



**Volume No. 2  
CASA for York County  
Fall/Winter 2022**

There is a saying this time of the year which goes sort of like this, “Luck and will come to thee if a bird nests in your Christmas tree.” Believe it or not, this statement relates really well to the CASA program. You see, the website My Growing Traditions quotes the German company Inge Glas with saying, "Bird nests are symbols of home. They represent the love, commitment, and effort it takes (birds) to build a happy home.”

Safe, permanent and happy homes for abused and neglected children are what our CASA volunteers work toward. The task is both satisfying and daunting. CASA youth leave their handprints on the hearts of many. Nothing that has happened to them is their fault. Their resilience is inspirational. Join us as we represent the best interests of these children.

## CASA for York County Snapshots 2022

We’ve had a busy year with record numbers of children in need of an advocate. We are grateful to our dedicated advocates for caring about, and sharing their heart with the children of York County. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.



Staff and Advocates attended the State CASA Conference, took part in the Yorkfest Parade, trained and welcomed eight new CASA volunteers, partnered with Corteva to provide backpacks and school supplies to area youth, had a chilly but very fun walk/run to fight child abuse, haunted the Holthus, are partnering with York State Bank to provide Christmas gifts to the children CASA serves, thanked our volunteers at our annual banquet and attended trainings to better serve our children and families ... whew! And all while serving a record number of youth!

# Coffee with Elizabeth

Hello and Happy Holidays!

As we approach the turn of the year, I like to look back and reflect on how we as a program have grown, changed, and improved over the last year. I think about what our goals and priorities should be as we turn the calendar to 2023.

The year 2022 has been a record-breaking year here at CASA for York. Firstly, we saw a new record for most children served by CASA at one time - 29! But on the other hand, we have had an exorbitant amount of children entering the child welfare system; in recent years past, the York County juvenile court has seen an average of 42 children per year.

This year alone, we have already seen 70 children, with 55 of those kids still being in the system today. We are working tirelessly to stay

on top of these cases, and find advocates who are willing to step up to the plate and be their voice. As we enter the new year, you can rest assured that as child abuse numbers rise, we here at CASA will be kicking it into gear, advocating for the safety and permanency these children deserve.



**Why did Sherry Tonniges choose to become a CASA volunteer?** Her reason is "... I retired from teaching but felt I still had something to give. The training was eye-opening and reinforced my desire to become a CASA. I wish every undergrad going into education could have this training. I would have had a much better understanding of many of my students had this training been a part of the college curriculum."

On the importance of becoming a CASA Sherry says, "Many children who enter the foster care system need a constant in their lives. No pressure – just a smile and a hug. They need someone they see regularly, someone with no expectations other than that smile and hug. This person shows up for the child at school, at daycare, at dance recitals, and at home, wherever that might be. A CASA can make a child's day by just being there.

"Several years ago, I attended a program at YES. I was the only person there for this child. When she saw me in the audience, her eyes got bright and her smile was beautiful. We took photos after the program just like all the rest of the children with their families. It is a photo I hope she still has today!" *See more about Sherry on Page 4*

## ***A note from a friend; Cornerstone Bank***

At Cornerstone Bank, we believe that doing the right thing for our customers starts with making our communities even better places to live and work - and that the best way to do that is to get involved.

From financial support to employee volunteerism, Cornerstone is actively engaged with the projects, organizations and decisions that shape the communities where we do business. We empower local leadership, so you can be sure Cornerstone is aware of the issues facing your community and is focused on making an impact where it matters most.

***President and CEO of Cornerstone, Zac Holoch, believes that it is imperative for the company to sponsor organizations like CASA for York County. He states, "There is a sense of responsibility to give back to the community. Cornerstone is honored and privileged to be a strong supporter of CASA, which makes such a positive influence in child's life."***

Cornerstone Bank, formerly First National Bank of York, received its charter in April 1882, with a mission to provide unmatched customer service and meet the financial needs of Nebraska. Surviving the pioneer days and the Great Depression, the bank now has 47 locations in 38 communities throughout Nebraska. Total assets of the bank have grown to approximately \$2.2 billion, compared to \$23 million in 1970.

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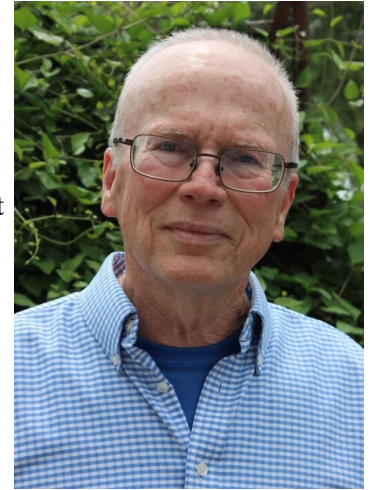
# From the desk of Dan

As I drive by businesses on my way to work I see so many that are looking for people to fill their vacant positions. Some have changed their hours due to staff shortages and others have offered incentives to attract potential applicants. Hiring bonuses, flexible work hours and even lowering the minimum hiring age seems to be the norm. Any of you who have traveled recently know this is the case elsewhere too.

In my role as the Volunteer Supervisor for CASA here in York, one of my duties is to recruit new volunteers. One would think that CASA would also be affected by the situation so many businesses are currently struggling with. After all, we pay much less than those businesses (actually we don't pay anything); However, we can offer new volunteer applicants the potential for a meaningful experience and an opportunity to make a difference in the life of a child. No small task. There is also a commitment involved – both an emotional one as well as a time commitment.

Despite this, we were able to recruit eight new volunteers during this past year. Each attended CASA new volunteer training and, after certification, were assigned a case and asked to commit themselves emotionally and give a portion of their time to advocate for a child.

I recently asked one of our newer volunteers why she does it. This volunteer indicated, "Our world is very troubled right now and I figure I have an opportunity to make some kind of difference by getting involved with a child at CASA. I had to contribute something." While the comment was seemingly simple, the way it was said and the "passionate simplicity" involved moved me deeply. Both the spirit and attitude involved in the comment gave me renewed hope for the future. I will let you make a conclusion of your own on why things appear to be going well at CASA.



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# Thank You!





CASA FOR YORK COUNTY  
NEBRASKA

York County Courthouse  
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### **Congratulations Sherry Tonniges, First Ever Heart of CASA Award Recipient !**

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CASA volunteer advocate Sherry Tonniges was named the first recipient of the Heart of CASA Award. Executive Director Elizabeth Hain presented the award at the Volunteer Appreciation Banquet held last spring. Director Elizabeth Hain says, “Sherry currently works with not 1, not 2, but 5 children, ranging in age from infant to 7 years old. Each month she visits multiple homes, schools, and childcare facilities, ensuring that she hears the opinions of all, and the needs of each specific child. With 3 different caseworkers, 2 different GALs, 2 different judges, and 3 different foster homes, Sherry has been the only constant in the lives of these small children. Despite the constant turnover and challenges this case has presented, Sherry has taken every obstacle in stride, and is always looking to move forward and find solutions to protect these children.”

### ***It's Giving Tree Time!***

The very special elves at York State Bank are at it again, working their holiday magic in the lobby of York State Bank's main office. And they haven't been the only ones; CASA Advocates have been busy collecting lists which will soon be hanging on the tree.

**From November 14th through December 9th the community is invited to pick a wish-list from the tree and purchase gifts for one of the children CASA volunteers advocate for.**

Kathy Ortmeier of York State Bank points to the following quote to explain the organization's reason for giving, “He (Santa) may not be the one that puts the presents under the tree, but his spirit works through us each time we give freely without expectation and each time we spread joy, love and light to another person.” Since 2017, CASA for York County kids have benefited from the York State Bank Giving Tree and we are grateful for their sponsorship of this charitable opportunity for our community!

