



MEET THE RICHIE CHILDREN:

HANNAH, RANDY, GRACE, LIZZY

volunteer Ryan who is proficient in ASL. **With his skills and knowledge of ASL, Ryan connected the grandmother with resources to expand her ASL to better communicate with Hannah. He also followed up with Hannah's medical providers and her school to ensure she had the resources to thrive.** Her grandmother was grateful for Ryan's assistance navigating the special education system and easing the burden of caring for a special needs child in her senior years. In addition, Ryan identified a summer camp for deaf children, secured a partial scholarship for Hannah to attend, and ensured that DCPD paid the balance. Randy, with an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis, was placed with a foster family. Given Randy's diagnosis, CASA assigned volunteer Tanya to advocate for him. **Tanya was a teacher of autistic children for many years and because of her professional working experience, she was able to actively participate in the school's Child Study Team meetings and explain Randy's needs to both his parents and foster family.** Tanya utilized basic sign language and picture prompts to communicate with Randy, who is nonverbal, and always ensured he received the routine medical care he needed including audiology, neurology, and psychiatry appointments. She ensured Randy attended the recommended extended school year and that his parents were able to understand the recommended special education services moving forward.

Grace had been labeled as a child with "severe" behavioral issues who often threw objects, pushed other children, and had tantrums if she did not get her way. She was first placed in a parishioner's home from her church, but due to her behavior, was removed and placed in a second foster home. In this foster home, it was reported that Grace often displayed signs of aggression while playing with other children.

A Family Reunited

Siblings Hannah, Randy, Grace, and Lizzy were removed from their parents after concerned family and friends reached out for help to the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPD) on behalf of their parents, Janice and Donald Richie. Both parents had a long history of mental health issues. Mom was suffering from post-partum depression and stayed in bed the majority of the day. Dad was trying to maintain a job as a Pastor while acting as a single parent to four children ranging in age from 4 months through 11 years old.

When DCPD made an unannounced visit to the Richie home, Dad reported thoughts of suicide, mom was unable to care for the children, and the house was in a state of chaos having not been cleaned in several months. All four children, which included two biological children and two children adopted from foster care all had their own unique set of challenges.

Due to the number of children and their special needs they were placed in separate foster homes and four CASA volunteers were assigned to work the case as a Team. This was important in order to ensure all of the children received the attention and resources they required. The comprehensive CASA training prepared the advocates to assist their assigned children while the parents were given time and services to address their mental health in order for their children to be reunified to a safe, healthy family.

Hannah, who is deaf and communicates with American Sign Language (ASL), was placed with her grandmother who had limited ASL skills. Knowing this, CASA assigned





Given Grace's history, CASA assigned Beth, a strong volunteer, who had experience working with special needs children. **Beth was able to assist in finding an appropriate school for Grace and acted as liaison between the foster parents, biological parents, and school to ensure that everyone learned the behavior modification tools and identifying triggers to manage Grace's emotions and behaviors.** Beth kept in touch with Grace's therapist to follow-up on her progress and advocated for Grace to attend six weeks of summer camp with the cost shared by CASA and DCPD.

Four month old baby Lizzy was placed in a foster home and did not appear to have any medical or developmental issues. **CASA assigned Kelly to be her advocate to ensure that the court was kept abreast of the placement, visitation with parents, and any recommendations as the case progressed.** She recommended an Early Intervention Evaluation, when she was six months old, which showed normal developmental milestones.

Working together with the CASA Staff Case Supervisor, all four volunteers worked as a team to ensure that each child received the services and resources needed to heal and have a strong foundation for reunification with their parents. Janice and Donald attended weekly therapy sessions, took their prescribed medications, and accepted support from their church community. As well as advocating for the services needed for all of the children, CASA was working to assist the parents on their road to recovery.

CASA provided the Richie children with new sneakers, bicycles, backpacks, and school supplies as well as

supermarket gift cards for Janice and Donald. For each child's birthday, CASA gave the parents the gifts, birthday cakes, and party supplies so they could provide special days for their children.

During the year of the children's removal, each CASA volunteer continued to advocate for their assigned child, ensuring appropriate medical, dental, and therapeutic appointments were all made and recommendations were followed. They met with teachers and attended Child Study Team meetings to review educational plans and they always kept the parents informed of the children's needs and progress. The CASA volunteers assisted the parents in obtaining a parent coach to better understand their everyday challenges and guide them in making positive changes in their parenting style.

When the court was ready to recommend reunification of the Richie children with their parents, the CASA volunteers collectively recommended a staggered reunification process to ensure a successful time for each child to re-connect with their parents. **Over a three month period, each child subsequently reunified with their parents, back into the family.**

CASA of Morris and Sussex Counties has a very qualified pool of volunteers with unique, diverse skills. The collective team effort of the CASA volunteers and staff ensured a successful reunification between the Richie children and their parents. Without CASA, the Richie children may not have received the appropriate resources and support they so desperately needed. **Today, each child continues to thrive in a healthy, stable, nurturing home environment.**

