

ADVOCATE SUCCESS STORY

MEET *April*



April's mother was proud of the fact that five-year-old April slept in bed beside her every night, even as an array of strange men occupied the bed on the other side. A neighbor, concerned about April's safety, contacted Child Protective Services, and April was removed from a dangerous situation.

Susanna was appointed to become April's Advocate. She monitored April's mother's progress to provide a safe home environment. Then, as it became more apparent that April's mother was not able to make the life changes needed, Susanna began searching for other relatives who would be willing to care for April, but to no avail.

Then the phone call came. Sarah, a relative in another state, called to say that she was interested in stepping in to take care of April. As a single woman in her early 20's, Sarah may not have presented the ideal picture of a stable adult ready to care for a young child, but Susanna saw promise in Sarah's intentions and in Sarah's heart.

“We have a *responsibility* TO CHILDREN. We teach them. *They learn from us.* Any time you touch the life of a child, you **change** that child's life. Whatever you do and whatever you say in that child's best interest is going to **IMPACT THEM IN A POSITIVE WAY.** *So how does it get any better than that?*”

-Susanna Bell, Volunteer Advocate



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Susanna laid down the law. She told Sarah that if she truly wanted to raise April, she needed to get her GED, find better employment, and maintain stable housing. Sarah went above and beyond, earning her high school diploma, which qualified her for a much better job opportunity, and in-turn, an apartment.

Montgomery County CPS approved April's placement with Sarah, however, Child Protective Services in the other state would not. With a heavy heart, Susanna called Sarah to relay the news that she would not receive any state assistance to help her raise April. To Susanna's surprise and delight, Sarah's response was, "I don't care. I still want April!"

Plans were soon underway to make sure April was "home" with Sarah for the holidays. And Susanna wasn't going to be left out. On her own dime, she booked her flight to travel with the CPS caseworker as they took April to her new family and promising future ahead.

Seven years later, April is a happy and healthy 12 year old, and she and Sarah have a normal day-to-day routine together. Susanna doesn't want praise for her efforts to look out for April's best interests. **Seeing April's smile and knowing that she lives each day in a happy, nurturing, and safe home is all the thanks Susanna needs.**

“CASA volunteers and case supervisors are **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT** in DFPS (CPS) cases. In addition to many other duties, they provide an *independent* **VOICE FOR THE CHILD** to the court. **It is a happy day and occasion when I can administer the oath to new CASA volunteers. KEEP UP THE *good work* FOR THESE CHILDREN.**”

-Judge Jerry Winfree, East Texas Child Protection Cluster Court (Montgomery County)