



## Volunteer Spotlight: Megen Noll, CASA Advocate - Sioux City

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Megen had been looking for an organization she could become heavily involved with where she could make a difference in the lives of children. After talking with a friend who was a CASA, she became a CASA Advocate, and has been for almost two years now.

Megen is a stay at home mom and works part-time for her husband from home. Her “mom” role often finds her driving the “bus” for kids to practices and pickups. But it extends beyond her own kids, as her house is the ‘hangout house’ once winter ends, and she is known for randomly picking up kids for DQ or arcade trips. This means she is a part of a lot of conversations with kids. These kids easily confide in her, knowing they can trust her and that she cares. Megen feels that becoming a CASA has helped her be a better communicator with all kids; listening closely, knowing how to ask the right questions, and knowing how to engage with them without being annoying ;0). Megen has found this to be true on her CASA cases as well. The girls she has advocated for (ages 12-18) have found in Megen a listening ear, someone they can talk to, and someone to share with. Megen has found that holding them accountable, listening, and encouraging them has helped them.

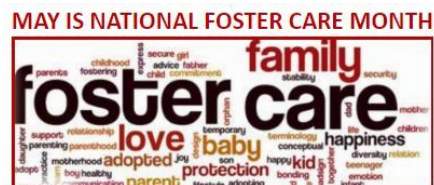
Megen looks forward to the girl’s smiles when she sees them. The text messages she receives from the children are full of excitement about things they have achieved and the calls from the parents are full of excitement when they complete something that gets them one step closer to being the best parent they can be. The thank you’s from extended family members have been gratifying. Megen recently received a message from a mom (whose case was dismissed) expressing appreciation and thanking her for her involvement even though as mom put it, “we butted heads”, due to things CASA reported and mom’s need to be accountable. Megen has been able to stay focused on the child’s best interest, which has made her a successful advocate; she finds it satisfying just knowing that she has done everything she can for these families.

One of the biggest challenges Megen has faced was not fully understanding addicts and addictions, stating, “It took me doing lots of research and listening, to start to understand more.” Another challenge she faced was understanding that her ‘perfect’ isn’t someone else’s ‘perfect’ and that neither way is right or wrong. She is careful to “observe my surroundings and adjust accordingly.” Megen believes being a CASA has benefited her in other parts of her life, such as her go-go-go personality. She struggles with how slow-moving the system can be, as she likes same day responses

and results “now”. Megen says she has “adjusted” but her experience and advice to address this is “definitely stay on top of everything and hold all parties accountable.”

On most of Megen’s cases, she has been the only consistent person involved in the case, stating, “In one case alone we went through two DHS workers and three FSRP workers.” CASA Coordinator Amy Hennies stated, “People like Megen show the kids that someone cares and is there fighting for what is in their best interest.”

Megen believes CASA Advocates give kids a positive outlook. “We become their person when sometimes they feel like they have no one. We give the hopeless, hope. We show these kids that someone is worried about them, someone wants to help them, and they have a voice with us.” Thank you Megen for your faithful commitment to CASA and the children and families you have served.



Dear Foster Parents of Iowa,

There are few words that can adequately express our deep appreciation for the care you provide to our system’s children. You answer a call, open your door and welcome a child into your lives ~ often during a time when there are no others to do so. You claim the child as your own and by loving and attaching and demonstrating that you are someone they can trust, you give them the ability to love, attach and trust. It is difficult for most of us to imagine choosing the almost inevitability of a broken heart, but **THANK YOU** for choosing to love, and let go, and serve another child, and another. You are irreplaceable!

We know there are children in Iowa who need foster parents now. We ask that our readers encourage friends, family, and acquaintances who may be interested in learning more to contact: [DHS Foster Care and Adoption](#).

## Monthly Morsels and Musings From the Child Advocacy Board Administrator



### Governor Reynolds Signs Guardianship and Conservatorship Reform Legislation

In a ceremony on May 1, 2019 Governor Reynolds signed legislation that transfers jurisdiction over minor guardianship from Probate Court to Juvenile Court. The Child Advocacy Board provided endorsement and support of this legislative change. Board Chair Beth Myers and Vice Chair Wayne Schellhammer appeared at a number of legislative subcommittee and committee hearings to speak in support of the legislation. The move of this responsibility provides to children and youth who are placed under state guardianship the benefit of having the one child-one judge philosophy of the juvenile court applied for these young people. This approach allows greater continuity in court decisions and direction along. It also brings the wisdom of judges who are steeped in knowledge of the traumatic impact

separation from the family can have on the child.

The change in the law also ensures additional protections of the rights of all parties in guardianship cases, that each appointed guardian will develop a care plan specific to the needs of each child, and that the guardian’s responsibility to report on the care plan will not be waived. These protections guard against problems that emerged when children were under the jurisdiction of the probate court. The changes in the law were based on over 200 recommendations made by the Supreme Court Task Force on Guardianship and Conservatorship reform. I was honored to be appointed by the Supreme Court to act as one representative of child advocacy interests on the Task Force.

Pictured above with Governor Reynolds at the signing ceremony is Professor Josephine Gittler, from University of Iowa Law School. Professor Gittler along with then-Professor Jerry Foxhoven provided coordination and support of the work of the Task Force. Professor Gittler continued to shepherd the development of legislation based on the Task Force recommendations and guide the proposal through the legislative process. With the Governor's signature, the reforms are now the law of the land.

This is a good day for Iowa's vulnerable children.

**Jim Hennessey**

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May 2019

ICAB Movie Month



*In the movie, Instant Family, when Pete (Mark Wahlberg) and Ellie (Rose Byrne) decide to start a family, they stumble into the world of foster care adoption. They hope to take in one small child but when they meet three siblings, including a rebellious 15-year-old girl (Isabela Moner), they find themselves speeding from zero to three kids overnight. Now, Pete and Ellie must hilariously try to learn the ropes of instant parenthood in the hopes of becoming a family. INSTANT FAMILY is inspired by the real events from the life of writer/director Sean Anders and also stars Octavia Spencer, Tig Notaro and Margo Martindale.*

Instant Family is based on the real-life story of Director Sean Anders and his wife, Beth, who adopted children from the foster care system. The movie also offers a closer look at youth adoption from the perspective of Maraide Green, a young woman who was adopted as a youth. Ms. Green served as a consultant and production assistant on the film.

To hear about the making of the film from Sean and Maraide, please <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRGufu0nfY>. You can also hear more from Maraide in her own words at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wxs9Rc0dYDY>.

In recognition of and respect for the difference CASA Advocates make in children's life, the Instant Family website includes a link to learn more about becoming a CASA. Please visit <http://www.instantfamily.org/learnmore.html> to learn more the work that has grown out of this movie: You can also keep track of what's happening on the Instant Family's Facebook page.

You can view *Instant Family* on Amazon Prime, rent it at a Red Box or stream it.

**We hope you enjoy ICAB's Movie Month! As an incentive to participate, once per year, CASA Advocates with at least one year of experience, may receive 2 hours toward the required 12 hours of continuing education for reading one of the books or watching one of the movies highlighted in our newsletter. You will find the form for getting credit at this link:**

[https://childadvocacy.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2017/07/continued\\_learning\\_tracking\\_sheet.docx](https://childadvocacy.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2017/07/continued_learning_tracking_sheet.docx)



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## Supporting Children and Families Through Foster Care Reviews

As we spend time this month recognizing the many foster parents, family members, mentors, policymakers and child welfare professionals who help find permanent homes and lifelong connections for children and youth in foster care, we also acknowledge the local foster care review board volunteers throughout Iowa who strive to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of children in out-of-home placements. Local review board volunteers collaborate with

interested parties to review case planning progress, identify areas of need for children and families and make recommendations for supports and services to address unmet goals of the case permanency plan.



\* This is not a unique number of children as some have more than one foster care review each year.

We extend our sincere thank you to our local review board volunteers who donate their time to advocate for permanency for Iowa's most vulnerable citizens.

## Trainer's Corner

### **For FCRB & CASA Advocates: May is National Foster Care Month**



May is National Foster Care Month—a time to acknowledge the foster parents, family members, volunteers, mentors, policymakers, child welfare professionals, and other members of the community who help children and youth in foster care find permanent homes and connections. It is also a time to focus on ways to create a bright future for the more than 440,000 children and youth across the United States in foster care.

This year, the theme for National Foster Care Month is “Foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents.” Resources on the National Foster Care Month website emphasize how the child welfare system—through community engagement, collaborative relationships, and targeted support services—can strengthen families, improve well-being, and increase the likelihood of successful reunification. View the [resources](#).

While children are placed in foster care, it is critical to advocate that siblings have consistent contact with one another if they are unable to be placed together. This promotes resilience and strengthens ties to their identity and history.

*Experts estimate that 23% to 75% of foster care children with siblings are placed separately at any given time, and that separation is more likely in traditional family foster care than in kinship care.*

Separation from a sibling can be an additional loss that brings its own stress, grief, and fear during an already turbulent time in a child's life. Read more on [The Importance of Sibling Relationships](#) here.

### **FCRB and CASA Advocacy in Action**



- Recommend joint placement of children when it is in the best interest of the sibling group.
- Be aware that there are many types of siblings and only the child knows the value of each relationship. Deep bonds can be formed with having a shared history with full-, step-, half- or non-siblings.
- Gather information from the child on the importance and closeness of a particular sibling bond.
- Recognize and respect cultural and circumstantial differences in defining sibling relationships.
- If siblings cannot be placed together, advocate for siblings to have access to one another as much as possible. In-person meetings, video calls, or phone contact are instrumental in maintaining sibling connections.

To listen to engaging first-person perspectives from children, youth, families, and professionals with child welfare system experience, click on [Real Life Stories](#). These narratives highlight the concept of supportive relationships as key factors in achieving family stability, individual success, and maintaining family connections.



**For CASA Advocates: In-Service Training Credit**

To build upon your advocacy knowledge and skills for working with sibling groups, we offer *Keeping Children Together in Foster Care*. CASA Advocates can request this training from their Local Coordinator.

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**Please print off and use to recruit a new volunteer!**



"I considered becoming a foster parent, but I was unable to because...,  
but I still want to help."

Volunteer to become a CASA Advocate who speaks up for the children who have been abused and neglected and find themselves involved in the child welfare system through no fault of their own.

Contact 866-469-2522



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