

March 28, 2018

Dear CASA Supporter,

Samantha is an intelligent, outgoing, kind, and strong young woman who excels in an academic setting, yet could easily be the stylist behind celebrity ‘Who Wore It Best?’ I was assigned her case when she was 15 years old and the first time we met was in a glass visiting room in juvenile hall. The room was stark, cold, and I couldn’t think of any conversation starters. But Samantha was so happy and thankful to have a visitor, even if I was a stranger. I was her first visitor in

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**“...the first time we met was in a glass visiting room in juvenile hall.”**

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almost two months. She was really alone and had been for a long time. She had been in foster care since she was 4 years old. Over the course of many visits, as Samantha waited to find out if there was a foster parent who would take her or if she would have to live in a group home, our relationship strengthened.

I attended Samantha’s Delinquency hearings for the trouble she was in and her Dependency Court hearings where the judge made decisions about her life in foster care. I quickly realized that my opinion was valued and was able to advocate for Samantha’s best interests in both court rooms.

Samantha has a twin sister who she has been separated from for most of her life. The bond between twins is a special one on so many levels. Being sisters, bonded together since before birth, but not being able to grow up together and share their milestones has affected their lives greatly.

Although sibling visits are court ordered, they have not occurred since I have been on the case. It is a CASA’s job to make sure that all court orders in place are occurring and if they are not, the CASA must advocate or shed light on them in court. But still, I was Samantha’s only visitor.



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A few months after our initial meeting Samantha was moved to a group home in Colorado. I knew that keeping up a relationship with a teen residing in another state would be difficult, but Samantha had simply stolen my heart. The facility she was moved to was extremely strict with

their phone policy and I was only able to speak with Samantha during therapy sessions. I quickly realized something was not right when every time Samantha complained about the home, staff, and rules, her therapist would interrupt her and not allow her to explain. Not long after I began

expressing concerns, Samantha was suspiciously injured and I knew she had to move. During this time, I was her only support.

Samantha was moved into another group home, this time in Indiana. I attend her treatment team meetings each month by conference call. I am on a text basis with several staff to receive updates. I speak with her Behavior Specialist and Therapist frequently to ensure her needs are being met. I am able to speak with Samantha on the phone two to three times a week even though the time change sometimes presents a challenge. We also keep in contact through snail mail. Samantha receives care packages from me that consist of books, cosmetics, stationary, socks, underwear, and sports bras. I send the kinds of things you would send to your own kid if they had to live far away.



Samantha's relationship with her family has been inconsistent and limited. Samantha's Social Worker asked various family members if they would be willing to visit her, but no one was. Her therapist tried to start them in family therapy, but they would not participate. Knowing that they were not coming, Samantha asked me to visit. The judge asked if I would be willing to fly across the country to visit Samantha as her most stable adult connection.

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With CPS support, I was able to visit Samantha just before Christmas. I met with her team members and toured her home. Samantha had met all of her probation requirements and I was so happy to be able to tell her how proud I was of her in person. I saw for myself that she has been in great hands for the past year and was elated to know that I was going to have all good news to tell the judge at the next hearing.

But being a CASA is not just about investigating and reporting. It is about a relationship with a child who hasn't had someone to appreciate them, celebrate with them, and make traditions with them. We went out to eat, we went shopping, and spent hours in the cosmetic aisle. It was the visit that we had been talking about ever since those months when she was in juvenile hall and I thought she'd be going to a home in Sacramento any day. We celebrated Christmas, what she called her first real Christmas.

There have been times where I have felt defeated and angry, but those emotions tend to be the fuel to my fire. I have a deserving youth who counts on me each day to fight for her.



I look forward to the single visit we are promised in 2018. I know one day we will be able to meet at the local McDonald's, but for now it is my responsibility to be just a phone call away and in attendance by conference line at each meeting.

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**“...I was so happy to be able to tell her how proud I was of her in person.”**

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You may be thinking, “How is a CASA volunteer in Sacramento really able to make a difference to a foster youth from so far away?”

As her CASA, I remain in Samantha’s words “the one who always shows up.”

Sincerely,

Anna

CASA since 2016

*\*All names and identifying information have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the child*