

# A JUDGE SPEAKS

*Please read from excerpts taken from the National CASA Judge's Page article by Judge Susan B. Carbon, Supervisory Judge, Concord Family Division, NH Past President, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges*

## ***What do I expect from the CASA/GAL volunteer in fulfilling his/her role?***

- 1. I want a CASA volunteer who really knows the child/teen. This means developing a level of trust and respect, something which isn't done easily, nor quickly.*
- 2. I want the volunteer to know what the child wants and what may be in the child's best interests; to clearly understand if there is a difference, and if so to articulate it.*
- 3. I want the volunteer to understand the parents, their limitations, their potential, and how they are progressing towards reunification (assuming the child has been removed). This helps put the child's wishes and needs in context.*
- 4. I want the volunteer to have spoken with the child protection agency, school and service providers to be able to make independent assessments of progress all around. This enables them to identify gaps, and commend progress.*
- 5. I want the volunteer to be well prepared for the hearing, meaning his/her report is filed on time, and he/she has reviewed all other reports and is prepared to comment in court.*
- 6. I want the volunteer to be confident enough to compliment those who are doing well (parents, child protection agency, service providers, child), and offer constructive criticism for those who are not.*
- 7. I want the volunteer to understand what needs to happen at each hearing so that reports and remarks are tailored to the decisions that must be made.*
- 8. I want the volunteer to empower the child/teen to speak for her/himself; even though the CASA volunteer is the voice of the child, the child's voice should be heard directly if the child so wishes.*
- 9. I want the volunteer to be there for the child from start to finish, so that the child will know he/she is not expendable, and that reliance and consistency mean something.*
- 10. I want the volunteer to hold everyone, including the judge, accountable so that every hearing has a purpose and is time well spent.*
- 11. Finally, I really like it when the volunteer brings a new photo to each hearing. It reminds me that the child's life is ticking by so quickly.*

*As I write and reflect, this seems to be a huge load, and yet time and again, our very well trained CASA volunteers come through. We have an amazing group here, all of whom are respectful, courteous, knowledgeable, compassionate and well-grounded. Our kids benefit from their competence and preparation. We rarely have a hearing that was not helpful in moving issues forward. To the contrary, they are purposeful and productive due in part to the CASA volunteers. They support the kids in ways some parents never have, and they never give up on the kids. They guide them, support them, and stand by them, allowing the kids to flex their wings, but they are there to make sure they won't be hurt in the process; most have suffered enough hurt already.*

*One of my CASA volunteers told me that the child he was assigned to told him he thought the CASA volunteer was the judge. Given all that I expect, and receive, from my CASA volunteers, I took this remark as a compliment! So did he.*