



## *Dora's CASA Story*

Dora became orphaned at 5 years old, when her mother died of AIDS. She went to live with her sister, Ebony, who was just 21 at the time. In July 2003, at the age of 12, Dora contracted diabetes and had two strokes. She also began developing behavioral issues. Ebony contacted DYFS and signed Dora into residential treatment facility under a "Residential Agreement" that was supposed to have a 3 to 6 month duration. Initially, the plan was for Dora to return home to live with Ebony; however, as time went on, it seemed unlikely that Ebony would be able to provide enough supervision given her own growing family and Dora's significant medical needs. Dora was placed in Cumberland Residential Hospital in Virginia. Dora remained in Cumberland Hospital for over a year and a half before the case came to the attention of the Court. At that point, the Judge ordered that a CASA volunteer be appointed for Dora. With this, Debbie became Dora's CASA. Debbie was devastated that Dora had been in a residential facility for so long. In March 2005, Debbie established contact with Dora and began searching for a family who would be willing to give her a permanent home. Debbie discovered a nurse at Cumberland Hospital who was interested in serving as a foster parent for Dora. Through Debbie's efforts, this nurse was approved through the interstate process and became licensed to be a foster parent for Dora. At this point, Dora had been in residential placement for two years. Unfortunately, after Dora was in the home for just three months, the placement failed and the nurse informed DYFS that she could not care for Dora. Luckily, though, throughout the time it took to complete the interstate process, Debbie remained vigilant in her search for others who could give Dora a forever family. Debbie contacted Ebony, Dora's sister. DYFS had discounted Ebony as a caretaker in light of the circumstances surrounding Dora's original placement and had cut off contact between the two. Ebony wanted desperately to help her sister and was now far better able to care for her. And so, on June 13, 2006, Dora returned to her sister in New Jersey. In February 2008, at the age of 16, Dora was formally adopted by her sister Ebony.

Rationale for Cost Savings: Had Debbie not been on the case and CASA not appointed, Ebony would not have been able to adopt her sister and Dora may have remained in a Residential Placement until the age of 21. Thus, the CASA saved the state the cost of residential placement for five years, which amounts to between \$632,080 and \$1,123,620, depending on the Residential Center being used.<sup>1</sup>

**Residential Treatment Facility to Adoption by Sister  
Total Cost Savings: \$632,080 to \$1,123,620 depending on the Residential  
Treatment Facility**

<sup>1</sup> FY2010 Proposed State Budget, p. D-36 shows annual cost per client for Residential Placements (between \$126,416 and \$224,724 depending on the particular facility). Even if Dora was able to transition to a Group Home until the age of 18, and an Independent Living Placement from 18 to 21, group home placements cost \$82,486 per year, and independent living placements cost \$45,925 per year. With two years in a group home and three in independent living, it would have cost the state a total of \$302,747 in hard costs for five years.