30 pm**
THE REDD CASE

*April 30 6:00 pm -7:30 pm**
WRAP UP

*May 2 6:00 pm -7:30 pm**

Induction and Optima training to be scheduled

An agency of United Way for Jackson, George, & Greene Counties since 1999

FINDING HOPE IN THE LIBRARY GARDEN SPRING RESOURCE FAIR

APRIL 11th, 2024 9:00AM - 11:00AM	Gulfport Public Library In the outside garden 1708 25th Ave Gulfport, MS 39501
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While supplies last: free food giveaways, food pantry, hygiene kits, clothing vouchers, resource list luggage tags, connect with local nonprofit agencies, and information and referrals.



Welcome New CASA Volunteers

CASA of Southeast Mississippi proudly welcomes a total of six new volunteers who have recently completed the winter training to become advocates for the children in Jackson, George and Greene Counties. They have been sworn in by either Jackson County Youth Court **Judge Stacie Zorn** or George County Youth Court **Judge Darryl Hurt, Jr.**, have done the required court observations, have done the Optima training and and are now ready to accept a case. Thanks to each one of you for your commitment to serve!

Laurie Godfrey, Sonja Cannan, Elizabeth Mullins, and Brittany Nash were sworn in by **Judge Zorn**; **Amy Delcambre** and **Ashleigh Gibson** were sworn in by **Judge Hurt**.



Pictured above is **Judge Stacie Zorn** with **Sonja Cannan** and **Elizabeth Mullins**.



Pictured above is **Laurie Godfrey** another newly inducted **CASA** volunteer.



Pictured above is **Judge Stacie Zorn** with **Brittany Nash** following her March induction in Jackson County.



Pictured above **Amy Delcambre, Judge Darryl Hurt, Jr., and Ashleigh Gibson** following the March induction in George County.

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.

April 19 at 11 am Samantha Kalahar, Site Director with **First Place for Youth**, will present an informative program aimed at supporting foster youth build the skills they need to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency and responsible adulthood. Currently, transition-age youth represent one of the most marginalized populations. At risk of intergenerational cycles of poverty, they are highly vulnerable to homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, the challenges of early parenthood, and dropping out of school. The **Mississippi Youth Voice** program provides a forum for youth leaders 18 - 26 years of age to advocate for those who have lived in foster care. It offers the opportunities to develop leadership skills and make real changes on the state level to provide resources for foster youth and those transitioning out of care. Make plans to attend this upcoming one-hour session to learn how volunteers, CPS and the court staff can assist and support the 90 percent of youth ages 18-21 who leave custody by their 18th birthday. Contact **Karen Horn**, Training Coordinator, at 228-762-7370 or email karen_horn@co.jackson.ms.us to reserve a spot!

Spring Training is coming up!

First day of Spring Training - Tuesday, April 2 (6 pm)

Additional volunteers are currently needed to serve the children in the youth court system.

Contact Karen Horn, CASA of Southeast Mississippi Training Coordinator, today to learn more about beginning the 30-hour required pre-service training to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate!



April Birthdays

April 4

Cathy Groff

April 5

Avonne Polk

April 10

Lynn Lemoine

April 17

Monica Norris

April 20

Maribel Barberi

April 24

Regina Krebs

April 27

Denise King

Bridgett Pickett



Latest Program Statistics

As of February 29, 2024, 101 CASA volunteers served 108 children with 428 donated hours of service for the calendar year. Thank you to each dedicated volunteer who 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 2024!