
ADVOCATE ALLEY

Volume 5, Issue 3

March 2011

“Luck is when opportunity knocks and you answer.” -Author Unknown

Greeting advocates,

As promised, here is the first picture of Master Miles Kelly. Baby, proud parents Kylie and Mike and big sister Sage are all happy, healthy and enjoying their first few weeks together.



We so enjoyed seeing so many of you at our annual Advocate Appreciation party. Congratulations to Lloyd Schwimmer (advocate) and Doreen Cursio (board member) who were honored with the CASA “Never Says No” awards this year, as well Karen Blackwell, Eric Paulson, Patty Ross, Fred Salazar, and Ron Scholl who were also recognized that evening for their extra special efforts. We are so deeply honored by all that each of you contribute to the youth in our community, and it was a pleasure to be able to take some time to say thanks.

For continuing education this month, we are featuring Ray Gonzalez from the Independent Living Program. He will be presenting “My Kid Is Going to Emancipate- What Do I Do!?!?” on March 29th from 6pm to 8pm at the CASA office. He is willing to cater his presentation specifically to our advocates, so please forward whatever specific topics you’d like covered when you RSVP for the class.

With gratitude,
Michelle Arnold
Program Manager

Our advocates are our best recruiters!

If you know of any interested potential advocates, please send them our way.

Our next informational mixer is:

Wednesday, March 30th

5:30pm to 6:30pm

McShane’s Nursery

115 Monterey Salinas Highway

Please feel free to join us at any of our mixers and share your experience. We’d love to have you!



Advocate Avenue



We would like to wish the following advocates a very happy birthday during the month of March...

Sammy Galvez	3/8
Magdalena Gutierrez	3/9
Kathy Manley-Coburn	3/11
Marguerite Primrose	3/11
Lin Blaskovich	3/14
Doug Steakley	3/21
Tameka Hill	3/28
Addie Abercrombie	3/31
Barbara Barnes	3/31

2011 Scholarship Notice and Application Information

Application Due Date: April 8, 2011

Scholarship Awarded by May 2, 2011

The Junior League of Monterey County, Inc. (JLMC) will award a scholarship(s) to a woman/women residing in Monterey County. Past award amounts have been up to \$5000, and the amount might increase this year.

The scholarship is designed to assist women 18 years of age or older who want to improve their career opportunities by furthering their education. The applicants must have specific degrees or training goals in mind and demonstrate community involvement. The scholarship recipient(s) shall be selected by the JLMC Scholarship Committee. Finalists will be required to participate in an interview process. Scholarship applications are due on Friday, April 8, 2011. Awards will be announced by Monday, May 2, 2011. All decisions made by the JLMC Scholarship Committee are final.

Applicants must be currently enrolled at a two- or four-year college or at a vocational school that has been approved and accredited by the State of California. Applicants must be registered for a minimum of nine semester units, or the equivalent. Applicants must be residents of Monterey County and must be a minimum of 18 years of age by January 1, 2011. Applicants must be citizens or legal residents of the United States and may be required to show proof of citizenship status with proper documentation.

Applicants will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Community Involvement
2. Personal essay – content and quality
3. Past academic performance and future goals
4. Personal interview (top five finalists only will interview)

The scholarship award is to be allocated for tuition, books, and student fees. Scholarship amounts of up to \$5000 have been awarded in the past. Checks will be sent by the JLMC to the recipient's chosen school upon receipt of written verification of enrollment/registration for the following school year.

Applications are available by request. Please contact Michelle if interested.

Please call JLMC's Scholarship Committee Chair, Kelley Carpenter, at 831.915.3057 with any questions or visit the JLMC web site at www.jlmontereycounty.org for more information about the JLMC Scholarship program.

Applications are due on Friday, April 8, 2011 and should be sent by U.S. mail or dropped off at the Junior League of Monterey County Headquarters Tuesday – Friday from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Please note that the Headquarters is not open on Mondays.

Foster Care: Extreme Edition

By Curtis Sittenfeld (Featured in Time Magazine, January 2011)

In many ways, Claire was a typical 14-year-old. Her favorite store was Forever 21, her favorite food was macaroni and cheese, and her favorite TV show was *Bad Girls Club*. As a ninth-grader living in St. Louis, she was a member of her school dance team, and she was (of course) on Facebook. A pretty and stylish girl, Claire was a strong student whose long-term goal was to become a lawyer.

In other ways, however, Claire's life was decidedly not typical, and the odds were seriously stacked against her. At age 6, she entered foster care after evidence of abuse and neglect surfaced in her home. She then lived in six different settings, including foster homes and group residences; her current home was a facility. Although she navigated those challenges with remarkable grace, her prospects were, statistically speaking, bleak. She would "age out" of the foster-care system when she turned 18, at which point she would have to fight to keep her head above water. There are nearly half a million American children in foster care; one 2007 survey found that of the young adults who age out, about half don't complete high school, about a third are arrested, and almost as many struggle with homelessness. Only 38% of those working at age 18 are employed a year after leaving foster care, and among the women, roughly half are pregnant within 12 to 18 months. ([See more about the epidemic of teen pregnancy in foster care.](#))

But in November 2009, Claire got a lucky break: her case was randomly selected to be part of an innovative program known as Extreme Recruitment. Pioneered by a 23-person St. Louis — based agency called the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition, Extreme Recruitment seeks out the foster children who are the hardest to find homes for — kids older than 10, kids with special needs, sibling groups and African Americans — and not only matches them with permanent adoptive families but also does so in a fraction of the time such matches usually take. Success depends on close coordination of a professional team — one that includes detectives who track down enough potential adoptive relatives to fill a small dance hall. Although half of all foster kids wait in custody for one to five years, Extreme Recruitment aims for a match in 12 to 20 weeks; instead of finding "forever families" for 40% of the children they work with, as the agency did before 2008, Extreme Recruitment finds families for 70%.

"We think it's the best thing since sliced bread," the coalition's executive director, Melanie Scheetz, says of Extreme Recruitment. "But until we can prove it as an evidence-based practice, it's just that nice little program that people are doing out in St. Louis." In 2008 the coalition partnered with the state of Missouri on a five-year federal grant to compare Extreme Recruitment's family-matching methods with foster-care business as usual — an evaluation Scheetz welcomes. As interest in the program rises and the coalition hosts visitors from around the country eager to observe and replicate its methods, Extreme Recruitment might remain just a nice little program out in St. Louis, or it might pave the way to revolutionize the foster-care system in America. ([See the story of one family who adopted a teenager.](#))

The Need for Speed

Extreme recruitment came about while its creator was waiting for *Desperate Housewives* to come on TV. That is the "very embarrassing but very true" story, as Scheetz describes it, of how she decided to dramatically shift the way her agency approached finding homes for children. She was sitting in front of the television in her family's living room on a Sunday night in March 2008, impatiently watching the last few minutes of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. "How can they build a house that fast?" she remembers wondering. "If they can do that — and they do it not because they use any new technologies or processes; they just coordinate their massive team of professionals and volunteers in a highly effective way — the question is why can't we do that too in finding homes for kids?"

Of the 424,000 American children currently in foster care, according to the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, close to a quarter will remain in care for more than three years. At the coalition prior to Extreme Recruitment, a social worker typically checked in with a child's caseworker once a month, and the various other players — the educational advocate, the therapist, the court-appointed special advocate — were rarely in the same room.

But under the Extreme Recruitment model, team members are in constant contact, with weekly 30-minute meetings propelled by checklists of action items. Among the team members are the coalition's not-so-secret weapons: two full-time private investigators employed by the agency who track down dozens of members of a child's biological family. The old assumption was that if a child's parents couldn't care for her, everyone else in the family would have a similarly negative influence — that the apple didn't fall far from the tree. The new conventional wisdom is that having contact with family is critical to a child's identity, and if you haven't found any family members who can be a positive influence, then you haven't looked hard enough. "There are," Scheetz says, "lots of apples."

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In 2008, George W. Bush signed family finding into federal law as part of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. While different states have implemented the law at different speeds, within Extreme Recruitment, the significance of family finding can't be overestimated. "We're talking about these kids being reconnected to support systems, family, their roots," says Sheila Suderwalla, a coalition social worker. "For our kids, when they enter foster care, their primary label, their primary identity, is a foster child." But a foster child reconnected to his family becomes Aunt Rita's nephew or Johnny's cousin. "He is someone who's cared about," Suderwalla says. ([See TIME's cover story on the crisis of foster care.](#))

On a practical level, Scheetz says, relatives are likelier than strangers to be unfazed by a kid's special needs. Say a 10-year-old foster child has been diagnosed as bipolar. It's possible that bipolar disorder runs in the family and that the great-grandmother considering adopting the child is already familiar with the condition because her niece has it too. "The family knows how to deal with it," says Scheetz.

Her claims are borne out by a recent Cornell University study showing that of people who take an adoption-preparation course, only 4% of those who do not have a prior connection to a child will ultimately go through with adoption, but a whopping 53% of people with a connection will. As foster-care consultant Kevin Campbell, who is credited with inventing the practice of family finding, puts it, "Before giving kids to strangers, we should be making sure they don't have family members who can take care of them. Children and young people need to be afforded the dignity of knowing their family story — where they come from, the strengths and challenges in the family. For me, it's a human-rights issue." ([See more about the heartbreak of adoption.](#))

Rather than following the steps to permanent placement sequentially — for example, identifying a family for a child and then making sure the child is mentally and physically ready to live with that family — Extreme Recruitment pursues all the preparations for adoption simultaneously. It also pursues multiple adoptive families at once instead of waiting for one not to work out before moving on. "What happens if we find more than one preadoptive family?" Scheetz asks. "Great!"

Where once social workers would locate just a handful of relatives per child, these days the social workers and private investigators working in tandem find a minimum of 40 per child, though the number is usually closer to 60. The Internet, especially public databases like publicrecordsnow.com and virtualgumshoe.com has made the job easier, though there's no replacement for old-fashioned pavement pounding. In one extraordinary week, coalition social worker Ian Forber-Pratt and private investigator Russell Smith identified a staggering 113 family members of a child; then Forber-Pratt attended a wake where he found 15 more. For putting faces with the names on a family tree, it turns out, nothing beats a funeral.

Finding the Gems

For each child's case, the goal is to find the two individuals who, Scheetz swears, exist in every family: the informant, who knows who lives where, who has been married or divorced or imprisoned and what everyone's phone numbers are; and the family gem, to use Scheetz's term, the cousin or uncle or grandparent who is both emotionally and logistically prepared to open his or her home to a young relative. The sign that he's found the family gem, says Carlos Lopez, one of the coalition's investigators, is when the person opens the door, hears why he's there and immediately says, "I'm so glad you've found me. What do I need to do?" [See TIME's cover story on the crisis of foster care.](#)

Regularly, Lopez and Suderwalla, who work together often, must apologize to family members who feel they have been failed by the foster-care system and quite possibly believe that the child ended up in foster care against their will. In one instance, a great-aunt berated Lopez and Suderwalla for three hours before she was willing to divulge any family information. "She had to grieve," Suderwalla says.

Despite the challenges, Suderwalla and Lopez both say they love their jobs. A former juvenile detective, Lopez was accustomed to encountering kids, often the same ones over and over, when they were in trouble and being unable to truly address the underlying problems in their lives. Now, he says, he can make a difference. It was by knocking on doors that Lopez found Stephanie, 31, whose ex-husband is Claire's cousin. When Claire's file came to the coalition, it contained the names of six relatives. Claire's Extreme Recruitment team managed to find over 80 more, one of whom was Stephanie. (Claire is still a ward of the state, and Claire and Stephanie are not their real names, though they are pseudonyms the two picked for themselves.)

A police officer who was recently promoted to detective and a divorced mother of three, Stephanie hadn't seen Claire for close to a decade but remembered her well. "She used to come around, and she was the cutest little girl," Stephanie says. "She always had these long beautiful ponytails."

When Lopez appeared out of the blue and told Stephanie the coalition was gathering information about Claire's family, Stephanie immediately wanted to know more. After a series of conversations with a coalition social worker and extensive prayer — "I'm a woman of the faith," Stephanie says — she decided she wanted to become Claire's adoptive mother. "She's family," Stephanie says. "And I feel like I have the resources. Why not?" ([See more about child abuse investigations that don't help kids.](#))

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In early August, shortly after her 15th birthday, Claire moved into Stephanie's rental town house, sharing a room with Stephanie's 8-year-old daughter. The plan is that after the required six-month period, Stephanie will legally adopt Claire. Though Claire is related by blood to Stephanie's children, Claire and Stephanie are not biologically related. But they both say this makes no difference. Stephanie maintains a friendly relationship with her ex-husband and several of her former in-laws and is eager for Claire to see them frequently. And one of these days, Claire will get to meet Stephanie's brother, who works in New York City as a lawyer — the profession Claire hopes to pursue.

Although they reconnected less than a year ago, it's hard to pinpoint the differences between Stephanie and Claire and other mother-daughter duos. Stephanie brags about Claire's 3.875 grade-point average, chides her for something she posted on Facebook (which neither of them, despite much pleading, would divulge to a reporter) and shares Claire's fondness for reading the Bible. Claire was quiet as a little girl, Stephanie recalls, but "she's very outspoken now. I love that, though, 'cause she's just like me." (See "Should Race Be a Factor in Adoptions?")

Not all Extreme Recruitment cases unfold as smoothly as Claire's: 50% of the planned first matches don't pan out, leading the team to look for a second, third or fourth match. "It's not magic," Scheetz says. "You've got to keep trying." In some cases, the team simply can't find any appropriate family members willing to consider adoption, though a nonfamily adoption isn't deemed a failure. Ideally, the child still develops relationships with family members without living with them and receives the family's blessing for a nonkinship adoption, thereby surmounting the uneasiness about disloyalty that can cause teens in particular to claim they don't want to be adopted.

Even in Claire's case, there are many unknowns. But the evidence so far suggests that Stephanie is exactly the sort of family gem whose existence Extreme Recruitment is built on and who gives credence to Scheetz's belief that many more such gems are out there waiting to be discovered by those willing to search. The program is being watched closely — and in some cases copied — by family-service professionals across the country. Using investigators is "a stroke of genius," says Rana O'Connor, who works for the Maine division of Casey Family Services, which serves 4,000 children in seven states annually. "Detectives have access to information or skills that social workers don't necessarily have." O'Connor plans to hire three full-time private investigators this year and mirror the intense focus and compressed timetable that Extreme Recruitment has developed. All of which means that this big program from a small agency could not only change the way foster care works in America but could also do so very quickly — and if it does, well, won't that be fitting?

Sittenfeld is the author of the novels Prep and American Wife (Random House)

FOSTER KIDS FIND BENEFITS IN RECONNECTING WITH FAMILY

On NPR: Children who are raised in foster care often lose touch with their biological relatives. A new federal law requires states to help these children find their birth families. *Reporter:* Elaine Korry
Listen to the audio file here: <http://www.californiareport.org/archive/R201101120850/b>

Special Kids Crusade of Monterey County is hosting a full-day "Wrightslaw; Special Education Law & Advocacy Seminar" on Thursday, March 24 at the CSUMB World Theater in Seaside, CA. We would like to extend the invitation for you, your staff, and parents who represent the interests of children with disabilities to register. (Register at www.specialkidscrusade.org)

The program will focus on four main training areas: Special education law, rights and responsibilities, Test and measurements to measure progress & regression, SMART IEPs, and Introduction to tactics & strategies for effective advocacy.

The fee is \$125 and includes the program, textbooks, breakfast and lunch. The event runs from 8:30am to 4pm. Registration required by 3/17/11.

Sam's Guide includes information on more than 30 topics or areas of service. Included are resources for food, housing, drug counseling, disabilities, health care, parent education, child development, domestic violence, recreation programs, senior services, and transportation, to name a few. Some 350 agencies and programs are listed in the guide. This is an excellent resource for nurses, social workers, counselors, teachers, community liaison workers and all others who provide counseling on health and social services to families in Monterey County, California. The guide may be downloaded at no cost at: <http://www.samsresources.com/index.html>

GOOD WORKS

BY ALISON GOLDMAN

CAUSE → VOICES FOR CHILDREN

JENNA PRICE, 45

Hometown → San Diego

Family → Husband, Joseph;
daughter, Audrey, 10

Jenna Price and Jacob*, 14, love spending time together, but she isn't Jacob's mom or teacher. She's his Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)—and the reason that Jacob, a former foster child, now has a permanent home.

CASA volunteers are assigned by judges to look after abused and neglected kids in the foster care system. These mentors are often the only constant in a childhood filled with changing homes and faces. Since CASA's 1977 inception, its advocates have served more than 2 million kids.

Jenna, a former attorney and current stay-at-home mom, was at a work event 12 years ago when she heard about CASA's San Diego chapter, Voices for Children, and she signed up immediately. "There's potential in all of these children," says Jenna, who has since overseen seven foster kids. "They just need someone to pay attention to what's going on in their lives."

In 2005, Jenna met Jacob, then 9. Since entering foster care three years earlier, he had moved six times. Jacob was scared and angry, and he had trouble trusting people. Because of his multiple placements and emotional instability, he had been deemed "unadoptable," meaning he would be in foster care until age 18. But Jenna had hope for Jacob. Rather than concentrating on his past troubles, she focused on what the two of them could do in the present to shape a positive future. Jenna built his trust by spending time with him—they'd go on hikes and visit the zoo together.

She worked tirelessly to find Jacob the right classes and teachers to help him succeed at school, and she went to court to fight for his right to a foster home that could meet his needs. When Jacob was 11, the court saw his progress and reversed the unadoptable decision; soon after, he met the couple who became his adoptive parents.

Jenna's experience with CASA has taught her that by being there for a child you can create enormous and exciting changes in his life. "Kids like Jacob have been through so much," she says. "But there's still this wonderful spirit inside." ●

Name has been changed

To sign up to volunteer, learn more or make a donation, visit casaforchildren.org.

KNOW SOMEONE WHO'S HELPING TO CHANGE YOUR COMMUNITY? Send details along with a photo to goodworks@familycircle.com.