



**Fall
2016**

Destination: Safety & Permanency



This CASA child was served by Terrill Johns until she found safety and permanency through Adoption.

Chelsey, Kenneth, and David were placed in foster care after their mother, Jan, was found driving under the influence (DUI) and having behaviors indicating mental illness which resulted in her arrest and placement in emergency protective custody. It was determined that she was incapable of providing proper care for her children.

Chelsey's father was unknown so she continued in a foster home placement while Kenneth was placed with his biological father (1 hour away from Chelsey) and David was placed with a previous partner of his mother (1 hour beyond Kenneth and further from Chelsey) who was the only "father" figure David ever had.

A CASA Volunteer advocate, Nancy, is assigned by York County Court Judge Caster Senff. Since the children live so far from each other, courtesy CASA Volunteers from CASA programs closer to where the children now reside are also recruited to visit with the children at least once a month, making sure the children are safe and that efforts are being made towards permanency for each child.

As time goes by, Nancy, the CASA Volunteer, continues to monitor the case, visiting with Chelsey, reading reports, observing visitations, attending team meetings etc. Jan continues to receive mental health treatment and, for quite a while, was on a waiting list to participate in inpatient substance abuse treatment.

Jan continues to have visits with Chelsey, Kenneth and David at least twice a month, sometimes more. Jan makes some progress on her mental health issues but definitely needs the substance abuse treatment in order to be a healthy parent who can care for her children. Finally there's an opening for her to obtain treatment. She completes inpatient treatment in 6-8 weeks. Jan is taking her medications as prescribed and is more stable. She obtains employment and has housing. However, she lives with a registered sex offender. The children cannot be placed in a home where a registered sex offender resides.

When children are placed in out-of-home care (also called foster care), it is imperative that child welfare agencies find safe, permanent homes for them as quickly as possible. In most circumstances, children can be reunited with their families, but in some cases children find homes with relatives or adoptive families. In this case, since the children need permanency (residing in a safe and nurturing home where they will live until adulthood) and the mother continues to reside with a sex offender, a petition to terminate parental rights is filed and the court has a hearing to terminate the parental rights of the mother.

What do you think when I say "Foster Home"?

"A home that takes in children temporarily when their parents cannot care for them."

"Home that embraces children not originally in the family."

"A safe place for children to be raised in a family setting when their home is no longer safe."

"CASA for York County supports and provides volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children, enabling them to thrive in a safe, permanent home."

All parties agree that the children have a good relationship with their mother but that she cannot provide the stable, permanent, safe home that they need. Instead of terminating her parental rights, another option is brought forth.

It is agreed that efforts will be made for the children to have permanency in the homes they currently reside in. Chelsey continued placement with her foster family who were committed to keeping her in their family home for as long as she needed it. Because parental rights were never terminated, when Jan finally leaves the sex offender, she is able to be reunited with her daughter, Chelsey. This is because Jan continues to be stable and is finally able to provide a safe, permanent home for her daughter.

Kenneth is doing well in his biological father's home. He continues there permanently. Efforts are made for David to be in a legal "Guardianship" with his pseudo-stepfather, the one who has been the only "father" figure David has known.

What do you think of when I say "Guardianship"?

"The guardian of a child is a person who has been given parental rights of a child, not the parents who bore the child."

"Legal situation where an individual has the responsibility to make decisions and provide for the care of someone who can't take care of themselves."

"Like all children, Brandie deserves to have a safe, permanent home," says long-time CASA volunteer, Sue Cordes, when she talks about her current CASA child. Brandie's mother wanted to have custody of her child but was not able to provide a home, did not have an income, and had some legal issues. Brandie's father was in a similar situation as her mother.

After a child has been out of home for 15 months the court must give consideration to terminating parental rights, so

that children do not linger in foster care. At this point in Brandie's case, neither the mother nor the father had been able to meet the requirements of the DHHS case plan in order for Brandie to safely return to either parent. Brandie had been placed with her maternal grandparents since removal from her mother's custody. When the 15 month timeline occurred, the court had the option of terminating parental rights in order to free the child for adoption or to grant guardianship with the grandparents without terminating parental rights.

Guardianships are more often used with older youth. It is somewhat unusual for a young child. However, in this case the court wisely chose to allow guardianship, recognizing that it was in the best interest of Brandie to leave her in her grandparents loving and safe family home. She would also continue to have contact with her mother as her guardian grandparents see fit. In this way, permanency was achieved as a guardianship was in the best interest of this child. The child welfare agency and its workers were dismissed from the case but the court continues to monitor the guardianship with court reviews every 6 months.

Most of the time a CASA Volunteer is dismissed from a case when permanency is achieved, including



Safety and permanency for Sue Cordes' CASA child comes through a Guardianship with her grandparents.

Guardianships. However, in Brandie's case the judge felt it would be beneficial to have Sue, the CASA Volunteer, continue monitoring Brandie's safety to make sure Brandie and her grandparents are getting their needs met so they can continue providing this permanent home for Brandie. Sue agreed and still contacts Brandie at least once a month at home or at school or daycare. Sue has a good relationship with the grandparents, making sure Brandie continues to be safe and getting her needs met. Sue writes a report for each 6 month court hearing letting the court know about her visits with Brandie, the family and her teachers, reporting what Brandie wants and needs and noting any concerns she may have.

Brandie's grandmother says that Sue has been very supportive and Brandie loves her. Sue has researched and suggested programs for Brandie to be in. Brandie enjoys having Sue visit her at school, knowing that someone is interested in her.

"I care about this child," Sue says when asked why she continues in this role. "I want there to be a good outcome for her. I feel I am still serving a purpose."

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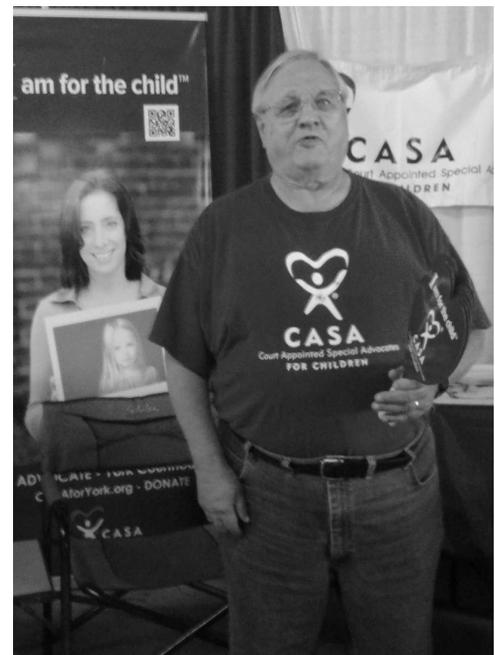
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AND OTHER ANONYMOUS GIFTS



Where do victims come from? What happens after the traumatic event is over? How do they navigate the court system? Are there special concerns for working with Native American victims? For one week in July, our administrative assistant, Melody Coehoorn, attended a training academy that covered these topics and more. The Nebraska Victim Assistance Academy is an intense week long training event held at Creighton University that brings together law enforcement officers, victim advocates, and anyone else who works with the victims of crime to learn from each other and experts in the legal and mental health systems. To cap off the week, the attendees heard from Lt. Governor Mike Foley, who also presented a Certificate of Graduation to each.

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Volunteer Spotlight

Terrill Johns

Terrill Johns used to see the CASA for York County signs on the courthouse lawn and think about doing something nice to help someone. When she retired, she took that step.

A little more than three years ago she became a CASA Volunteer. Since then she has served two little girls on their journeys to safety. About the two cases she says they “are very different but both have been rewarding. I’ve learned from them and I hope they learn[ed] a little from me.”

Terrill’s favorite memory is from her trip to the 2015 CASA National Convention in New Orleans. She is also very grateful for Carol Knieriem and Maureen Diaz, who help her whenever she needs them.



Terrill and Carol stop for a break during the 2015 CASA National Convention.

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