



Volunteer Spotlight

Ellen Sandberg Shook, CASA Volunteer

When Ellen was asked how she became interested in serving as a CASA Advocate she said, "I became interested in becoming a CASA volunteer after reading something about the role of a CASA. I wanted a volunteer activity that would be meaningful and would make a difference in someone's life. I was invited to attend a CASA breakfast and I signed up to be a volunteer that day! I have been a CASA since October 2019 and have been involved in the same case since that time."

Although Ellen shared she has not really had work experience which prepared her to be a child advocate, she believes that living in many parts of the United States and meeting many people has helped her to be a more well-rounded person.

Not knowing anything about the court system has been somewhat of a challenge, but Ellen followed that up with saying her CASA Coach has been very helpful in explaining anything that she didn't understand.

Ellen believes her experience as a CASA has been "rewarding in a variety of ways and stated, "The most rewarding thing has been knowing that I have actually had a chance to make a difference in the life of a child. I now know that one person on the outside CAN really make a difference."

She feels that it is very beneficial for a child in foster care to have an advocate that is looking out for them in all aspects of their life. Everyone involved in a case is busy with other cases, but a CASA can make suggestions based on their knowledge of the child that the other people involved may not be aware of. This happened for her. "I made a suggestion that I thought would make a situation better and it was implemented. That was a win for the child!"

Local Coordinator Dawn Goerdts said, "Ellen's first CASA case has taken many twists and turns, but she has been instrumental in assuring that the child's best interests are being respected regarding communication, interactions and placement. She has formed effective and professional relationships with the child, family, foster family and the providers. Ellen is a huge asset to the CASA of Dubuque program and definitely made a difference in this child's life!"



In March 2021, the Child Advocacy Board approved a one-year pilot Foster Care Review Board in Polk County to review the cases of older youth who have the permanency goal of another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA). This has been a long-standing request that originated from the late Honorable Judge Colin Witt who believed older youth needed some additional oversight as they prepared to age out of foster care. The hope is that citizens will be able to offer ideas and recommendations for additional connections to community resources and opportunities for older youth. A group of energized individuals from the greater Des Moines area have continued to advocate for a local board in Polk County.

Coordinator Carrie Phelps and Administrative Assistant Cindy Goellnitz will support a Polk County local foster care review board in FY2022. Recruitment of volunteers to serve on this board is underway! You can help spread the word to those who may be interested in learning more about this volunteer opportunity. Additional information about the program, volunteer qualifications and training can be found on ICAB's website: <https://childadvocacy.iowa.gov/fcrb> which also includes a link to apply online.

We look forward to working with youth and their families, judges, DHS, placement caregivers, attorneys, service providers and other individuals who support youth in foster care.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW VOLUNTEERS!



Jamie Adkins, CASA, Madison County
Tony Berry, CASA, Polk County
Sydnie Franklin, CASA, Johnson County
Christine Gosch, CASA, Polk County
David Ladwig, CASA, Jasper County
Lisa Miller, CASA, Henry County
Geena Staiert, CASA, Polk County

Alyssa Barrantes, CASA, Polk County
Lisa Cecil, CASA, Jefferson County
Geriane Jordan, CASA, Johnson County
Madison Guffey, CASA, Wapello County
Linda Leeper, CASA, Polk County
Mary Savage, CASA, Polk County
Abigail Voyna, CASA, Polk County



On March 9, 2021 a group of Iowa Child Advocacy Board members, staff and volunteers descended on the Iowa State Capital for our Legislative Day. During the time we had to talk with legislators we focused on awareness of ICAB and its programs: Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board (ICFCRB). Legislators inquired about the needs and growth of the ICAB programs and many expressed an interest in our work. Volunteers and staff representing both programs came from around the state and were able to talk with anyone who had questions. They were able to share about their experiences in a generalized manner and about the needs of the children they served. We appreciated assistance in making sure that our handouts were delivered to everyone in the House, as well as being delivered to all legislators' mailboxes. Thank you to everyone who participated in-person and behind the scenes to help us introduce ICAB and the work we do on behalf of children to our Iowa legislators. Thank you to all the Legislators who welcomed us at the Capital. A plan is in place to participate with a Day on the Hill again in 2022!



CASA of Iowa will be returning to in-person child visits effective July 1, 2021, unless the child's caregiver requests a virtual visit. CASA of Iowa policy requires advocates to meet with their assigned child(ren) in person every 30 days.



Other CASA Advocacy work such as parent and family visits, Family Team Meeting participation and court hearings should also be completed in person unless there is a virtual attendance option or expectation.

An exception may be granted at the discretion of the local program coordinator. When an advocate does not see a child every 30 days, it must be noted on the monthly update in CAMS.

Please contact your Coordinator with questions. Thank you.

Covid-19 Pandemic Afflicts CASA of Iowa **An Editorial**

With Appreciation, Amy Carpenter, CASA of Iowa

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged CASA Organizations across the country to help children achieve safety and permanency despite significant obstacles. The pandemic demanded that CASA volunteer advocates and staff become creative and resourceful in their advocacy efforts. But what happens when Covid-19 hits your office staff in profound, life-altering ways while you're trying to prepare for the National CASA/GAL Association Highly Effective Review of your state? This is the story of the amazing, dedicated staff at the CASA of Iowa State organization.

To begin, let's back up to December 2019. Steffani Simbric had just joined the Iowa Child Advocacy Board and CASA of Iowa as the new State Administrator. The Child Advocacy Board has two deputy administrators; me, Amy Carpenter, Deputy Administrator for the CASA Program and Shirley Hoefer, Deputy Administrator of the Iowa Citizens Foster Care Review Board program. In March 2020, as Steffani was wading through budgets, learning about personnel and becoming familiar with the National CASA/GAL Association's state and local standards, Covid-19 hit Iowa. Almost all Child Advocacy Board employees retreated to their homes to work. Although CAB saw a few employees fall ill, as an agency we were relatively spared.

In the fall however, the second wave of the pandemic hit Iowa with a vengeance. In any given week, three or four new Covid cases impacted CASA of Iowa personnel, whether through exposure or a confirmed case. While some staff and their family members were asymptomatic, others became quite ill and were out of work multiple weeks. Almost all employees again retreated to their homes to work safely.

On Halloween, my 51-year-old husband Paul Carpenter spiked a fever. Testing the following day confirmed he was positive for Covid-19. I tested positive a few days later. Both Paul and I had high fevers, severe headaches and body aches, but Paul's illness quietly took an unseen turn and by the end of the week Paul would pass out whenever he would try to sit or stand. He was admitted to the hospital on November 6th with a pulse-oximetry reading of 68% blood oxygen (normal is generally anything above 90%). Five days later, Paul was placed in the Intensive Care Unit. A week after that, his blood oxygen was again 68% despite being on the highest settings of oxygen. Paul was able to give his own emergency consent to intubation so he could be placed on a ventilator. During intubation, Paul's heart stopped. After 15 terrifying minutes of CPR, Paul was revived, but was frighteningly ill.

The following day, the terrifying phone calls started. Doctors and nurses were seeking permission for treatment of a litany of Covid-related organ failures, including continuous dialysis for kidney failure, a multiple port IV line because he needed so many medications at one time, a feeding tube and strong medication to regulate heart rhythm. The most frightening phone call came when Paul's doctor asked permission to place him on ExtraCorporeal Membrane

Oxygenation (ECMO), an advanced life support machine that externally oxygenated Paul's blood; a function his lungs could not do on their own.

The following week, an infection in Paul's lungs spread to his bloodstream; he became septic and went into shock. His heart rate was alarmingly high, heart rhythm could not be regulated and his blood pressure was dangerously low; he was dying. Our 14-year-old son Carter and I were called into the hospital to say goodbye. As I was completing "Do Not Resuscitate" paperwork that morning, a miracle occurred. Paul's heart rate dropped and his blood pressure stabilized as the potent antibiotics began attacking the infection. Paul survived that first round of sepsis and began months of treatment to treat Covid-pneumonia and its horrible aftermath.



Amy with her husband Paul, November 19, 2020, the day he was placed on ECMO

Paul was on ECMO a total of 40 days; a new record for the hospital where he was treated. He was on a ventilator for 87 days. He received countless bags of IV antibiotics, over 25 units of blood. survived yet another bout of sepsis and an additional month of dialysis after further

kidney failure.

After 95 days in ICU, Paul was released to the respiratory floor of the hospital where he began the two-month journey to re-learn basic tasks such as breathing on his own, talking, swallowing/eating, sitting, standing, walking and taking care of his own needs. On March 9th, Paul was released from the hospital to inpatient rehabilitation. Physical, occupational and speech therapies worked with him 3+ hours per day to build strength and stamina. On March 30th, Paul was finally able to go home after 144 days in the hospital setting.

Through all of this, I certainly wasn't the most productive employee. I was fairly ill with Covid myself for 3 weeks in November and simply didn't have the energy to work. After Paul stabilized around Thanksgiving and was cleared from Covid visitor restrictions, I worked as much as possible. But between hospital visits, my own Covid brain fog, stress and bouts of depression, I quickly determined work simply couldn't be my priority. Thankfully, beginning in January, I was able to take 12 weeks off through the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to help care for Paul, maintain the household and help Carter lead as normal a life as possible.

The beginning of a calendar year is always busy in my work world as I prepare year-end reports, instruct local programs on National CASA/GAL Annual Survey work and revise the CASA policy manuals for approval by our board, in addition to my monthly program administration and employee supervision work. It's always a stressful time at my job. In 2021 however, the workload was increased as the CASA of Iowa State Organization prepares for the National CASA Association Highly Effective Review process and on-site visit. Additionally, the release of the new local program standards meant a large revision of the Iowa CASA Program Policy manual, along with a new layout. And to keep my sanity and protect my family, I had to step away and give up control of all of this work.

I think on some level we'd all like to believe that we are indispensable at our job; the work would slow to a crawl without us. Thankfully, my experience was the complete opposite. The State office staff picked up my tasks and got everything done before I got back to work.



took over the work on State Standards and the National CASA Highly Effective, along with supervision of multiple employees.



interpreted the new local program standards, wrote much of the revised CASA policy manual with the new layout,

trained all staff on the new policies and helped get the policy update distributed to staff and volunteers. She also worked on additions and enhancements to the CAMS data system in my absence.



assisted in completion of the National CASA six-month report, along with State Organization and Local Program Annual Surveys for National CASA and ran reports monthly for quality assurance.

While I was out, the CASA of Iowa program staff sent me a HUGE box of home-cooked frozen meals, gifts for my son, snow removal service for the winter, gift cards, money, positive vibes, prayers and weekly messages of support. The entire CASA of Iowa staff showed incredible patience, understanding, sympathy and generosity during my absence.

Thank You is simply not expansive enough to express my deep gratitude for everything they've done. They picked up work that allowed me to confidently step away and take care of myself and my family's needs. If the night sky represented my appreciation, it still couldn't hold enough stars to adequately thank my CASA family. Thanks so much to you all!



Register and invite 10 people by forwarding this email!



5th Annual Missouri River Valley Light of Hope

Awareness and fundraising event to benefit Friends of Iowa CASA and FCRB and the abused and neglected children of Iowa

Monday, May 10, 2021
7:00 - 8:00 pm
Virtual – you can watch from anywhere!

Keynote Speakers

Mary Sterk – owner, Sterk Financial Services
Gary Niles – Chief Juvenile Court Officer
Brian Crichton – CEO, CMBA Architects
Brittany Beard – former foster youth

RSVP

Sponsored by Friends of Iowa CASA and FCRB

iowacasafriends.dm.networkforgood.com/forms/missouri-river-valley-light-of-hope

Trainer's Corner: Mental Health

For FCRB Members & CASA Advocates:



Increased public awareness about mental health issues is the first step towards fully supporting the millions of individuals and families who are facing the reality of living with a mental illness. NAMI, the National Alliance of Mental Illness, provides education, support and advocacy efforts for public policies around mental health. In a country where 1 in 5 people are affected by a mental health condition, it's time for all of us to step up and change the conversation. Join Mayim Bialik and pledge to be

#StigmaFree . <https://youtu.be/Gzk7sSOHGSQ>

To learn more about the work happening in Iowa, [Click here](#)

What can you do as an Advocate or Foster Care Review Board member?

- Recommend a mental health evaluation of a parent or child if you are concerned that a mental health issue has gone undiagnosed or possibly untreated. We are not the expert, but we can recommend that an expert

assess the issue.

- The standards of research and definitions of mental health, illness and treatment have changed over time. It is important to be aware and sensitive to an individual's self-stigmatization and resistance to a label, diagnosis or treatment or a family's ethnic or cultural considerations.
- When appropriate, you can ensure that children are provided age-appropriate explanations of their own or their parent's diagnosis by a qualified individual.
- When appropriate, you can advocate for holistic treatment that considers all aspects of an individual, including mental, spiritual, emotional and physical, as opposed to one-dimensional treatment.



Numerous resources are available to learn more:

- <https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Warning-Signs-and-Symptoms>
- <https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions>
- <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>
- <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions>



National CASA and the Iowa CASA Program encourage and support lifelong learning by offering in-service trainings on various topics. To increase advocacy efforts, we encourage every one of our volunteers to consider taking one of our in-service training around topics specific to their case.

Classes available to Advocates and Coaches can be found here: [In-Services Available List Jan 2021.pdf](#) **Please reach out to your Local Program Coordinator to participate in one of these classes and earn credit towards your annual 12 hours of in-service training.**

MAY IS...
National Foster Care Month

CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN
IOWA

We thank all the volunteers who make a difference in the lives of children and youth in foster care.

icab
IOWA CHILD ADVOCACY BOARD

Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board
Advocating for Permanency



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