



the Advocate Newsletter

Spring 2023



Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained community volunteers who dedicate their time to a child in foster care to advocate for the child in court and all aspects of their life. Volunteer CASAs make a positive difference for a child in foster care, helping the child to thrive and find safety and permanency.



CASA's DEI Statement

Drew MacLeod

The staff and Board of Directors at CASA of Yellowstone County recently finished work on a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement that we would like to share with you. It is our intent to have our actions reflect the words we have put on paper and honor the sentiment of treating our neighbors as we want to be treated. Our resolution is to open the doors to our neighbors and bring stability and acceptance to youth and families in the foster care system. We desire to live out our commitment and shared values of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in our relationships with the community of volunteers, donors, and supporters who give their time, talents, and treasure to the mission of CASA. Please find the collective and collaborative efforts of the Staff, Board of Directors, volunteer Advocates, and Peer Coordinators by visiting: yellowstonecasa.org/about.

Sincerely,

Drew MacLeod

CASA of Yellowstone County Executive Director

Congratulations Winter Class!



Congratulations to CASA's winter 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 Linneweber for swearing in this class and for his support of CASA of Yellowstone County.

Bush Scholarship & Aubree

Aubree, 20, is a student at Flathead Valley Community College and is the most recent recipient of the Bush Scholarship. Aubree is working on an associate degree in business, with a certificate in social media marketing. At age 15, Aubree entered foster care and had close to 30 different placements before she aged out of the system. When asked what the Bush Scholarship means to her, she said, "It really means a lot to me for someone to give their hard-earned money to a random kid, and I was surprised it was from a couple, not a company. I think they did a good way of going about it, by choosing kids who are trying to go to college and trying to do something for themselves, and to kids who might not have parents who could provide them financial aid. It means a lot to me because I can really focus on school and not have to worry about extra money for books or all this other stuff." Once she graduates, she is looking to attend the University of Montana, or somewhere else where she can pursue more marketing education.

CASA of Yellowstone County is pleased to partner with former volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate, Dick Bush and his wife, Rosalie, to administer the Bush Scholarship for youth transitioning out of foster care. Youth who have spent time in the child welfare system—especially older youth—often lack resources, including a network of adults to guide and support them during years which are typically spent learning a trade or earning a degree. The Bush Scholarship is intended to help reduce or remove the financial barrier to college degrees or vocational training. To date, two youth, both from and attending school in Montana, have received scholarship awards. The Bush Scholarship is renewable if the student is successfully moving forward to a degree or certificate, and while funding lasts. **Thank You to Dick and Rosalie for supporting youth in foster care and their future success!**

Please contact Drew MacLeod at drew@yellowstonecasa.org if you would like to donate to the scholarship fund.



To read Aubree's full interview and to get more information about the Bush Scholarship visit: yellowstonecasa.org.

PINT NIGHT

Join us on Thursday, July 27th at Thirsty Street at the Garage from 5-9 PM for Pint Night! With each beverage sold, \$1 will be donated back to CASA of Yellowstone County to help with training costs for volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates to support children in local foster care. Come on out for a fun night and a good cause to Thirsty Street at the Garage (2123 1st Ave N). We can't wait to see you there!



**You CAN make a difference in a child's life.
Join an Upcoming Information Session to learn how**

July 13th at 1 PM
(Mazevo Coffee, 819 Grand Ave. Billings)

July 19th at 6 PM
(Virtual)



2023 Advocate Appreciation Night



CASA of Yellowstone County held its annual Advocate Appreciation Night on June 6th where we were able to honor all of our current and past volunteer Advocates. It was also a chance to celebrate this year's Advocate Award recipients, present two Lifetime Achievements awards to the Honorable Judge Todd and Honorable Judge Moses, as well as celebrate CASA's 20th birthday of serving the Yellowstone County community. It was an evening filled with fun, food, and amazing people who give their time to help the children of our community. Thank you all for your support and dedication to CASA of Yellowstone County.



Thank you to Riverstone Health for being our Lead Sponsor, and thank you to Ameriprise Financial, Matovich Keller & Huso P.C., Mattress King, and Netzer Krautter & Brown Attorneys at Law for sponsoring as well.



Thank you to our raffle basket donors, Montana Club, Texas Road House, Mazevo Coffee, SCHEELS, Northern Hotel, and of course our wonderful board members. Also thank you to Crazy Taco, Opa Grill, and I'm Cravin' Bar-B-Que for bringing your food trucks to our event! Everyone loved your food!



And a HUGE thank you to Zoo Montana for hosting us, as well as helping us set up and tear down! You all were amazing!

Lead Sponsor



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Jess's

Story

Note from the editor, Emily Gaudreau: I had the great privilege to meet a former foster youth who had a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate on her case in Yellowstone County. It was truly an honor to hear the stories of this young woman who has overcome so much adversity in her lifetime. I want to note that this story is completely true. For the privacy and safety of Jess and her siblings, we have changed their names and certain identifying information. I want to thank Jess profusely for trusting me with her story and for her willingness to share about her experiences having a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate on her case.

“It happened so quickly,” Jess said as she remembers the day her siblings and her entered foster care. “One minute we were home with my mom and stepdad, and hours later, we were in foster care.” What Jess found out later was her parents had been under investigation for drug distribution for some time before police came to their house. It all culminated when her stepfather and mom got into an altercation in their backyard. Her stepfather was high on drugs and had a gun as he fought with her mom in the yard.

Jess remembers going to hide in the garage with her brothers and sisters as police thronged in to arrest her stepdad and mom. Jess learned a lot of this later in life when she turned eighteen and read the case files. Her parents had been under investigation for drug distribution, illegal weapons, partner family member assault, and child abuse for months before they were arrested. As a child, Jess remembers moving around a lot with her parents, sometimes every few months, which made it hard for law enforcement and Child Protective Services to keep track of them. Throughout her childhood, Jess and her siblings lived in a wide range of houses from their family car, low income homes, all the way up to nice homes in affluent neighborhoods.

Jess was fifteen years old when she was removed from her parents' care along with four younger siblings: two brothers and two sisters. Being the oldest, Jess remembers being left alone as the sole caretaker of the four other kids for days or even weeks at a time. She said they were all pretty self-reliant by the time they entered foster care.

Unfortunately, because of the large sibling group, the kids were not able to be placed together right away as they came into foster care. Jess and her teen siblings, Cane and Helen went to go stay with a family friend. Her twin brother and sister, Josh and Rylee, were placed with an available foster family while Child and Family Services tried to decide what to do next with the kids. Due to the complicated nature of the case, it was placed on the CASA priority list right away to receive a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate. Fortunately, the same day the case was put on the priority list, Anna, a CASA Advocate was in the office planning to pick a new case after the closure of her first case. The family's situation spoke to Anna, and she stepped up to take the case with all five kids.

Several days later, Anna was officially appointed to the case by a judge and went to visit Jess at school with her case worker. Jess said, “I was already at an age where I understood what would happen if I told the truth, and I did exactly that. My CASA had made it very clear that she was there for me and my siblings and that's all that mattered to me. I had never talked to anyone about what was happening at home and trust did not come easy to me. Lies and manipulation were my best friends because that's how we

were taught to survive. I don't know why but I quickly saw an out to mine and my sibling's life. I understand that everything that had happened to us was not normal, okay, or fair."

Jess, Cane, and Helen were eventually able to move in with their aunt. Anna continued to visit with them regularly and got to know all the kids. She played an important role in helping to keep all five of the kids connected while they were placed in separate homes and advocated for the individual needs of the kids in the courtroom and community. Jess became a powerful voice for her and her siblings as well, advocating for them to be all placed together and stressing the importance of keeping all the siblings in one home. Finally, after many months of hard work, the twins, Josh and Rylee, were able to be placed with their aunt and older siblings. In her interview, Jess said it was hard at times to help care for all her siblings but having them all together as a family was one of the most important things to her. The bond between Jess and her siblings was very clear in this interview.

Anna was on the case for a little over a year with the kids. She was a consistent presence for them as they went through the ups and downs of foster care. Jess said this about her CASA: "having that security and reassurance that she was on my side, and she understood what I was going through helped beyond any words I could describe. She met with us all individually and together and was able to connect with us all. She was a big support to my aunt as she transitioned to taking care of five kids at once who were coming from a background of trauma."

The goal for each volunteer Advocate is to finish the case out with the kids so they don't have more change and turnover in their lives while they are in foster care. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen personal circumstances, Anna was not able to close the case out officially with this family and she did step down from the case. When she said goodbye to the kids, they were in a much better place than they had been, and they were headed towards permanency in the form of guardianship with their aunt. Jess said it was hard to say goodbye to her CASA, "she reminded us of what an accomplishment it is, that we are safe, and we are okay. Being okay may not mean a lot to some, but to us it meant the world. We were safe and we knew where our next meal was. It meant no more abuse, no more strangers in and out of our lives, no more hiding or lying. Now, it was all about recovery and stepping forward."

One thing that was clear in interviewing Jess was her resiliency and determination to overcome the circumstances of her early years. She spoke about how important school was for her and how it became a haven for her throughout the chaos and constant change in her childhood. Jess and her siblings are doing well. Jess is now twenty years old. She works full-time in a public service role, helping other people find services and safety when they need it most. Helen and Cane are out on their own as adults now, as well. After sitting down for this interview, Jess said she was going to take her now ten-year-old twin siblings, Josh and Rylee, to the zoo. She sees the twins and her aunt often. In the near future, Jess said she would like to be a CASA Advocate herself and serve children in foster care.



When asked what she would say to youth going through similar circumstances in foster care, Jess said, "If there was anything I would like to say to youth, it would be to not give up. Life can be really rough no matter what age you are, but you can make change and get out of that life. You can make a difference and take control of your future!"

It's Time to... "Run"?

Get ready to "run" on **September 16, 2023!** The CASA 0.5k fundraiser "run" is back! The 6th annual 0.5k will be held at Thirsty Street Brewing Company @ The Garage (2123 1st Ave N, Billings MT 59101), and we are bringing back the classics you've come to love!

We have in-person and virtual options again this year. Make sure to sign up by Friday, August 25th to guarantee a shirt on race day!



Ready to "run"?



Scan to find out more information

Want to be a sponsor for the "run" or know someone who might interested?

Please contact our Development Director, Emily Gaudreau, by email (emily@yellowstonecasa.org) or call 406-259-1233.

Memorial Gifts

In memory of of Monte Cherry
Vera & Bob Ulschak

In memory of of Gerry Hudson
Joanne & Bud Leuthold

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Audrey & James Bonogofsky

In memory of Cody W. Johnson
Kathy Johnson

In memory of Gennifer Coler
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In memory of Dorothy Long
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Memorial & Honor Gift Form



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





Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CASA OF YELLOWSTONE COUNTY
P.O. Box 688 | Billings, MT 59103-0688



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20 YEARS