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Volunteer of the Year

CASA Ann Sestrich truly exemplifies everything CASA stands for: consistency, compassion, collaboration, and courage. She went above and beyond for her youth, helping them move out of state for college, coordinating with a local CASA, and making sure they settled in safely.

Since then, Ann has remained a steady, caring presence—through FaceTimes, reminder texts, and check-ins—showing what it truly means to have the heart of a CASA, earning her the Volunteer of the Year award.

Upcoming Events & Deadlines

Sunday, November 30th
Nominations for Light of Hope due!

Saturday, December 6th
Rudolph Run Through
Cumming First UMC | 11AM

Thursday, January 22nd
CASA Awareness Day
Statewide

Thursday, February 5th
Light of Hope Ceremony
Browns Bridge Church | 7PM



254.41 advocacy
hours



29 hearings attended

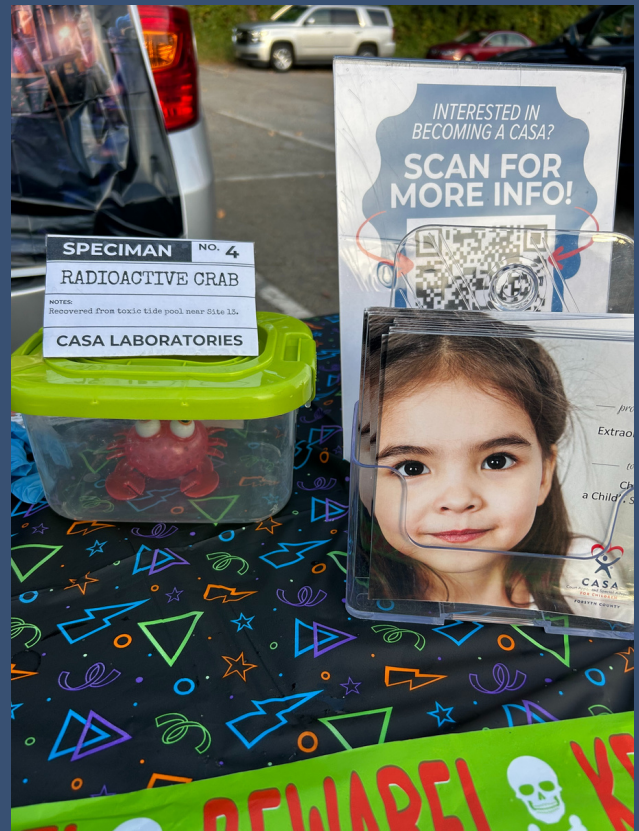


2424.30 miles driven

OCTOBER BY THE NUMBERS

October Monthly Recap

October was a busy and exciting month at CASA! We kicked things off with Cornhole for CASA event, which brought together supporters, volunteers, and community partners for a fun and successful day of raising awareness. Later in the month, several of our Advocacy Specialists joined the Forsyth County Fire Department's Trunk or Treat, connecting with families and sharing the spirit of the season. It was a full month of community engagement, and we're grateful for everyone who showed up to support our mission!



Highlight

What Would You Do? Real-Life Advocacy Scenarios

Last month, we asked you how you would respond in the following situation:

In a case you are assigned to, the children are in foster care and the case plan lists safe and stable housing for the parent as a key goal for reunification. The parent is currently couch surfing between friends' homes, which makes it difficult to maintain employment, attend programs, and consistently meet with the children. The children are thriving in foster care, but progress toward reunification is slowed by the parent's unstable housing.

What would you do?

Next month's scenario:

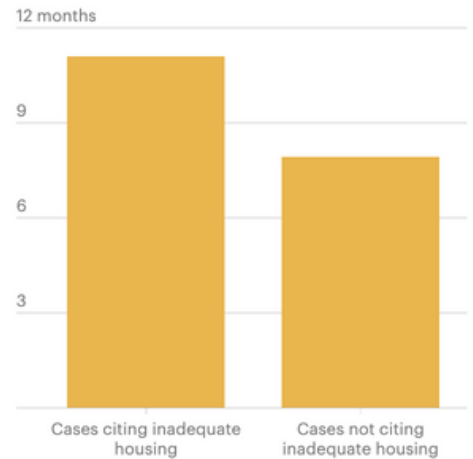
A child in your CASA case will be spending the holidays with their foster family for the first time instead of with their biological parents. The child is anxious and unsure how to feel, while the foster family is eager to include them in their traditions.

What would you do?

💡 *Look to next month's newsletter to see what the most effective course of action might be!*

Inadequate Housing Was Associated with Significantly Longer Foster Care Stays

In Georgia, children whose cases cited "inadequate housing" typically took three months longer to reunify with their families than those whose cases did not.



Only foster care cases in which children were reunified with their caretakers were included in this analysis.
Source: ProPublica analysis of National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System records Agnel Philip/ProPublica

Here's how we recommend responding:

- **Document and communicate** how the parent's lack of stable housing is affecting the case.
- **Highlight both the parent's efforts and challenges** so the court has an accurate picture of their progress.
- **Recommend flexible visitation options**, when appropriate, to preserve the parent-child bond during periods of instability.
- **Encourage DFCS to provide appropriate referrals** for housing supports or local resources.

Sample court report recommendation: "CASA recommends that the parent be connected with local housing resources and case management to address housing instability. Additionally, CASA recommends continued supervised visitation with flexibility for virtual visits when housing or transportation challenges arise, ensuring the children maintain consistent contact while their parent works toward reunification."

Homeless Youth & McKinney-Vento

November is **National Homeless Youth Awareness Month**, a time to recognize and support children and teens who experience housing instability. Under the **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**, “homeless children and youth” are those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes youth who are:

- **Staying with others due to loss of housing or hardship**
- **Living in motels, shelters, or transitional housing**
- **Sleeping in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, or other places not meant for habitation**

“Unaccompanied youth” are homeless children who are **not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian**. Eligible students can remain in their school of origin for the duration of homelessness, and through the end of the academic year in which they find permanent housing, if it is in their best interest. Transportation must also be provided to maintain educational stability.

CASAs are sometimes assigned to **private dependency** cases, where a child lives with a relative or other caregiver who does not have legal custody. Until custody or guardianship is established through juvenile court, these children may also be considered unaccompanied youth under McKinney-Vento if their living situation is temporary or unstable. CASA volunteers support these children by advocating for safety, stability, and permanency, providing the court with clear information, and helping ensure a smooth path to a safe, permanent home.



In honor of National Homeless Youth Awareness Month, we're taking time to acknowledge the difficult realities many young people face—especially those transitioning out of foster care. **The numbers are striking: according to the National Institute of Health, about 46% of young adults who have been in foster care experience homelessness by age 26.**

We also want to recognize *The DROP*, an invaluable resource here in Forsyth County (and our office neighbors!). *The DROP* is a safe, welcoming drop-in center for unaccompanied young adults ages 18–24 who are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Their team provides basic needs support, referrals to community partners, life skills, and coaching to better equip young adults take their next step forward.





Native American Heritage Month & the Indian Child Welfare Act

November is Native American Heritage Month—a time to celebrate the cultures, resilience, and contributions of Indigenous peoples across the U.S. It’s also the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and why it matters in our advocacy.

You may have found yourself asking, “What does the judge mean when they ask about ICWA?”

The Indian Child Welfare Act, passed in 1978, was designed to keep Native American children connected to their families, Tribes, and culture whenever possible. ICWA recognizes that for Native children, maintaining those cultural ties is a vital part of their well-being and identity.

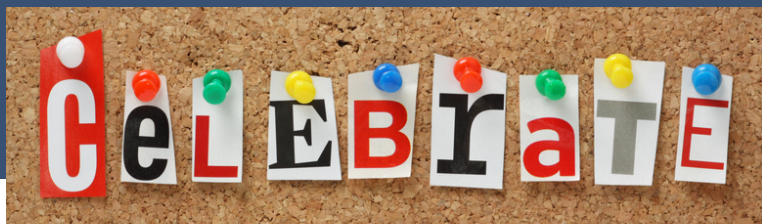
As a CASA, your role includes being aware of whether ICWA might apply in a case. If a child or parent has Native American heritage, the court and DFCS are required to notify the Tribe and involve them in decisions about placement and permanency.

CASA takeaway:

Even though we don’t often see ICWA cases in our local court, the message behind the law is one all CASAs can take to heart—every child’s culture and background matter. Taking time to understand a child’s traditions, family story, and sense of belonging helps us advocate more fully for their best interests.

Birthdays & Anniversaries

-  Nov 2nd - Sandy Hughes (celebrating 10 years!)
-  Nov 6th - Christina Catchpole
-  Nov 7th - Kristi Morton
-  Nov 7th - Carloyn Burruss (celebrating 24 years!)
-  Nov 8th - Laurie Ferry
-  Nov 16th - Sheila Gunby
-  Nov 18th - Ashli Siddall (6 years!)
-  Nov 19th - Andy Brown
-  Nov 21st - Linda Carrier, Kristin Jones, Kristi Morton, Adi Stuler (each celebrating 1 year!)
-  Nov 26th - Kim Boudet



Volunteer Appreciation Superlative Winners

Volunteer of the Year: Ann Sestrich

Lifetime Achievement Award: Carolyn Burruss

- *Years of dedicated advocacy- 24 years!*

Sherlock Holmes Award: Sheila & Steven Castelein

- *For always uncovering the key information needed in a case.*

Rising Star: Kelly Weeks

- *Less than 1 year with CASA of Forsyth*

Rookie of the Year: Alisa Love

- *1 year with CASA of Forsyth*

Voice for All Award: Lina

- *For honoring advocacy for Spanish and Portuguese speaking families*

Trauma-Informed Champion: Susan Phelps

- *For recognizing leadership in bringing trauma awareness to the team*

The Mic Drop Award: Liz Draper

- *For always presenting information clearly and effectively in the courtroom, and for delivering updates that leave no questions unanswered.*

The Curious George Award: Cathy Carlton

- *For always being eager to learn.*

Bridge of Trust Award: Melva Payne

- *For making kids feel safe, heard, and understood.*

The Bond-Builder Award: Jeni Smith

- *For creating lasting, trusting relationships with children and families that go beyond the courtroom.*

The Advocacy Acrobat Award: Kristin Miller

- *For juggling 3 cases at once.*

The Courageous Heart Award: Barb Taylor

- *For showing bravery and compassion, even in the most heartbreaking situations.*

CASA Tip of the Month

One of the most meaningful ways CASA volunteers can support the children they serve is by helping them feel heard. Children in the child welfare system often feel like decisions are being made about them, not with them. Your role gives you a unique opportunity to change that.

During visits and conversations, create space for the child to express their thoughts, feelings, and preferences. Ask open-ended questions (“What would make things better for you right now?”), validate their emotions, and reflect back what you hear to show you’re truly listening. Even if a child is quiet or unsure, your calm curiosity can help them feel safe enough to share.

Please remember to log your training in the tab marked "Training" on the main page in Optima- you need to log 12 hours of continuing education each year.

Reading along with Book Club is now worth 4 CE hours!



Learning & Growth

In-Person, Virtual, and Self-Guided Training Opportunities

Native American Heritage and ICWA Trainings

Advocating for Indian Children: ICWA and the Role of CASAs

- On-Demand

National CASA

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#)

Little Brown Eyed Girl with the Long Brown Hair: Adelyn's Story

- On-Demand

Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#)

Homelessness Awareness Trainings

Basic Requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act

- On-Demand

National Center for Homeless Education

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#)

Seen: Housing Insecurity Amongst K-12 Youth

- On-Demand

Center for Cities and Schools

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS](#)

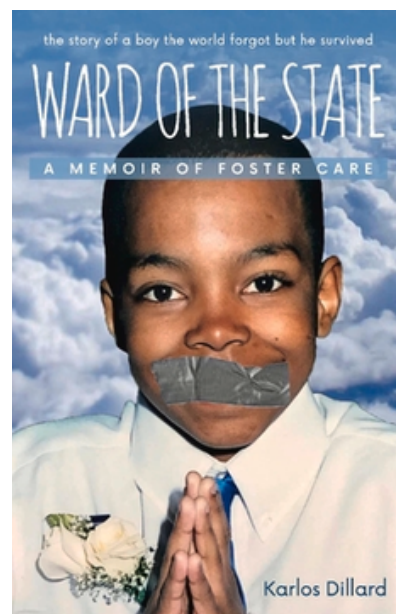
CASA Book Club

Ward of the State: A Memoir Of Foster Care

by Karlos Dillard

This is the story of Karlos Dillard, severely neglected by his mother who often left him and his siblings at home alone for weeks to fend for themselves. Enduring severe neglect and abuse, the boy was removed by the State of Michigan and put into foster care. Karlos was removed from his mother's care just to end up in foster homes that treated him worse. The book is an emotional rollercoaster. Every time Karlos describes the pain he is feeling you will feel the same pain. Whether it be hunger, anger, or being sexually violated. Karlos' use of words makes sure that you aren't just reading the book, you are actually engaged. What is most enticing are the small victories experienced in the story because they give you a break from the horrors of some of the foster homes. Karlos was told he was not loved, he was not wanted and he was nothing but a ward of the State. Karlos had nothing left to look forward to and that almost ended his life, but his hope to find a family that loved him kept him alive.

We'll be doing both an in-person and virtual book club meeting! Stay tuned for details.



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Danny Bennett

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Fitzgibbons Family Charitable Foundation - Weaver Capital Management

Deer Creek Shores Presbyterian Church - George Lipsey - Hampton Family Charitable Fund Teleios Ministry -

Richard Warner - Georgia CASA Eggs Up Grill - Horizon Christian Academy Silvia Anderson - LEJ Capital -

Vanguard Management Group - Northpoint Mortgage

Unity Class of First Baptist Church - Bald Ridge Chapel Trustees

CHANGE A CHILD'S
STORY

 **CASA**
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN
FORSYTH COUNTY