

CASA FOR KIDS

FLATHEAD
COUNTY

LIFT UP A CHILD'S VOICE. A CHILD'S LIFE.



A **NEWSLETTER** ADVOCATING FOR ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN

OCTOBER 2015



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

CASA FOR KIDS FLATHEAD COUNTY

“Our mission is to recruit, train and supervise volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children.”

~ CASA for Kids

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

CASA advocates are super heroes, here are their stories...

Have you ever wondered what the role of a CASA advocate looks like? What kind of impact can a CASA make in the life of a child who has been removed from their home? We call our supporters and advocates super heroes. The dictionary definition of super hero is a very heroic person having extraordinary or superhuman powers. We define super hero as an individual

who makes a positive, lasting impact in the lives of abused and neglected children.

We had the privilege of honoring our advocates and thanking them at an appreciation event in August. As we reviewed the last year, we selected four advocates for special recognition. Their stories provide a glimpse into the impact a CASA advocate can have in the life of a child.

Every child deserves a loving, permanent home...

When Shelly was assigned to her first case, the child had been in a kinship placement for some time. The foster parents were used to the status quo and not thrilled to have a new person involved. Nevertheless Shelly diligently fulfilled her role as a CASA/GAL, investing many hours in her case. As the child's

trust in Shelly grew, the foster parents became even less enamored with Shelly and began to voice their dislike for her presence. They began to block Shelly's visits, and attempted to interfere in her advocacy. Shelly became discouraged. As a new advocate she questioned her skills and whether the CASA role was a good fit for her. Our executive director explained that advocates are not always popular, but that her presence WAS making a difference in her CASA kid's life. Ultimately, Shelly's faithfulness paid off. Her CASA child began to detail the abuse she was experiencing in her foster home. The child was removed and placed in a new loving foster home. Several months later this young lady was adopted into her forever family. We sometimes wonder, what would've happened if Shelly had quit?

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE (CONT'D)

A chance to say good-bye...

Niki is an advocate on her first case. She developed a relationship with her CASA kids and was able to effectively advocate for them without alienating the struggling biological mom. By the time a third social worker received this case the children had been in a potential adoptive placement for quite a while. The new worker had received an arm load of cases all at once and her supervisor was quick to let her know how familiar Niki was with the children, the mom and the foster family. The clock was running out for this case and they were approaching termination of the mom's rights. The supervisor had an innovative idea for Flathead County: memorializing the last visit between the children and their mom on film. Due to Niki's familiarity with everyone involved it was decided she was the best person to facilitate the visit. She filmed while the mom explained to her children that she loved them very much, but wasn't able to care for them. She stated that she trusted the foster parents to love and care for them; explaining that it was okay for them to love both mommies. She gave her blessing for them to bond with and love the foster/adoptive parents. The children and mom each received a copy of the video.

The importance of one last visit...

Tracey is currently working on her third and fourth cases simultaneously. She was assigned as an advocate for a medically needy child. Tracey tracked and organized his entire health record, pages and pages. This boy resided in an out-of-town therapeutic group home. His family was here in the valley but his mom was

unable to care for him due to her own chronic health issues. Tracey faithfully visited this CASA child and spent many hours communicating with his multiple care providers; consolidating all the information as an aide for the decision-makers. Meanwhile, the mom's poor health continued to decline, requiring his siblings to enter foster care. Tracey advocated for this young man to return to the valley to be near his family and to facilitate as many visits as possible. She stated, "you never know if it's going to be their last visit." Then word came that their mom was dying. It was time for the children to say goodbye. During that final visit the children waited for their mom to regain consciousness. Deciding she may not wake up, they prepared to leave. The nurse came rushing to the parking lot informing them that she was awake. Thanks to Tracey, these CASA kids were able to talk with their mom one last time.

True heritage is important to who we are...

Wayne is also working his first case. Unfortunately it was the second time for his CASA kids to be in foster care. Through his diligent investigation and conversations with relatives he discovered that one of the children was probably Native American but there was no documentation in the previous case to indicate that this had been dealt with properly. Feeling that the determination of heritage was very important, Wayne began, to make calls and shake trees until others listened and agreed that the right thing to do would be to properly determine the child's heritage. This wasn't popular, but it was legally required and the RIGHT thing.

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THANK YOU...WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED SO MUCH!

Flathead County's foster children benefited from the generosity of staff and community partners working with two great organizations: HUB International and Thrivent Financial. Each organization coordinated a school supply and back pack drive that resulted in a lot of smiling faces. Together their efforts resulted in over 60 brand new backpacks, filled with school supplies! What a great way to support CASA for Kids and the young people we serve.



Thrivent Financial is a financial services organization. Their members have chosen CASA for Kids Flathead Valley as a principal recipient for outreach funds in two ways: Thrivent Choice and Thrivent Action Teams. Members direct where Thrivent distributes its charitable outreach funds using a vehicle called Choice Dollars. The partnership began in March and CASA for Kids Flathead Valley looks forward to receiving these grants quarterly. Secondly, Thrivent believes that positive change begins by taking action. One example of how the Action Team works can be seen in the backpack drive. Action Team seed money was used to purchase 50 backpacks, Thrivent members donated school supplies and filled each backpack. Thrivent members can call 800-847-4836 or visit Thrivent.com to direct Choice Dollars or apply for a Thrivent Action Team.



HUB Gives is an initiative of HUB International that helps employees invest in and give back to their community. For the past few years, CASA for Kids has been a major focus for the HUB – Kalispell office.



Over 130 cyclists rode to make a difference in the lives of children in the Flathead Valley! Cycling for Children was a great success, thank you to all our participants, sponsors and volunteers. A special thanks to Parkside Credit Union and Glacier Bank!



We were privileged to be a part of the Great Fish Community Challenge this summer which was put on by Whitefish Community Foundation. In 12 weeks the community was able to raise \$46,420 for CASA for Kids, thank you! We had so much fun with our super hero booth at the Great Fish Color Run which ended the community challenge.

HEALING FOR THE HOLIDAYS



GIVE A CHILD THE GIFT OF HOPE

It's easier than you think!

Fall is my favorite time of year. I love the changing colors, spicy warm aromas, sweaters and crisp morning air. Most of all, I love this gateway to the holiday season for all the fond family memories it contains and has yet to create.

Unfortunately not everyone looks upon this time of year quite the same way. In fact, this can be a particularly challenging time for struggling families and hurting children. What if your family isn't so happy? Worse yet, what if you are a child and you're living with strangers?

Everywhere you turn you are inundated with messages of happy families. Nothing like rubbing salt in a wound.

Although foster care is often an essential step in helping abused and neglected children, it is a miserable thing to be apart from the people you love while you wait indefinite periods of time – hoping things will get better soon.

Actually, indefinite is a pretty good descriptor for the state these kids live in. It's pretty hard for them to count on anything because their life is so unpredictable. Nothing can take away the sense of loss this period can bring.

There is hope! When a child has a CASA advocate they have someone they can depend on. This person will stay with them while they remain in foster care – that alone can help build stability for a child. If they need to change homes, or schools, or social workers, yet again, they can count on their CASA being the same one they met at the beginning of this journey. That's huge!

If you support CASA you are part of this stabilizing and healing force. You don't have to become an advocate to make a difference for these children! The great thing is that there are so many ways to be involved, meet their needs

and bring moments of joy into their lives. Please consider some of the following ideas.

- Grab a tag, buy a gift. (Our giving tree with tags will be at Flathead Valley Community College.)
- Adopt a CASA child or family group. Call Libby, 755-7208.
- Donate gift cards. Ross, Target, Walmart, Claires and sports stores are always well received.
- Snow boots, snowsuits, warm coats, scarves, hats and winter gloves are needed.
- Gifts for teenagers is often an unmet need.
- Sleds
- Gift cards to grocery stores to support families.
- Want to volunteer but not be an advocate? Join Voices for CASA to help with projects and events throughout the year.

~by Jamie Campbell

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