



Editor's Note: This story appears on the National CASA web site, www.casaforchildren.org. Lauren was the Keynote Speaker at the 2008 "Speak Up For Children" Breakfast event for CASA of Franklin County.

Lauren's Story



About ten years ago, I was 11 years old and in fifth grade in Longmont. I had moved from Columbus, Ohio two years before with my mother and sister. We were escaping my mother's physically abusive second husband, and though we thought that Colorado would be a new beginning, it was really just another chapter in my mother's battle with alcoholism and mental disease. Unfortunately, my younger sister and I had to find a way to cope with our mother's issues.

Soon after we moved, my mother and I began getting in physical fights. I believe now that these fights were a result of my mother's mental issues and not, as I thought then, all my fault. I held a lot of blame for my mother's problems and tried my best to care for my sister when my mother was unable to. She would black out or physically assault me, and I would hide my sister in the basement, or even run away with her.

I was a very intelligent child. I loved school and tutored younger children. I had tons of friends and did my best to put on a front that nothing was wrong. However, when I got home at night, my happy-go-lucky nature disappeared. My mother's dependency on alcohol had turned into a full-blown problem. In the two years prior, she had received two DUIs and been in rehab. My sister and I went into foster care for the first time.

My first night in foster care was, to put it simply, awful. I was no longer being abused, but I still felt alone. I had all hand-me-down clothes from my foster home, and I had none of my personal belongings. I always wrote in a diary, and without that outlet I felt very lost. My foster family was okay, but foster care is just so hard to understand when you're young. I felt like an outcast, and I couldn't see my friends, or my sister.



Soon, I had my first meeting with my CASA volunteer, Stephanie Eichenaur. I immediately attached to her like a leech! It was explained to me that Stephanie would stand up for me in court and she would always make sure that I was okay. For me, Stephanie's role in my life went much farther. She was like my big sister, my best friend and the person I talked to when I was sad or lonely or happy.

Stephanie and I did lots of things together*, but my favorite was bowling. We also had picnics and went to the library. She would talk to me on the phone whenever I needed her, and she made sure I got another diary. Stephanie made me a CD of music we sang to in the car, and I still have it.

Stephanie took me to every court appearance. She told the judge exactly how I felt about my mother, my foster home, and my overall situation. She was the first person I ever trusted. Stephanie gave me stability when I was at my most vulnerable.

*Regulations for what constitutes allowable interaction between a child and GAL vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.