

Mayor's Prayer Breakfast hears about helping troubled people

By Bill Rea

Efforts to help young people at risk take place all over, including in Ohio.

People attending the recent Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, hosted by Mayor Marolyn Morrison, heard about some of these efforts. The speakers included Carolyn Thomas, the mayor's sister, who is part of Voices for Children, which is a Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) organization.

Thomas explained CASA is a national agency operating in just about every county in the United States.

Voices for Children is aimed at advocating for safe living conditions for kids at risk, providing information to judges and getting input from the youngsters, parents, schools, doctors and anyone else who might be knowledgeable about the kid's history. She added the main task of CASA volunteers is to focus on what's best for the kids, with the involvement continuing until the case is resolved. "We make sure that no child gets lost in the system," she said.

In one of the cases she cited, two boys, aged 12 and 13, were taken from their mother because she couldn't control them and they wouldn't go to school. They weren't street-wise kids, and Thomas said they loved their mother, but she was poor and didn't know what to do. There was no family support and she had trouble accessing the services she needed because she didn't have a car. The boys were placed in temporary custody with her sister, who was married to a man in the military. That provided some structure. The boys ended up going to school, with their mother knowing the right thing was being done.

Another case she cited involved a baby boy who's mother had drug problems and was in jail. She had already given up two other children (all three by different fathers, and no one in her family wanted to adopt this boy. He was placed with the father of her first child, and was available for adoption, but Thomas said the mother wanted to maintain some contact.

Thomas said her CASA support people had said the boy would be adopted easily, but also agreed children do better when they are with the biological family. And the father of the woman's first child was willing to take him.

Thomas also mentioned a current case she has, involving a 17-year-old girl who was removed from her home at 13 because her mother's boyfriend was abusing her. She was placed with her father, who sent her on to live with his sister, and the sister sent her back.

"He's a good guy," Thomas said, but added he doesn't know how to deal with a rebellious teen. She added she was able to talk to him and agree that the girl would be able to take advantage of available supports.

"It just goes to show you how a stable and loving home affects a child," she observed.

"I just pray that some of the seeds I have planted will grow," she added.

The gathering also heard from Sue Griffith, who spoke about her experiences working with a Community Based Correction System (CBCS), which she said is seen as an alternative to prison in Ohio.

She said the facility is always full and there's a waiting list, with referrals coming from police, judges and lawyers.

Each participant has a case worker who sets up a program, and once that's complete, they are eligible for discharge, provided they have a job and a place to live. They also have to allow for six after-care sessions to help them back into the community and avoid relapses.



Carolyn Thomas spoke about Voices for Children, a Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) organization at the recent Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, hosted by her sister, Mayor Marolyn Morrison. The gathering also heard from Sue Griffith, who spoke about her

experiences working with a Community Based Correction System.