



the Advocate Newsletter

2024 Vol. 1



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 Different Take on Volunteering – Do it for Yourself

As its mission statement, CASA of Yellowstone County advocates for a safe and permanent home for abused and neglected children in Yellowstone County. It does this through providing volunteer advocates to speak up for the best interest of children in the foster care system and through countless others working behind the scenes to make advocacy possible. While the virtue of contributing time and resources toward creating a better life for a child cannot be overstated, and should not be understated, the benefits from your contributions aren't limited to the children being served. It is not a purely altruistic endeavor, nor should it be.

We teach our children to “be good for goodness sake,” to make themselves feel better through kindness to others—and for good reason. There is a certain sense of accomplishment and pride that comes from making something better; from doing something for someone else. So yes, volunteering your time or resources to an organization like CASA unquestionably benefits the children being served, but it benefits the volunteer as well. I would challenge anyone to better the life of a child in need and not immediately feel better about themselves.

CASA of Yellowstone County is always looking for support from our community and I encourage you to give yours. Give your support to benefit the many children in need, and give your support to benefit yourself. Either way, I'm confident you won't regret it.

Sincerely,

Clayton Gregersen
CASA of Yellowstone Board Vice President

Welcome New Board Members



Holly Hintz



Lindsay Masquat-Yellow Robe



Lisa Raney

Congratulations Fall Class!



Congratulations to CASA's fall 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 Knisely for swearing in this class and for her support of CASA of Yellowstone County.

Monthly Giving to CASA of Yellowstone County

\$10
a month provides training materials for one CASA

\$20
a month covers half the training cost for one CASA

\$40
a month provides 6 months of training & support for one CASA

\$60
a month provides one year of training & support for one CASA

\$85
a month provides one year of training & support for TWO CASA's

\$120
a month provides one year of training & support for THREE CASA's



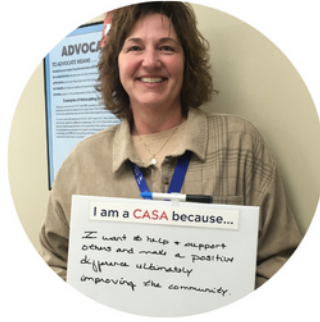
Become a Monthly Donor!

Court Appointed Special Advocates go through 35 hours of pre-service training and 12 hours of on-going training each year as they walk through the foster care system with their CASA children. As a monthly donor, you can help provide training and support to the volunteer Advocates serving children in the local foster care.

I am a **CASA** because...

"I am a CASA because I want to help and support others and make a positive difference ultimately improving the community."

-Lynn Sandretzky
CASA since 2023

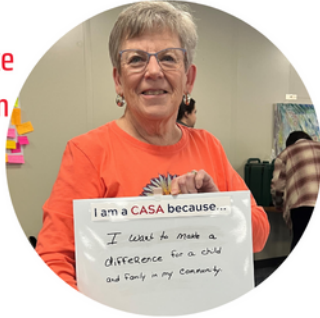


"I am a CASA because I want to help champion kids in foster care."

-Jennifer Mack
CASA since 2014

"I am a CASA because I want to make a difference for a child and family in my community."

-Marla Lord
CASA since 2022



"I am a CASA because I want to use my retirement time to help make a positive impact for children. I love being a strong voice and a listening ear."

-Joan Sleeth
CASA since 2020

Help children achieve a brighter future.
Become a CASA volunteer.



Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN
CASA OF YELLOWSTONE COUNTY

For more information got to: yellowstonecasa.org/volunteer



A Letter from the Honorable Judge Rod Souza

If seeking a worthwhile volunteer opportunity, I give the highest recommendation to CASA of Yellowstone County. On any given day, over 600 children are in foster care in Yellowstone County. While numerous attorneys and social workers devote significant time to these important cases, the system is nevertheless strained.

That's where you come in. These children need a voice. While attorneys and guardians ad litem are appointed for children, a shortage of attorneys and concomitant heavy caseloads prevent consistent contact with the children. A CASA for the child can gather the critical information needed for all parties in a case to make informed decisions. For the decision makers in these cases, more information about the child's needs, wishes, and parents' progress is vital.

Finally, CASAs can become long-term healthy supports for families and children. In some cases, the bonds CASAs develop while working on their cases continue long after a family is reunited, or a different permanency option (guardianship or adoption) closes a case. I have seen first-hand the benefits of the deep trust that develops between a child and their CASA. These mentorships and friendships lasting beyond an open case are invaluable to a child or family's future success.

Cases within our Dependent Neglect system are unquestionably trying. However, with the most difficult journeys come the most rewarding destinations. In your role as a CASA, you will make a difference.

-Honorable Judge Souza
13th District Court Judge
of Yellowstone County



Judge Souza with newly sworn in Advocates in March 2022

CASA of Yellowstone County

Anchor of HOPE Project

Measuring Hope: Anchoring a Promising Future for Foster Care Youth



Alyssa Guerrero



Tyra Klein



Carrie Porter

CASA of Yellowstone County is excited to introduce the Anchor of HOPE Project, an initiative aimed at fostering hope in children within the foster care system. This project centers around a specially designed curriculum, "Anchor of Hope," tailored to instill and nurture hope in the hearts of youth served by volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates.

Program Coordinator, Carrie Porter explains why an "Anchor of Hope." "We chose an anchor as the representation for this project because of its symbolism. Just like a ship's anchor provides stability and security during storms, hope represents our inner strength and resilience during life's challenges. The anchor serves as a reminder that, even in tumultuous waters, we can remain steady and grounded, finding our way back to solid ground. Hope embodies the belief that better times are ahead if we maintain our resilience and perseverance. We want Advocates and youth to know and believe that their future can be different than their present circumstances. That is what keeps us going."

Overview of the Project:

The Anchor of HOPE Project is grounded in the belief that hope is not just a sentiment but a tangible and teachable concept. The project utilizes a modified curriculum inspired by the Hope Rising book and the iFred Hope curriculum, initially designed for classrooms. However, CASA of Yellowstone County has adapted it to cater specifically to youth aged 5-12+ in the foster care system, creating a year-long program to measure hope at different stages.

Advocates participating in the project undergo initial training on the importance of hope and its positive impact on youth. Program Coordinators then conduct monthly meetings with advocates to preview upcoming lessons and

activities. The CASA Advocate, referred to as the "First Mate," subsequently implements the month's lesson with the youth, affectionately called the "Captain." "We use a fun theme of pirates and the sea for the curriculum to help get kids engaged", stated Porter.

Curriculum Overview:

The curriculum spans a range of topics designed to explore and build hope in the lives of the youth. Some of the topics include:

- o Understanding the role of the brain in fostering hope
- o Managing stress responses and developing skills
- o Cultivating happiness habits
- o Identifying and navigating emotions effectively
- o Cultivating gratitude, encouraging a sense of wonder and awe in daily life
- o Establishing purposeful goals for hope, including outcomes and SMART goals
- o Overcoming obstacles with resilience
- o Building networks
- o Understanding and practicing empathy and forgiveness

The Anchor of HOPE Project is not just a curriculum; it's a journey towards a brighter future for foster care youth. In closing, Porter said, "I am excited to see this curriculum come to fruition.

The program team at CASA of Yellowstone County has put a lot of time and heart into the project. If we can play a small role in helping others have Hope, that makes it all worth it."



Ezrah, Silas, & Raelynn's

Story



Brothers Ezrah and Silas were introduced to their volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate, Lara, when they entered foster care amid the chaos of their parents' cycle of severe domestic violence and substance abuse. Placed under the care of their grandparents, Lara embarked on a journey to build trust and relationships not only with the boys but also with their parents and extended family.

Lara's dedication was evident as she navigated the complexities of her very first case as a volunteer CASA. Over the course of a year, she worked tirelessly to ensure the brothers' well-being, eventually facilitating their reunion with their mother, who had undergone significant personal growth, becoming a safe and sober parent. As the boys settled back into their home, Lara continued her involvement with CASA, assuming the role of Peer Coordinator, guiding and supporting other Advocates.

A year and a half later, Ezrah and Silas found themselves back in the foster care system, this time accompanied by their baby sister, Raelynn, as their mom relapsed into substance use and was once again involved with an abusive partner. Lara again stepped up to advocate for the siblings, who had returned to the care of their grandparents.

Over the next two years, Lara's commitment remained unwavering as she became a constant presence in the children's lives, attending medical appointments, daycare, and school visits. Her dedication extended to their mother, who, despite setbacks, showed remarkable resilience in her journey towards recovery. A staff member at CASA of Yellowstone County recently filled in for Lara in a family engagement meeting and said "it was clear to me that Lara has built a strong relationship with the kids, but she's also a friend and support to the family. They treat her more like a member of the family than their CASA".

Recently reunited with their mother after nearly two years in foster care, Ezrah, Silas, and Raelynn are embarking on a new chapter of their lives, supported by Lara, their grandparents, and the community.

Lara's impact extends beyond the individual cases she has handled; her dedication has inspired and empowered other volunteers, resulting in a ripple effect of positive change within the community. To date, Lara has served as a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate for 4 kids, and she has coached and mentored 4 volunteers who have collectively served 16 children. Lara exemplifies the impact that just one person can have on a community. When you support CASA of Yellowstone County with your time, talent, and treasure, you come alongside volunteers like Lara to serve the community.



Memorial Gifts

In memory of Jan Butorovich

Nancy Steel

In memory of Mike Conaway

Sylvia McKinley

Lynn Conaway

In memory of Lucia & Michael DeCarlo

Annette Behm

In memory of Carmen & Angela DeCarlo and Mary Ann Philipps

Annette Behm

In memory of Damon Gannett

Juli Pierce

Dixie Bertagna

Patricia & Allen Karell

In memory of Roger & Loretta Garrett

Sue Bogunovich

In memory of Ted Lechner

John & Debra Miller

In memory of Catherine Martin

Jon & DeeAnn Egeland

In memory of our parents

Brenda & Eugene Olheiser

In memory of Marc Priest

Arlene Priest

In memory of Gail Wewel

Mary & Cal Bretz

Honor Gifts

In honor of Angie Dornisch

Tom & Lee McCollough

In honor of Lil McBride

Rika & Tim McBride

In honor of Tim Schultz

Rindy River

In honor of Julie Kleman

Gail Kleman

In honor of Anne Rost

Patti Stein

In honor of Vera Ulschak

Lillian & James Hartung



Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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