



Dear FCRB and CASA Volunteers, Judges presiding over Juvenile Court, DHS caseworkers, CPS workers, Adoption workers, service providers, GALs and attorneys,

These last few months have brought significant challenges to the work that is done on behalf of children and families. At times, it has seemed somewhat impossible to move forward. We have wondered how we will do all that is necessary to serve those involved in our child welfare and juvenile court systems.

If one watches the evening news or tries to explain the current state of the world in which we live, it can easily overshadow the good that exists. But by definition, all work done in the name of protecting children and keeping families safely together, is well worth the effort ~ it is good.

One may wonder how even the smallest act of volunteering can make a difference when there is so much suffering and injustice occurring around us. But if we meet someone at their point of need and help do what we can to give them hope, we can all benefit from the positive building up of others in our communities.

Thank you for your dedication and for helping to bridge the gap between Covid19 and the lives of Iowa's children and families in need. As things begin to reopen in Iowa, stay safe in your service to others.

ICAB Staff

From the Bench

Q & A with Judge Kevin Parker of Indianola. He is a District Associate Judge in Judicial District 5A of Iowa and was appointed to the bench in 2005. Judge Parker presides over juvenile court cases in Warren and Madison Counties.

Q. What factors do you consider when determining whether to assign a CASA to a case?

A. I try to consider the complexity of the case. For instance, our drug-related cases can be very difficult and involved. The parents aren't always thinking right until they can get into a treatment program and begin their recovery. A CASA helps the court stay on top of such a challenging situation.

Q. What benefits do you believe the CASA program provides you and the juvenile court system?

A. The CASA program has been very helpful to the courts. I noticed and believed this when I was in the County Attorney's office, but I've come to believe it even more since I've been on the bench. CASAs are just so thorough. They really put in the time and effort for these children. Caseworkers orchestrate services but that's about all they are able to do with their number of cases, and the FSRP workers don't necessarily have the time some families need. But a CASA pulls it all together and really is the voice of the kids.

Q. What advice would you give someone considering volunteering as an Advocate with CASA? **A.** I would tell them to sign up. We need them. We have some difficult cases they could really make a difference on. And they will be in good company. I've really enjoyed the people I've gotten to know over the years - the coordinators and the volunteers.



Volunteer Spotlight: Cindi Smith, CASA Advocate

How did you become interested in serving as a CASA Advocate?

"The Evelyn Miller case (a five-year-old girl who was sexually abused and murdered by her mother's boyfriend in Floyd County in 2005) really bothered me and I couldn't figure out why no one knew she was being sexually abused, especially since DHS was making visits to the home. I later saw an article in the paper about the CASA program and decided as soon as I retired, I would apply to become a CASA to try to help children like Evelyn."

How long have you been involved in your current volunteer role?

"I've been a CASA for a little over four years."

Tell us about the experiences you have had or work you have done that has helped you to be ready for your job as a child advocate.

"I worked at Quaker Oats for 37 years and had no prior experience advocating for children other than my own family. I wouldn't want anyone to think they need previous experience of any kind to be CASA volunteer. All you need is the desire to be a voice and advocate for children who have been abused and/or neglected, everything else can be learned in training."

What do you find rewarding about your (CASA or FCRB) experience?

"My reward in being a CASA is knowing I'm making a difference in these children's lives. When something happens or is discovered in a case and I realize it probably wouldn't have happened or been disclosed if I hadn't been assigned to advocate for these children, I know I'm making a difference in their lives."

What do you find challenging about this work, and how do you deal with the challenge?

"One challenge is trying to decipher fact from fiction and people's perceptions, and to remain unbiased. Children won't usually tell you what's going on at home because they are trying to protect their parents no matter how horrific the situation is, or they are too young or lack communication skills because of disabilities or severe neglect. Finding the

truth isn't easy and it takes a lot of investigation and observation. Another challenge is when you are trying to be the child's voice and what they want is not in their best interest. To deal with that challenge you need to have built trust with the child so they know you are advocating what is best for them even if they don't agree, and you need to be upfront with them."

Has being involved as a CASA Advocate been a benefit to you in other parts of your life?

"When I applied to be a CASA, I had no idea how much impact a volunteer position could have. If I would have known this sooner, I wouldn't have waited until I retired to become a CASA volunteer. People have said to me, 'I could never do what you do as a CASA, it would be too depressing.' I won't say it's easy, but I can't think of any volunteer role more rewarding than helping children who have no one to stand up and speak for them, and help make sure they have a permanent, safe, loving and nurturing home."

In what ways do you think our programs can improve the lives of the children we work with?

"Besides advocating to keep them safe and find permanency, a CASA is usually the one consistent person in these children's lives who see them on a regular basis and once they figure out you are there because you care about them and they matter, you are helping them build self-worth and positive feelings about themselves. I wish every foster child had a CASA; I think it would make a big difference in their lives."

In reflecting on Cindi's work as a CASA volunteer, Coordinator Jennifer Gericke stated that Cindi is very deserving to be in the Volunteer Spotlight because of all her hard work. She said, "I can't begin to count the hours of dedicated time she has spent in meetings with the kids and their respective team members. Throughout her service to the children she advocates for, she continues to epitomize what great CASA's do and the positive impact they can have."

Thank you Cindi for your incredible commitment to making such a huge difference in the life of children!



Issued: 2020 06 15

**CASA Programming During Covid-19 Pandemic
Guidance for Advocates and Coaches**

If comfortable, CASA Volunteers MAY resume in-person volunteer activities effective immediately, provided criteria below are met. In-person volunteer activities are defined as face-to-face child visits, parent and other interested party visits and visiting the CASA office or training location.

Criteria required for in-person CASA volunteer activity:

1. When visiting a child in-person, the volunteer has spoken with the child's custodian and has received permission to enter the home.
2. When visiting a parent or other interested party, the volunteer has spoken with the interested party and has received permission to enter the home or business of the party.
 - a. Please ensure the space allows for the standard six (6) feet social distancing practice.
3. The volunteer nor any person in the volunteer's home is feeling sick (no fever, cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste/smell or other symptoms defined by the CDC) and no one has been diagnosed or tested positive for Covid-19 in the previous 14 days.

4. If the volunteer or any person in their home develops symptoms in the time between making the appointment to visit and the scheduled appointment time, the volunteer will cancel the visit.
5. If the volunteer or any person in their home becomes sick, they will avoid in-person volunteer activity for 14 days.
6. If the volunteer develops symptoms or tests positive up to 14 days post CASA activity, they will let their CASA Coordinator know immediately so the agency can conduct contract tracing.
7. Drop-in, unscheduled visits for children and families are not allowed at this time.
 - a. If there is a concern that would warrant an unannounced visit, please contact DHS or law enforcement to conduct a child welfare check.
8. The local CASA Coordinator will have face masks available for any volunteer who wishes to use face coverings during any of their in-person volunteer activity.
9. A family member or custodian may request the volunteer wear a face mask during the visit. In this situation, the volunteer will need to wear a mask.
10. In-person activities other than court attendance will not be required at this time.
 - a. If the volunteer does not wish to visit in-person, a minimum of a monthly virtual visit or telephone call with the child is still required.

1 Exception to in-person requirements: Per National CASA/GAL Association Standards, if a court hearing is scheduled to be conducted in-person, the CASA Advocate, Coach or Coordinator is required to be present in-person to ensure the child has an equal voice in the courtroom. If the CASA Advocate is not comfortable or is unable to attend a court hearing in person, please contact the CASA Coach or Coordinator to schedule an alternate person to attend the hearing in person.

Issued: 2020 06 15

CASA Offices and training spaces

CASA staff will begin returning to their offices on July 6, 2020. CASA offices will have facemasks and disinfecting products to assist with office sanitation.

When visiting the CASA office or training space, bear in mind CASA Staff generally have no authority over common areas such as elevators, restrooms or waiting areas. Please plan accordingly when using common areas in buildings.

Beyond July 2020

Current restrictions on in-person CASA-related activities are lifted effective June 15, 2020. The CASA Program continues to monitor the situation. We are hoping and presently expect to resume mandatory in-person child visits in August 2020. If you have questions or concerns about this change, please talk with your coordinator.



Melissa Loehr, CASA/FCRB Coordinator, in the western region resigned from our organization in early April 2020. The

Iowa Child Advocacy Board is not able to move forward with hiring for the position vacated by Ms. Loehr which has caused some difficult decisions to be made regarding FCRB programming in the western region.

Effective August 1, 2020, the following changes will be implemented by the Child Advocacy Board:

1. The existing Kossuth - Emmet - Palo Alto board will be disbanded. Two of these counties will combine with adjacent boards within the region.
2. Palo Alto cases will be reviewed by the newly combined Clay-O'Brien-Palo Alto board.
3. Emmet cases will be reviewed by the newly combined Dickinson-Osceola-Emmet board.

Kathy Fritz, CASA/FCRB Coordinator, will provide coordination and oversight of four local FCRBs to include the Clay Cluster, Dickinson Cluster, Buena Vista and Cherokee-Ida. Carmen Cameron will continue to provide board support.

Due to the distance Kossuth is from the newly combined boards, citizen foster care review board programming will no longer be available in Kossuth County as of 8/1/2020. These decisions were not made lightly and have an impact on our FCRB volunteers and children served by the Board. Plans for combining counties, where feasible, allows us to continue to provide as much FCRB programming as possible with our current staff.

We extend a special thank you to the members of the Kossuth-Palo Alto-Emmet (Algona) board for their dedication and commitment to the children in foster care from their local communities. Members are *Ruth Ann Loebach, Anesa McGregor, Roberta Hersom, Judy Christensen, and Linda Koppie*. This Board will hold its final meeting on July 15. We sincerely appreciate all they have done as foster care reviewers.

Iowa Child Advocacy Board
321 East 12th Street
4th Floor Lucas Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

childadvocacy@dia.iowa.gov