**Month in the Life of a CASA**

**By Margie Yeomans-Oliver**

On reflection, the first five months of my CASA experience with my kids was an easy honeymoon period. Because it was mostly summer vacation months, we had lots of time to go places and have fun together. Still riding on that wave of “this is easy,” I expected that October would be a calm month with my three CASA siblings now settled into new schools and back into a routine. And, it did start off that way.

Angelica, the seventh grader, really wanted to be in band, but because of her IEP she needed a study skills class, which gave her no time for an elective. Although disappointed, she was adjusting well and looking forward to playing on a soccer team after school instead. Her fourth grade sister, Noeme, was thrilled to have the same classroom teacher as her neighborhood friends, and her teacher said that she was a very hard worker despite being three years behind in reading and math. I made a written request for psychoeducational assessment in August and she is currently being tested for evidence of a learning disability. Maria, a 16-year-old junior, was very happy at her alternative high school. The school offers some unique ways of recovering credits, making it possible for her to graduate on schedule.

The first sign that things were about to get busy was an SOS text from their caregiver. The family found marijuana and a bottle of whiskey under Maria’s bed, and later learned that Maria had been smoking and drinking with friends for a few weeks. The social worker arranged for Maria to go to a teen rehabilitation center. A few days later, I received a frantic text from the caregiver that Maria did not come home on the bus from rehab that evening. The caregiver drove around to all the places we thought she could be without success, and ultimately reported her absence to the police. To everyone’s relief, Maria came home (though very late and with no explanation).

I knew Maria was anxious and scared about her mother’s court hearing that had been scheduled for the middle of October. I also knew Maria’s downward behavior spiral began when that date was postponed to the end of November. I met with Maria and her counselor the next day to make a plan to pick her up from the rehab center for the next few days. Several days later, I picked her up from school when she was suspended for smoking in the bathroom. But just a week after that, we were celebrating her six-week report card with two A’s, two B’s, and one C—the best she has ever achieved in school! Being a CASA can be a roller-coaster ride as the kids deal with the uncertainties of their lives, but the rich reward of being a stable person for them through it all is awesome.

The girls and I have lots of great times together, too. In October, I took the girls to a Blue Apple Ranch event in Ramona. It was a beautiful day and the girls laughed and had a wonderful time riding horses, eating great food, climbing a rock wall, making hats, getting their faces painted, and getting a caricature of themselves drawn. What an experience it is to spend time with these girls, to get to know them, and to just let them have fun and be kids.