



National CASA Film List

New July 2014: The National CASA Association offers the following list of films and television programs to help improve and inspire your service to children. Almost all items on this list were suggested by volunteers and supporters via [the National CASA Facebook Page](#). *Not all films have been viewed by National CASA Staff.*

Topics touched on by each film are noted. Whenever possible, links to more information are provided for documentaries or online video.

We encourage you to submit your own suggestions via email to staff@CASAforChildren.org.

Categories:

- [Movies: Documentaries](#)
- [Movies: Drama](#)
- [Television Shows](#)
- [Short](#)
- [Movies For Kids](#)

Movies: Documentaries:

Adopted: for the life of me

(Adoption, adult adoptees)

When adoptees seek their birth families we generally think of young people in their 20's and 30's. But what about adoptees who are over 50? What about an adoptee who's 92, seeking closure on her origins before she dies?

<http://www.adoptedforthelifeofme.com/>

Ask Us Who We Are

(Foster care, voices of foster youth)

Ask Us Who We Are is a documentary film focused on the challenges and extraordinary lives of youth in foster care. The film is a reflection on loss and the search for belonging and finding family.

<http://kingdomcounty.org/portfolio-items/ask-us-3/>

Autumn's Eyes

(Foster care, poverty, incarcerated parent)

A compelling documentary about a 3-year-old girl who tries to navigate through the harsh reality of severe poverty, her teenage mother's incarceration and looming foster care.

http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/autumns_eyes

Buck (2011)

(Abuse, recovery)

An examination of the life of acclaimed 'horse whisperer' Buck Brannaman, who recovered from years of child abuse to become a well-known expert in the interactions between horses and people. <http://buckthefilm.com/>

Closure

(Adoption, race, family)

A documentary about a trans-racial adoptee who finds her birth mother, and meets the rest of a family who didn't know she existed, including her birth father. A story about identity, the complexities of trans-racial adoption, and most importantly, CLOSURE. <http://closuredocumentary.com/>

Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son about his Father

(Domestic/partner violence, murder, custody battle, international custody law)

A filmmaker decides to memorialize a murdered friend when his friend's ex-girlfriend announces she is expecting his son. <http://www.dearzachary.com/>

First Circle (2010)*(Foster care)*

This emotionally involving documentary follows the journeys of several foster children in Idaho and Oregon as they navigate the world of government social services and temporary custody, looking for love, acceptance and healing.

FYI: This film seems to be difficult to find.

Healing Neen*(Trauma, substance abuse, homelessness, mental health, legacy of child abuse)*

Healing Neen follows the amazing recovery of Tonier 'Neen' Cain from a lifetime of abuse and drug addiction to a career as a nationally-known speaker and educator on the devastation of trauma and the hope of recovery. For 19 nightmarish years, she lived on the streets, racking up 66 criminal convictions, until finally treatment for her trauma offered her a way out and up. <http://healingneen.com/>

Homeless: The Motel Kids of Orange County*(Poverty, homelessness, parenting)*

Explores the world of children who reside in discounted motels within walking distance of Disneyland, living in limbo as their families struggle to survive in one of the wealthiest regions of America. <http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/homeless-the-motel-kids-of-orange-county#/>

Hookers A Documentary*(Sexual abuse, violence against women, personal stories, first nations (Canada),*

Abridged: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xA6C1zaGiV8>)

The Hungry Heart (2013)*(Addiction, teenage substance abuse)*

The Hungry Heart provides an intimate look at the often hidden world of prescription drug addiction through the world of Vermont Pediatrician Fred Holmes who works with patients struggling with this disease.

<http://thehungryheartmovie.org/>

Inocente*(Poverty, homelessness, child welfare, immigration)*

At 15, Inocente refuses to let her dream of becoming an artist be caged by her life as an undocumented immigrant forced to live homeless for the last nine years. <http://inocentedoc.com/>

Kind Hearted Woman*(Sexual abuse, domestic/partner violence, alcoholism, custody battle, Native culture)*

In a special two-part series, acclaimed filmmaker David Sutherland creates an unforgettable portrait of Robin Charboneau, a 32-year-old divorced single mother and Oglala Sioux woman living on North Dakota's Spirit Lake Reservation. Sutherland follows Robin over three years as she struggles to raise her two children, further her education, and heal herself from the wounds of sexual abuse she suffered as a child.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kind-hearted-woman/>

Know How*(Foster care, stories written and performed by foster youth)*

Know How captures the reality of life in foster care from the point of view of those living in it. It's not a documentary nor is it fiction. It's a hybrid approach for using film to create social change. Instead of professional screenwriters and actors, these true stories are written and performed by a cast of ordinary foster care youth, and their performances are powerful, moving, and eye-opening. <http://www.knowhowmovie.com/>

Lost Sparrow*(Interracial adoption, abuse, Native children, sibling group, family secrets, domestic violence, substance abuse)*

On June 27, 1978, a 44-car freight train struck and killed two Crow Indian brothers near the quaint town of Little Falls, NY. The day before, Bobby, 13, and Tyler, 11, had disappeared. They had run away from the white, Baptist family that seven years earlier had adopted them out of a troubled home on the Crow reservation in Montana. In the documentary *Lost Sparrow*, filmmaker Chris Billing has embarked on a quest to find out what happened to his adoptive brothers, and to confront a painful family history. <http://lostsparrowmovie.com/>

Off and Running*(Interracial adoption, blended families, race, identity, teenagers)*

Off and Running tells the story of Brooklyn teenager Avery, a track star with a bright future. She is the adopted African-American child of white Jewish lesbians. Her older brother is black and Puerto Rican and her younger brother is Korean. Though it may not look typical, Avery's household is like most American homes — until Avery writes to her birth mother and the response throws her into crisis. <http://www.pbs.org/pov/offandrunning/>

Sexy, Inc.*(Sexualization of young people)*

Sophie Bissonnette's documentary analyzes the hypersexualization of our environment and its noxious effects on young people. Psychologists, teachers and school nurses criticize the unhealthy culture surrounding our children, where marketing and advertising are targeting younger and younger audiences and bombarding them with sexual

and sexist images. Sexy Inc. suggests various ways of countering hypersexualization and the eroticization of childhood and invites us to rally against this worrying phenomenon. https://www.nfb.ca/film/sexy_inc/

Trust: Second Acts in Young Lives

(Sexual abuse, drug abuse, mentors, immigration)

TRUST is about creativity and the unexpected resources inside people you might discount because they are poor, young or of color. APTP is a neighborhood theater project dedicated to helping young people reimagine their experiences on stage. Marlin's is one of incredible struggle and pain, from enduring rape as young girl, to the difficult journey of immigrating to the U.S., to further abuse at the hands of her own brother, and finally to emancipation and overcoming substance addiction. <http://trustdocumentary.org/>

Unlocking the Heart of Adoption

(Adoption, family)

The 56 minute documentary *Unlocking the Heart of Adoption* bridges the gap between birth and adoptive families through diverse personal stories of adoptees, birthparents and adoptive parents in same race and transracial adoptions interwoven with the filmmaker's story as a birthmother revealing the enormous complexities in their lives with fascinating historical background. <http://unlockingtheheart.com/www/index.htm>

Very Young Girls

(Sexual abuse, human trafficking)

The film takes us into the work of a former sexually exploited youth-turned-activist named Rachel Lloyd, who started the New York City organization GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services) to help victimized young women escape their pimps and find another way of life. <http://www.gems-girls.org/get-involved/very-young-girls>

Waiting for "Superman"

(Education)

Explores the argument that the American public education system is failing our nation's children, and explores the roles that charter schools and education reformers could play in offering hope for the future.

<http://www.takepart.com/waiting-for-superman/film>

[\(return to top\)](#)

Movies: Drama:

America (2009)

(Foster care, sexual abuse, trauma)

A biracial 17-year old boy named America, who has experienced a difficult life of foster care and sexual abuse, undergoes counseling to help him come to terms with his painful past of childhood trauma, including growing up with (and abandoned by) a crack-addicted mother and being shuffled through a series of foster homes.

Antwone Fisher

(Based on a real person, foster care, abuse, sexual abuse)

Antwone Fisher, a young navy man, is forced to see a psychiatrist after a violent outburst against a fellow crewman. During the course of treatment a painful past is revealed and a new hope begins.

Any Day Now (2012)

(Custody case, adoption, LGBT issues, substance abuse)

In the 1970s, a gay couple fights a biased legal system to keep custody of a teenager with Down Syndrome who has been abandoned by his mother.

A Beautiful Mind

(Mental illness)

After a brilliant but asocial mathematician accepts secret work in cryptography, his life takes a turn for the nightmarish.

The Blind Side

(Foster care, drug abuse, success story, based on real person)

The story of Michael Oher, a homeless and traumatized boy who became an All American football player and first round NFL draft pick with the help of a caring woman and her family.

Camp (2013)

(Foster care, abuse)

To impress a potential client, financial advisor Ken Matthews signs up to be a counselor at a camp for kids in the foster system.

Crash

(Race and class issues)

Los Angeles citizens with vastly separate lives collide in interweaving stories of race, loss and redemption.

Dolores Claiborne*(Physical abuse, sexual abuse, mother-daughter relationship)*

A big-city reporter travels to the small town where her mother has been arrested for the murder of an elderly woman that she works for as a maid.

Freedom Writers*(Education, race, 'at-risk' teens, based on real person)*

A young teacher inspires her class of at-risk students to learn tolerance, apply themselves, and pursue education beyond high school.

Gimme Shelter (2013)*(Based on true story, teen pregnancy, foster care)*

A pregnant teenager flees her abusive mother in search of her father, only to be rejected by her dad and forced to survive on the streets until a compassionate stranger offers a hopeful alternative.

Gracie's Choice*(Teen taking care of siblings, drugs, incarceration)*

A teenage girl tries to raise her three half-brothers and 1 half-sister on her own after their drug-addicted mother is sent to jail

I Am Sam*(Parenting, mental disability, custody battle)*

A mentally retarded man fights for custody of his 7-year-old daughter, and in the process teaches his cold-hearted lawyer the value of love and family.

Like Dandelion Dust*(Adoption, custody case)*

A drama that explores the different meanings of being a parent through the gritty, realistic lives of the struggling, blue-collar Porters, and the privileged Campbell family. Their lives intersect, intertwine and collide, all for the love of a little boy.

Losing Isaiah*(Interracial adoption, custody case, substance abuse, parental rights)*

Newborn Isaiah is found in a dumpster with cocaine in his system. Three years later, a bitter custody battle develops between the family who has adopted and raised him and the mother who has gone through rehab and says she never intended to give him up.

Moonrise Kingdom*(Foster care, loss of parents, adoption)*

Set on an island off the coast of New England in the 1960s, as a young boy and girl fall in love they are moved to run away together. Various factions of the town mobilize to search for them and the town is turned upside down -- which might not be such a bad thing.

Mother and Child (2009)*(Adoption)*

A drama centered around three women: A 50-year-old woman, the daughter she gave up for adoption 35 years ago, and an African American woman looking to adopt a child of her own.

Ordinary Miracles (2005)*(Foster care, adoption, teenagers)*

A troubled teen is scooped up by a tough San Diego judge whose conscience causes her to bring the girl home with her to live. Together they face insecurities and personal problems to forge a special bond.

Precious*(Poverty, abuse, sexual abuse, teen parent, custody issues, education)*

In New York City's Harlem circa 1987, an overweight, abused, illiterate teen who is pregnant with her second child is invited to enroll in an alternative school in hopes that her life can head in a new direction.

The Pursuit of Happyness*(Poverty, homelessness, parenting, based on real person)*

A struggling salesman takes custody of his son as he's poised to begin a life-changing professional endeavor.

Reign Over Me*(Post-traumatic stress, grief)*

A man who lost his family in the September 11 attack on New York City runs into his old college roommate. Rekindling the friendship is the one thing that appears able to help the man recover from his grief.

Secrets & Lies (1996)*(Adoption, multi-racial families, adult adoptees, class issues)*

A successful black woman in London traces her birth mother to a lower-class white woman. The woman denies having given a child up for adoption; emotions run high as everyone's secrets are exposed.

Short Term 12

(Foster care, group home life)

A 20-something supervising staff member of a residential treatment facility navigates the troubled waters of that world alongside her co-worker and longtime boyfriend.

Temple Grandin

(Autism)

A biopic of Temple Grandin, an autistic woman who has become one of the top scientists in the humane livestock handling industry.

White Oleander

(Neglect, foster care, group home, substance abuse)

A teenager journeys through a series of foster homes after her mother goes to prison for committing a crime of passion.

[\(return to top\)](#)

Television Series:

The Fosters

(Foster care, adoption, interracial adoption, LGBT families)

A multi-ethnic family mix of foster, adopted, and biological kids are being raised by two moms.

The Guardian

(Child welfare work, abuse)

Nick Fallin is a hotshot lawyer working at his father's Pittsburgh law firm. Unfortunately, the high life has gotten the best of Nick. Arrested for drug use, he's sentenced to do 1,500 hours of community service, he's now The Guardian - a part-time child advocate at Legal Aid Services, where one case after another is an eye-opening instance of kids caught up in difficult circumstances.

Law & Order: SVU

(Assault, sexual assault, abuse, neglect)

This show introduces the Special Victims Unit, an elite squad of NYPD detectives who investigate sexually related crimes.

Our America with Lisa Ling

Documentary series on marginal groups, including nontraditional families of many types. In 2014, aired a special on foster care.

[\(return to top\)](#)

Short:

Foster Stories (23 min)

(Foster care)

Four people, two teenagers, a twenty-two year old and a thirty-nine year old all live or lived in foster care. The director journeys through their separate lives searching for a common experience of coming of age in foster care, using her own life experience to ask questions about the most hidden effects of this transitory life style.

http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/foster_stories

ReMoved (13 min)

(Foster care, physical abuse, siblings)

<http://vimeo.com/73172036>

Additional Resources:

- [National CASA's interview with filmmaker](#)
- [Suggested Discussion Questions](#)
- [Suggestions for Using ReMoved at a CASAGAL Program from National CASA Conference Attendees](#)

[\(return to top\)](#)

Movies For Kids:

Anne of Green Gables

(Adoption)

An orphan girl, sent to an elderly brother and sister by mistake, charms her new home and community with her fiery spirit and imagination.

Annie

(Adoption)

Broadway musical based on the Little Orphan Annie comic strip. A young orphan girl's adventures in finding a family that will take her.

Despicable Me

(Adoption)

When a criminal mastermind uses a trio of orphan girls as pawns for a grand scheme, he finds their love is profoundly changing him for the better.

Hotel for Dogs

(Foster care, poor foster parenting, siblings, adoption)

Animals are strictly forbidden at Andi and her little brother Bruce's foster home. But for Friday, the adorable dog they secretly care for, they're ready to risk everything.

Kung-Fu Panda Series

(Adoption, cross-species parenting)

In the Valley of Peace, Po the Panda finds himself chosen as the Dragon Warrior despite the fact that he is obese and a complete novice at martial arts.

Meet the Robinsons

(Adoption, family)

Lewis is an orphan and a brilliant inventor who meets a mysterious stranger from the future named Wilbur Robinson. Together they team up to track down Bowler Hat Guy in a showdown that ends with an unexpected twist of fate.

If you have comments about this list, please email them to staff@nationalcasa.org.

[\(return to top\)](#)

National CASA Association | 800-628-3233 | 100 West Harrison, North Tower, Suite 500, Seattle, WA 98119 | staff@casaforchildren.org

National CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) ©2015. The National CASA logo, CASA®, "A Powerful Voice in a Child's Life," "Stand Up for an Abused Child," "Speak Up for a Child," "Light of Hope" and "Give the Light of Hope to a Child" are all registered trademarks of National CASA.