



Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

FORSYTH COUNTY

JANUARY 2026

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF FORSYTH COUNTY CASA

# THE FORSYTH VOICE



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## CASA of the Month

Recently awarded the **“Curious George”** superlative at our November Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast, she embodies the power of curiosity. Read how one CASA volunteer’s eagerness to learn strengthens her advocacy for the child she serves.

## Upcoming Events

Thursday, January 22nd

**CASA Awareness Day**

Statewide

Friday, January 23rd

**Lunch with the Judges**

Juvenile Courthouse | 12pm

Tuesday, January 27th

**Book Club Meeting**

Virtual and In-Person

Thursday, February 5th

**Light of Hope Ceremony**

Browns Bridge Church | 7PM

Support Children in Foster Care





366 advocacy  
hours



32 hearings attended



3,857 miles driven

## DECEMBER BY THE NUMBERS



*Santa talking with some of the children on the nice list at Rudolph Run Through!*

# December Monthly Recap

December was a meaningful and busy month for CASA. Our staff attended ***The Summit***, a statewide, multi-disciplinary conference that brought professionals together to share best practices, strengthen collaboration, and deepen our collective impact for children and families.

We also participated in the ***Rudolph Run Through***, spreading gifts, smiles, and Christmas cheer to our amazing children in care and the extraordinary foster parents who open their hearts and homes all year long. It was a joyful reminder of the community that surrounds and supports the children we serve.

To wrap up the year, celebrated an incredible milestone as ***four children achieved permanency through adoption and reunification***, an outcome worth celebrating and a reminder of why this work matters so deeply.



*CASA programs from throughout the state of GA attended The Summit.*

# January Volunteer Spotlight

This month, we're excited to recognize **Cathy** as our CASA of the Month and present her with The Curious George Award! Cathy is known for her eagerness to learn, ask thoughtful questions, and continually grow in her role as a CASA. Her curiosity helps her better understand the complexities of each case and strengthens her advocacy for the children and families she serves.

## **Q: What motivates you to keep seeking new knowledge in your role as a CASA?**

*"I continue to seek new knowledge in my role as a CASA so that I can provide the most effective support and advocacy for the children I represent. Continuous learning also helps me to understand the legal and educational landscape and find the most appropriate resources to address unique challenges of the children and families I am supporting."*

## **Q: Can you share something you've learned through your CASA experience that surprised you or challenged your perspective?**

*"I decided to become a CASA because I love children and hoped that I could be a help to a child or children who were going through a difficult time in their life. I'm pleasantly surprised at how much I've come to care for not only the children, but for the biological mother who is working to become a better parent and the foster parents who are giving so much of themselves to care for children who are not their own."*

## **Q: How do you think curiosity and asking questions strengthen your advocacy for children and families?**

*"My natural curiosity and asking lots of questions have enabled me to identify new possibilities and explore options for the children and parents I am supporting. Using open-ended questions has helped me connect with my older foster child and strengthen relationships with the foster parents."*

***Speaking of expanding knowledge, Cathy didn't just participate—she led the way! She logged the most training hours last quarter and earned a \$20 Starbucks gift card.***

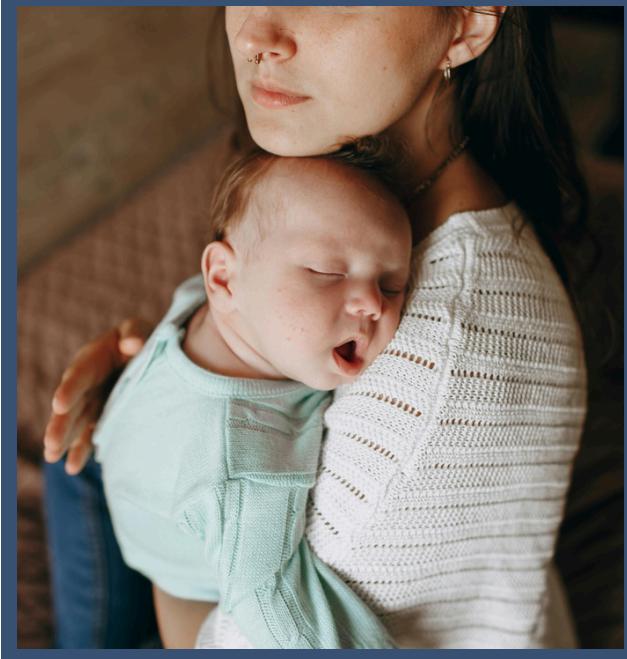


# What Would You Do? Real-Life Advocacy Scenarios

Last month, we asked you how you would respond in the following situation:

*A medically fragile infant in your CASA case requires frequent doctor visits, specialized feeding, and careful monitoring at home. The foster parent is capable but refuses to collaborate with the birth parents, even for supervised visits, and resists following certain care recommendations from the child's medical team. The birth parents are motivated and willing to learn, but the foster parent blocks their involvement. The child seems unsettled by the tension between caregivers.*

**What would you do?**



## Next month's scenario:

An 8 -year-old child on your case has been in foster care for over a year and is doing well academically and behaviorally. However, the child frequently tells you they feel "forgotten" and worries they will never go home or be adopted. The case plan has shifted multiple times due to changes in the birth parents' circumstances, and court hearings are often continued with little explanation given to the child.

The foster parents provide stability but avoid conversations about permanency, saying they don't want to "get the child's hopes up." Meanwhile, the child's anxiety increases before court dates, and they are beginning to withdraw socially at school.

**What would you do?**

 **Look to next month's newsletter to see what the most effective course of action might be!**

## Here's how we recommend responding:

- **Center the infant's medical safety and emotional stability**, recognizing that consistency and calm collaboration among caregivers is critical for a medically fragile child.
- **Observe and document concerns related to the foster parent's noncompliance** with medical recommendations and refusal to support appropriate, supervised involvement of the birth parents.
- **Advocate for the birth parents' involvement in medical education and supervised caregiving opportunities**, given their motivation and willingness to learn skills necessary for the child's care.
- **Communicate concerns to the case manager, GAL/attorney, and medical providers**, emphasizing that collaborative care supports both the child's health needs and permanency planning.

**Sample court report recommendation:** "CASA recommends that the child's medical needs remain the primary focus of all caregivers involved. Given the child's medically fragile status, CASA further recommends adherence to all medical team recommendations and increased collaboration among caregivers. CASA also recommends that the birth parents be provided appropriate, supervised opportunities to learn and participate in the child's medical care, as this supports continuity of care and long-term permanency planning. Additionally, CASA recommends increased communication among all parties to reduce caregiver conflict and promote the child's safety, stability, and well-being."

# National Poverty in America Awareness Month

January is **National Poverty in America Awareness Month**, a time to spotlight the realities of financial hardship in our communities and deepen our understanding of who is affected and why. Traditional poverty measures, like the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), often **miss a large group of working households that struggle to make ends meet**. That's where ALICE data comes in.

## What is ALICE?

**ALICE** stands for **Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed** — households that earn above the Federal Poverty Level but below the basic cost of living in their community. These are hardworking individuals and families who are **employed yet financially insecure**, often **one emergency away from falling into poverty**.

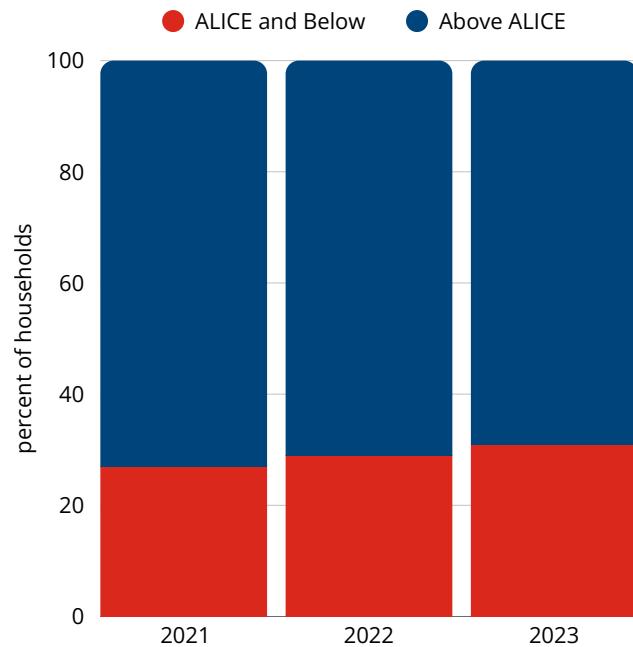
## Forsyth County Snapshot

In 2023, approximately **25% of households in Forsyth County were classified as ALICE**, meaning they earned above the federal poverty line but still could not afford essential needs such as housing, childcare, food, transportation, and healthcare. When combined with households living below the FPL (about **6%**), **nearly one-third (31%) of Forsyth County households fall below the ALICE Threshold**.

### Why it Matters for CASAs:

- Financial instability is a common underlying factor for families involved in the child welfare system.
- Households below the ALICE Threshold are often working and doing their best, yet still struggling to meet basic needs.
- Ongoing financial stress can affect housing stability, access to childcare and healthcare, and overall family well-being.
- Many child welfare cases stem from systemic financial strain rather than a lack of care, effort, or love.
- Understanding ALICE helps CASA volunteers provide informed, compassionate advocacy in court.
- This awareness strengthens advocacy for services and supports that promote stability, safety, and permanency for children.

Percentage of Forsyth County Households Above or Below ALICE Threshold



# National Human Trafficking Prevention Month

**Human Trafficking** = the exploitation of a human through force, fraud, or coercion. It can include labor or sex trafficking.

**CSEC** = the commercial sexual exploitation of children. This is the sexual abuse of youth through the exchange of sex/sexual acts for drugs, food, shelter, and money.

Youth who have experienced sex trafficking often have a history of multiple traumas and adversities. Many face significant challenges before being trafficked—such as abuse, neglect, instability, or unmet needs—that increase their vulnerability to exploitation. Additional trauma often occurs during trafficking, and even after being identified as victims, these youth may continue to face complex emotional, physical, and social challenges as they work toward healing and stability.

Between 2018 and 2022, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) received **over 2,400 reports of children missing from foster care in Georgia**. These reports involved **1,790 individual children**, many of whom went **missing multiple times**. Of those children, **410 were identified as likely victims of child sex trafficking**.

**772 youth in Georgia** were served by Children's Advocacy Centers of Georgia (CACGA) for the risk of or confirmed CSEC in 2022. The average age of youth served was **14 years old**.



CALL THE NATIONAL  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
HOTLINE AT **1-888-373-7888**

TEXT THE NATIONAL  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
HOTLINE AT **233733**

CALL THE GA STATEWIDE  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
HOTLINE AT **1-866-363-2732**

## What You Can Do as a CASA:

- **Be a consistent, trusted presence.**
- **Pay attention to warning signs.** *Changes in behavior, frequent runaway episodes, unexplained items or money, older “friends,” or sudden secrecy can be indicators of exploitation.*
- **Document and report concerns promptly.** *Share patterns, red flags, and safety concerns with your supervisor and the court to ensure they are taken seriously and addressed.*
- **Advocate for stability.** *Placement stability, school consistency, and access to basic needs reduce risk and promote healing.*
- **Support trauma-informed services.** *Advocate for mental health care, medical services, and specialized supports when a child has experienced or is at risk of exploitation.*
- **Remember: healing takes time.** *Youth who have experienced trafficking may need patience, understanding, and long-term advocacy—even after identification and services begin.*

# Birthdays

- 🎂 Jan 9<sup>th</sup> - Jeni Smith
- 🎂 Jan 11<sup>th</sup> - Sean Pittman
- 🎂 Jan 15<sup>th</sup> - Mary "Hope" Thatcher
- 🎂 Jan 17<sup>th</sup> - Jennifer Howell
- 🎂 Jan 19<sup>th</sup> - Jacquelynn Edmonds
- 🎂 Jan 29<sup>th</sup> - Alec Menoni

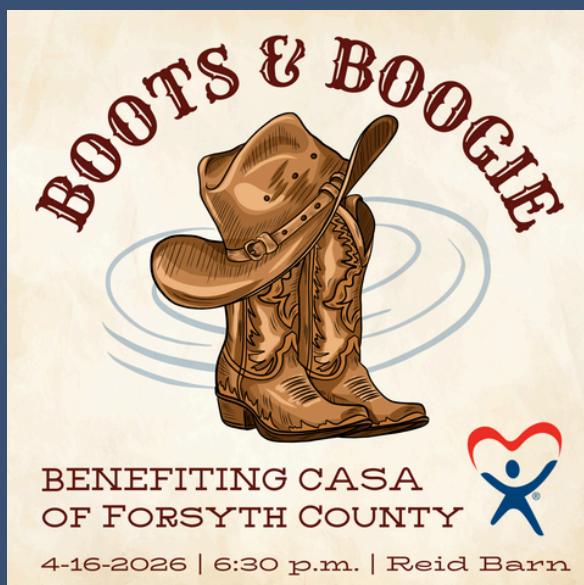
# CELEBRATE

**Baseball legend John Smoltz** is known not only for his Hall of Fame career with the Atlanta Braves, but also for using his platform to give back to children and families. His commitment to supporting youth reminds us that **advocacy matters—both on and off the field.**

At CASA, our volunteers step up to the plate as advocates for children in foster care, showing up consistently and speaking up when it matters most. To celebrate the power of advocacy and community involvement, **we're giving away signed John Smoltz baseballs to the first few people who reach out!**

Contact Rebekah **770-876-7905**

## Upcoming Event- Boots & Boogie!



📅 Yeehaw! Get ready to **SAVE THE DATE!**

Dust off your boots for the inaugural **Boots & Boogie Gala**, benefiting **CASA of Forsyth County**!

Join us for a night of incredible fun:

- Line Dancing 🎵
- Dueling Pianos 🎹
- Custom Hat Bar 🎩
- Live Auction 🎪
- Bourbon & Wine Tasting 🍷

While we boogie, we'll be raising vital funds to ensure every child in Forsyth County has a powerful voice and a caring advocate in their corner.

📅 **When:** Thursday, April 16, 2026, 6:30 p.m.

📍 **Where:** Reid Barn, Cumming

Please remember to log your training in the tab marked "Training" on the main page in Optima- you need to log 12 hours of continuing education each year.

Reading along with Book Club is now worth 4 CE hours!



# Learning & Growth

## In-Person, Virtual, and Self-Guided Training Opportunities

### Poverty

#### Poverty, Politics and Profit

- On-Demand

*Frontline PBS*

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#)

### Growing Up Poor in America

- On-Demand

*Frontline PBS*

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#)

### Human Trafficking

#### Responding To the Complex Issues of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Child Welfare

- On-Demand

*National Child Traumatic Stress Network*

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#)

create a free NCTSN Learning Center account!

### Human Trafficking 101

- On-Demand

*Polaris Project*

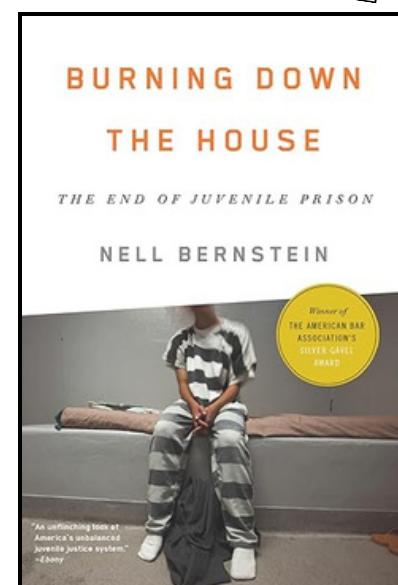
[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#)

## CASA Book Club

### *Burning Down the House: The End of Juvenile Prison* by Nell Bernstein

In Burning Down the House, Nell Bernstein exposes the harsh realities of juvenile detention in the U.S., where isolation and abuse too often replace care and guidance. One in three American children will be arrested by age 23, and many spend time in facilities that fail to support their growth or rehabilitation. Through the voices of youth who have endured these conditions, Bernstein highlights their resilience and determination to maintain their humanity. She presents these young people as full, complex individuals—not just victims of a broken system. Interwoven with these stories are examples of innovative programs that offer real alternatives to incarceration. Bernstein's work is both a powerful critique of the current system and a hopeful vision for how children can thrive when given support, connection, and opportunity.

We'll be doing both in-person and virtual book club meetings! Stay tuned for details.



# Thank You to Our Donors!



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CHANGE A CHILD'S  
STORY

