

CASA Weekly Happenings

Dear CASA Volunteers:



**Welcome back Lana!** Lana is back at the CASA offices. We definitely missed her. She will contact you in the near future to get a status on your case.

**Welcome New CASA Volunteers!** CASA welcomes John, Cadance and Allison to the CASA program. Our new volunteers were sworn in by Judge Wogan on January 25, 2010. We know they will do a great job for their assigned kids.

**CASA Soup Luncheon.** If you were not able to attend CASA's Soup Luncheon in January we will have another one soon. This is an opportunity to network with other CASA volunteers. Our veteran volunteers can give their input based on past experience and volunteers can share questions and ideas for effective advocacy.

**Training Opportunity.** The registration deadline for Poverty 101 with national speaker, Donna Beagle, is February 16. This is a great training opportunity for CASA volunteers. Attached is a flyer and registration form for the March 11 training being held at the OIT College Union Auditorium. Registration fee is \$15. Lunch is included. Thank you for planning on attending. The training will give you valuable insight into the experiences of the children and families we work with who are living at poverty level.

**Sweatshirts for CASA Kids.** We still have some sweatshirts for kids donated at Christmas time. The next time you stop in at the CASA offices take a look to see if we have any sizes that will work for your CASA kids.

**Heart Pillows for CASA Kids.** Thanks again to CASA Vicki Grinnell for making heart pillows for our CASA kids. The picture above shows two of our CASA kids. CASA Margot Durand gave them the heart pillows and did a craft with them. Thanks for your positive interaction with these kids.

**Minimum Sufficient Level of Care (MSL) Standard.** Despite the bad things that have happened in their lives, most children in the system love their families and want desperately to be reunited with them. To develop into functional, emotionally stable adults, they need that unique sense of belonging that comes from being part of a family.

Most children you serve as a CASA volunteer will go home. It is CASA's role to advocate for the services necessary so the child can go home safely.

As a CASA volunteer, you start with the assumption that a child's family is usually the best setting for raising and nurturing that child. This is true even if the family's lifestyle, beliefs, resources, and actions are radically different from yours. As long as the child's family meets or can be helped to meet the minimum sufficient level of care required for the safety of that child, the child belongs with his/her family.

A minimum sufficient level of care (MSL) means that all basic needs are met and the child is not harmed physically, sexually, or emotionally. A CASA volunteer should ask the question "Is the parent able to provide for the following needs at a basic level?"

- Physical (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, safety, protection)
- Emotional (attachment between parent and child)
- Developmental (education, special help for children with disabilities)

In considering what the minimum sufficient level of care is for any one child, it is important to remember the key parameters of this standard:

- It relates to a particular child.
- It is a set of minimum conditions, not an ideal situation.
- It is a relative standard, depending on the child's needs, social standards, and community standards. It will not be the same for every family or every child in a particular family.
- It remains the same when considering reunification as when considering removal.

As we know, once the system has intervened, the responsibilities of the parent (e.g., to seek substance abuse treatment or learn parenting skills) and those of the child protective services agency (e.g., to provide visitation, arrange counseling, etc.) are spelled out in agreements that are enforced by court orders. Ideally, these agreements will help the parent move at least to a minimum sufficient level of care.

The steps in these agreements with parents need to be small and measurable. Appropriate resources need to be available to support changes that the parent makes. If the steps are too big or complex, the parent may give up, causing the family situation to deteriorate and the child to lose the chance to ever return home. If the steps are not measurable, success cannot be determined.

For example, a parent can attend parenting classes for six months without ever making a change in behavior. If the agreement specifies that the parents are "able to

describe and apply five ways to discipline their child without spanking,” both the parents and any observer will be able to tell whether the task gets accomplished.

As a CASA volunteer, you can ask the caseworker, “How will you know when this requirement is met?”

The idea that a minimum sufficient level of care should be the standard for families is often difficult for CASA volunteers to embrace. It feels counterintuitive, as though it defies common sense. You may be tempted to ask, “Wouldn’t any child be better off in a family without the limitations that are present in this situation?” The truth is that most would not. The overwhelming sense of loss that children suffer when removed from their homes—loss of love, of security, of the familiar, of their heritage, of control in their lives; feelings of worthlessness; and the almost unendurable pain of separation—is terribly painful for most children.

There are many resources in our community to help parents and families. Many of these resources are listed in our Community Resource Guide which can be downloaded at [www.klamathfallscasa.org/community-resources](http://www.klamathfallscasa.org/community-resources). If you have a parent on a case who is working toward reunification, but lacks basic services; e.g., housing, employment, utilities, food, etc., thank you for talking to the caseworker and making recommendations to the court about services that may help a parent.

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National CASA Volunteer Training Curriculum (2007)

A New American Agenda for Children and Families, National Commission on Children, 1991.