The Advocate

JULY 1, 2020

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

Family Advocates in the Office

CASA Child

Family Advocates, like many non-profits, have had to learn new ways to provide our services during this time of quarantine. These are skills we will carry with us as our staff returns to the office full time in July. One of the useful tools we have acquired during this time, are alternative ways to interact with our kids and youth, volunteers, and supporters. The Family Advocates staff is very excited and motivated to get back into the office and face to face with the children we serve in La Porte County.

The CYA (Court Youth Advocate) Program will be conducting, for the first time, a virtual training for new volunteers. There has been a good deal of research put into the best way to virtually train our volunteers, which will take place on July 14th and 15th.

The CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) Program is scheduling a virtual training for new CASA volunteers in August. The CASA program will also conduct an in-service on July 16th on The 3Ps; Positive Parenting Program presented by Amy Penrod- Jarrett. The topic of discussion will be Communication: How we are able to listen, understand and talk to our children through the new way of communicating

Harmony House has resumed in-person visits to ensure families have to opportunity to continue to develop relationships with the non-custodial parent.

- CYA Training - July 14, 2020 - July 15, 2020
- CASA Training - August 2020
- Fall Gala - November 13, 2020

A Letter from Board Member, Shaw Friedman

Having joined the board over two decades ago when Harmony House was a sister agency to CASA, I cannot tell you how important it has been for us to have strong community support which has sustained us and allowed our combined agency to thrive and survive.

It was in the late 1990's as a board member of Swanson Center that I first began discussing with CASA's executive director Karen Biernacki the problem that we'd both identified that there were no suitable locations for visitations or monitored exchanges. It greatly discouraged both of us that some families felt the need to do "drop-off's" at a particular mile marker on the Toll Road or were simply meeting at a local fast food restaurant for a "visitation."

With Swanson Center having moved our outpatient offices from 1005 Michigan Avenue to the Westside of LaPorte, it struck both us that our former residential treatment facility would make a perfect, homelike setting for such visits and monitored exchanges – hence Harmony House was born at the turn of the new century.

With Harmony House now a critical part of the Family Advocates' trio of services including CASA and CYA, it gives me great pleasure and satisfaction to be part of our Board celebrating 30 years of service to this community.

With the benefit of a dedicated board, exceptionally committed staff and support from our Community– Family Advocates can look forward to many more decades of providing much needed services to kids and families in LaPorte County.

Board Member ,Shaw Friedman-Family Advocates

Family Advocates Programs

Family Advocates is an agency with three programs under one roof. The La Porte County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) Program, the CYA (Court Youth Advocate) Program, and Harmony House.

The CASA Program recruits and trains volunteers to be the voice of a children who have been abused or neglected. A CASA volunteer is a court appointed, trained and committed adult who ensures that each child's individual needs remain a priority in an overburdened child welfare system. They get to know the child while also gathering information from the child's family, teachers, doctors, caregivers, and anyone else involved in the child's life in order to make independent and informed recommendations to help the judge decide what is best for the child. CASA volunteers come from every walk of life and share a commitment to improving children's lives, a willingness to learn, and an open mind towards life experiences different from their own. For children who have been abused and neglected, CASA means having a home instead of feeling lost, and being a priority instead of feeling invisible. For volunteers, CASA is a life-changing experience that makes our community a better place.

The CYA (Court Youth Advocate) Program recruits and trains volunteers who seek to reach at-risk youth or youth who are adjudicated delinquent in order to reduce the probability of reoffending by working directly with them. The mission is to support the best interest of those youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system due to delinquent acts by promoting intervention services and providing a positive mentor. The Juvenile Magistrate appoints a youth advocate to assist in concerns of adolescents involved in the courts. The advocate acts as an additional support to all involved with the youth at this time and promotes better choices and personal growth. Every day, there are many adolescents who wish there was someone who they could talk to and express their concerns; someone who represents their feelings without bias; a positive role model to look up to and interact with. A CYA is that person who listens, understands, and represents the best interests of the youth.

Harmony House is a supervised visitation and safe exchange program. Visitation takes place in a comfortable, neutral setting encouraging the parent and child to relax while strengthening their family relationship. Sessions are closely monitored by visitation staff that observe, record activities, and stand close to intervene if necessary for the emotional and physical safety of the child. Harmony House is a locked facility for safety, however has a kitchen to cook meals, fenced in back yard for playing, and homelike rooms so the family feels comfortable to interact. Harmony House staff is trained to conduct family coaching to help and encourage parents to safely build the parent and child bond.

The Safe Exchange program is a child-friendly monitored exchange program to help parents reduce the stress of custodial exchanges of their children. Arrival and departure times are staggered so the parents have no direct contact. Children are under the supervision of a person attentive to their needs while at the exchange site. This allows children to be more relaxed during departures and arrivals with parents.

VOLUNTEERS COME FROM EVERY WALK OF LIFE AND SHARE A COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING CHILDREN'S LIVES.

Volunteer of the Year 2020 - All Volunteers

Every year Family Advocates spends the month of April celebrating our amazing volunteers who give their time and hearts to help at-risk children and youth in La Porte County. This April, due to the Coronavirus Pandemic and the need to keep everyone safe and well, we have had to push back our celebration. We typically pick a CASA Volunteer of the Year and a CYA Volunteer of the year, this year we want to recognizer all of our volunteers will be the Volunteers of the Year 2020! This has been such an unusual time for our world and our volunteers have stepped up and worked extra hard to stay connected with our kids and youth. The volunteers transitioned to virtual visits and out of the box thinking to keep the engagement with their cases and make sure the situation the children and youth are in are safe and healthy. It is because of their dedication and ingenuity we want to honor each and every volunteer in 2020. Thank you CASA and CYA Volunteers for all you do!

Recognizing Volunteer - Allison Dent

CASA has always been a cause that is close to my heart. I first became involved with CASA around 2000. My family has always been proud community philanthropists and after I came home from college, I was expected to give back to my community. Being a recent college grad, my funds were lacking and I sure didn't have anything extra to donate, so my family said I needed to donate my time. I researched a few area programs including CASA and after a brief discussion with Karen Biernacki, I knew CASA would be my cause!

I went through the training and was so excited to get started. I truly saw this program as something that would allow me to see immediate results of my work. In my capacity, I would interview caretakers, case workers, and service providers to give me a back story of what was really going on with the child I was charged with representing in court. My children were typically young and couldn't physically speak for themselves. I would then write a report directly to the judge specifically on behalf of this child and what my thoughts were as to what should be recommended and provided for this child. Even though my clients were young, there are many in the system that are older and don't have individual representation. CASA provides that voice in court which is neutral and not directed by any outside influences on what the needs and wishes of the child should be. We advocate only on behalf of the child.

CASA is a very important program to our community. They are always looking for volunteers as you can imagine. There are many children in the system that need representation. Our goal is to have a CASA for every child and we can't do that without you. Please consider giving these children a voice in an otherwise bureaucratic and rather cumbersome system of abused and neglected, and they desperately need the support of an adult who truly cares about them and stays with them for the length of their court case. In Indiana, they're called Child in Need of Services (CHINS). The CASA volunteer provides a judge with objective information about the child to help the court make a sound decision about that child's future. The CASA volunteer makes recommendations to the judge and follows through on the case until it is permanently resolved. They advocate for the child's best interests and help them have a safe and permanent home as soon as possible. In my experience CASA I've seen first-hand what a difference that can make in the child's life experience.

-Allison Dent

FORMER VOLUNTEER ALLISON DENT

"I researched a few area programs including CASA and after a brief discussion with Karen Biernacki, I knew CASA would be my cause!"

Thank you 2020 Volunteers

Juanita Akins
Mischelle Battle
Patricia Baxter
James Beien
Karen Biernacki
Adam Binkley
Vicki Cain
Diane Calderone
Kayla Caves
Annette Clark
Karen Cooper
April Daly
Jamie Dillon
Mary Drewes
Taylor Emmons
Christine Frank
Maggie Fritzen
Claudia Geise
April Greetham
Kayla Pedreza
Alice Good
Gloria Horn
Lisa Huber
Felicia Johnson
Norma Kasinger
Gretchen Kubit
Tim Mace
Jeannie Martin
Julia Martinez-Smith
Kitty Maurer
Ron McAtee
Neki McCray
Jane McDonald
Thomas McDonald
Andrea McLean
Jennifer Mrozinski
Kevin Noland
Tim O'Brien
Keiren O'Kelly
Suzanne Osborn
Katrina Parham
Daryl Penfold
Tracey Pollock
Jamie Pritchard
Nicole Roberts
Candice Rompa
Triston Rouse
Ryan Reynolds
Peggy Rose
Stephanie Satchwell
Shawn Schindler
Jamie Schwingel
Maureen Scully
Cheryl Seitz
Karen Shea
Larry Sheagley
Brenda Stellema
Lynn Stombaugh
Kelli Tanger
Lorraine Tighe
Hugh Tonagel
Kathy Tonagel
Joanne Turner
Kristen Vowell
Michael Walker
Tommy Watkins
Cheryl Webster
Sharon Yuscius
James Wszolek

Family Advocates
1005 Michigan Avenue
La Porte, IN 46350

Phone: 219-324-3385
Fax: 219-362-9144
E-mail:
mfritzen@lpfamilyadvocates.com

WE ARE ON THE WEB WWW.LPFAMILYADVOCATES.COM

OUR MISSION:
FAMILY ADVOCATES IS AN INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION ADVOCACY AND INTERVENTION AGENCY WORKING FOR THE BEST INTEREST OF AT-RISK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Family Advocates Stories

Lisa has been a CASA for the past 36 months on an ongoing child in need of services case. Her CASA kid, *Angie, has been adamant to remain in her foster placement, desiring guardianship or adoption by her foster parents. Representatives from the State have recommended she be reunified with her mother. *Angie's foster parents have given her the opportunity to experience life with a new structure, love, and consistency. *Angie has written letters to the court expressing her past, present, and future concerns of going back to living with her mother. In the beginning, Lisa noted that *Angie was very quiet, shy, withdrawn yet throughout the relationship she has become empowered and developing the confidence to respectfully express her wishes. Lisa has helped *Angie learn to express herself and now the court has decided to grant guardianship to her foster parents.

*Name changed for confidentiality.

*Mike was a scouted football player at our local high school who experienced the tragic shooting of his cousin. After intimidation from gang members caused *Mike, a 21st Century Scholar, to obtain a gun for his personal protection. Under the pressure of this gang intimidation, this young man showed pictures of the weapon he obtained during football practice one day. A concerned player and parent reported the incident to the school. The CYA, working with Probation and the state attorney, through further investigation revealed no weapon was on school property. A deferral agreement was made and *Mike had an opportunity to retain his "Scholar" status and continue his pursuit of college academic and football goals. *Mike did not return to the high school, rather enrolled in an on-line program and completed his diploma early and started college. The CYA's efforts brought attention to his scholar status and requesting further investigation into the case to determine his innocence. *Mike worked hard to push beyond the death of his cousin and the gang influence to redirect himself on the path of success.

*Name changed for confidentiality.

Harmony House has started face to face visits for the first time since the quarantine due to the pandemic. *Sherry was able to visit her son, *Devon, for the first time in months face to face. Both *Sherry and *Devon were extremely excited to see each other. During the visit, *Devon said, "I don't want to do anything but snuggle with you on the couch." Sherry reached for Devon and put her arms around him and they sat for fifteen minutes. *Sherry and *Devon talked, shared stories, *Sherry rubbed *Devon's back and head. It reinforced how important it is for children to see there parents and get those much needed snuggles.

*Name changed for confidentiality.

Reach for the Stars

Family Advocates continues to work on our 30th Anniversary Gala, Reach for the Stars scheduled for Friday, November 13, 2020.

As plans come together more information will be shared. We hope to have a large amount of support to help us celebrate 30 years working with children in La Porte County.

Movie and television actor Alan Ruck, co-star in Ferris Bueller's Day off and television show Succession, will join Family Advocates for the event.

Make sure you mark the date on your calendar!

Family Advocates

CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

harmony house

CYA
Court Youth Advocate Program