

# THE ADVOCATE

DECEMBER 1, 2020



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

## *Thank You for Your Support!*



Family Advocates would like to thank everyone who helped make our 30th Anniversary Gala a success!

The Reach for the Stars Gala was a jam packed night of comedians, testimonials, dinner from Albano's Pizza, beverages from The Bottle Shop, and interview with stage, movie and television actor Alan Ruck.

With a lot of planning and preparation and the

extreme talents of Duneland Media and host Ric Federighi the evening was able to raise \$40,000 for our agency. This would not have been possible without the support of our sponsors, donors, participants, volunteers, staff and our supportive community.

We are thankful to everyone who contributed and participated in this evening. Since it was a virtual event we were able to spread our message farther than we would have had in a person event. The night of the event 1,192 people watched from the comfort of their home.

A special thank you to our event sponsors who

include Friedman and Associates, Horizon Bank, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America.

Thank you to sponsors Swanson Center, Tonn and Blank, Qubit Network, Prosecutor John Lake, Northwest Health, NIPSCO, Sauers Buick GMC, Todd Connor & Andrew Tournay, VS Engineering, Cardinal Point, Maple City Dentistry, La Porte County Sheriff John Boyd, Guy DiMartino Law, ADH Leasing Co., MC Doors, Applegate and Company, Lawrence Zimmer & Ted Perzanowski, IBEW Local 531, General Insurance Services, Cender & Company, Inc., MTM Realty Group, Kevin Noland & Tim King.

- ◆ CYA Virtual Training - January 2021
- ◆ CASA Virtual Training - February 2021
- ◆ CYA Virtual Trivia - February 2021

## *A New Look for a New Year*

As we welcome 2021, we are excited to introduce you to a refresh of our brand identity.

For 30 years, Family Advocates has been dedicated to providing our families with a commitment to advocacy and respect. We continue to uphold this commitment with a logo that better reflects the evolution of our brand.

With the rebrand of our logo, we pay homage to our company's roots while symbolizing our agency's dynamic and modern future. This clean

new look represents the outstanding excellence we provide for each one of the children in our programs.

### **Same Great Service**

By the beginning of the New Year, you will see our new logo on our website, social media accounts, business cards and on all branded documents.

Our website will be updated and improved to reflect our rebrand and provide a more user friendly experience.

We hope that you take the time to take a look at the new and improved website at the beginning of the new year.

We are excited to share our new logo and website with you and look forward to working with you in 2021!

**Have a Safe and Happy Holiday Season!**



[familyadvocates.com](http://familyadvocates.com)

## Letter from CEO Karen Biernacki

IN 2020, ALONG  
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COVID.

I hate to use the word again, but it has been an *unprecedented* year. Personally, I have learned the importance of time with family and friends, running into an old friend or an acquaintance at a local restaurant, enjoying the local theater or going to the symphony. Here at Family Advocates, we have missed those spontaneous moments of sharing an idea or getting help with a case from the person around the corner in the next office as we moved to working remotely. For many, there have been greater losses. Even before the pandemic, millions of children were growing up in families who were unable to meet their most basic needs. In 2020, along with poverty came uncertainty, unemployment, sickness, and for some, the loss of a loved one due to COVID. This stress has increased the number of individuals struggling with mental illness, substance use disorder, and domestic violence.

### Technology Upgrade

Family Advocates is the recipient of an anonymous donation to improve technology. These funds could not have come at a better time, as many services and meetings have become virtual due to the pandemic. As COVID-19 started sweeping through the world, Family Advocates began grappling with unprecedented challenges that were helped dramatically by these upgrades.

Nonprofits, by necessity are lean organizations, working to stretch every dollar so they can have the greatest impact within the community they serve. Tight budget constraints mean that certain areas of running a nonprofit business, like technology, gets placed on the back burner.

Technology upgrades can reduce operating expenses and increase

The need for social services increased threefold. Our Family Advocates team, CASA and CYA volunteers and our donors met the challenge. In this last year, the Family Advocates team, our CASA and CYA volunteers, and our donors have worked together to ensure that service at Family Advocates continued while keeping everyone was safe. We knew that when school was virtual there no longer was an extra pair of eyes and ears looking out for these vulnerable children. Our volunteers, at times, were the only outside contact for these children. We kept in contact with child welfare case workers, teachers, and caregivers to help coordinate virtual services, sharing food drive information and providing a listening ear. Working together, abused and neglected children, at-risk youth and vulnerable families continued to receive services. The big 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala was held – but like most events

during 2020 it too was virtual. With the help of Duneland Media and our Event Planning Committee, it was still a celebration with laughter from up-and-coming comics, an interview with Alan Ruck, and some very special messages from our volunteers, foster parents, youth, and donors. As we enter 2021 and hope for a safer, healthier new year, Family Advocates would like to thank the frontline workers, our law enforcement, child protection, teachers, mental health providers and our volunteers for working to keep people safe, both physically and mentally; ensuring everyone had access to food; and working hard to provide an education for all students during 2020. We look forward to working with all of you as we edge our way out of this pandemic and back to seeing each other's smiles. Happy New Year, Karen Biernacki, CEO

productivity, they can also open doors to new donors and boost fundraising efforts. Like many nonprofits, Family Advocates faces the practical challenge of moving their staff, operations, and program delivery to virtual work environments. This includes the hardware for staff as well as software for collaboration. There has been an uptick in organizations we work with now adopting collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

With offices working with limited in-person staff, our staff has had many of our communications move to cellphones. Cell phone communication has been particularly important with the vulnerable populations we work

with. This allows staff to remain in contact with our volunteers and children while working outside of the traditional office setting.

The upgrade in computers, monitors, and hardware has increased productivity greatly. Many of the computers being used by staff were over 10 years old. With newer, faster computers staff can access information more quickly and utilize newer programing better suited to facilitate the needs of Family Advocates and the families we serve.

Family Advocates is incredibly grateful for the anonymous donation and looks forward to stepping into the new age of technology as we enter 2021.

### Recognizing Volunteer - Juanita Akins

Family Advocates has been honored to work with Juanita Akins since she became a CASA Volunteer in 2012. Juanita was born in Chicago, Illinois but grew up and spent most of her life in Michigan City, Indiana. She has lived the past 23 years in La Porte, Indiana. Juanita has been married for 23 years to her husband, Kerrie, and has two step children, one son-in-law and one granddaughter. Juanita has a degree in business from Purdue University and worked at Whirlpool Corporation, she retired in 2013 after 34 years.

While at Whirlpool she became a facilitator for Stephen Covey's "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People". Juanita says, "I always knew after retirement I would be involved somehow working with children."

Juanita has been a CASA Volunteer since April 2012. She started her first case right after she was sworn in as an officer of the court, and advocated for two little boys until the case closed three and a half years later. She

has advocated for multiple children during her time as a volunteer. She is thoughtful and dedicated, and truly fights for the best interests of the children, even if her opinion is not shared by others. During her first case, Juanita also signed up to become a CYA volunteer and now advocates for children in both programs.

Juanita became a CYA volunteer in the fall of 2013. She took a very complicated case in the following spring which involved her child being a part of the CHINS (Child in Need of Services) and delinquency sides of court. Juanita worked with this young lady for two and a half years, guiding her with love and patience to a path of hope and success. Juanita works with skill and compassion for the children and youth she works with and continues her efforts to see they find their way through the darkness of their situation.

Her obvious dedication to the welfare of children made her the



CASA & CYA Volunteer  
Juanita Akins

perfect candidate for Family Advocates Advocate of the year in 2016. Juanita gives her time not only to the children she works with, but is very dedicated to the agency's mission.

Family Advocates is thankful to have amazing volunteers, like Juanita, who are the heart and soul of our organization.

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### Recognizing Those Who Have Made a Difference in 2020

## *Family Advocates Stories*

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**WE ARE ON THE  
WEB  
[WWW.LPFAMILYADVOCATES.COM](http://WWW.LPFAMILYADVOCATES.COM)**

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

