



Gracie's Journey

Case Study

Case Study: Gracie's Journey to Healing and Hope

Some children make you work extremely hard for a smile, a laugh, or even a glimmer of happiness.

8-year-old Gracie* is one of those children—and no one would blame her after hearing the story of what she's been through. From a very young age, Gracie was exposed to countless instances of domestic violence. Her parents' relationship was tumultuous, further complicated by drug and alcohol abuse. At seven years old, the court determined that Gracie was not safe in her home and placed her into a foster home while her parents worked toward recovery from their addictions and aimed to rebuild their parenting and relationship skills.

CASA volunteer Brenda* immediately began advocating for Gracie, but it quickly became clear that Gracie was a deeply stoic child—one that Brenda had never encountered in over 10 years of volunteering. It was a challenge: How could Brenda help this child experience the happiness and innocence every child deserves? How could she help Gracie simply be a child again?

*Names have been changed to protect the identity of the child.



In an effort to bring some joy into Gracie's life, Brenda gifted her a brand-new backpack and matching water bottle for back-to-school, thanks to generous donors of the CASA program. Gracie's reaction was a quiet "thank you" before she moved on—no smile, no excitement.

Then, Gracie was suspended from school for fighting.

Determined to find a way to help, Brenda researched therapeutic options and discovered horse-riding classes, which are often used to help children process trauma. Brenda worked tirelessly to ensure all the necessary paperwork was completed, and Gracie's first lesson was scheduled.

And then, it happened—the moment Brenda had been waiting for.

As Gracie interacted with the horses, a sense of awe overtook her. She treated the animals gently, with compassion and care. As she sat atop the horse with a giant smile on her face, it was evident that this was exactly what Gracie needed.

For Brenda, seeing Gracie's transformation was a testament to the power of persistence, love, and hope. It was the beginning of a new chapter in Gracie's life, one where healing and resilience could take root.

Though Gracie's journey in foster care is far from over, there is now hope. Her parents continue working toward reunification, though there are many challenges ahead. But now, Gracie has new tools and an outlet to begin working through her past trauma. Brenda remains committed to advocating for Gracie's safety and well-being every step of the way.

For now, Brenda's greatest joy is simply seeing Gracie smile—a small but significant sign that healing is possible and that brighter days lie ahead.