



December 6, 2017

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Dear Friend,

Thanks to your generosity and support, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children of Mercer and Burlington Counties had another successful year helping abused and neglected children find homes free from violence, where they can feel safe to be themselves and be kids, not numbers in the system, not cases in the court, or a statistic in a report about child abuse.

Did you know that children with a CASA volunteer get additional and better services and find a safe, loving, permanent home more quickly than children moving through the system without an advocate? This past fiscal year 80% of our cases that closed resulted in the child receiving a permanent home.

**Our advocates change children's lives.** Lives like Guillermo, who was trafficked to the United States from Ecuador when he was 11 years old and forced into manual labor, in order to pay off family debts. He was made to work every day and not allowed to attend school. Finally, after five years Guillermo escaped and contacted the local police. Child Protective Services then helped him move into a youth homeless shelter as an emergency placement. Our CASA volunteer, Noelle, was assigned to Guillermo a month later. Noelle quickly realized how much support Guillermo needed and didn't hesitate to act. Guillermo, on top of having no family connections, spoke very little English and had not gone to school since he was 10 years old. Noelle began making frequent visits to the school and shelter to assess his emotional, physical and educational needs. She developed strong relationships with school personnel and his caseworker in order to find him a safe, permanent home. As a result, Noelle identified a parent whose son was Guillermo's best friend, who ultimately became Guillermo's foster parent. Guillermo now resides with his friend and the family considers him one of their own. Despite being out of school for so long, due to the stability offered at his new home and the partnership Noelle formed with the school, Guillermo is thriving and will have the opportunity to graduate with his peers in a community that cares about him and a family that loves him.

Volunteers are the most important resource any community organization can have, but ours are truly essential to our mission. Volunteers like Noelle provide a judge with recommendations and a carefully researched background of the child and their needs, which assists the court in making an informed decision about that child's future. This past year, 97% of recommendations made by CASA volunteers were accepted by the judge. The work of our volunteers truly makes a difference in a child's life.

Thanks to our generous donors and 258 trained-volunteers, we were able to serve 352 children this past fiscal year. While we are proud of serving 11% more children with 22% more advocates, we know there is so much more to do. The number of children entering the child welfare system continues to rise substantially. More than 1,000 of our communities' most vulnerable children living in foster care and residential facilities still need a CASA volunteer.

Our children need your help. Please consider a year-end gift. We greatly appreciate your dedication, care and continued support to help us provide an advocate for ALL abused and neglected children in our community who desperately need someone looking after their best interests.

We wish you and your family a wonderful holiday season.

Sincerely,

Katherine Carmichael  
Executive Director

Roseann Vanella  
President

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