

THE CASA BULLETIN

CASA of Terrebonne, INC.



This month we would like to introduce you to Nathan Aucoin. He was sworn in on July 14, 2022, and is still working on his very first case with one little boy. He recommends that anyone thinking of becoming a CASA volunteer that they should jump in with both feet because the time it takes is minimal and the hope you provide can be life-changing.

If you notice Nathan's last name, he shares that with the one and only Christine Aucoin. Christine and Nathan have been married for 38 years. They have two adult sons, Joshua and Mitchell. They also have two grandbabies, Amelia three years old and Louis who is eight months old and their step-grandson Connor, who is 19. Their pets include six laying hens. Amelia LOVES to tend to the chickens. Nathan has been hanging around the office since Christine came to CASA six years ago. Once she moved into the executive director's role, Nathan became an office regular. He is one of the most kind and sincere people I know. He is sure to stop in to check on everyone, fix anything we need fixed and occasionally will drop goodies by for the staff.

Nathan is employed by Crosby Energy. In his free time, he enjoys fishing, gardening, hunting and spending time with his grandchildren. A fun fact about Nathan is that he will NEVER pass up the opportunity to go shopping for his grandchildren. To say they are the light of his world is an understatement. Nathan was born in Morgan City but raised in Houma. He has been a resident of Houma for the past 56 years, with short amounts of time spent living in other areas including Mississippi and Texas for work. But this is Home!

Nathan decided to take the plunge and become an advocate in 2022. He has worked extremely hard to maintain contact with all associated parties. It is not unheard of for Nathan to drop off a box of donuts or some cookies for the DCFS staff. He shows up to visits at the foster home with pizza and snacks. He has truly embodied the Southern saying that the fastest way to the heart is through the belly. These things have served him well.

When asked why he chose to become a volunteer with CASA he said, "I got involved hoping I could make a difference in at least one child's life. I was blessed to come from a family that loved and cared for me daily. Seeing these kids going through trials without a family foundation, brings us all down as a society. Children getting caught in these situations deserve all the care we can provide." Thank you Nathan for your dedication and commitment to CASA of Terrebonne. We appreciate you.

A CASA polo will be donated to this month's CASA Volunteer by Shelly Toups at Artistic Embroidery.



National Foster Care Month

BY ANNA MERLOS

Each May, National Foster Care Month provides an opportunity to focus our attention on the constant needs of abused and neglected children and youth. This month, we want to raise awareness about foster care and encourage others to get involved in the lives of these foster children.

During National Foster Care Month, we acknowledge the thousands of dedicated foster families and other caring individuals and organizations who are already supporting these children. At CASA, a child's story is our main focus. A story we don't often hear is how someone got to the point in their lives where they chose to open up their home and heart and take on the responsibility of becoming a certified foster parent. There are so many paths that can lead to this journey. It can be a married couple who have suffered from infertility challenges for years. It can be a same-sex couple who wants to start a family. It could be an empty-nest couple who believes they have more love in their heart and a safe home to offer to a child in need. It could be a family member who sees the need to step up and take care of their relative. No matter the reason, to become a foster home, you are giving a second chance to a family in need.

Foster caretakers and CASA volunteers work together to ensure that the children do not fall through the cracks of an overwhelmed system. In April, Co-CASA partners Carol Breaux Bergeron and Penny Hebert witnessed their fifth and final CASA child's adoption into her forever home. Carol and Penny have been advocating for a sibling group of five children since 2020 and our program has been assigned to this case since 2017!

The adoptive father posted the following on his social media about Carol and Penny after the adoption:

"I just want to acknowledge these two selfless angels... our CASA workers. God sent them to us and they will forever be part of our family. They fought for us... shed tears with us... and became our family. They adore and truly care about the well-being of [CASA child]. The investment they give along with all CASA workers to the foster care system and in making a difference in the life of foster children is 100% volunteer and selfless work. They not only give their time but they give their entire heart. They have been a true Godsend since day one and we love them so much!!!"

At any given time, in Terrebonne Parish roughly 250 children and youth need foster and adoptive parents able to care for them. There is always a strong need for placement of older children and sibling groups. You can learn more about becoming a foster parent at www.dcf.la.gov/foster or call 1-888-LAHELP-U (1-888-524-3578)

Whether you have a few minutes, hours, weeks or more, there are lots of ways that you can show your support and make a difference for children and youth in foster care. We have included 15 ways YOU can help CASA help children in foster care this month!

15 Ways
to Help CASA Help Kids in Foster Care

| Become a CASA Volunteer | | Become a CASA's Krewe Member |
|---|--|--|
| Follow & Share CASA's Social Media Pages | Attend a CASA outreach event | Refer a friend to become a CASA volunteer |
| Donate to CASA of Terrebonne | Become a foster parent | Buy gift cards that CASA uses to supply foster children's immediate needs |
| Invite CASA to speak to your company, faith community, organization or groups | Host a holiday gift drive | Ask your employer to support foster care through matching gifts of time or money |
| Donate a meal for a pre-service training session | Forward the monthly CASA e-mail newsletter | Sponsor activities for Advocates and youth to do together |



His Story

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE IS WRITTEN BY A CASA TEEN ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE IN FOSTER CARE

Within this essay, I will reveal my story, its traumas, its endurance to be good, and the hopes of its happy ending. To give a clear image of who I am, I will address my family history, my interests, career aspirations, and reveal my current philosophy on life. In my pursuit to grow in knowledge in core subjects, extra-curricular, and career trades, I see vast opportunities to make something of myself.

Throughout my life I struggled with a lot of things that I had no control over. My mother was in the picture at first but my story goes plenty of other places. The most consistent person in my life has been my brother. I spent almost all my struggles with my brother. Two others were introduced to my life because my mother had two girls, who are my half-sisters. I was about 2 years old when my first sister (that I knew of) was born.

Life became dark when my mother started to use drugs; we were jumping house to house. I really could not keep friends because I would switch schools multiple times a year. The year I was in first grade, I was introduced to a new member to call "family", my mother's boyfriend, who used to abuse us. I was beaten and bruised. Even on my face I carried bruises so my mother kept me from school. She was worried DCFS (Department of Children & Family Services) would be called on us, and I would be taken away.

Amongst the abuse, school became hard. My school held me back a year because of the amount of days I missed in that era of abuse. Life became more difficult as I witnessed my mother start using drugs more and more often. At an early age, I had responsibilities to take care of my baby sisters because my mother would leave us at the house for days without food at an apartment complex. I would have to sell all my toys to my friends. This gave me money to walk to the dollar store to get us food to eat for the nights while she was gone partying and having different men over.

Around the age of eight, I was introduced to another family member, my father. He spent most of my life in jail but my mother kept this from me. Around this age, DCFS began to get involved. At that time, DCFS had told my mother that my brother and I needed another placement. If she could not find one, we were getting taken from the state. My father, my new "placement", had pulled up one night to come pick my brother and I up from her house to move to Houma. I had to leave my sisters behind not knowing if I would ever see them again.

Once again, I was faced with the obstacle of making new friends and starting a new school. Being a good student in the classroom helped me plenty; the teachers always love me for my hard work. I was always very quiet and listened to their directions keeping me from any write ups and always maintaining good grades.

Trials strike again as my father began using drugs while he was on the shrimp boats for work. My brother and I struggled a lot on food. We slept at friends' houses for food. My father was hiding from the police. Many nights he would have my brother and I scared because he was tripping out on drugs in front of us. One night, he got caught by the police and was arrested.

In need of another placement, my Aunt took us in. We spent two years with her until my father got out of jail on work release. We saw beyond his drug addiction and wanted to go back to stay with him. Not longer after, he got caught leaving the boat to come see us. His boss called the cops, being under work release, he got arrested that night so we had to find another placement. This time another Aunt took us in. My Aunt kept us for a while until DCFS got involved asking why we switched placements so many times in a school year.

One ordinary morning, my brother and I were getting ready for school, as we walked into the living room we saw my Aunt and a DCFS worker sitting. They called us to come sit and the DCFS worker told my brother and I that we were getting separated from each other into different group homes. Him, being the only consistent person in my life, made me take this news really hard. I did not know if I would ever see him again. I had to watch him be placed in the van and driven away. It was quick, I gave him a hug and there he went. I was told

nothing of where he was going. A little while later, my DCFS worker called my Aunt and told them that they had a placement for me in Thibodaux called Lafourche Juvenile Justice Center (JJC). DCFS soon came to pick me up. Once again, I was faced with the obstacle of restarting: new place, new school, and new faces. At least at the DCFS office that day I found a little more closure because I saw my brother again. It was very hard for me to go through that at 12 years old. I lost everyone, every family member, everyone just taken away from me because of our parents' bad decision.

That day, they brought me to JJC, and they brought him to the MacDonell Home. At this new "placement", the home was full of older boys and girls that I did not know and staff that was there to watch you. In group homes, it feels like life or death. This was a turning point for me as I came to the realization that my decisions heavily affected me. I had other kids steal from me, bullying me, pushing bad behavior on me, and trying to influence me. I knew my decisions would impact me and could ruin my life in the long run. I spent nights and nights praying to go home and to be safe. People take for granted what it is to lay his/her head at night and know they are safe and home. Instead I had the grand view of a plain tan wall and the hope to not get bullied or stolen from. I was the smallest, youngest there and grew up watching so many bad things that happen such as other kids trying to kill themselves. And even worse, understanding how they were doubting they would ever make it in life because of their situation.

At this moment of my life I had no motivation to strive for better because there was no one in there to tell me to do better; I was consumed by negativity. From the age of 12 till now, I feel as though I lost my whole childhood. I was given no happy moments, no family spending time together, no calls from anyone who cared, and no money to send me for snacks and phone bill to pay to communicate with friends. I had to save my allowance that I got every two weeks from the home to pay for my phone bill. To call it a home felt foolish because they did not even give you the WIFI password nor let you call more than one day a week. My calls went to my brother, because I wanted him in my life.



His Story Cont'd

These traumas made it hard to learn. This was because I never felt safe, I never felt in control, and I was constantly faced with depression. My mind was just ready to give up, but I looked at the bigger picture and just kept pushing through. The cycle continued over and over within those six years of group home life. I stayed at JJC for about two years waiting every six months at my court hearing to see if I could finally go home. I remember marking the days on my calendar getting happier and more motivated each time that I would look at it, only to be disappointed. I watched others get to go home. I always wanted to feel that relief of all this trauma but it was out of my hands.

Eventually got some good news, I got to be moved to the MacDonell home with my brother. Obstacles continued to come as I restarted once more. The MacDonell group home was worse than JJC. I longed for a safe place but instead had adults who spoke mean words, witnessed many others try to commit suicide, and constantly having things stolen. I strive my best to catch up in school and what I felt I missed out on but even more I was depressed at this time.

Life continued with hardships. I have this one memory of calling my mother and her telling me "I'm going to get you out there. I promise," but when the court date came up neither my mother nor my father was there. Calendar marks and counting days to their failed promises, my brother and I were faced with the fact that we had no one. Soon after that, I was given a chance to go back with my aunt. If my brother and I did good, we could go live with her. I got to go with her but my brother unfortunately had to stay in the group home for his bad behavior.

In that month of staying with her, I took advantage of the situation and started to go down the wrong path like sneaking out to see my friends that I missed. Feeling both convicted and guilty of leaving my brother in a group home, I decided to ask to go stay at the group home with my brother. I just did not want him to suffer alone. No one should suffer alone. I wanted to go back to suffer through it with him. There were even times I was offered to be adopted but I chose my brother because I was loyal to what I said. I will suffer for the only family I felt I had.

Cycles continued as we were split apart again with me at JJC, eventually back to MacDonell. Swapping schools and learning new topics and lessons began to be more of an adaptation for me. I switched from Lafourche parish to Terrebonne parish schools but I still tried my best to have all As and Bs. Clearly, my family life is not the norm nor is it something that anyone would ask for. But now I see family is more than just blood.

Sometimes journeys leave scars so we can encounter certain people in life. People who change your life and hopefully you change theirs. There were people that came into my life that actually cared and were not there for the money. They wanted to have a bond with me even if sometimes I blocked it out because I wanted to do things myself. These people are my CASA worker and a worker from the MacDonnell home who I see now like a brother who took me in. I realize by letting someone in my life that cares really helps heal from years of trauma that I had. It gives me a more positive mindset and having the feeling of someone that loves you for who you are. This is a feeling I've been looking for my whole life.

Interest in sports and extracurricular activities offer a lot of problem-solving skills, social skills, and meaning to life. I was involved in many sports like football, basketball, track and powerlifting for South Terrebonne. These were sports that I had a dying passion for which motivated me every day. The activities, the goals, and the team kept my mind off things when I was going through. Literally shooting a basketball or even throwing a football can be a therapy from the things you are going through.

My junior year I was diagnosed with a labral tear in my hip which made it very difficult to do all sports. When this happened, I had to quit sports which brought a lot of struggles for me. Even without this obstacle, I still would not have been able to be a part of extracurricular activities and sports this year due to having two jobs to cover my living expenses. I lost those two jobs due to my truck breaking down. I was graced with a friend who networked me with a lawn care company for the time being. I spend most of my time doing schoolwork and work. My extended foster care monthly funds never came in like they

were supposed to. I have kept some space in my schedule to start participating in the bible study since November, and I am taking this time to discover my religious belief due to lack of experience because of foster care. I miss doing sports, but I know the obligations I have in maturing and making responsible decisions.

I have huge hopes of becoming an electrical engineer. The one whom I spoke of as the worker who became like a brother to me has networked me with an electrician to help me build a resume and grow in experience. I want to stay with him and go to either Nicholls State University or Fletcher University and then possibly transfer to Louisiana Tech University. While doing all of this, I am currently and hope to remain helping him as he fosters kids who have similar stories to me. I want to give back through my experiences, because I have been in their shoes. Even if it's not the same story I know the feelings of what it's like to be abandoned and uprooted. This is something I hope to continue doing throughout my life.

Recently, I watched a video on an art form called Kintsugi where you take broken pottery and join it together in gold making it more beautiful than before. The pieces highlight the imperfections and reveal the triumph in healing. In a similar way I can look back on my life and see the damages, people I lost, abuses, and traumas that I faced are like the pieces that are broken. Education, friendship, sports, mentors, and people who love me are like the gold that are building me to be more special than I could have ever been before.





BECOME A KREWE MEMBER TODAY!

CASA's Krewe is a new ambassador program meant to help support the mission of CASA of Terrebonne in many ways outside the traditional volunteer advocate role. CASA's Krewe is a network of individuals and businesses that assist our program in promoting the quality, sustainability, and growth of CASA of Terrebonne by creating awareness, pursuing program investment partners, and serving as outreach support for CASA of Terrebonne.

The new CASA's Krewe program provides its members the flexibility and opportunity to share their energy and talents at their own pace; so they can make a difference in our community. Visit our website to sign up to become a Krewe Member.

Find a Forever Home



We want to give a HUGE shout-out and congratulations to Carol Breaux Bergeron and Penny Hebert. The Co-CASA partners were there to witness their fifth and final CASA child's adoption into her forever home. Carol and Penny have been advocating for a sibling group of five children since 2020 and our program has been assigned to this case since 2017.

Thank you, Penny and Carol! We are so lucky to have you two advocating for the children in Terrebonne Parish!

Welcome to CASA **CLASS # 65**



Join us in welcoming our newest advocate volunteer Sandy Trahan. Sandy was sworn in on April 25th by Honorable Judge Dagate.

Sandy completed the 30-hour pre-service training and is in the process of getting started on her first case!

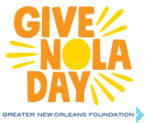
Welcome to the CASA Community Sandy!



Our Mission

CASA of Terrebonne's mission is to be a voice for children in foster care by advocating independently and objectively in the courts for their best interest.

Up-Coming CASA Events:



May 2, 2023

GiveNOLA Day

Make a difference by joining us for 24 hours of giving to benefit CASA of Terrebonne, Inc. GiveNOLA Day is a 24-hour event hosted by the Greater New Orleans Foundation. It's a day to inspire people to give generously so that we can make our region stronger and create a thriving community for all.

You can select which non-profits you would like to give to at www.givenola.org and give directly to CASA of Terrebonne at www.givenola.org/CASAofTerrebonne.



May 6, 2023

CASA Crawfish Boil-Off Hosted by the Herman J. Courville Foundation

It's that time of year! The 16th Annual CASA of Terrebonne Boil-off is Saturday, May 6th in the old Rite Aid parking lot. Team entry is \$75. Sponsorships are available.

Register at Southdown Bar or register VIA VenMo @hjcfoundation. Be sure to include your name and phone number if you register VIA Venmo.

CASA Staff

CHRISTINE AUCOIN
Executive Director

JENNY DOMANGUE
Lead Advocate Supervisor

ANNA MERLOS
*Office Manager/
Marketing Coordinator*

EDWARD OLIVIER
Advocate Supervisor

SULMA REYES
*Outreach/Training
Coordinator*

VALENTINE VERDIN
Advocate Supervisor

Board of Directors

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Bonnie Naquin
Treasurer

Shelly Toups
Secretary

Rev. Charles Brown

Cindy Courville

Cindy Doiron

Justin Lirette

Martin Majewski, III

Buddy McNabb

Tim Stevens



Volunteer Shout-Outs

- **Allison Eschete** - Congratulations on seeing your CASA child's case to adoption. You are much appreciated.
- **Carol Bergeron** and **Penny Hebert** - Congrats on seeing your case to adoption!! The last of the five children to find their forever home! You, ladies, are so special to this case.
- **Elaine Beyer and Denise Cuartes** - Phenomenal job on your first court report and standing by your children's wishes during court. You both put so much heart into this case. These kids are blessed to have you.
- **Rushelle Fitzgerald** - Welcome back! Thank you for taking a new case, and attending the family team meeting and court appearance. You are going to do great things.
- **Sarah Ghere** - Thank you so much for your attention to detail in your case! You asked important questions at the Family Team Meeting and wrote a great court report!
- **Mary Guidry** - Thank you for participating in your CASA child's family team meeting and completing your court report. You are growing in your volunteer role!
- **Traci Hawthorne** - You wrote a very detailed court report and continue to go above and beyond for your case! Thank you so much for attending court!
- **Tim Hitt** - Congratulations on attending your CASA child's court appearance. You have been such an influential part of this case and we can finally see the end! Way to go!
- **Karey Kinnard** - Congratulations on attending your CASA child's court appearance. Your tenacity throughout the case has been inspirational.
- **Buddy McNabb** - Thank you for attending court for your case! Your presence is so important in this case!
- **Kathy Mella** - Thank you for attending your CASA child's court appearance. We are starting to see some movement in the case. Thank you for being so easygoing and continuing this journey.
- **Kathi Murphy** - Thank you for your hard work on the court report for your case!
- **Darlene Naquin** - Thank you for writing your court report and for your dedication to this case!
- **Amanda Reeves** - Nice going on your first court report. Your recommendations will make a difference.
- **Jon Russo** - Thank you for your diligent work on your case. While it isn't the norm, know that you are doing the very best thing for your CASA child. That's why CASA is so important. Thanks for attending your CASA child's hearing and speaking up for the best interest of the child.
- **Lani Tarr** - Congratulations on attending your first hearing. You're remarkable!
- **Danielle Walker** - Thank you for attending court for your CASA child! You are appreciated.

April Donations & Grants

Seeca Medical, Inc
 Tori Rayne
 Nicholas & Elaine Fry
 Marty Majewski
 In Grammy's Attic (In-kind)
 Artistic Embroidery (In-Kind)
 CASA-AP

May Birthdays

| | |
|-----------------|------|
| Susan Porche | 5/8 |
| Mia Foret | 5/12 |
| Bonnie Nauqin | 5/14 |
| Reis Prevost | 5/14 |
| Timothy Stevens | 5/26 |

May Anniversaries

5 Years

Carol Bergeron
 Emily Gilmore

4 Years

Allison Eschete
 Kimberly Eubanks
 Kristy Ledford
 Leah Voisin

Latest Program Stats

42

Volunteer Advocates

65

CASA Children Served

 163

children waiting for a CASA

