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November 3, 2023

CASA LIBRARY LAUNCHES TO INCREASE VOLUNTEER PREPAREDNESS, EARNS 'FACES AND PLACES' DESIGNATION

Uniontown, PA – “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.”

The well-known quote from children’s author Dr. Seuss is one that Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Fayette County Executive Director Corie Berry has taken to heart. Berry said she believes reading helps one’s world grow, along with imagination and understanding.

It was that sense of better understanding Berry was aiming for when she launched the CASA library recently. The library’s goal is to aid CASA volunteers in gaining a deeper comprehension of the organization’s clients and the situations they may be facing.

CASA volunteers serve as representatives for children who are involved in court cases, often due to abuse or neglect. They observe the child and his or her situation, including interactions with biological, adoptive or foster families, and make recommendations to the court regarding the best interests of the child.

“We work with the entire family, so we really gain an understanding of who we’re working with,” Berry said.

For its contribution to better understanding and improving the welfare of Fayette County’s children, the CASA library has earned the most recent ‘Faces and Places’ designation.

Berry said she started the library after CASA moved into its new location on West Main Street in Uniontown, above the Fayette County Chamber of Commerce.

“We moved in January and began working on an idea for the library,” she said. “Because it’s being used as a training tool, we were able to utilize supporting funds through a United Way grant.”

Berry said the library currently contains 118 books, “ranging from memoirs of child abuse to racially diverse books” so volunteers can gain an understanding for the different demographics of Fayette County families.

“I created the library so our volunteers could gain a perspective from accredited writers,” Berry said. “All of the books have been highly researched by both my volunteers, as well as myself, over the summer.”

CASA Volunteer Matt Sparks certainly sees value in the new library.

“Having access to a library with so many relevant resources is a tremendous help,” said Sparks. “Part of our role is to continue growing our knowledge and understanding of complex topics. What Corie has created for us is so beneficial.”

Berry said in addition to topics such as child abuse, the books touch on an array of other issues families may be dealing, including drugs and alcohol and mental health conditions.

“I put a lot of work into it,” Berry said, adding the library is a “safe space” where volunteers can not only read and gain knowledge, but also discuss what they have learned. “They can discuss the book and how it has affected them and their understanding of the people they work with,” she said.

While the CASA library has been very well received, it isn’t finished just yet.

“This is only the first stage of our library,” she said. “We’ll be launching a second stage (where) volunteers can take books out to the kids.”

Berry said children will be able to check out the books, just as they do in any other library.

It’s one more thing CASA of Fayette County can do for its young clients. The main thing, Berry said, is just lending some consistency to a chaotic situation.

“I talk about, what if you were a kid, and you were told to put all of your stuff in garbage bags,” she said. “You were moved (to foster care), and then you were moved again. In the meantime, though, you’ve gained a CASA advocate. And the next time you move that advocate comes with you. That’s the consistency we’re trying to achieve.”

The new CASA library is just one more resource volunteers can use to support those kids through consistency and care.

For more information on Fayette County Court Appointed Special Advocates, visit www.casafayette.org.

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This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the 2016 Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.

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