



CELEBRATING 10 YEARS with STORIES

My name is Alison and I am a foster parent. I am you.

We have had many broken and battered children come into our home over the years – each with their own troubling story. We always do everything that we can to provide a loving, home for these children and that always includes asking for a CASA volunteer to be assigned to our children’s cases because we know how hard each CASA fights for our children, fights for their rights and fights with their best interest at heart.

Two years ago, a small, frightened, 11-month old boy, who we will call Drew, came to our home in the middle of the night after an emergency removal. His mother was selling drugs and the police raided the home and found Drew alone and crying in his crib. That night when the Division of Youth and Family Services, or DYFS, case worker handed this sweet, terrified, child with dark, thick hair to me in all that he had - his yellow pajamas and blanket, I immediately felt a strong bond and knew that I wanted to be more than a temporary family – I wanted our family to be Drew’s forever family.

The first few months he required constant care and assurance - often screaming, crying and throwing himself on the floor. Bedtime was worse because Drew suffered from night terrors, waking up in the middle of the night screaming at the top of his little lungs. Sleepless nights were not new to me, but something about this little boy and the terror he felt really shook me to the bone.

As a foster mom I have always relied on CASA volunteers, and Drew’s case was no different. Imagine caring for a small child who has already suffered so much in their short life, having a CASA volunteer always gives me an additional sense of protection for the children we care for - they provide an additional set of eyes, help support the children and ensure that they get the services they need. Drew’s CASA volunteer was instrumental in recommending and having court-ordered doctor’s visits for everything from speech therapy to an orthopedic evaluation for his bowed legs.

Drew was with us for 6 months and was finally adjusting to his new home when an uncle was located in New Mexico who said he was willing to raise Drew with his wife and small daughter, so DYFS began the process to move Drew out of state.

The first time that Drew was taken to visit his uncle he screamed with his arms outstretched to me and cried “Mommy” all the way out to the case worker’s car – my heart broke for him and our family and I knew these visits would set Drew’s positive development back. Despite our hard fight and against CASA’s recommendations – Drew was taken 3 months later on a 2-day train ride to live with his extended family in New Mexico.

CASA volunteer Sue stayed in touch with the family in New Mexico and realized, almost immediately, that the family was having a difficult time adjusting to Drew, especially his often troubling, constant emotional breakdowns.

Three weeks later we received the most emotional call of our lives – Drew’s severe emotional problems, especially his tantrums and night terrors, proved to be too overwhelming for his family in New Mexico. Drew’s uncle had decided that his family could no longer care for him and he was coming back to New Jersey. The DYFS case worker did not even have to ask us – Drew was coming home to us - his true forever family - for good. The happiest day of my life was the DYFS case worker returning Drew to us and he called out “Mommy” from his car seat – I couldn’t get him out of the car fast enough!

While the move to New Mexico was traumatic and a small set back for Drew, I am happy to report that he is a happy, well-adjusted 4 year old who just started pre-school and loves kicking the soccer ball in the backyard with me. His CASA volunteer still visits him regularly and although she won’t ever say for certain – I know that she was instrumental in getting Drew back to our family.

I often find myself watching Drew peacefully sleep and can’t imagine what would have happened to him - what his life would have been like - if he did not have the chance to grow up in our family. Thankfully we will never know the answer to that question because with the help of CASA, Drew finally has the forever family that every child deserves – we officially adopted him this past summer.

Drew’s story is just one among the 700 children who are in the foster care system in Atlantic and Cape May Counties. There are still many more children, who have stories like Drew’s, that need a helping hand. Will you help lift up their voice? To donate or volunteer please call (609) 601-7800 or visit www.atlanticcapecasa.org.