

## Court Report Writing

### Introduction

Arizona Revised Statute, title 8, section 522(E) states:

8-522. Dependency actions; special advocate; appointment; duties; immunity

E. A special advocate shall:

3. Gather and provide independent, factual information to aid the court in making its decision regarding what is in the child's best interest and in determining if reasonable efforts have been made to prevent removal of the child from the child's home or in reunifying the child with the child's family.

4. Provide advocacy to ensure that appropriate case planning and services are provided for the child.

Writing a court report is one of the most important responsibilities of a CASA . The court report is the official method that a Court Appointed Special Advocate uses to inform the judge about what the advocate has learned about the appointed child and family. Through the court report a CASA lets the judge know what has been happening to the child while in the court's care. The report outlines, in a standard format, what the CASA volunteer has discovered, the volunteer's assessment of the child's situation, and what the volunteer feels the court needs to do to help the child achieve a safe, permanent home.

The CASA court report becomes an official court document. It is accessible to all legal parties in the case, and provides the factual basis from which the CASA has made recommendations.

Completing the court report does not have to be a difficult task. If the notes and Contact Log are handy the volunteer can work through the report section by section. Previous reports and the case plan should also be reviewed to compare what was expected to happen with what actually occurred during the time between court appearances.

Each required section of the report is broken down and discussed in the proceeding training topics.

### Opening Section

The first section, or opening section, is where the case identifying information is recorded.

Identifying information consists of the court hearing date, the CASA's name, the county where the case is being adjudicated, the date the report will be submitted, and the JD number (a number used by the court to identify individual cases). Underneath this information should be entered the names, ages, number of placements and contacts for each child involved in the case. The number of placements should reflect all placements since the child was removed from the home (i.e. shelter care, licensed foster care and relative placements). The numbers of contacts are the number of times the CASA has had contact with the child since the last CASA court report or hearing.

See following example:

<b>Court Hearing Date:</b>	11/10/05	<b>CASA Volunteer:</b>	Harold H. Hendrick
<b>County:</b> Pima	<b>Date Submitted:</b> 10/25/05	<b>JD Number:</b> 99999	
<b>Child Name:</b>	<b>Age:</b>	<b>Total # of Placements:</b>	<b># of Contacts Since Last Report:</b>
James Ducats	7 years	3	12
Karen Ducats	4 years	3	10
Carl Ducats	10 months	1	6

### **Brief History**

The second section contains a brief history. The history of the case should include why the child or children came into the court's care. It also should contain information about the CASA.

The history must also mention the various placements that the child has had since being removed from the home. The CASA appointment date and the number of hours spent working on the case since the last report should also be included.

This section is to contain a brief history. All of the details of the child's removal are not necessary; they are to be addressed in later sections of the report or should have been addressed in previous court reports. It is not necessary to duplicate all of the information previously given to the court. CASA reports should track what has been happening in the child's life since the last report. Each report can build on what was addressed in past reports, but should contain mostly new information about what has occurred. By doing this, the judge and legal parties can follow what has been happening to the child from an independent point of view.

See following example:

<b>Brief History</b>
James, Karen, and Carl Ducats were taken into custody on May 7, 2005. A neighbor, Ms. Helen Greer, telephoned authorities when James came to her door one evening asking for food so he could feed his brother and sister. The CPS investigation found that their father was to be supervising the children, but they had been left alone for two days. Neither the mother nor the father could be located. James and Karen were placed into a shelter on 5/7/05 while Carl was placed in an emergency foster home. James and Karen were placed in a foster home on 5/13/05 and Carl was allowed to remain at the emergency foster home. On 6/10/05 James and Karen were removed from their foster home and placed in a group home. On 8/14/05 James and Karen were placed in a second foster home, but will soon be returned to the group home. This CASA volunteer was appointed to the case on 9/10/05 and has spent 37 hours on the case since being assigned.

### **Assessments**

The third section CASA provide the factual information on which they base their opinions and recommendations. This section should contain only the facts that were found during visitations, interviews, and research since the last court report. Behaviors, situations, and important information from reviewed materials are also to be described. All information should be given with its source and can include direct quotes from the people interviewed. Quotes must be correct and not taken out of context.

This section should contain descriptions of the CASA's visits with the child and the interviews with people about the case. Descriptions should include the child's placement, development (emotional and physical), academic work, and any services received. The CASA should also address the services that have been

provided to the parents. Descriptions should not include the address of where the child is staying or the last name of the foster parents. Services should be explained by the type offered, how often the child receives the services, who is providing the services, and the results of the services.

For the child's academic needs, court reports should address how the child is doing in school. Note any changes, positive or negative. Also, the report should contain descriptions of any learning disorders or special needs that have or have not been met, including the services offered for these special needs.

The Assessment Section must address a CASA's experiences with the parents of the child. Visitations with the child are to be described, how well the parents and child interact, and any services that are needed by the family to allow the child to be returned home, if appropriate.

Court reports must be objective. Any statements or observations must be supported by factual information, witnesses, and quotes. Without a basis in fact, assessments can be challenged as being biased and uninformed. Court report descriptions should also be as short and direct as feasible. Important details cannot be left out, but clear descriptions do not need redundancy.

*See following example:*

### **Assessment**

#### **James Ducats, child -- case plan: Family Reunification**

James' behavior has been deteriorating since he was removed from his mother. Initially after removal he was quiet and reserved. Now he regularly throws tantrums and refuses to listen to his foster parents. He will openly oppose whatever his foster parents ask him to do. James' attitude has gotten to the point where his current foster parents have asked for his removal. Personal interviews with the previous foster family and the current foster family confirm the personal observation that James' behavioral and emotional states get worse after each parental visit. Dr. Melrondur (James' therapist) attributes this to James' fear that he will never be returned to his mother. The doctor believes that James' tantrums and disobedience are efforts to make people put him back with his mother.

Mr. Woodbury (James' teacher) states that James is reserved in class. He does well in his coursework, but does not get involved with any other children during recess or during group activities. I asked James why he does not get involved and his response was, "Why make friends when I'm leaving here soon?"

I have been present during two parental visits by Ms. Walden and one with Mr. Ducats. James brightens up when his mom arrives. He always asks her when they get to go home together. Ms. Walden also seems very happy to see her children. They interact well and the children seem very happy to spend time with their mother. James does not interact much with his father, spending most of his time talking to his mom. James and Mr. Ducats will play catch with a football together.

During my visits with James he does not seem to understand why he was taken from home. He misses his mom and his friends and wants to return home. James appears indifferent about his father and was not concerned about only seeing him once during his removal.

#### **Karen Ducats, child -- case plan: Family Reunification**

Karen told this volunteer she was frightened by her removal from home. She does not understand why she does not get to see her mom every day. As a result she spends as much time as she can with her brother. When they are apart she is restless and appears tense. Once James arrives home from school, Karen is by his side. As James' behavior has deteriorated so has Karen's. She uses her brother as a role model and copies his

poor behavior. When James gets upset with things, Karen picks up on this and has started throwing tantrums.

During the parental visits Karen sits in her mother's lap. When they play a game Karen insists on being next to her mother and reaches out to touch her frequently. When the visits end Karen cries as her mother leaves. Karen has no contact with Mr. Ducats and does not even seem to notice he is in the room. Her focus is totally on her mother.

Karen prefers to be with her brother during my visits. I have met with her several times though before James returns from school. In my one-on-one visits with Karen she is shy and reserved. She misses her mother and really wants to go home. She draws family pictures and items from her home. She talks about how much she liked playing with certain toys and being put in bed by her mother. Mr. Ducats is noticeably absent from her drawings.

#### **Carl Ducats, infant -- case plan: Family Reunification**

Carl has been doing well in his current placement. Since there were no relatives to take Carl he has remained at the first foster home that took him in on the night he was removed. Elaine and John (foster parents) report that Carl is eating fine and is a well-behaved infant. Carl makes eye contact, faces, and smiles when someone holds him. He is not irritable and is easily soothed when upset.

Carl's mother has supervised visits with him each week. She holds him in her arms, talks to him, caresses him, and he giggles, coos, and laughs when she speaks to him.

#### **Lisa Walden, birth mother**

Ms. Walden resides in a one-bedroom apartment. She works a full-time job to earn money to raise her children. On the night her children had been removed Lisa was finishing an out-of-town weekend job for Mr. Smithe. Lisa is a model employee who Mr. Smithe says he would have a difficult time replacing.

Lisa has attended all ten of the parenting classes that had been arranged for her. She told her case manager that she has learned Donald really cannot be responsible enough to watch after the children. Prior to the children's removal, Lisa had arranged with a friend to care for the children while Lisa was at work. Donald had agreed to watch the children on the weekend of May 7th. He did not show up. Donald and Lisa do not live together.

The visits between Lisa and her three children have been very emotional. She cares about the children's well being and asks them what they have been doing since their last visitation. The older children run to their mother when she arrives. Prior to her arrival the children fidget and repeatedly ask when she will be arriving. Lisa interacts very well with all of her children. When the whole family gets together, Lisa will converse with Karen and James while holding Carl.

#### **Donald Ducats, birth father**

Donald Ducats is the father of all three children. Donald and Lisa have been dating on and off since shortly after they graduated high school. During a supervised family visit I noticed that Donald is very standoffish towards the children. He pays no attention to Carl, answers Karen's questions with short or one syllable answers, and only gets involved with James to throw balls around. Donald attended only one of the ten parenting classes that were arranged for him.

Donald told the case manager that he was supposed to be looking after the children on the weekend that they were removed from home. He did not show up on Friday because he worked late on a neighbor's car and "forgot to check on the kids." Saturday he went to an afternoon ball game and then went out celebrating the victory with his friends. Sunday morning he was feeling too bad to leave his apartment.

## Reasonable Effort

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1990 requires that "reasonable efforts" be made to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of a dependent, neglected, or abused child from the child's home and to reunify the family if the child is removed.

Reasonable Efforts: 1) to keep family together; 2) to reunite families; 3) to enable a child to have some other permanency plan.

The reasonable efforts requirement is designed to ensure that families are provided with services to prevent unnecessary disruption and foster care drift. To enforce this provision, the juvenile court must determine whether the required reasonable efforts have been made.

In the Reasonable Efforts Section of the court report, volunteers are to address several issues.

This section should contain a brief description of the case plan. It should also include any progress made and obstacles to fulfilling the case plan. If there is a separate permanency plan, it must also be described along with its progress and obstacles. The reasonable efforts section should include explanations of any services being recommended and provided to the parents and child. This explanation must state whether the services are being completed, if they are having success, and any obstacles to the success of the services provided.

Arizona Revised Statutes 8-522(E) gives CASAs the authority to determine if reasonable efforts have been made. Supportive information is to be included to substantiate the CASA's judgment. This information should come from either the Assessment Section observations or the reports from experts about how well or poorly the services have been offered and received. The CASA must clearly state an opinion regarding reasonable efforts. If they are unsure whether reasonable efforts are being made, that should also be stated.

*See following example:*

Reasonable Efforts
The case plan is to reunite the children with their biological mother, with a target date of 11/17/05. CPS has identified and assigned a parenting course to the biological parents. The mother has attended all ten of her course meetings and participated in each session. The father attended only one course and did not participate during the discussions. James has been provided with therapy to address his emotional and behavioral problems. His behavior has not improved, but Dr. Melrondur has told me James should dramatically improve once he is returned to his mother. CPS has successfully provided services and support to the family during the removal process. The only exception is Mr. Ducats, but it was his own choice not to participate in the services. Reasonable efforts have been made.

## Opinions and Concerns

The fifth section contains the CASAs opinions and concerns. This section is the only area in the court report where a CASA can discuss personal feelings about the case. This is an open forum area to mention anything that the CASA feels the judge should know that was not mentioned in earlier sections.

Comments can be on any aspect of the case that a CASA feels should be brought up. Discussion about how the case is being handled, services that should be offered that were denied, or even if the current placement is meeting the child's needs can be listed here. The CASA can mention problems that could affect the case but do not have outside evidence supporting the concern. Comments can even cover the

number of visitations the parents have or someone the CASA feels should be allowed to be an interested party.

This section is meant to be a place for personal concerns. By listing concerns, a CASA can give the judge a more personal feel for the case and how well the child is truly being served. The CASA can discuss how well other legal parties are working with the volunteer to help the child under court's supervision. Even though these are opinions, they must still be objective and should not make personal attacks. Stating and outlining problems can be the best way to allow the system to correct them. CASA opinions are important to help the system operate for the best interests of a child.

*See following example:*

<b>Opinions and Concerns</b>
<p>I believe the case plan for reunification is the correct choice for the children. Lisa Walden cares deeply for her children and they love her. The problems that James has been having do not carry over to school and I feel they will clear up once he is back in his own home with his mother.</p>
<p>The services provided have been very helpful to Lisa. She now fully understands the responsibilities for child care rest completely with her. After completing her parenting courses she knows that Donald is not responsible enough to watch after the children and she has arranged with several friends to care for the children in the event that her normal weekday caretaker is unavailable. Mr. Smithe has also offered to give Lisa more flexibility in her job so she can take care of her children if she has problems with scheduling. He knows a valuable employee when he has one. The services for James were not very beneficial for his behavior, but they did confirm that his poor behavior is based on his removal from home and not any underlying physical or mental deficiencies.</p>
<p>Kelly Samuals (case manager) has been a great help to me. Her assistance with the case file review and contact names for people was very important. She saved me many hours of seeking out that information on my own.</p>
<p>Donald Ducats has almost no regard for his children. He places his own fun and entertainment above the well being of the children. He only takes an apparent interest when the child can offer him some sort of benefit. His lack of concern for the children shows that he is their father in genetics alone. Ms. Walden has done a great job raising these children by herself.</p>

## **Recommendations**

The sixth section of the court report is the Recommendations Section. Recommendations should be specific and based on the information provided earlier in the report.

Recommendations can encompass whether the child should remain a ward of the court and whether the current placement is best for the child. Visitation schedule changes and even additional services that should be given for either the child or the parents are also items that can be included in the Recommendations Section.

The first item on the recommendation list should be a statement as to whether the child should be returned immediately to the parents or remain in the court's care. Anything else that a volunteer feels would ultimately benefit the child's well being can be recommended to the court. The benefit should have been addressed in the Assessment, Reasonable Efforts, or in the Opinions and Concerns Section. Factual information will need to be presented for a CASA's recommendations to be taken under consideration by the court. Without a factual basis, a volunteer's recommendations are nothing more than opinions and a court cannot base the future of a child on a personal opinion.

See following example:

<b>Recommendations</b>
<p>I respectfully make the following recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. That all children remain a ward of the court, committed to the care, custody, and control of the Arizona Department of Economic Security.</li><li>2. That James, Karen, and Carl be reunited with their mother in accordance with the case plan.</li><li>3. That James receives a follow-up session with the Dr. Melrondur 2 weeks after his return home.</li></ol>

## **Resources**

The seventh section contains information about all of the people directly involved with the case and the names of the people interviewed by the CASA.

Legal parties in a dependency case are only those listed in the court's Minute Entry. Legal parties include the CPS case manager, attorneys for the parents and the children, FCRB, etc. CASA court reports are distributed only to legal parties.

Interested parties are granted the right to notice of and participation in any review or hearing concerning the child. Interested parties may include therapists, foster parents, relatives, friends, etc. If the parents have attorneys, the parents are considered to be interested parties. If the parents do not have attorneys, then the parents are legal parties. Interested parties are not given copies of the CASA report nor are they allowed to be given confidential information. Only the court or CPS can decide to release information to an interested party.

Keeping an accurate and up-to-date Contact Log is very important for a CASA. The CASA will need to be able to identify people and associate the information gathered from those people several months after contact. A CASA may also need to contact those same individuals later. Educational, medical and psychological evaluations can change over time, and by dating when the information was gathered, a volunteer can be sure that the information used is the most current available.

See following example:

<b>Persons of Interest and/or Interviewed</b>
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James Ducats	Child
Karen Ducats	Child
Carl Ducats	Child
Lisa Walden	Biological Mother
Donald Ducats	Biological Father
June and Richard	James and Karen's former Foster Parents
Helen and Charles	James and Karen's Foster Parents
Elaine and John	Carl's Foster Parents
Kelly Samuals, MSW	CPS Case Manager
Alice Melrondur, PhD	Therapist for James
Fred Woodbury	School Teacher for James
Edward Smithe	Lisa Walden's employer
Maxwell Gibbs, MD	DES appointed physician
Howard Mells, Esq.	Attorney for Mother
Julie Delmont, Esq.	Attorney for Father

### Records Reviewed

The last section contains a list all of the written material that was reviewed by the CASA since the last court report.

The basic guideline for what records should be entered is any piece of material that provided information about the child the CASA represents. This material is in part what the assessments, concerns, and recommendations will be based on.

Records that are to be listed are the Child Protective Services case file, Foster Care Review Board reports, police reports, and medical records that have been read. Other records include letters written by teachers or other people about the child's behavior and welfare. Also, reviewed minute entries and case plan documents should be listed.

Exact titles and dates must be used when available. This allows the assigned judge to look up and review the same documents as the CASA.

*See following example:*

Records Reviewed	List date, title, and author of material
Psychiatrist's assessment of James	Dated 10/14/05 by Dr. Alice Melrondur
School report from James' teacher	Dated 10/4/05 by Mr. Fred Woodbury
Medical Exam report by Dr. Gibbs	Dated 8/11/05 - 8/13/03
CPS case file records	Dated 6/8/05-10/22/03
Minute Entry from Dependency Review Hearing	Dated 5/12/05

### Formatting Notes

There are several points to remember about creating a court report. The most important is the need to remain unbiased. All assessments, recommendations, and conclusions must have a factual basis. Anything written in a report could be challenged by an attorney, so supporting documentation is essential. This also gives the report the added weight of a professional presentation and even prepares a CASA to answer direct questions in court.

Court reports statewide are to be written in the approved format. This allows judges to find the CASA's analysis and evidence quickly. It also helps the volunteer verify that the report is complete.

Completing a court report is a joint effort between the CASA and the county coordinator. The CASA always needs to have the report reviewed and edited by the county coordinator. This editing process is a cooperative effort. Coordinators may have suggestions about better ways to effectively phrase issues: to help get the CASA's point across. The coordinator can also verify the court report formatting. The CASA helps the coordinator understand what has been happening in the case and makes sure that the intent of the report is maintained through the editing process. Any changes that the coordinator wishes to make in the court report should be discussed with the CASA who has written the report.

The CASA should follow these three guidelines:

1. Court reports must be given to the county program office at least 2 weeks prior to the court hearing.
2. All court reports must be reviewed by the county coordinator.
3. CASAs are not to send any information directly to the court without first going through the county program office.

**Here is a review of a complete Court Report:**

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**Court Hearing Date:** 11/10/05                      **CASA Volunteer:** Harold H. Hendrick

**County:** Pima                      **Date Submitted:** 10/25/05                      **JD Number:** 99999

<b>Child Name:</b>	<b>Age:</b>	<b>Total # of Placements:</b>	<b># of Contacts Since Last Report:</b>
James Ducats	7 years	3	12
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**Records Reviewed**                      **List date, title, and author of material**

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**Persons of Interest and/or Interviewed**

James Ducats	Child
Karen Ducats	Child
Carl Ducats	Child
Lisa Walden	Biological Mother
Donald Ducats	Biological Father
June and Richard	James and Karen's former Foster Parents
Helen and Charles	James and Karen's Foster Parents
Elaine and John	Carl's Foster Parents
Kelly Samuals, MSW	CPS Case Manager
Alice Melrondur, PhD	Therapist for James
Fred Woodbury	School Teacher for James
Edward Smithe	Lisa Walden's employer
Maxwell Gibbs, MD	DES appointed physician
Howard Mells, Esq.	Attorney for Mother
Julie Delmont, Esq.	Attorney for Father

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### Brief History

James, Karen, and Carl Ducats were taken into custody on May 7, 2005. A neighbor, Ms. Helen Greer, telephoned authorities when James came to her door one evening asking for food so he could feed his brother and sister. The CPS investigation found that their father was to be supervising the children, but they had been left alone for two days. Neither the mother nor the father could be located. James and Karen were placed into a shelter on 5/7/05 while Carl was placed in an emergency foster home. James and Karen were placed in a foster home on 5/13/05 and Carl was allowed to remain at the emergency foster home. On 6/10/05 James and Karen were removed from their foster home and placed in a group home. On 8/14/05 James and Karen were placed in a second foster home, but will soon be returned to the group home. This CASA volunteer was appointed to the case on 9/10/05 and has spent 37 hours on the case since being assigned.

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### Assessment

#### James Ducats, child -- case plan: Family Reunification

James' behavior has been deteriorating since he was removed from his mother. Initially after removal he was quiet and reserved. Now he regularly throws tantrums and refuses to listen to his foster parents. He will openly oppose whatever his foster parents ask him to do. James' attitude has gotten to the point where his current foster parents have asked for his removal. Personal interviews with the previous foster family and the current foster family confirm the personal observation that James' behavioral and emotional states get worse after each parental visit. Dr. Melrondur (James' therapist) attributes this to James' fear that he will never be returned to his mother. The doctor believes that James' tantrums and disobedience are efforts to make people put him back with his mother.

Mr. Woodbury (James' teacher) states that James is reserved in class. He does well in his coursework, but does not get involved with any other children during recess or during group activities. I asked James why he does not get involved and his response was, "Why make friends when I'm leaving here soon?"

I have been present during two parental visits by Ms. Walden and one with Mr. Ducats. James brightens up when his mom arrives. He always asks her when they get to go home together. Ms. Walden also seems very happy to see her children. They interact well and the children seem very happy to spend time with their mother. James does not interact much with his father, spending most of his time talking to his mom. James and Mr. Ducats will play catch with a football together.

During my visits with James he does not seem to understand why he was taken from home. He misses his mom and his friends and wants to return home. James appears indifferent about his father and was not concerned about only seeing him once during his removal.

#### **Karen Ducats, child -- case plan: Family Reunification**

Karen told this volunteer she was frightened by her removal from home. She does not understand why she does not get to see her mom every day. As a result she spends as much time as she can with her brother. When they are apart she is restless and appears tense. Once James arrives home from school, Karen is by his side. As James' behavior has deteriorated so has Karen's. She uses her brother as a role model and copies his poor behavior. When James gets upset with things, Karen picks up on this and has started throwing tantrums.

During the parental visits Karen sits in her mother's lap. When they play a game Karen insists on being next to her mother and reaches out to touch her frequently. When the visits end Karen cries as her mother leaves. Karen has no contact with Mr. Ducats and does not even seem to notice he is in the room. Her focus is totally on her mother.

Karen prefers to be with her brother during my visits. I have met with her several times though before James returns from school. In my one-on-one visits with Karen she is shy and reserved. She misses her mother and really wants to go home. She draws family pictures and items from her home. She talks about how much she liked playing with certain toys and being put in bed by her mother. Mr. Ducats is noticeably absent from her drawings.

#### **Carl Ducats, infant -- case plan: Family Reunification**

Carl has been doing well in his current placement. Since there were no relatives to take Carl he has remained at the first foster home that took him in on the night he was removed. Elaine and John (foster parents) report that Carl is eating fine and is a well-behaved infant. Carl makes eye contact, faces, and smiles when someone holds him. He is not irritable and is easily soothed when upset.

Carl's mother has supervised visits with him each week. She holds him in her arms, talks to him, caresses him, and he giggles, coos, and laughs when she speaks to him.

#### **Lisa Walden, birth mother**

Ms. Walden resides in a one-bedroom apartment. She works a full-time job to earn money to raise her children. On the night her children had been removed Lisa was finishing an out-of-town weekend job for Mr. Smithe. Lisa is a model employee who Mr. Smithe says he would have a difficult time replacing.

Lisa has attended all ten of the parenting classes that had been arranged for her. She told her case manager that she has learned Donald really cannot be responsible enough to watch after the children. Prior to the children's removal, Lisa had arranged with a friend to care for the children while Lisa was at work. Donald had agreed to watch the children on the weekend of May 7th. He did not show up. Donald and Lisa do not live together.

The visits between Lisa and her three children have been very emotional. She cares about the children's well being and asks them what they have been doing since their last visitation. The older children run to their mother when she arrives. Prior to her arrival the children fidget and repeatedly ask when she will be arriving. Lisa interacts very well with all of her children. When the whole family gets together, Lisa will converse with Karen and James while holding Carl.

#### **Donald Ducats, birth father**

Donald Ducats is the father of all three children. Donald and Lisa have been dating on

and off since shortly after they graduated high school. During a supervised family visit I noticed that Donald is very standoffish towards the children. He pays no attention to Carl, answers Karen's questions with short or one syllable answers, and only gets involved with James to throw balls around. Donald attended only one of the ten parenting classes that were arranged for him.

Donald told the case manager that he was supposed to be looking after the children on the weekend that they were removed from home. He did not show up on Friday because he worked late on a neighbor's car and "forgot to check on the kids." Saturday he went to an afternoon ball game and then went out celebrating the victory with his friends. Sunday morning he was feeling too bad to leave his apartment.

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### **Reasonable Efforts**

The case plan is to reunite the children with their biological mother, with a target date of 11/17/05. CPS has identified and assigned a parenting course to the biological parents. The mother has attended all ten of her course meetings and participated in each session. The father attended only one course and did not participate during the discussions. James has been provided with therapy to address his emotional and behavioral problems. His behavior has not improved, but Dr. Melrondur has told me James should dramatically improve once he is returned to his mother. CPS has successfully provided services and support to the family during the removal process. The only exception is Mr. Ducats, but it was his own choice not to participate in the services. Reasonable efforts have been made.

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### **Opinions and Concerns**

I believe the case plan for reunification is the correct choice for the children. Lisa Walden cares deeply for her children and they love her. The problems that James has been having do not carry over to school and I feel they will clear up once he is back in his own home with his mother.

The services provided have been very helpful to Lisa. She now fully understands the responsibilities for child care rest completely with her. After completing her parenting courses she knows that Donald is not responsible enough to watch after the children and she has arranged with several friends to care for the children in the event that her normal weekday caretaker is unavailable. Mr. Smithe has also offered to give Lisa more flexibility in her job so she can take care of her children if she has problems with scheduling. He knows a valuable employee when he has one. The services for James were not very beneficial for his behavior, but they did confirm that his poor behavior is based on his removal from home and not any underlying physical or mental deficiencies.

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### **Recommendations**

I respectfully make the following recommendations:

1. That all children remain a ward of the court, committed to the care, custody, and control of the Arizona Department of Economic Security.
2. That James, Karen, and Carl be reunited with their mother in accordance with the case plan.
3. That James receives a follow-up session with the Dr. Melrondur 2 weeks after his return home.

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