

January 2024 Issue #28

# CASA CONNECTION

## Newsletter



## Welcome to our newest advocate

**Congratulations & Welcome to Nila Novotny, our newest volunteer advocate. Nila was sworn in by the Hon. Denise Kracl, Platte county, on October 26. Nila and her husband John are parents to three adult children and volunteer with several organizations in the Columbus area. Nila is an Otolaryngologist with Columbus Otolaryngology Clinic. We are very grateful that she has chosen CASA Connection to give her time to.**



*Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." -Leo Buscaglia*

# A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - *Susan Jarecki*

As I move into my 13th year as Executive Director of CASA Connection, I have a lot of very good memories due to the amazing people I call “Our volunteers”.

We all know that it is the volunteers that make or break this program. Without them, CASA Connection would not exist, and we do appreciate each of them. However, today I am going to talk about just one of them, and a day I will remember for a very long time.

On October 6, 2023, I was able to witness Rolaine Blaser receive the Serve Nebraska Senior Volunteer Award in Lincoln at the Embassy Suites. Rolaine was nominated and awarded for her demonstration of leadership, innovation, and hard work in service to others in the State of Nebraska.

Rolaine has been an advocate for CASA Connection since February of 2001. She has advocated for more children than either of us can remember, as records weren't always kept back then.

Joining us that day in Lincoln were Rolaine's 5 grown children, 2 grandchildren and one of her sisters. You could see so much love and pride in each of their faces as they watched Rolaine accept the award from Governor Jim Pillen.

It was truly beautiful to see Rolaine with her family knowing she had unselfishly helped and continues to help so many other families.

Congratulations Rolaine...We are lucky to have you as one of “Our volunteers”.



# CASA Connection Happenings

## Volunteer Appreciation Pool Party August 18

We celebrated our volunteer advocates and board members with a pool party in August. The evening was a big hit with guests enjoying the pool, the food and catching up with other volunteers, board members, staff and their guests. We are so very grateful to have such a group of big-hearted individuals dedicated to improving the lives of children in our communities. A big Thank You to Travis & Tara Hill for hosting this event.



Volunteer appreciation pool party at the home of the Hills.



Joy Dannelly, Rolaine Blaser & Carrie Kreber enjoyed catching up by the pool.

## Thank you to our volunteers & board members for all their dedication to CASA

Since January 1, 2023 CASA Connection advocates have put in 919.94 case hours and have travelled 10,215.80 miles to advocate for children in our service area.

In January, 2022 CASA Connection expanded into Nance county with the swearing-in of three new volunteers. We are now advocating for 5 children from Nance county since our expansion to the county in 2022.

## 2023 Year-end Program Statistics

74 Children served by our program  
53 Children served with an advocate  
22 Active volunteers  
41 Family groups

14 Cases Monitored  
7 Children served by staff advocates  
1 Volunteer sworn in  
3 Volunteers taking another case

*“Be the person you needed when you were younger.” Ayesha Siddiqi*

# Columbus Days 2023



**Lights, Camera, Action** was the theme of the 2023 Columbus Days held August 12. The annual event, held in Frankfort Square, featured activities such as a street dance, parades, CASA Connection's Cutest Baby Contest and various booths offering games including our Outreach Coordinator, Lisa Rosendahl & her helpers played *Spin the Wheel of Prizes* with children who stopped by.

## "I'm a Little Cutie" Baby Contest Winners



Left to right: 1st Place: AJ Jaster, son of Taylor Jastor. 2nd Place: Lennox Podliska, daughter of Nick & Amber Podliska. 3rd Place: Carlos Sebastian Salgado, son of Carlos Salgado & Rosa Leon.



Left to right: 1st Place: Olivia Jasper, daughter of Joe & Monica Jasper. 2nd Place: Jaxon Lopez, son of Dru Lopez & Miranda Sealey. 3rd Place: Lexi Schreiber, daughter of Jeremy & Lesli Schreiber.



Left to right: 1st Place: Liliانا Maria Rodriguez, daughter of Jose Rodriguez & Luz Colon-Rodriguez. 2nd Place: Knox McCloud, son of Zac McCloud & Samantha Legler. 3rd Place: Jaden Krings, son of Matt & Katie Krings.

THANK YOU

- ★ Riley Scott for being our wonderful emcee
- ★ Our judges: Brad Hruska, Bonnie McPhillips; Violet Trujillo
- ★ Our helpers: Robbin Cutsor, Bekka & Alena Hruska
- ★ Walmart for providing gifts for all the entrants
- ★ The parents who entered their adorable children

# Continuing Education

CASA volunteers and staff are required to earn 12 Continuing Education hours a year. One of the ways our staff assist the volunteers to achieve those hours is to offer monthly one-hour long sessions, usually held via Zoom. These sessions cover a broad variety of topics which are often suggested by the volunteers. Many of the sessions were facilitated by staff members Susie Jarecki or Lisa Rosendahl. We also had many guest speakers who gave presentations. 2023 guest speakers were: Karmen VanDeWalle gave two presentations: "What is hope" and "What are ACES". CPD officer Jodi Hefti, Platte County Attorney Breanna Flaherty and Nebraska DHHS Initial Assessment Supervisor Ashlin Kava explained the Emergency Protective Custody process. As part of their advocacy for the children they serve our volunteers often recommend services and programs that can assist the children and their families. In order to learn about different organizations we invited the Executive Directors (or President) of a couple to talk about their programs and how they benefit the children. This year our speakers included Executive Director of Camp Catch-Up: Mona Tarin, Executive Director of Youth & Families for Christ: Katie Loseke and Guardians of the Children/Heartland Chapter President Ed Bogue. We are always looking for guest speakers so if you or someone you know may be interested please contact Lisa or Susie at our office: 402-563-4944.

## **Nebraska CASA Association "Chalk it up for CASA" chalk art competition winners announced. Grand prize winners are from Columbus.**

CASA Connection was SO EXCITED to learn that the Grand Prize winners of the Nebraska CASA Association "Chalk it up for CASA" chalk art competition winners are Carl Edwards & Chelsea Werner of Columbus. They are both employees of Columbus Public Schools. Congratulations to them both and a huge THANK YOU to them as well as everyone else who entered this year. This is the second time the grand prize winners were from Columbus. Be sure to be on the look out for a chance to enter the 2024 chalk art competition.



2nd Place



Best Family Art



People's Choice



3rd Place



Best Children's Art

# **“Step Up To The Plate”. 2023 Nebraska CASA Statewide Conference**

The 2023 Nebraska State CASA Conference was in La Vista. Speakers included former football running back Raymonn Adams, Dr. Alger Studstill, Jr. Deputy Director Deputy Director of Protection and Safety, Children & Family Services Division at Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, panelists including Lisa Gonzalez [GAL], Monika Gross, JD [FCRO], Judge Chad Brown and Dr. Studstill. A long with attending various information sessions, attendees had the opportunity to stop and meet members of various organizations, such as the Kim Foundation, Foster Care Closet and CasaManager. A fun highlight of the weekend was the Dunking Booth Challenge fundraiser on Friday evening. A couple people, including NE State CASA Executive Director Corrie Kiely and RuAnn Root-Executive Director of CASA of South Central Nebraska were dunkees.

CASA Connection attendees included Exec. Director Susie Jarecki, Outreach Coordinator Lisa Rosendahl, volunteers Dee Condon, Robbin Cutsor, Joy Dannelly, Renee Held, Michele Monroe and Theresa Seipel.



Left to right: Robbin Cutsor, Susie Jarecki, Joy Dannelly, Michele Monroe, Theresa Seipel, Dee Condon, Lisa Rosendahl and Renee Held



The final panelists of the day included Judge Chad Brown, Monika Gross, Lisa Gonzalez & Dr. Alger Studstill



Case managers from the Nebraska Dept. of Health & Human Services during “A Day in the Life of a Caseworker” breakout session

# Save the Date for 2024

## Coffee & Conversation with CASA

THE BROKEN MUG  
2200 28TH AVE  
COLUMBUS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9  
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Grab some coffee and learn more about becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate and chat with current advocates.



CASA CONNECTION  
402-563-4944.

<https://casaconnectionne.com>

**Nebraska CASA 2024  
State Conference  
August 23-24  
Younes Convention  
Center, Kearney**

**2024 Columbus Days  
August 8-11  
Frankfort Square**

**“I’m a Little Cutie” Baby  
Contest  
Saturday, August 10  
Frankfort Square.**

**CASA Connection sends a huge THANK YOU to the following for all of their past support, funding and in-kind donations**

Platte County, Nebraska  
Columbus Area United Way  
National CASA Association  
Thrivent Member Network  
Cornhusker Public Power Goodwill Fund  
Ticket to Dream  
Walmart

Colfax County, Nebraska  
Nebraska CASA Association  
Nebraska Crime Commission  
First Interstate Bank  
Sherwood Foundation  
Delta Kappa Gamma  
Numerous individual donors

Thank  
you

Thank you to the Guardians of the Children/Heartland Chapter for the GENEROUS donation of toys & gifts for our "CASA kiddos", the Calico Quilt club for the handmade quilts to keep the children warm and to Peace Lutheran Church for the box of snacks our volunteers can enjoy when they stop by our office.



# CASA Connection Volunteer Spotlights

CASA Connection has some of the best volunteers. Here are a few to get to know

## Michele Monroe

Michele was sworn-in in March 2023. She is advocating for second family since being sworn-in.

**Tell us about yourself.** My name is Michele. I grew up in the southern suburbs of Chicago and raised my two kids in the Northwest Suburbs. I came to Clarkson NE when my Kids were grown and flown to pastor New Zion Presbyterian Church. I love Jesus, hiking, camping, journaling, and kids.

**How did you hear about CASA Connection and what led you to wanting to volunteer with our organization?** One of the members of the church is a CASA volunteer and since I love kids and needed a way to help in the community I decided to volunteer.

**What has surprised you the most about volunteering with CASA?** The complexities of the families and service providers continues to surprise me.

**How do you balance your own family life, activities, job and volunteering CASA Connection?** I live one day at a time making the people who count on me and my own wellbeing priorities. Truth be told, I drop the ball sometimes.

**Anything else you would like us to know about you?** I am in my third career having started as a foster care case manager and crisis intervention social worker.



## Tom Cleary

Tom was sworn-in in June 2019. He has advocated for 4 familie since being sworn-in.

**Tell us about yourself.** I grew up in Atkinson Nebraska. My wife, Helen and I have three adult children, Emily, Jeff, and Brian. I worked in healthcare administration in hospitals and clinics for 40, years retiring in 2018. I currently reside in Columbus, where I've lived for 27 years.

**In the 4 years since you have been a volunteer with CASA Connection, what has surprised you the most about the role of being an advocate for children in foster care?** One thing that surprises me is the small number of male CASA volunteers. Only 12% of our CASA Connection advocates here in Columbus are men, yet 75% of the children I've worked with are male. Another thing that has surprised me is the diversity of the four cases I have been involved with. Each one has presented different challenges and different family structures.

**Men make wonderful advocates for children. What got you interested in becoming one with CASA Connection?** The year before I became a CASA I joined the board of Youth and Families for Christ. It was there that I became interested in working with children and that piqued my curiosity about CASA volunteers. Once I found out that being a CASA advocate involved working with children in the foster system, I just knew that it would be something that I would like.

**What advice would you give to a new advocate?** As far as advice I would give to a new advocate, I would say this. Be prepared to learn new things with every case and don't be afraid to ask questions. Each case will be different and each case will be a learning adventure.



## Jean & Dan Britt

Dan & Jean are married and were foster parents prior to volunteering for CASA Connection. Jean was sworn-in in 2015 & Dan followed in 2016.

**Tell us about yourself.** Dan works at Auto Quality as a Technician; I don't work anymore. We have been married 40 years. We have 4 children: 3 boys and girl. We also have 7 grandkids & 7 great grandkids! Dan and I like to go camping and fishing. I also do a lot of reading.

**What advice would you give to a new advocate?** Stay active with the whole team. Don't be afraid to become a Casa Advocate. There is a lot of support from both Susie and Lisa plus other advocates!

**How have the children you have worked with, as an advocate, impacted your life?** When you go to visit your child and they call you by your first name and are excited to see you...that is a wonderful feeling. You know you are making a difference!



## Board Members

Scott Ditter, President  
Robbin Cutsor, Treasurer  
Theresa Seipel, Secretary  
Zach Johnson  
Travis Hill  
Barbara Howser  
Doug Pauley  
Cheryl Richardson  
Nicole Saalfeld

## Volunteer Advocates

Julie Anderson  
Traci Barnes  
Dan Britt  
Tom Cleary  
Robbin Cutsor  
Tricia Dusatko  
Barbara Howser  
Lynsey Kime  
Cheryl Noonan  
Kim Schmidt  
Tim Sky  
Tara Svatora  
Michele Monroe  
Rolaine Blaser  
Jean Britt  
Dee Condon  
Joy Dannelly  
Renee Held  
Nila Novotny  
Carrie Kreber  
Kim Olsufka  
Theresa Seipel  
Joan Smith  
Annette Swantek  
Karmen VanDeWalle

## Staff

Susan Jarecki  
Executive Director  
casacon@yahoo.com

Lisa Rosendahl  
Outreach Coordinator  
casacoord@gmail.com

CASA Connection is affiliated with  
the Nebraska CASA Association &  
The National CASA Association.  
CASA Connection is a  
Columbus Area United Way partner  
agency

Find Us | *We're Social*

### Facebook:

CASA Connection, Columbus, NE

### Instagram:

@casa\_connectionnebraska

### Twitter:

@CASAConnectNE

### Office Location:

1465 27th Avenue

### Mailing Address:

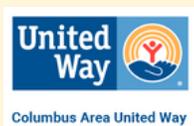
2610 14th Street

Columbus, NE 68601

**Phone: 402.563.4944**

### Website:

[www.casaconnectionne.com](http://www.casaconnectionne.com)



# Happy Birthday!

**HOW ARE YOU, REALLY?**

“**HELP IS KEY TO MENTAL HEALTH.**”  
Coach Frenzen




“**ESTOY AQUÍ PARA TI.**”  
Mia

columbusunitedway.com/mentalhealth

Your mental health matters.





Cheryl Richardson	January 3
Kim Schmidt	January 5
Tricia Dusatko	January 7
Jean Britt	January 8
Nila Novotny	January 10
Travis Hill	January 14
Tara Svatora	January 14
Traci Barnes	February 21
Joy Dannelly	March 12
Zach Johnson	March 19
Karmen VanDeWalle	April 16
Michele Monroe	April 30
Carrie Kreber	May 10
Theresa Seipel	June 3
Rolaine Blaser	June 7
Tom Cleary	June 13



**CASA**  
Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

**CASA CONNECTION**



*Lisa Rosendahl*  
Outreach Coordinator

**CASA Connection is looking for speaking opportunities**

**CASA Connection is looking for opportunities to give presentations about our program and our need for community volunteers.**

We would love to come and present at your civic organization meetings, businesses, clubs and more!

Give us a call at 402-563-4944 or email Lisa Rosendahl: [casacoord@gmail.com](mailto:casacoord@gmail.com)

Visit our website: <https://casaconnectionne.com>

**Do you have time to spare?**

You can make a difference in the life of a child in foster care. All training is provided.



CASA Connection needs caring adults who want to make a REAL difference in the life of a child.

Call our office: (402)563-4944 or email Lisa at [casacoord@gmail.com](mailto:casacoord@gmail.com) for more information.



*“When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments – tenderness for what he is and respect for what he may become.”*  
– Louis Pasteur