



The Trumpet



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Parent Voices United for New Orleans Children

Neighborhoods Partnership Network's (NPN) mission is to improve the quality of life by engaging New Orleanians in neighborhood revitalization and civic processes.

CASA New Orleans:

A valuable support for children and foster families

Foster parenting or adoption from the foster care system aren't usually the first thing that most people think about when we talk about parenting, but it can be an incredibly rewarding experience. Terry Horabovsky, President of the Foster Parent Association, generously shared her family's journey with us.



Being a foster parent never crossed our minds as we began to take the training classes given by the State to become adoptive parents. My husband Brian and I really did not know much about foster care and what we did know, or thought we knew, was not very good. We had many misconceptions, such as foster parents are only doing it for the money, like a get rich quick type thing. And foster children, well everyone knows that these kids are damaged and some beyond repair, right? And don't even get me started on the birth parents or problems with the State. Wrong! In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

As the classes continued and we became educated about the needs of foster children and their families, we could not do anything but become both certified foster and adoptive parents. Since 1997, our family has fostered around 40 children and adopted two through the State system. Having three young girls already, we were able to take in the children that allowed us to best care for our girls and the foster children, never taking a child that was older than our youngest.

We quickly learned that there were many players that helped make this system work including social workers, judges, attorneys, therapists, birth parents, foster parents and Court Appointed Special Advocates or CASA. With so many "moving parts" I'm sure you can begin to see some of the challenges.

With so many children entering the system, one of the greatest needs is for safe and loving families that are willing to take in a child, love, nurture, and care for this child for possibly up to 18 months and release the child back to their birth family. This is not a job for the faint of heart and our hearts are broken on a regular basis, however, the difference that we are able to make in that child's life and possibly even the family unit is worth the cost and humbling to be a part of. Choosing to become a foster family is a choice for sacrificial living, a lifestyle not many of us are familiar with.

The budget cuts have dramatically impacted the system with less social workers having to carry more of the load. This can be looked at two ways: a real problem or a real opportunity. We believe that it is an opportunity for us, everyday folks, to rise up and make a dramatic impact on a very overstressed system. There are many other ways for people to become involved besides fostering or adopting. These kids need mentors, visiting resources, and a community who doesn't label them but supports and believes in them. Toy drives at Christmas, school supplies, coats, sponsored

events such as picnics, and scholarships are some of the ways that folks can get involved.

One of the most important and valuable avenues for someone to help would be to become a CASA Advocate. In a foster child's life, many changes happen often very quickly. The child is removed from their birth family, possibly school, friends and everything that is familiar to them.

Their social worker usually changes at least once, sometimes the child is moved from one foster family to another for various reasons, but the Advocate remains the same. This is a relationship that the foster child can count on for the duration. Deep levels of trust and connection are often developed between the child and their CASA Advocate. Which brings me to another issue: there are not enough Advocates for all of the children who come into care. In the case where my husband and I were able to adopt our son, our CASA Advocate was an invaluable resource. She reported to the court what she saw as the 'child's best interest.'"

Quin Bates is a long-time CASA Advocate and former foster parent. The best things about the system, he says, are good foster homes and the opportunity for children to receive wrap-around services. But there are so many issues the kids face, including over medication, diminishing resources, a lack of consistency with foster homes and DCFS workers, and instances where normal teenage behavior is seen as a need to medicate or remove a child from the home.

Wishing for more stable foster placements, he told us about a particularly great foster dad he worked with after the foster child he was advocating for was sent to boot camp outside of Baton Rouge. Quin researched the child's records and found a previous foster home where the child did exceptionally well. He reached out to the foster family and inquired if they would be interested in having the child placed in their home again. The foster dad went to visit the child at boot camp and supported him while he finished the program. Quin then went to court and advocated for the child to be replaced in this home. Once there, the child had no behavior issues, returned to school and did well. The family provided structure and this child went from being labeled as a delinquent to high school student of the week – twice!

Quin and our other volunteer Advocates are often the only stable adult presence in an abused or neglected child's life. They provide a voice in court, helping to ensure that every child has a safe, permanent, nurturing home. To find out how you can support foster kids through CASA New Orleans as a volunteer, donor, or community resource, visit www.CASANewOrleans.org or call 504.522.1962. To learn more about becoming a foster or adoptive parent, visit www.dcf.la.gov.

As Terry says, "The system is struggling. There are a few doing a lot. These kids need all of us to lend a helping hand just as each of us have been helped at sometime in our lives. If you are interested in learning how you can get involved, please, make a call. No pressure, no commitment - just good accurate information so that you can make an informed choice."

