**Month in the Life of a CASA - James**

By Meridith Coady, CASA for 3½ years

When I first met James, a 17-year-old young man, the first thing I noticed was his hair. It’s thick and dark and he wears it long over one eye so he has something to hide behind. He stoops to try to minimize his six foot, two-inch frame, but he can be imposing. He entered foster care five years ago, along with his seven siblings, after an investigation of allegations of domestic violence and substance abuse in his home. While some siblings were able to stay together, James was placed without his siblings into an emergency shelter and then several group homes. While in one of these homes, he engaged in a fight with another resident and is now on juvenile probation for an assault conviction.

I was assigned to work with James right after he had changed placements and was residing in a new group home. I met him for the first time at a CFT (Child Family Team) meeting held at the home, which was attended by James, his social worker, his probation officer, group home staff, and a facilitator. At the meeting, James set goals for himself related to school, his health, and plans to transition out of foster care once he turns 18. This meeting provided a road map of the areas in which I could best support him in the coming months. My participation in this meeting was one of observer and listener.

Later that month, I contacted the school counselor to introduce myself as James’ CASA and asked to be included in any conferences or meetings that might be scheduled. I contacted James’ mental healthcare provider and requested information on his medications, treatment plans, and diagnoses. I also made a call to James’ attorney to introduce myself and update him on how James was doing in his new placement.

James still has contact with his biological mother, who has been granted unsupervised visits. I attempted to contact her to introduce myself and make arrangements to meet her, primarily to observe the visits between her and James. James also wanted to have visits with his siblings, so I contacted the social worker and probation officer to see if this could be arranged.

James enjoys team sports and the group home staff had made arrangements for him to participate in a weekly sports league. With James’ permission, I spent a sunny Saturday morning watching him play and observing his interactions with his teammates and the adults supervising the league. After this visit, I called the probation officer, social worker, and my advocacy supervisor to share my thoughts and observations.

James will be turning 18 in six months. There are a lot of committed professionals working with him to help him get ready to complete the transition into adulthood and potentially enter extended foster care until age 21. I am grateful that I am part of this group of professionals who will continue to advocate for his needs.