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## Rocklin man finds joy in helping foster children

Lifelong passion for working with kids becomes career Lifelong passion for working with kids becomes career Lifelong passion of working with kids becomes career

Gloria Beverage, Placer Herald Editor



Courtesy

Rocklin resident Jim Wood, pictured with his grandson, finds satisfaction of working with foster children through Child Advocates of Placer County.



Jim Wood, a resident of Rocklin for 40 years, has volunteered for youth programs since he was 15.

As a youth, he had been active with youth groups and Boy Scouts. As his own three children grew, he became involved with their extracurricular and school activities.

Two years ago, Wood found himself in a unique position to change careers.

After working in construction for a large company for 27 years, Wood, now 56, found himself unemployed. In reviewing his options, Wood recalled what he had learned about Child Advocates of Placer County a few months earlier.

The local program connects foster youth, at-risk youth and young adults with well-trained, caring and reliable adult mentors and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

"It was an opportunity to really help kids," Wood said of his decision to become a mentor.

The 30-hour training was tough and packed with information, he continued.

"I've never been a great student," he admitted. "But, it was very worthwhile. It helped immensely when I got my first case."

Don Kleinfelder, executive director for Child Advocates of Placer County, recalls that first assignment.

"Jim is a really good guy...as with all our male volunteers, he was quickly matched with a young boy who never had a good male role model," Kleinfelder said. "Jim's 10-year-old boy had some behavior issues, but Jim dealt with them really well. Jim has a lot of patience and a quiet presence that allows him to weather the storm of the youth's outbursts."

Even though the boy left the foster care system and returned home earlier this year, Wood continues to maintain contact with the youth through weekly visits.

"He's such a good kid. I'm very interested to see how he's going to grow and develop as a young man," Wood said of the connection the two have forged. "I plan on being there when he graduates from high school and college."

When Wood indicated he was ready to take on another case, Kleinfelder assigned him to one involving very serious child abuse.

"This is a long term case and the child had been moved from his placements several times," Kleinfelder said. "These children suffer from placement changes, which means new schools, new friends, new care providers. Again, Jim has been a hugely stable influence in this youth's life."

David Ramsey was 16 when he first met Wood.

"He's cool. I love hanging out with him," Ramsey, 18, said. "Going out to lunch with him was really fun. And he goes to movies I like."

Now living in his own apartment in Sacramento, Ramsey said it wasn't always about their time together. Wood was instrumental in getting him registered for college this semester.

"He helped me fill out paperwork for school," he said. "I'm grateful for that."

For Wood, the satisfaction comes in watching young men like Ramsey overcome their challenges.

"It's an honor to go out and do this job," he said. "You get to know these kids. It's horrible the kinds of stuff these kids have been through."

Still, Wood recognizes the children are resilient and benefit from the relationships they develop with their assigned mentors and advocates.

"You know you're an important part of their lives," he said.

Wood has enjoyed his experience so much that he recently convinced his wife of 33 years, Nancy, to become a volunteer. The oldest of his three children, 31-year-old Jenny, hopes to become a CASA volunteer when her own children are older, Wood added.

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"Although they have different cases, they are able to share the experience," said Kleinfelder. "They are one of six couples who work as CASAs with us."

In September 2010, Wood became the agency's second volunteer case supervisor.

"In this role he came into the office a few times a week and oversaw about 10 CASA volunteers and their cases. The volunteers definitely appreciated his calmness, his ability to listen, his strength in being organized and compassion for abused/neglected children."

As a result, Kleinfelder offered Wood a full-time paid position as a case supervisor in January.

"He now oversees 45 volunteers and 55 youth cases," he continued. "His team relies on him to help advocate in court for unmet needs, facilitate many basic needs and monitor the child's situation at school, placement and visits..."

Wood has become the agency's "poster volunteer of how men can step up and make a huge lifelong difference in the lives of Placer County foster children," Kleinfelder concluded.

For more information on volunteer opportunities with Child Advocates of Placer County, visit [www.casaplacer.org](http://www.casaplacer.org).

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### Keywords

Jim Wood, CASA, Child Advocates of Placer County, mentors, foster care

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