



# the Advocate Newsletter

Fall 2022



CASA of Yellowstone County's Mission is to advocate for a safe and permanent home for abused and neglected children in Yellowstone County. We wouldn't be here without the generosity and care of our community. Thank You!





# A Letter from Program Director **Shayla Fox Brown**

Dear friends,

I want to extend my gratitude to our wonderful donors, volunteers, and staff at CASA of Yellowstone County. Without your support, dedication, and passion, CASA wouldn't be able to continue the amazing work of advocating for children in the foster care system. In the past 9 months, 124 unserved children were appointed advocates. Each of these kids now has a voice in court and a CASA who will advocate for their safety, medical, psychological, and permanency needs.

One of the main roles of a volunteer CASA is to advocate for a safe permanent home for children, which includes reunification with the child's family of origin. The organization understands that a child may not always be able to return home, but we believe that it is in a child's best interest to return to their family of origin when safely possible. According to the Children's Bureau with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), many children exiting foster care are reunited with their families. Over the past several years, 65-67% of children in foster care were reunited with their parents nationwide. Therefore, CASA of Yellowstone County emphasizes family strengths and a pro-reunification stance. CASA staff and Advocates know there are many variables in a case. Using a family strengths-based approach, Advocates help families stay together, resulting in better outcomes for children. As an organization, and as a community, we can partner with families and help them thrive. I have seen numerous examples of the amazing work CASAs do in this area including support in finding housing, connecting families to resources, identifying and addressing barriers to success, and being a constant, supportive person in the lives of children and families.

The CASA organization is excited for the upcoming year; we have 365 days to make a difference in the lives of children and families in our community. **Thank you for supporting CASA of Yellowstone County's mission.**

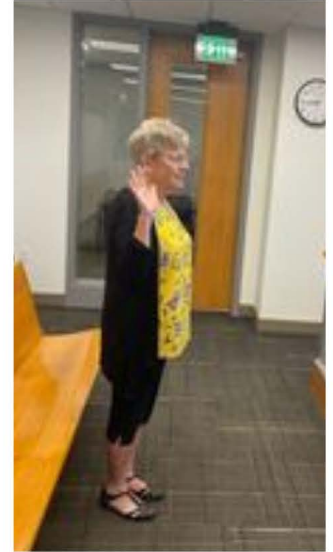
Sincerely,

*Shayla Fox Brown*

CASA of Yellowstone County Program Director



# Congratulations Summer Class!



Congratulations to CASA's summer class of new Court Appointed Special Advocates! The organization recognizes these wonderful community members for their hard work throughout pre-service training. A special thank you to Judge Harris for swearing in this class and for his support of CASA of Yellowstone County.



The annual Underground Dinner benefiting CASA of Yellowstone County is coming up! Save the date for **Thursday, January 19th** at Abby's Catering Company. Tickets will be available at the beginning of January.





Be the voice for a child in foster care.  
Become an **Advocate.**

TAKE THE FIRST STEP

[Attend an Info Session](#)

[♥ Donate](#)

Check out the updated CASA of Yellowstone County Website! It still has all the essentials from the old website, but now it has a beautiful new design and is more user friendly. Take a look for yourself!



[www.yellowstonecasa.org](http://www.yellowstonecasa.org)



Join us for coffee and learn more about  
CASA of Yellowstone County.

We meet semi-monthly to give you the opportunity to ask questions and meet some of our volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates who work with kids in foster care.

The next Coffee with CASA will be on **December 8th** at Mazevo Coffee (1405 38th St W, Billings, MT) at **5:30 PM**



# Advocate Appreciation Night

In August, volunteer Advocates, staff, board members, and court personnel gathered to celebrate Advocate Appreciate Night at Zoo Montana. This annual event recognizes the important work of all volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates. Thank you to everyone who came, we had such a great time with you! And congratulations again to the award winners.



## 2022 Advocate Award Winners

**Advocate of the Year:** Becky Wagner

**Peer Coordinator of the Year:** Kathleen Linger

**Rookie of the Year:** Genna Southworth

**Perseverance:** Jody Crowl

**No Stone Left Unturned:** Erin Zimmer

**Heart of ICWA:** Mary Rose Swan

**CPS Person of the Year:** Rhonda Bodvig & Suzanne Braun

**Court Official of the Year:** Kris Copenhaver



# Braydon & Leah's

## Story



Police responded to a report of a violent fight at a house party one evening. The house was full of people who were intoxicated or on drugs. As police were clearing out the house, they found eleven-year-old Leah, who had locked herself in the back bedroom of the house when the violence had started. Leah's fourteen-year-old brother, Braydon, was nowhere to be found. Eventually, Leah was taken to the police station where Child and Family Services met her to try and sort out the situation. It came to light that Leah and Braydon were under the guardianship of their twenty-year-old sister while their mom was serving time in prison. Their sister had thrown the party which led to the police being called. Braydon was finally found at one of his friend's houses. He'd been couch surfing for months with kids from his school. Leah and Braydon's older sister decided to dissolve her guardianship after that night, stating she still needed to grow up before she could properly care for them.

A month after entering foster care, the siblings received a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate for their case. Their CASA, Tony, had just completed training and had been sworn-in by a judge. When he sat down to pick a case, Leah and Braydon's story jumped out at him. By the time Tony came into the case, both kids had been placed in a foster home together. Tony started to visit them soon after coming on their case, beginning a relationship which would span over the next four years.

For over a year, Tony went to visit Braydon and Leah at their foster home several times a month. The three of them would talk, play board games, and work on the kids' homework during their visits. Along with their social worker, Tony was the only person who visited them regularly during their first year in foster care. Tony worked in coordination with their foster parents to set up weekly phone calls with the kids' mom and older sister so they could stay connected. Braydon and Leah's mom was released from prison a year after they entered foster care and she quickly engaged with the social worker and started working on a treatment plan. She and the kids were able to see each other frequently. Around this time, Braydon and Leah went to live in a different foster home in town, and Tony helped to make the transition as smooth as possible and continued to be a stable relationship for them as they changed placements and re-connected with their mom.



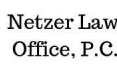
Several months into their new placement, Leah moved into group home because of conflict between her and her foster mom. Unfortunately, around the same time, the kids' mom relapsed into her drug addiction and dropped contact with everyone involved in the case, including her kids. This was particularly difficult for Braydon and Leah, who had been holding out hope they'd be going home soon. Tony doubled down on his efforts to be a steady person for the kids. He kept them closely connected while they were placed apart, working to make sure both kids were able to visit and talk to each other frequently.

Deeply unhappy in her placement, Leah told her CASA she was planning to run away. From the training he'd taken to become a volunteer Advocate, Tony knew the dangers for kids who ran away. Nationwide, kids who run away from foster care have a high likelihood of being trafficked along with other serious risk factors which would have put Leah in danger. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Tony sat down with Leah and had a frank conversation with her about the consequences of running away and what this could mean for her future. In the end, Leah agreed not to run away, and in exchange, Tony promised he would work to get her more time with her brother. Tony and the social worker immediately got to work to find Leah a new placement. Soon, Leah was able to move back into the foster home where Braydon was still placed. Leah started counseling to work through some of the trauma responses causing her and the foster mom to be in conflict.

Much to the excitement and joy of everyone involved, three years into the case, the kids' mom re-engaged and started the long journey toward healing and sobriety. Slowly, over a series of months, first Leah, and then Braydon transitioned home to their mom. Braydon graduated from high school in the spring and aged out of foster care. He was able to secure steady employment after graduation and remained living at home with Leah and their mom. Leah, who had struggled for years in school, eventually started taking classes through a trade school and started working part-time as well.

After four years in foster care, Leah and Braydon's case was dismissed from the court system and they were placed permanently with their mom. Through the ups and downs of foster care, Leah and Braydon always had a stable, consistent person in their corner who never gave up on them. The kids are so happy to be back with their mom, and they still check in with their friend Tony to keep him posted on how they're doing. Thanks to your support, there are hundreds of ordinary community members like Tony, doing extraordinary things for kids in our community.





Thank you for coming out to "run" with us at the 5th Annual 0.5k!

CASA of Yellowstone County is especially grateful to the sponsors and supporters of the 5th annual 0.5K Run!

This year's event had a record number of "runners" and surpassed fundraising goals! We hope to see you next year!





# Memorial Gifts

**In memory of Chris Carstens**

Joanne & Bud Leuthold

**In memory of Dennis Greenwalt**

Annette Behm

**In memory of Pat McNew**

Annette Behm

**In memory of Don Dundas**

Dorothy & Robert McLain

**In memory of Nina LaSeur**

Bruce Bacon

**In memory of Tara Sinkler**

Cathy Pomeroy

Joan & Tim Sleeth

# Honor Gifts

**In honor of Diane Jung**

Ben & Celina McKee

**In honor of Vera Ulschak**

Lillian & James Hartung

## Memorial & Honor Gift Form



Amount \_\_\_\_\_

Send Acknowledgement to:

Given by \_\_\_\_\_

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

In Memory/In Honor of \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: CASA of Yellowstone County | P.O. Box 688 Billings, MT 59103







**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

CASA OF YELLOWSTONE COUNTY