

## CASA/GAL REPORT TO COURT

Case #: 08P-█

**In the Matter of: Debra Ford**, a minor Age: 14

**Hearing Date:** September 20, 2008

### **Interviewed:**

Barbara Cooney, petitioner for guardianship  
Debra Ford, minor  
Holly Cooney, daughter of petitioner; friend of Debra.  
Alice Travis, maternal grandmother of minor  
Tammy Travis, mother of minor

### **Findings:**

The minor, Debra Ford, was a classmate of Barbara Cooney's daughter last year in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The two girls became close friends. Debra has been living with Ms. Cooney since May 30, 2008. Previously, Debra had lived with her maternal grandmother, Alice Travis, since the age of 2. Debra's father allegedly put her into a clothes dryer at age 21 months and her mother subsequently obtained an order of protection. He was described as violent and his whereabouts are unknown. He has not had any contact with Debra since she was a toddler. No other relatives are able to care for Debra.

Debra's mother, Tammy Travis, resides in Carpentersville. She has 4 children, none of whom live with her. According to Ms. Cooney, Ms. Travis has been in abusive relationships in the past. Debra does speak with her mother by phone frequently and sees her occasionally. In fact, they all recently went out to a movie together.

CASA visited Ms. Cooney's home on August 22nd. Both Debra and Ms. Cooney's daughter, Holly, were present. The girls appear to be very bonded, sitting close together on the sofa and finishing each other's sentences. They giggled a lot and described how they met and became friends. Debra talked about knowing all of Ms. Cooney's extended family. Debra's grandmother lives less than 1 mile away and she continues to see her often. Ms. Cooney and Ms. Travis have a very cordial, cooperative relationship regarding Debra.

Ms. Cooney has been divorced for 7 years. Mr. Cooney lives in Chicago and travels frequently. Their daughter, Holly spends one weekend a month at his apartment. Ms. Cooney is employed full time in an insurance company and also holds a real estate license. She receives child support for her daughter, Holly. She plans to add Debra to her insurance policy as soon as the guardianship is ordered. She drives a 4 year old Honda Civic.

Ms. Cooney's home in South Elgin is modest in size. The girls use the two small bedrooms individually. Ms. Cooney sleeps on a sleeper sofa. While the house was crowded, it was very neatly organized and cheerfully decorated. There was an enclosed front porch, living room, spacious kitchen and back entry area. Many books and family artwork were evident. The family has various pets with appropriate cages inside and outside the house. From the interactions observed and the descriptions of daily routines, (each girl has several daily chores and plans one menu per week) and special activities, this is a happy and child-centered little family.

CASA spoke with the maternal grandmother, Alice Travis (age 78) by phone on August 29th. Ms. Travis has severe arthritis and high blood pressure and had recently been released from the hospital after a bout with pneumonia. She stated that it is not that she can't or won't take care of Debra, but "if something happens to me, I want her to be in a good place." Ms. Travis stated that she is on a fixed income and Debra is now having a chance to be with friends, and out in the world doing things. She explained that she has been carefully watching the situation to see how it was going, really listening to every little word and expression. She needed to know in her heart that this was right for Debra. She said she felt comfortable when Debra expressed to an aunt her desire to live permanently with Ms. Cooney. She and Ms. Cooney talked and agreed. Ms. Cooney's extended family has told Ms. Travis that they consider Debra a blessing. Debra loves the whole family and her grades are excellent for the first time in her life. Ms. Travis said that she likes Barbara Cooney very much and that "she's good for my granddaughter". Ms. Cooney invites Ms. Travis for Sunday dinner every other week. She also stated that Debra loves her own mother and needs to stay in contact with her.

CASA also spoke by phone with Debra's mother, Tammy Travis. She stated that she thinks Barb (Ms. Cooney) is a nice person. "Debra loves these people to death" and wants to be with them. She talks to her daughter by phone often. "We're close and that will never change. No one is yanking her out of my life. I just can't have her livin' with me. I'm happy that she's happy. We've talked about it; this is what Debra wants." Ms. Travis states that she is 35 years old and not stable at this time. "It's not a deal that I don't care; I see her when I can."

Submitted by: Judith M., CASA/GAL

September 15, 2008