



Volunteer Spotlight - Doug Cameron, CASA Advocate & FCRB Member

When Doug Cameron was an elementary school principal, he witnessed the positive work of both the CASA Advocate and FCRB Member volunteer positions in advocating for children in foster care, and he became interested in serving.

Doug and his wife adopted their youngest daughter, Kim, twenty years ago, when she was a ten-year-old in foster care. When he retired, he knew it was time to give back to the system that had helped her so much. Doug states, "A lot of people fail to realize that CASA and FCRB are in place to help children who are in terrible situations in their lives to be as comfortable as humanly possible. I knew this through personal experience and knew it was something I wanted to do and had to do." Doug has been involved as a CASA Advocate and FCRB Member for ten years.

As to what helped him be ready to do his job as a child advocate, Doug believes it was his 38 years as an elementary school teacher and principal. In these jobs he had the opportunity to see children who lived in a variety of environments. He said, "I learned early that one should never make snap judgments about children and their family circumstances. Also, we adopted Kim who attended my school when she was ten years old. A lot of people expressed how fortunate Kim was to be in our home. I learned quickly that we were the fortunate ones, not Kim. She started life over, a difficult task for anyone, let alone a ten-year-old child. I learned more from Kim than she did from me I am sure."

When asked what Doug finds rewarding about his CASA/FCRB experience, Doug aptly answers that the rewards are difficult to measure because of the fragile situations involved. He truly believes being a CASA and FCRB Member has made him realize that despite terrible circumstances, there is good in everyone. An example Doug shared is about 'Amy' (name changed). "Amy was part of one of my CASA cases. She was a tough 15-year-old. In her words, she 'was not going to take any shit off of anybody.' But, she was very nurturing to her little brother, and when her brother was getting picked on she handled herself appropriately and firmly despite wanting to 'beat the crap out of the bully'. She was not the hard case people thought she was."

Doug also shared that meeting some amazing counselors, social workers, foster parents, parents, attorneys and teachers, all of whom work very hard for children, has been rewarding as well.

In talking about challenges of this work, Doug said for him it is to remain unattached, but not detached. He explains that to be "detached" sends the message to families and children that you don't care; to be "unattached" shows caring but not overstepping beyond established boundaries. He finds it sometimes difficult to step back and say, "I can't fix this." Another challenge Doug mentioned is that he is sometimes familiar with the parents of children he sees in his CASA/FCRB roles that were his former students, and he finds this a bit awkward.

Doug believes being involved as a CASA Advocate and FCRB Member has most definitely benefited him in other parts of his life. He states, "I feel I have greater respect for the circumstances in which people live. Also, I am pretty quick to jump to the defense of those people who work within the foster care system."

As to the ways Doug thinks our programs can improve the lives of the children we work with, he said, "We ... and I mean all of us, need to take a more active role in recruiting foster parents, CASA Advocates and FCRB Members."

Having recently attended Family Drug Court in Ottumwa, Doug would like to see every county receive funding for this, as it holds parents accountable in a positive manner.

Cara Galloway, ICAB Coordinator, and Linda Yates, FCRB Facilitator, are very appreciative of Doug's service. Linda shared, "Doug Cameron is very committed to helping his community. He was involved in the education system for a very long time, so he knows many of the parents that come before the Board. They are thankful to have someone they recognize and that has advocated for them in the past through their experience with Doug in the education system." We at ICAB are very grateful for Doug's life of service and years devoted to children in need.

FCRB 2019 Volunteer Satisfaction Survey Summary

In June 2019, the Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) invited FCRB members to complete a Volunteer Satisfaction Survey. There was a 43% response rate statewide. While we appreciate all the feedback and suggestions provided by FCRB members, here are a few highlights from this year's respondents.



- The majority of respondents are motivated to volunteer for FCRB because they want to make a difference in the lives of children from their communities. One noted, *"I want to be the voice of kids that would not normally have a voice."*
- 90% agreed that they have the support and guidance needed to carry out the volunteer role.
- 89% agreed that they feel they are a valued member of the ICAB organization. Several comments included a desire to feel more valued by courts and the child welfare system.
- 82% indicated they are using the semi-digital method for accessing case file information. Comments shared included favorable remarks about going to partial digital, as well as remarks about wishing ICAB would return to hard copy files only for volunteers.
- 93% indicate that they receive training that adequately prepares them for their volunteer role.

Respondents were asked to identify challenges and suggestions for ways to improve their volunteer experience and support from staff. Responses ranged from challenges new board members face to the process changes that have occurred with the FCRB program the past two years. The most commented challenges were:

- Lack of in-person attendance by interested parties, especially DHS case managers and Guardians ad litem.
- Lack of current case information or receiving the information too late to be prepared for reviews.
- Keeping up with training requirements; many noted that training on local services and practices would be beneficial.
- Using a semi-digital system to access case files.

The FCRB Program Committee will be working to prioritize responses from this survey and developing plans to address key items to improve the FCRB process and value within the child welfare system. Thank you to all FCRB members who took time to complete the survey and offer their candid and insightful responses.



Welcome to Our New Volunteers!

Grace Ahlers, CASA, Johnson	Ashley Lampe, CASA, Clinton
Kaisa Baker, CASA, Johnson	Irene Maryland, CASA, Emmet
Stacie Buchanan, CASA, Black Hawk	Gina McDaniel, CASA, Scott
Lauren Chiles, CASA, Black Hawk	June Mikkelson, CASA, Crawford
Kelli Collier, CASA, Woodbury	John Murphy, CASA, Dubuque
Virginia Dupuis, CASA, Des Moines	Misty Nissen, CASA, Wright
Cassandra Hines, CASA, Plymouth	Michael Norton, CASA, Story
Lindsey Holm, CASA, Polk	Chloe Olszewski, CASA, Johnson
Jennifer Hughes, CASA, Woodbury	Kathleen Suehl, CASA, Clinton
Deborah Koua, CASA, Polk	Kaela Wiig, CASA, Woodbury



SEPTEMBER is National Recovery Month. This long-standing national observance promotes the societal benefits of prevention, treatment, and recovery for substance use and mental disorders, celebrates people in recovery, lauds the contributions of treatment and service providers, and promotes the message that recovery in all its forms is possible. Here we share: *A Letter from a Recovering Addict*

Dear FCRB and CASA Volunteers,

I have had the gift of having both a CASA Advocate assigned to my children's case and have appeared twice before a FCRB. When this all began I did not see you as a gift, but rather as intruders into my world, and you were not invited. I had no idea what you wanted from me, but I know I wanted nothing from you.

I live the life of an addict. For me, that means paralyzing moments, bad decisions at times, actions I'm ashamed of, and a burn in me that screams, "Don't look at me – don't talk to me – don't you judge me." But on some days of my sobriety, I notice a change in my harsh approach, I feel lighter inside and a bit of hope whispers, "With my higher power – I can do this."

I have a better support system around me right now. I hold tight to those people who will hold me accountable and who I am learning to trust to help pick me up when I fall. I am grateful for these people.

Some people have held my children, believed their lives could be better and fought hard – fought even me – to make sure that no one could ignore my children's needs. There have been times when others have cared about their safety and showed them kindness and how valued they are, when I was not able to. As a mom in recovery with her children coming home, I am grateful for these people – I am grateful for you. Jane S.

From the CASA Volunteer: Why CASA?

Many thanks to the CASA Advocates and Coaches who completed the CASA Program Satisfaction Survey this summer. The summary data of this survey can be found at this [link](#). Thanks to all who responded to the survey. Your feedback and comments help us improve programming and ultimately outcomes for the children we serve.

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents indicate their primary reasons for volunteering in the CASA role include the opportunity to make a difference, helping people and responding to a specific social need. Their individual responses for volunteering with the CASA Program and the Child Advocacy Board inspire CASA Staff to continue our pursuit of excellence in supporting our Advocates and Coaches. Here are some of the many reasons our volunteers give their time and talents to the CASA Program.

"I wanted to volunteer with a program that in some way benefited or helped children."

"... to help the life of a child, the most vulnerable among us."

"It's important to me to volunteer."

"[I enjoy] being part of something bigger and more important than myself. I love the relationships I've made and the chance to see how other people live their lives. I enjoy being able to see past my initial impression of people, to see what makes them tick. It's made me more compassionate."

"CASA is nationally known for the impact the program has on the successful outcomes of children caught up in the DHS system."

"[Volunteering with CASA] made sense with my teaching background."

"I know the power one person can have in a person's life and I know how lonely the system can feel."

"I believe every child should feel important and valued."

"[I volunteer to] make a tangible difference in someone's life, hopefully."

"Being a CASA was a way to help children but still be in control of my schedule."

"I chose to volunteer with the Child Advocacy Board because it was and continues to be a great learning opportunity to receive the well-rounded education needed to effectively advocate for the well-being of our children."

"[I chose CASA] because foster parenting requirements are too demanding and costly and became unappealing. But I still wanted to support the children that need and deserve that extra love/ attention."

"I had just completed service on a professional board and was

looking for a volunteer experience that directly impacted our community. I know DHS is significantly underfunded and wanted to be helpful.”

“I saw a story in a magazine about a foster mom and how much she appreciated her CASA. I wanted to work in the social service field but I do not have the proper education. CASA gave me an opportunity to make a difference without the appropriate degree.”

“It matches my skill set and desire to be a voice for children.”

“I enjoy meeting with the kids and learning about their worlds.”

Attempting to provide DHS and the court with a thorough view of the child’s life.

“Helping find what is best for the children.” “Seeing the children go home.”

“I enjoy the relationships I formed with the children in my cases the most. They were sometimes difficult and took awhile to see the impact I was making, but the moments when I knew I had become an important part of their life and was helping them, even if in a very small way were very happy moments for me.”

“I have been fortunate in my lifetime and I wish to help those that may have had struggles.”

Trainer’s Corner

For FCRB Members & CASA Advocates:

Reunifying Families with Substance Use Disorders Excerpt from National CASA’s ADVOCACY IN ACTION: *Resources to Improve Safety, Permanency and Well-Being*

WHY IT MATTERS

With substance abuse being one of the primary reasons for removal from their homes (accounting for up to a third of all removals in 2015)¹ timely reunification of children and youth in foster care with their parents can be a challenge. Recovery is a lifelong and cyclical process, with relapse not uncommon and often a part of the process to recovery.

The federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requires that children achieve permanency within 15 months of their 22 months in care, a difficult challenge at best, but especially for those getting treatment for substance abuse. **The tension between these two timelines — the urgency for children to be reunified with their families as soon as possible, versus the time needed for recovering parents to engage in services and prepare to**

safely care for their children — is a challenge. The single strongest predictor of reunification for families affected by substance abuse is completion of treatment. Studies have shown that women who complete 90 or more days of treatment nearly double their likelihood of reunification.²

Mothers who enter early into substance abuse treatment programs are more likely to reunify than mothers who don't, and their children spend less time in foster care.³ Strategies that help motivate parents to enter and remain in substance abuse services are critical to enhancing treatment outcomes.

ACTIONS

Identifying the issues related to substance abuse early is critical to the success of reunification and long-term recovery. Screening family members for possible substance abuse with culturally appropriate and validated tools should be routine. As the child's advocate, inquire whether this has been completed.

Engage recovery coaches. Studies show that parents are more likely to enter treatment quickly and stay longer if they have a recovery coach. Recovery coaches work with parents, child welfare caseworkers, treatment agencies and advocates to remove barriers to treatment and provide ongoing support to families.

Provide encouragement and frequent feed-back to parents. Well-deserved praise can have a powerful impact on adult behavior. Recognize the hard work and struggle that is happening in the recovery and treatment process. Feedback that is timely, therapeutic and motivating instead of punitive or authoritative will be far better received.

Inquire about Family Treatment Drug Courts (FTDCs)⁴. FTDCs are courts that bring together treatment services with case management in a supportive setting and coordinate those efforts with child protective services. Research shows that family reunification rates are higher, and children spend less time in care, when their parents participate in FTDC.⁵

Ensure that parents are set up for success. Although reunification is a motivating force for recovery, mothers and fathers report experiencing significant stress from parenting for lengthy periods of time after they have regained custody. The emotional stress of being reunified can overwhelm coping resources and increase the risk of relapse. In addition, many parents do not have strong support networks in place to assist them after they reunify with their children. Help parents identify new and healthy relationships and supports to avoid social isolation. Make sure that they have things in place to be successful in reunification like stable housing, childcare, a mentor, a schedule for meetings located in a convenient place, etc.

Participate in the development of a safety plan in the event of relapse. Ensure that the team is coordinating with treatment providers to develop and implement a safety plan in the event of parental relapse. The plan may include identifying individuals who regularly check on the well-being of children. This plan can identify homes where the child can stay if the parents are unable to provide a safe environment. The plan can help the parent identify trigger behaviors that would necessitate safety planning.

Learn about addiction and how it affects the whole family. Learn how treating the family holistically — rather than an individual child or parent in isolation — can be more effective in addressing a family's underlying issues.

Consider attachment-based parent-child therapy and/or trauma-informed services as key components to improving parent-child relationship given the stress that addiction can create in child- parent relationships.

Celebrate families and equip them with supports as they journey on their road to recovery. A combination of therapies and other direct services tailored to meet the parent's needs might include housing, transportation, childcare, employment, and educational services. Studies show that treatment that provides parenting support and employment opportunities results in higher rates of reunification.⁶

Collaborate widely and often. Integrated service provision with providers who are flexible and committed to the success of parents is needed. When all parties work together, studies have shown that treatment works better, faster, and produces stronger families.⁷

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2016). *The AFCARS report*. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb>

2 Grella, C., Needell, B., Shi, Y. & Hser, Y. (2009). Do drug treatment services predict reunification outcomes of mothers and children in child welfare? *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 36, 279–293.

3 Green, B. L., Rockhill, A., Furrer, C. (2007). Does substance abuse treatment make a difference for child welfare case outcomes? A statewide longitudinal analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 460–473.

4 See Issue Brief on “Family Drug Treatment Courts.”

5 Marlow, D., Carey, S. (2012). *Research update on family drug courts*. National Association of Drug Court Professionals. Retrieved from [NADCP](#)

6 Grella, C.E, Needell, B., Shi, Y., Hser, Y. (2009). Do drug treatment services predict reunification outcomes of mothers and their children in child welfare? *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 36, 278-293.



For CASA Advocates: In-Service Trainings

For a complete list of all available CASA in-service trainings please click here: [In-Service Trainings](#)

Reminder CASA Advocates:

Fostering Futures: Supporting Youth Transitions to Adulthood Training is required for Advocates serving on cases of youth 14 or older. You may also attend a training session prior to the youth's 14th birthday, as this curriculum addresses the unique need of building rapport and trust with an older child.

Upcoming Fostering Futures Sessions:

September 6 West Des Moines
October 18 Cedar Rapids
October 26 Storm Lake

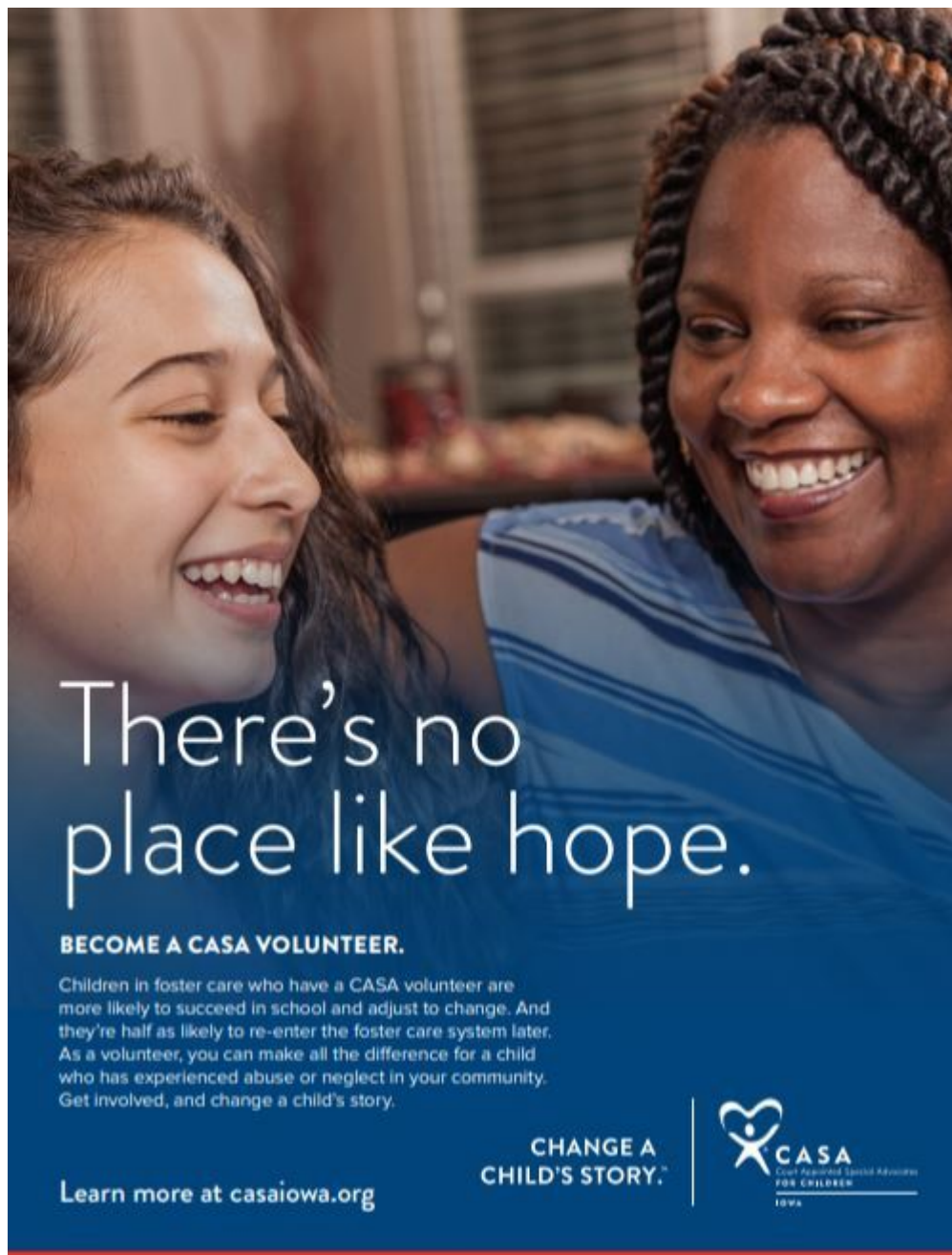
Calling All CASA Advocates!!

If you have found yourself looking for a new challenge, have a desire to take on a leadership role within the CASA program, or feel excited about creating a team of fellow Advocates, consider learning more about becoming a CASA Coach!



This fall we will begin offering our newly revised CASA Coach Pre-Service Training and would love you to join us! Contact your Program Coordinator if you are interested in learning more about what it takes to become a Coach. To learn about the revised Coach Curriculum or how to register for the training, please reach out to the State Trainer. Email lesa.christianson@dia.iowa.gov or call 515-986-4790.

**"Help Change a Child's Story"
by passing this on to someone you know.**




There's no place like hope.

BECOME A CASA VOLUNTEER.

Children in foster care who have a CASA volunteer are more likely to succeed in school and adjust to change. And they're half as likely to re-enter the foster care system later. As a volunteer, you can make all the difference for a child who has experienced abuse or neglect in your community. Get involved, and change a child's story.

Learn more at casa-iowa.org

CHANGE A
CHILD'S STORY.™



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