

Newsletter

1st Edition

January 2016



"Elevate your voice so you are not crying to the wind." -Exavier Pope

On October 26, 2015 CASA hosted a community conference titled, Renew: Alleviating the Effects of Trauma on the Child. CASA was fortunate enough to have Exavier Pope and Libby Buchanan be our featured keynote speakers. Exavier Pope is a man of many hats from owning his own law firm, being a Sports/ Entertainment attorney, to a Fortune 500 speaker, a peak performance strategist and a Yogi. Prior to his professional career, Exavier was a child of abuse. His story is riddled with examples of extreme physical abuse by his prostitute mother, witnessing domestic violence, abandonment, and reaching out for help to unwilling officials. His salvation: his foster mother. She taught him how to love, how to forgive and the value of an education. After Exavier shared his story, he facilitated a discussion that allowed attendees to probe into the heart wrenching details and encouraged them to re-evaluate their role in the community. Exavier provided The Pope Powerplan, so people can set realistic goals and hold themselves accountable. "The purpose in life is to inspire others," Exavier Pope shared, and now we are equipped with motivation and a plan to carry this out.

Libby Buchanan is a phenomenal speaker and a force to be reckoned with. She too, is a child of abuse. As a young child her mother "betrayed" her into child pornography where she suffered sexual abuse, extreme physical trauma, in addition to, parental mental illness and alcoholism and gross neglect. As an attendee, listening to the stories, many imagine her everyday life to be so traumatic that it wasn't worth living. But Libby reminds the audience that in between the horror, there were family vacations, dinners, fun times, and positive memorable moments. Libby explained in depth the symptoms of PTSD in children and adults and the little ways a non-professional can help. "Trauma is a living thing that pursues [you]."

Each year CASA tries to host a conference to promote community discussion and be applicable to our everyday lives. Attendees shared that they felt that they have a plan to accomplish their goals. Many revered about the many networking possibilities, being provided with a different lens when meeting new people, and the power of affirmations. In September 2016 we will be focusing on Diversity and will be inviting Ladonna Wattley for her Big Momma's chair presentation. It's not just a child welfare conference, its a community conference.



Judges Corner

"A CASA...[is] considered to be one of the essential workers in our Court."

-Honorable Mary Linn Green

"Who is allowed to be in the Court room for proceedings in Juvenile Abuse and Neglect Court"? The Juvenile Court Act, c 705 ILCS 405/1-5(1), lists those persons designated as necessary Parties by Statute. They are: the Minor who is the subject of the proceedings, the Minor's Parents (Biological), the Minor's Guardian, the Minor's Legal Custodian, and the Minor's Responsible Relative. The Juvenile Court Act, c705 ILCS 405/1-5(2)(a) also provides that any Current or Former Foster Parents of the Minor many also attend the Court Proceedings.

The persons who will typically come to Court Proceedings are the Biological Parents and the Current or Former Foster Parents. If a Relative, such as Grandmother, Grandfather, Aunt or Uncle, does appear at Court Proceedings, the Court must ask them to leave- if they are not the Minor's Foster Parents, Guardian, Legal Custodian or Responsible Relative.

Of Course as a CASA, you are considered to be one of the essential workers in our Court, along with the Court personnel, Caseworkers and Attorneys. As you know, because we deal with children, our Court is extremely confidential. No one who works in our Court is allowed to discuss anything about our cases outside of court. We are all held to this high level of Confidentiality and this responsibility very seriously.

As the Year of 2015 draws to a close, I would like to thank you all for your continued support of CASA. And I would like to wish you & your family & friends a very Happy (and healthy) New Year!

From the Director

With the holiday season just wrapped up, now is a great time to reflect on all that has happened in 2015.

This has been an exciting and challenging year in Winnebago County. We have seen local resources hit hard by the budget impasse from our State legislature. Many of these programs and organizations are realigning themselves and merging with other like operations to continue to serve our community. That spirit of partnership is exactly what CASA stands for. CASA has always been focused on working with others to find resolutions for the children in Abuse and Neglect Court. We continue to partner with our area programs to help children reunite with their families whenever possible. And because of you and your support, Winnebago County CASA is able to do this without any State or Federal funding.

In 2015, CASA has served 415 children. We are hopeful that our efforts to raise awareness in the community about Child Abuse and Neglect is truly helping these children. We have trained 28 new advocates to serve an additional 84 new children in our community. These 28 individuals join the 125 volunteers

already serving our most vulnerable population. During a time when money is short and needs are great, it is astounding to learn that there are so many people out there willing to stand up and be heard for a child who needs them.

As we continue to make strides and help ensure the future of our children is a safe and healthy one, I invite you to partner with CASA to make Rockford and all of Winnebago County a safe place to live and help these abused and neglected children grow into successful members of our society. Through your attendance at CASA events, sponsorship of our educational seminars for the community, and volunteer hours as an advocate, you are helping our CASA children find safety, support, and a permanent home. Thank you for this important role you play for our children.

All of us at Winnebago County CASA are excited for what the New Year will bring for our community. Best Wishes to you and your family in 2016!

“The spirit of partnership is exactly what CASA stands for”- Taryn Marko

From the Board President



As the new Chairman of the Board of Directors, I want to thank all who have given generously of their time and heart by volunteering to advocate for the children, attend and participate in our fundraising events throughout the year, and by donating to our Annual Appeal. Without your patronage we could not be there to watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children, to make sure they don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in inappropriate group or foster homes.

With support from you and our community we can continue to recruit, and support existing CASA volunteers who can be the stable force in a child's life. Our goal remains to provide a CASA to each child that needs one.

I thank you for being a part of Winnebago County CASA and appreciate your investment in the future of the children.



Mission

To assist the Court in seeking the best interests of abused and neglected children through court-appointed volunteer-advocacy

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In 2015, CASA served over 400 children put in over 124,000 hours of service had 106 children find safe permanent homes

Imagine being a 9 year old hearing your parents argue in their bedroom for hours. They do this a lot and they yell loud, you tune them out - you are use to this. When you come out of your room, you see your mom laying on the floor covered in a blanket, asleep. You don't want to wake her so you go back to your room and go to bed. The next morning, mom is still asleep on the floor when you go to school. She's still sleeping when you get off the bus that day so you shake her to wake her up and let her know you're home. She won't wake-up.

You call for your dad but he's in the bathroom. You're worried so you bang on the door to get your dad, and get no answer, so you call 911. The cops come and you are told to sit in the back of the squad car. There you sit alone as they remove your mom's lifeless body from the living room floor. They open the bathroom door to find your dad, alive, but barely after a suicide attempt. Again you are 9 years old. There you sit, in the back of a squad car with hardly any explanation of what has happened. The first responders grab some of your stuff

and put it into a black garbage bag and you're taken to the station to sit. You're here until 2 am, waiting. Then another adult shows up, she explains that she is with DCFS and wants to take you to a relatives house. So you get into her car, but first, she takes you to the ER to be checked out. She explains its protocol, you don't know what that means, you just want it to end. Its a busy night and you are there until about 5 am. Then finally you are on your way to your uncle's house.

Through the Eyes of a Child: Trauma and the Court Process

Just like that, the life you knew was just a memory, no way to contact your friends, no field trip tomorrow, and the police forgot to grab your favorite stuffed animal.

After a child has experienced trauma, they are often abruptly removed, with little explanation. Because they are fragile only experts can deliver certain news, ask them various questions, and make decisions on their behalf. For this child, only a forensic interviewer who is trained was allowed to share any information. It was DCFS that eventually told the child about the mother's death, and that was days later.

Once the matter comes into court a caseworker is assigned to the family. They are responsible for servicing the entire family. Within the first 3 months, there must be a trial to decide if the child was abused or neglected by law. During this time the child starts a new school, learning to trust again, and just trying

to get back to normal. The Dispositional hearing must occur 30 days after the trial, and the judge will rule whether parents are fit, willing, and able to care for the child, and if the child should remain in foster care. From here, every six months the case comes in front of the judge to make sure a child is not lost in the system until permanence is achieved, whether it's return home, adoption, guardianship, or independence. On average, a case is open for 3-4 years. A child is only returned if parents were able to correct the conditions.

During this time, the child has many appointments to maintain, visits with dad, visits with siblings, counseling, therapy, any other recommended services, and the caseworker. As long as this child is in foster care, there are no sleep overs, because everyone in the home would have to submit to a background check. Any vacations out of the area would have to be approved by the court. Imagine

3-4 years living like this, unsure of your future, needing to wait for a court date before decisions can be made.

When CASA is appointed, we are the child's voice to share from the child's perspective what life is like; make recommendations for their best interest; and show up to just be there solely for them. Our advocates work with a team of case managers, attorneys and office support for each child they serve.

Recently, one of our previous CASA children shared with us, that their CASA was their everything, because they would show up and just be there for her. They were the only ones who knew her eye color. The role is not easy, but those who take that oath do so because there is a child in need for someone to be there just for them.



Karen Baker, CASA 4yrs, Tom Harrolle 2 yrs, CASA Attorney Robert May

Winnebago County CASA celebrated 28 years of service to our Community's abused and neglected children this year. Congratulations are due to the following advocates for their years of service.

15 Years:

Fran Knutson
Brenda Kickertz
Kathy Vining

5 Years:

Amanda Clinton
Michelle Colletti
Lara Fierz
Elaine Leslie
Diane Mitchell
Jenny Ralston
Mary Sargent
Pat Webster

10 Years:

Namor Barnett, Jr.
Marge Malachowski
Bill Morrow
Karen Schiller
Arlene Williams

Our Volunteers: The Child's Champion

"Regardless of how difficult a case maybe, how horrendous the situation is, and the many road blocks I may come across; I remember its for the kids and thats all that matters. It is imperative that if you make a commitment, you fullfill it."

- Burnette Shivers, CASA for 26 years, over 60 children served



Everyday our advocates make the decision to champion for the children they serve. This year alone, they have put in over 124,000 hours to serving the children of Winnebago County. Do you want to know what makes these individuals special? Their commitment. In recent conversations with our advocates, we have asked, why do you continue? Why do you make the choice to keep fighting when everything is falling apart? Why do you always choose the toughest case? For each question, our advocates share that they made a commitment for the children. Our advocates were your everyday citizens who decided to join CASA and dedicate their time to child victims of abuse; now they are trained champions.

This year we celebrated our volunteers on September 29, 2015 with a rustic and country themed BBQ at The Midway Village Barn. Guests were treated to music from the Casey Brothers band! Through a generous grant from the Alpine Kiwanis each advocate was given a leather CASA portfolio to use in their work with our children.

Congratulate our new Trainees this year!

Sonia Arora
Jaime Conder
Rachel Crain
Ruth Engelking
Danica Ford
Lacresha Graves
Autumn Havlovic
Stanford Hilton
Louis Lane
Lois Lutz
Tom Lynde
Judy Mattson
Louise McCown

Skye McGee
Sandra Morales
Joyce Oaks
Lisa Pearlman
Patricia Pfoutz
Morgan Smith
Kristina Steele
Xandra Stockton
Marilyn Teague
Britney Teal
Michelle Weygandt
Duane Wilke
Petrea Witt

"Every [child] is one caring adult away from being a success story."

- John Shipp



Advocate Spotlight: Tom Harrolle

Tell Us About Yourself:

I'm 52 years old and I have lived in Rockford since the age of 8. My wife & I have been together for 30 years, with three kids, Luke is 30, Suzie is 28 & Grace is 24. I'm a communication technician employed at Audio Engineers for the last 15 years.

What Other Organizations Are You Involved With:

I also volunteer at the Rockford Rescue Mission, Winnebago County Jail & Noah's Ark.

What do you do for fun?:

I try to make fun every where I go! Some of the fun activities I do are driving my race car, riding motorcycles with my wife and friends, walking my golden retriever, & hanging out with my family.

What inspires you to do what you do for CASA:

Growing up I had a tough childhood, abuse, neglect and poor supervision to name a few. So when I started getting into trouble with the law, I did not get guidance from anyone other than the law. I was not sure anyone cared. So if I can show a child that someone does care my inspiration is being fulfilled.

What do you like the best about your job as a CASA:

I love being a CASA because it does not feel like a job, and my payment is measured in smiles.

What is the most difficult part of your job as a CASA:

The adults in the childrens' lives !!!

What is something people are surprised to learn about you:

I have a fatal and progressive illness, that I can keep in remission with a daily regiment. Thank God it is not contagious, and I can live a long life if I do the next right thing.

What is the best advice you've ever received:

Take one day at a time.

Do you have any funny life experiences:

For fun I put on my Superman shirt and cape, and ride my motorcycle around town. Most people are laughing with me but some laugh at me and I only care that they are laughing.

What is the biggest challenge you ever faced:

Taking the steps necessary to keep my illness in remission, one day at a time with the help of my God.



"I love being a CASA because it does not feel like a job, and my payment is measured in smiles."

- Tom Harrolle, CASA 2 years

Farewell to a few Dedicated, Long Serving Board Members

Our CASA Board of Directors has a unique role: to provide governance, support the front line ambassadors serving our abused and neglected children, and to raise funds to finance the organization and its programs. After many years of serving at the board level, we bid adieu to David Buchen, Sharon Cooper, Barbara Havens-Shirk, Kathy McCarty, and Matthew Thomann. Each of these members have held various roles on the board including Chairperson, Vice-Chair, and Secretary. Through their passion for helping children, Winnebago County CASA has grown in technology, created new funding resources, and increased awareness in the community. We are so grateful to your work on our board over these past years. Thank you for all that you have accomplished for CASA!



Back row (left to right): Fred Muehlfelder, Marilyn Kloepfer, Fran Rossate, Kathy McCarty, Matthew Thomann, Jo Marie Montalbano, Kimberly Bruce, Audrey Engelbrecht, Raegan Caras-Hill, Barbara Havens-Shirk, David Buchen, Sharon Cooper. Front Row (left to right): Taryn Marko, Mary Kay Garganera, Darlene Hanna, Burnette Shivers, Faye Marcus, Sue Gorski

Join the Board

Our Community is thriving! We have more compassionate individuals now more than ever working together to make our community a safe place for people and children to live. Your support over the last year provided 400 foster children a relentless advocate at their side, thanks to their CASA volunteer.

Are you willing to take on a more active role in CASA and join our Board of Directors to impact the futures of our community's children? We are challenged to provide court advocacy to over 900 additional children in Winnebago County. Help us serve these children waiting for a CASA. Contact Fred Muehlfelder for more information: fmuehlfelder@winnebago-countycasa.org

We had a Ball Last Year!

We kicked the year off with a Wine Tasting at Artale Wine Company. The event was a success. We had over 80 people attend and sample about 30 various wines. If you missed out last year, make sure you mark your calendars for Friday-February 5, 2016.

Come April, we hosted our highest grossing Dinner and Auction at Tebala. Last year's theme was "There's No Place Like Home" and we encouraged all of our guests to wear red shoes. As a result from a night of laughs, which people are still talking about, we have decided to permanently adopt the theme and have our guests top their red shoes from last year. You do not want to miss out, so mark your calendars for Friday-April 29, 2015. Invitations to follow.

Then, in June the Airfest adopted our Race the Runway event with proceeds benefiting CASA and the United Way. We had a blast collaborating with the Rockford Airport, United Way and the various sponsors. Last year the evening weather was perfect for large turnout. The airfest is still in the planning stages and we will keep our Facebook page up to date as soon as we have more information.

Fast forward to the fall, we teamed up with Kegel's Harley Davidson's Allen's Hero Ride. Our riders get an opportunity to dress up and put on their superhero costume and go on a 2-3 hour ride. The children who attend loved taking pictures with them, and the riders are nothing but kids at heart in their costumes. A date is to be determined for this coming year, but its normally hosted the beginning of September.

Lastly, we decided to join the #GivingTuesday campaign. This campaign was started in 2012 as a nationwide Give Back initiative to those working to serve in the non-profit sector. Sort of an answer back to retail's Black Friday and Cyber Monday. For the first year taking part in the campaign we didn't do too bad. It was definitely a learning curve to say the least, but we still raised around \$400. Of course there's always next year, so like us on all social media and try to keep up this year!



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Grants

CASA relies on the communities support to not only provide the one on one service of Court Advocacy to our children but also to help provide the necessary materials for our advocates to properly serve these kids.

Through various grants, CASA has been able to work harder and better equip our volunteers to deal with the many obstacles the CASA families face.

The Mill Foundation provided a grant of \$15,000 to fund case management for 50 children for the next year.

The Blazer Foundation provided a grant of \$2,000 to go toward recruitment, training, and retention of our CASA volunteer advocates.

The Community Foundation of Northern Illinois, Howard D. Colman Memorial Fund provided \$5,850 for Recruiting Male & Minority CASA Volunteers.

Woodward Foundation granted our program \$4,000 to fund our Outreach activities to help recruit volunteers.

Alpine Kiwanis granted the program \$1,200 to provide portfolios to every advocate to hold their confidential court papers and to conduct CASA related business with.

The Rockford Kiwanis also provided a grant in order to purchase a folding machine to assist the program in mailings to the CASA stakeholders and advocates.

Sponsors: "One Act of Kindness can Change the World"

CASA would not be able to assist, support and guide the children involved in Abuse and Neglect Court without the tremendous support of our Sponsors. Over this past year we have been able to expand our services to the advocates to better serve our children because of these strong relationships with the Sponsors below. We are proud to list these special supporters of the Winnebago County CASA Program. Thank you for your sponsorship in 2015.

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**WINNEBAGO COUNTY CASA
PROGRAM**

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at
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Admission \$15.00
Try over 30 wines & Enjoy Hors d'oeuvres from Josef's

2016 Annual CASA Dinner & Auction
There's No Place Like Home
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Doors Open at 6pm
Don't forget to wear your
RED SHOES

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