Summer 2014

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

Carol Celebrates 10 years with CASA !

It's been 10 years since Carol Knieriem first shouldered the mantle of Executive Director of CASA for York County. In all that time, there's still one little boy, one case, she can't get out of her head. He was found by York police stumbling nearly naked through the streets. A bandage covered a wound to his head. His body was bruised and he was deserted, alone. He was 5 years old.

This was a child who had been let down by everyone: by his mother, who abused him and lost custody; by his father, who gained custody but inexplicably began abusing him as well; by the

out of state case worker who told the court a month earlier that the boy was fine even though she hadn't bothered to visit. Distance was no excuse. "It would've taken her 10 minutes to fill out the paperwork to get a worker here to check on him, to pick up on some signs that he wasn't doing well," Carol recalls.

This was one case Carol took on herself. She became the CASA volunteer. She ferretted out the family problems, challenged the bureaucracy and in the end, helped ensure this boy was adopted by a good family. She didn't stop there: she called the Ombudsman's Office in the State of Iowa and the guardian ad litem to make sure they followed up so the boy wouldn't get lost in the system again.

"That's what CASA volunteers do," Carol says simply.

It has been a good 10 years at CASA for York County for Carol, who used to work for the Nebraska Foster Care Review Board until her job was threatened by budget cuts. She put her contacts with Health and Human Services, attorneys and the courts to good use helping hundreds of children find safe, permanent homes.

One lesson learned over time: "That everyone has their issues to deal with," Carol said. "I think our culture tends to blame victims a lot but we all have something that we struggle with. Some of my volunteers have faced abuse in their own *(cont. pg. 2)*

Celebrating 10 years …continued:

background but they are doing something positive because of that, making a difference for people." Carol is also appreciative of her CASA board members over the years, including Candy Otte, who's been on the board for more than 10 years. "That's a huge commitment," Carol says. CASA for York County also has many wonderful, dedicated volunteers, like LeVauna Weismann, who has been a CASA since the organization started in York County in 2000. Sue Cordes has also been with CASA for more than a decade.

She is very thankful to the people, businesses and foundations of York County and beyond, who donate towards the $70,000 annual budget in a steady stream, year after year. "The community is very supportive. I have been so blessed to think about our finances and how we have the funds we need. We continue to need that support, and to seek it, but it has not been a struggle like it has been for some other CASA programs. I'm so appreciative of that," Carol said. York County supplies the other half of the budget, for which she's also grateful.

And unlike the lax out of state case worker she wrestled with, Carol finds the case workers in York to be excellent. "We have incredibly wonderful workers here in York, but sometimes things fall through the cracks, and we're here to help keep that from happening."

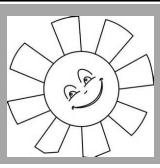
When methamphetamine production boomed in rural areas, Carol needed many more CASA volunteers to deal with the 70 children in the York County Court System, many of whom were being raised in meth labs. Thankfully, laws were passed that closed many of the labs.

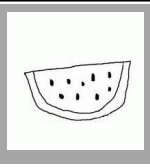
Today, "we are holding steady at 30-40 kids at any one given time, so it's lower. We have around 20 volunteers."

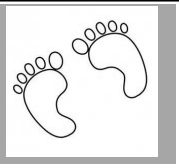
And every one of them are sorely needed. "Our goal is safe, permanent homes for kids to live in. Without a CASA volunteer, they won't always get their needs met or kids will linger in foster care because things are not done in a timely fashion."

become a volunteer - call the CASA office @ #362-5454

"My thought is the more we have people watching out for kids, the safer they'll be. It doesn't take much to speak up for somebody and make a difference."







Some Things I've Learned Along the Way by Carol Knieriem

There's more than one way to do everything (and not just the right and wrong way)
Everyone has their issues
Some children/people have more than their fair share of issues to deal with
It is beyond me how some parents can abandon and/or severely abuse their own children
Our culture is very violence oriented……violence is NOT the answer
We tend to blame victims (especially if they are female)
I have hope
I remember everything…….eventually
There are amazing, caring, generous people in this world
God is good….God is very, very good

YOU make great things happen for children — our Donors November 2013-June 2014

MidWest Bank donates to CASA

"It takes only one person to change a life."

"Several people reached out to me and can be credited not only for my success, but my survival – and one was an unpaid volunteer."

Ashley Rhodes-Courter

Terrill Johns gets "Sworn In" by Judge Linda Castor Senff

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Volunteer
Kathy Moore visits with a CASA youth

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CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

I am a CASA Volunteer

To a child silenced by injustice,
I am a voice.
To a child with whom the world has broken faith, I am someone to believe in.
Amid confusion, I am certainty;
amid instability, constancy.
In a dark labyrinth of bureaucracy,
I am a way through – a steady arm around the shoulder, a calming voice in the ear. For while my appointment may come from a court, my calling comes from within.
To the child neglected, the child abused, the child cast upon the mercy of an often merciless system,
I am heart and caring and courage personified.
I am a CASA volunteer.

- *CASA Volunteer - Dallas, TX*

***Standing*: Carol Knieriem, Michael Crutcher, Kathy Moore, Stephanie Cunningham, LeVauna Weismann, Sue Cordes; *Sitting*: Mary Novak, Chris Tonniges, Gayle Coffin, Lorraine Grenfell**

Volunteers Suzy Heine, Gayle Coffin, Lorraine Grenfell, Sherry Tonniges and Director, Carol Knieriem at Speaking of Children Conference.