

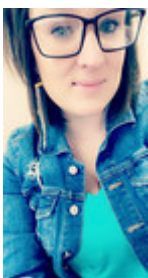
# icab | IOWA CHILD ADVOCACY BOARD

# Connection

Advocating for the protection of Iowa's children and improvement of the child welfare system.



## Volunteer Spotlight - Heather Ice



Heather Ice, CASA Advocate, yearned to give back to her community and was looking to serve in a role that served a purpose that was greater than herself. She knew the area she resided in had high child neglect/abuse rates and had always had a passion in her heart for helping children, which made being a CASA Advocate a perfect fit for her.

Heather was sworn in as a CASA Advocate approximately 4 ½ years ago by Judge Franklin (February 2017). At the time she was a mother of two small children, had volunteered in different capacities within her community and had completed an internship with DHS during college. Throughout that internship she saw firsthand the difference CASA workers were making in the lives of children and wanted to make that difference too.

When asked about the most rewarding aspect of being an advocate, Heather said it is the knowledge that the work put forth on a case is essential to better outcomes for the children served. "Building relationships with children who sometimes have never had a steady adult in their lives, and gaining the trust of those children, is a feeling that goes unmatched. We live in such an adult-centered world that it is rewarding to know that you may be the sole reason a child's voice is heard. I find satisfaction in knowing that I am able to help give safety and stability to children in need. Making connections with the children I advocate for has made me more aware of the true need for CASA workers. I still receive updates from children I have advocated for in the past and anticipate those being lifelong relationships." Depending on the circumstances, a CASA Advocate may remain a constant in a child's life long after case closure.

Heather believes the most challenging aspect of CASA work (besides not being able to bring each child home) is that it can be very challenging emotionally. She shared, "You encounter situations that break your heart but you have to be

unbiased and stay focused on the best outcome for the children. Being an advocate has made me vastly more aware of the struggles that some people face. It has taught me to be more empathetic, compassionate, and nonjudgmental. You truly never know the hills others have had to climb to get to where they are today.”

Heather quoted Josh Shipp “Every child is just one caring adult away from being a success story.” She said, “A CASA Advocate is a living example of this. By simply being the one constant, the one familiar face, the one person to speak up on the behalf of nothing but the best interest of the child, we have the power to change lives!”

Program Coordinator Carrie Phelps stated, “Heather has been an excellent child advocate. She has had two cases in her four years of advocating; her last case being a high profile, intense case. Heather was able to handle all of the pressures of the demanding case. She was a neutral party that was able to be a conduit of information to DHS. She received praises from the DHS worker and the placement for her dedication and work on the case.” Thank you, Heather, for being such a strong and caring voice for children!



## **Changes to DHS Family Interaction Services**

Planful family interaction ensures that children and youth removed from their home maintain relationships with parents, kin, and other supports. The primary purpose of family interaction is to maintain the parent-child relationship and other family attachments, strengthen family connections by ensuring that in-person contacts are occurring and reducing the sense of abandonment that children/youth experience at placement. Family interactions should occur in the least restrictive, most homelike setting that allows for natural interaction and appropriately meets the child's need of safety.

The decision whether to supervise family interactions is based on identified safety concerns. If there are no identified safety concerns, there is no need for the interaction to be supervised. Semi-supervised visitation occurs when there is some risk and a need for parental education and skill building. Natural supports to the parents – such as kin, fictive kin and community support - can also be utilized to assure child safety while allowing more frequent interactions. If safety factors exist, these must be addressed in the family interaction plan and interactions will be supervised.

Over the years, professional supervision of interactions significantly increased with the primary responsibility placed upon DHS contracted service providers. While the concept of increased interactions is very much aligned with a Family First philosophy – and is a position that DHS and ICAB strongly support – the number of hours/interactions currently being required for contract providers to supervise is not financially sustainable.

## **Continued: Changes to DHS Family Interaction Services**

Effective July 1, 2021, FCS contractors are only required to provide supervision on family interactions when a child or youth is placed in out of home care with regularly scheduled family interactions. In these situations, family interactions will not exceed 20 hours of in-person supervision time or 10 separate family interactions for the month. In order to have the FCS contractor conducting the Family Interactions, there must be a Family Interaction Plan in place.

DHS will monitor implementation of these new requirements and gather data to determine how contract adjustments should be made.

As CASA Advocates and FCRB Board Members, this change could impact recommendations for supervised family interactions. What can you do to help families have more interaction? Recommend that supportive family members, friends, fictive kin and community members undergo a background check so they are able to provide interaction supervision, allowing the family more time together. CASA Advocates and FCRB Board members do not supervise family interactions as this falls outside the scope of the volunteer role and presents liability issues.

Additional information is posted on the DHS website at the following:  
[https://dhs.iowa.gov/child-welfare/policy\\_updates](https://dhs.iowa.gov/child-welfare/policy_updates)



## **Welcome to Our New Volunteers!**

Jessica Becker, CASA, Linn Co.  
Nicole Blevins, CASA, Linn Co.  
Dannielle Knecht-Carlson, CASA, Chickasaw  
Amy David, CASA, Dubuque Co.  
Casey Hodson, CASA, Johnson Co.  
Ellen Junk, CASA, Johnson Co.  
Kris Reints, CASA, Black Hawk Co.  
Jennifer Shekleton, CASA, Dubuque Co.

Dawn Beckley, FCRB, Muscatine Co.  
Stephanie Brown, CASA, Story Co.  
Beth Carolan, FCRB, Johnson Co.  
Kristin Glomstad, CASA, Dubuque Co.  
Amy Johnson, CASA, Johnson Co.  
Jessica Leal, FCRB, Clinton Co.  
Megan Sharp, CASA, Linn Co.  
Linda Sullivan, CASA, Scott Co.



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## Trainer's Corner



### **For FCRB Members & CASA Advocates: The Road to Adulthood for Teens in the Child Welfare System**

As Advocates and Board Members we are part of the system making the foster care system better and more supportive of adolescents and emerging adults.

Some key practices include:

- Training around the importance of understanding trauma and racism.
- Prioritize permanency for all youth.
- Understand that foster care carries a level of stigma, affecting successful educational completion and opportunities for employment.
- Build connections with local housing providers to support safe and adequate housing for youth leaving the foster care system.
- Understand brain development of transitional age youth and learn how to support the individual in their decision making.

**To learn more, review the following resources and videos:**

[Promoting Safe and Stable Housing for Young People](#)

[Building Resilience for Young People in Foster Care](#)

[Keeping the Family Conversation Alive-Permanence](#)

[Successful Connections to School and Work](#)

[The Road to Adulthood: Adolescent Brain Development](#)

[Transition Resources AMP Achieving Maximum Potential Video](#)

[Iowa Aftercare Services Network](#)

[Iowa Aftercare Services Video](#)

[ASK Resource Center](#)



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

Advocates and Coaches interested in learning more about working with older youth, reach out to your Coordinator to attend one of our available trainings that includes *Fostering Futures: Supporting Youth Transitioning to Adulthood*. See [CASA In-Services](#) for the full list of available trainings.





THERE ARE SO MANY CHILDREN WHO NEED A VOICE AND NOT ENOUGH ADVOCATES LIKE YOU TO SPEAK FOR THEM.

RESEARCH SHOWS THE BEST AND MOST SUCCESSFUL RECRUITMENT BEGINS WITH YOU!

ICAB VOLUNTEERS – PLEASE **TELL YOUR FRIENDS.** TELL YOUR OWN STORY, EXPLAIN THE WORK YOU DO ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN AND SHARE YOUR LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCES.

THEN... ASK THEM TO BECOME INVOLVED.



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