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child where her skills and commitment would have a greater impact.

Debbie was assigned to six year old "Dwayne" in June, 2004. He had been removed from his Mother's care due to neglect. His mother was a drug user, lived in an abandoned home, left him unattended for extended periods of time, failed to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter, and misused her public assistance benefits. She also had other children who had been removed from her care. Dwayne's father was incarcerated in Hagerstown where he remains. Dwayne was removed 6 months later from his paternal grandmother, when she "failed to meet the medical care and mental health needs of the child".

Next, the Court ordered that Dwayne be placed with his maternal aunt where two of his two siblings lived. However, in defiance of the court order, he stayed with his grandmother.

Debbie entered the case at this time, met with all the family members and assessed the home environment. Debbie believed the grandmother's home was "more than adequate" for this child and saw a close, caring relationship between Dwayne and his grandmother. Debbie acknowledged

to the Court that the Grandmother had communication problems with the Department of Social Services. However Debbie's mediation and conflict resolution skills have helped restore grandmother's home to a court approved placement, in Dwayne's best interest. Due largely to Debbie's effort, the paternal grandmother and the maternal aunt have an informal arrangement, allowing Dwayne to visit his siblings on a weekly basis at his aunt's home. He is doing well in school and participates in recreational activities.

Debbie also takes Dwayne to visit his father in Hagerstown. The father has expressed a desire to assume parenting responsibilities when he is released, and Debbie is attempting to find the father necessary parenting classes and support services. Debbie is an integral part of Dwayne's child welfare team and is respected by all the parties.

Debbie regularly visits, monitors, and supports Dwayne and his family and there is a great deal of hope and excitement about his future. Debbie has made a huge difference in this child's life and CASA is fortunate to have this dedicated, devoted, and delightful volunteer. Thank you Debbie for going and above and beyond....

If we are to have real peace, we must begin with the children. — Mahatma Gandhi

The Starfish is a publication of CASA Baltimore a 501c3 non-profit organization registered with the State of Maryland. It is printed six times a year. Any comments or submissions should be sent to our editor: Linda Koban @ lindarosek@aol.com or 410-244-1465. We reserve the right to accept, reject or edit any submissions to our publication. CASA Baltimore PO Box 13004, Baltimore, MD 21203



The Starfish

Newsletter for CASA Volunteer Advocates

March/April 2006

Volume 04 Edition 2

You are cordially invited to attend

The Sixth Annual CASA Baltimore Luncheon of Champions

Awarding

Joan Little, Esq.

*CASA Baltimore 2006 Child Advocate of the Year
and recognizing
our extraordinary volunteers*

*Thursday, May 11, 2006
11:30am-1:00pm*

*Hyatt Regency Baltimore
On the Inner Harbor
Constellation Ballroom
300 Light Street*

Parking \$8 on site

You will receive an invitation in the mail. CASA volunteers may come for free. Please send in the response card so we know you are attending. If you'd like to bring a guest, ticket prices are \$50 per person.

*RSVP requested by April 28, 2006
410-244-1465*

Please join us!

All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law IRS code 501c3. \$25 represents the fair market value of the food and entertainment for the event. \$25 is tax deductible.

Next Volunteer Orientations
March 16, 2006 & April 11, 2006

A LETTER FROM ONE OF OUR KIDS

To: Ms. Barbara Darley, CASA Volunteer Supervisor

Thank you Ms. Barbara L. Darley for the gift card. I remember that day when you came with Ms. Smith and surprised me with all these gifts and I thought that was wonderful.

This is even more wonderful. This touched my heart, Ms. Barbara and I greatly thank you because I have been touched by an angel.

Hand Printed and sent by
Tony (fictitious name) Age 17, Mentally Challenged, living in a group home

"No joy can equal the joy serving others."

Sai Baba

Is Your CASA Child Struggling with Reading?

Dyslexia Tutoring Program is a non-profit organization that provides FREE screening and FREE one-to-one tutoring services to low-income children and adults who have dyslexia or another language-based learning difference.

To find out more, please call 410-889-5487.

Coffee & Chat Big Success



On March 4th, Linda Koban, Asst. Director of CASA Baltimore opened her home to volunteers for an informal coffee and chat. The purpose of the gathering was to give volunteers an opportunity to connect with one another, and at the same time, talk about their experiences, ask questions, gain clarity and just share.

Those who attended said they really enjoyed themselves and were delighted to reconnect with others they had trained with, as well as meet new people. Linda said she will do this again sometime in the near future.

CASA is grateful to Linda for hosting this gathering.

Starfish Award Winner

Debbie Bertram has been a CASA volunteer for 4 years and has been assigned to two cases, each time advocating for a young boy. Debbie has her own young man, a 19 year old son. She has worked at Valley View Farms for many years. According to Debbie she became a CASA volunteer at this time of her life because, "...repeatedly through my lifetime I have felt that I never did enough...". She believes her identity and her core values, doing for and giving to others, have grown from her Catholic upbringing. She has a history of volunteerism, at nursing homes, at her son's school for the PTSA, and as a teacher for her church's Sunday School. The best description of Debbie may be one recounted by a reference on her CASA volunteer application, **"Debbie has a heart of gold, a head for justice, and a will to do what is right."**



Though she describes herself as "too opinionated", she has established trusting relationships with her CASA children and their family members and made an impact on their lives. At the recent volunteer chat and breakfast, at Linda Koban's house, Debbie's sense of humor was on full display.

Her description of a demonstration on behalf of children in Annapolis had volunteers and staff doubled over with laughter. The first case assigned to Debbie was "Antoine" then 12 years old who had been removed from his home after being subjected to exces-

sive physical punishment as a means of discipline by his mother and her boyfriend." This wasn't the family's first contact with DSS. Antoine was diagnosed with ADHD, Mood Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. He had numerous psychiatric hospitalizations, was prescribed psychotropic medications, and the highest level of special educational services. Debbie bonded with Antoine, and visited him as he was transferred within the system. Her visits took her to placements where she experienced serious concerns about his care and well-being.

In December, 2003, Debbie and her CASA supervisor, traveled to Virginia to see Antoine at the "Pines," a residential treatment center. He greeted Debbie with a smile and a hug. At that time he was adapting well, participating in group therapy and performing well in school. Subsequently, things deteriorated for the now, 14 year old and he ran away several times and became involved with the Juvenile Justice system after being picked up in Baltimore County on a charge of carrying a dangerous and deadly concealed weapon.

His involvement with the Department of Juvenile Justice and his poor impulse control finally resulted in a lack of continuity with DSS and with Debbie. In November, 2004, while on run-away, the CASA program requested rescission of the CASA appointment. CASA staff were eager to channel Debbie's energies and desire to help to a

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