

*Spring 2021 Issue #23*

# CASA CONNECTION Newsletter



## Welcome to our new advocates

Congratulations & Welcome to our newest volunteer advocates. Traci Barnes, Scarlett Johnson and Keith Luedders. Traci & Scarlett were sworn in by the Honorable Frank J. Skorupa on February 3 and Keith on April 15. We are so glad that Traci, Scarlett and Keith have joined our team of volunteers willing to speak up and advocate for the children we advocate for here in Platte and Colfax counties.



[left to right] Hon. Frank Skorupa,  
Traci Barnes, Scarlett Johnson



[left to right] Hon. Frank Skorupa,  
Keith Luedders

# A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Susan Jarecki

## *HAPPY SPRING EVERYONE,*

*We have made it to the spring of 2021! I don't know about the rest of you, but I felt the winter of 20-21 was one of the longest I have ever had. I didn't think these spring temperatures were ever going to get here, but they have and I am loving it!*

*COVID update for CASA Connection: Our office building has finally been opened back up to the public. Meaning you can come in through an unlocked front door, but you still need to wear a mask and fill out a COVID questionnaire. If you are planning a trip to our office, please continue to check with Lisa or myself first to make sure our office is currently open. We are starting to venture out more as the virus starts to subside, and meetings are being held in person.*

*As you are all aware of, we have been holding our trainings and board meetings virtually and I believe we will continue with this as an option. I miss the visiting and seeing everyone in person, but being able to connect virtually has proven very beneficial. We are having a higher attendance rate on the on-going trainings and the pre-service training has also been going well.*

*I know many of our volunteers had to get pretty creative in contacting their CASA kids and keeping everyone safe and unexposed to COVID. I want to express how much we appreciate each and every one of our volunteers for keeping these visits strong. We sent out our stakeholder surveys and although we only received 37% of them back, they all had very good and encouraging comments on them. That is when you know you have a great group of volunteers.*

*I believe as of today, thus far into the pandemic CASA Connection came through it and we are stronger for it. I believe we do have light at the end of the COVID tunnel and truly believe in the Finish Strong Nebraska campaign.*

*Everyone in our office has been vaccinated and I hope all of you that wanted the vaccine have been able to get it.*

*Just as we wish the best for the children we advocate for, I hope you are all able to count your blessings, lift your heads high and greet the future with hope and optimism.*

***SUSAN JARECKI***



**THANK YOU** to members of the Guardians of the Children "Heartland" chapter for the donation of toys, blankets and other gifts which we are now able to give to the children we advocate for. The toy drive is an annual community event for their group and members chose CASA Connection as this year's recipient. Our volunteers are encouraged to stop at our office prior to visiting their "CASA kiddos" and picking out gifts to take to them. Thank you to anyone who donated gifts to this toy drive.

THANK YOU to attorney Jason Mielak. Jason was the guest speaker for CASA Connection's monthly volunteer Continuing Education session in April. Jason, who is a frequent GAL for many of our cases, explained what the role of a GAL is and answered questions asked by the volunteers. Our volunteers always appreciate the information Jason provides.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month



**April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, and CASA Connection is raising awareness about child abuse and neglect and the need for more citizens of Platte & Colfax counties to step forward and help make a difference.**

When a child is placed in the foster care system due to abuse or neglect, they are often removed from their home – sometimes far away from their family, loved ones and community. CASA volunteers are everyday people from all walks of life who are recruited and specially trained to advocate for these children and provide a consistent, reliable adult presence for them during a difficult time in their life.

CASA volunteers are assigned to one child or sibling group to advocate for their best interest in court. They get to know the child and everyone involved in their life, such as family members, foster parents, therapists and teachers, in order to best advocate for the child. They make recommendations to the judge overseeing the child's case, with the goal of ensuring that the child is safe and has the resources needed to heal and thrive.


**Many success stories have one thing in common: 'Someone believed in me.'  
Don't you want to be that someone for a child in need?**

**CASA Connection Volunteer Spotlight**  
**January 2021**

At CASA Connection we are very thankful for all of our AWESOME volunteers! These men & women give their hearts & time advocating for children in Platte & Colfax counties. Join us in getting to know a little about one of these volunteers each month.

**Tara Svatora**

Tara has been an advocate with CASA Connection since 2019



**Tell us about yourself:** I am a stay at home mom to 4 kids. My husband works for Piller Family Farms. Originally I was a hairstylist until we adopted our 4 kids. We have one girl age 5, and three boys age 12, 11, and 8. We have 2 dogs and a cat!

**Why did you choose to volunteer with our organization?**  
I chose to volunteer with CASA because its a way you can truly be there for kids who have been displaced. To be someone constant in their lives when everything around them is changing. Through adopting our children our CASA worker was our greatest blessing! You get to be their voice!

**What do you like most about being a CASA advocate?**  
I love walking into a visit and seeing faces light up! Building trust with the kids is a good feeling, when they can talk to you about anything and know they are safe doing so!

**With so many worthwhile organizations to volunteer with, why should others choose to volunteer with CASA Connection?**  
Foster care is such a huge need! If you can't become a foster parent CASA is a great option.

**What would you say to someone considering becoming a volunteer with CASA?**  
Dive in! You won't regret it!

**For something fun-Who or what inspires you and why?** Teachers, the most patient people in the world. Travel inspires me, nothing like a great reminder of how big this world is.

**CASA Connection Volunteer Spotlight**  
**December 2020**

At CASA Connection we are very thankful for all of our AWESOME volunteers! These men & women give their hearts & time advocating for children in Platte & Colfax counties. Join us in getting to know a little about one of these volunteers each month.

**Carrie Kreber**

Carrie has been with CASA Connection 2 years as an Advocate



**Why did you choose to volunteer with our organization?**  
My oldest sister struggled for years to get pregnant before doing foster to adopt in Iowa. They had a phenomenal CASA volunteer named Carey. Her daughters, had been in the system enough times and long enough before being placed with my sister that they lovingly refer to her "Aunt Carey." After seeing how amazing she was with the girls and all she did to support them, I knew one day I had to do that. It was then added to my bucket list.

**What do you like most about being a CASA advocate?**  
I love being able to be the one constant adult in the child's life. For a few hours and a few times each month, I can bring sunshine, smiles & support to those kids.

**With so many worthwhile organizations to volunteer with, why should others choose to volunteer with CASA Connection?**  
Being a teacher, I already have a soft spot in my heart for kids of all ages. Helping kids & supporting families is a passion of mine.

**What would you say to someone considering becoming a volunteer with CASA?**  
Do it! You can help change a child's life! If you love kids, helping people, changing lives and making a difference, this is exactly for you! You will never regret it.

**For something fun-What is one of your favorite quotes?**  
"It's not about the cards you're dealt, but how you play the hand." Randy Pausch

**CASA Connection Volunteer Spotlight**  
**March 2021**

At CASA Connection we are very thankful for all of our AWESOME volunteers! These men & women give their hearts & time advocating for children in Platte & Colfax counties. Join us in getting to know a little about one of these volunteers each month.

**Patricia [Tricia] Dusatko**

Tricia Dusatko has been an Advocate with CASA Connection since 2018



**Why did you choose to volunteer with our organization?**  
A friend was with CASA and I was a teacher so I thought it would be a good fit.

**What do you like most about being a CASA advocate?**  
Seeing the kids and the changes in them.

**With so many worthwhile organizations to volunteer with, why should others choose to volunteer with CASA Connection?**  
If they love children they might like this.

**What would you say to someone considering becoming a volunteer with CASA?**  
I would try to answer any questions they might have about CASA.


**For something fun-What would you tell your 18-year old self?**  
Have confidence in yourself.

**CASA Connection Volunteer Spotlight**  
**February 2021**

At CASA Connection we are very thankful for all of our AWESOME volunteers! These men & women give their hearts & time advocating for children in Platte & Colfax counties. Join us in getting to know a little about one of these volunteers each month.

**Dee Condon**

Dee Condon has been with CASA Connection 3 years as an Advocate



**Why did you choose to volunteer with our organization?**  
I retired from 36 years in education in 2016. After giving it a year I decided to join CASA as many of the Foster Children I encountered while in education would have benefited from an advocate, someone who focused on just them. This is what CASA does, so I decided I wanted to be such an advocate.

**What do you like most about being a CASA advocate?**  
My relationship with the youth. Feeling like I am making a difference in her life.

**With so many worthwhile organizations to volunteer with, why should others choose to volunteer with CASA Connection?**  
I have volunteered for other very worthwhile organizations in my past and have found volunteering rewarding. CASA Connection was new to me and I find it extremely worthwhile.

**What would you say to someone considering becoming a volunteer with CASA?**  
Give it a try. The 30 hours of training is good information for everyone. If you like it, you will stay, if you don't you can quit. It certainly wouldn't hurt to try.

**For something fun-What would you tell your 18-year old self?**  
I would tell myself what I told my 4 children at that age and younger:  
"You can do/be anything you want, just try!"



## Congratulations Carrie Kreber!


Congratulations to CASA Connection Volunteer Advocate Carrie Kreber. Carrie was recognized by the Columbus Area United Way as an Outstanding United Way Partner Agency Volunteer. We truly appreciate all you do for the children we serve!!!!!!

**CASA Connection Volunteer Spotlight**  
**April 2021**

At CASA Connection we are very thankful for all of our AWESOME volunteers! These men & women give their hearts & time advocating for children in Platte & Colfax counties. Join us in getting to know a little about one of these volunteers each month.

**Mike Goos**

Mike Goos has been an Advocate with CASA Connection since 2019



**Why did you choose to volunteer with our organization?**  
As a retired School Psychologist I frequently witnessed the lives of children mired in the criminal justice system through no fault of their own. Involvement with CASA is an opportunity to help children feel a sense of normalcy and support in what is very confusing and intimidating.

**What do you like most about being a CASA advocate?**  
The opportunity to be a positive influence in a child's life.

**With so many worthwhile organizations to volunteer with, why should others choose to volunteer with CASA Connection?**  
Personally, the most satisfying aspect about working with CASA is that you can see direct and tangible results of your efforts to affect the outcome of a child's future.

**What would you say to someone considering becoming a volunteer with CASA?**  
Even though I am relatively new to CASA, I would say the reward of helping a child through a very difficult period in their life is immeasurable.

**Do you have a favorite book or movie and why?**  
The Meaning of Life by Viktor Frankl who was a concentration camp survivor in Nazi Germany. Essentially he said we all have the ability to survive adversity with dignity.

# Board Members

Travis Hill, Interim President  
 Robbin Cutsor, Treasurer  
 Theresa Seipel, Secretary  
 Scott Ditter  
 Zach Johnson  
 Doug Pauley  
 Karina Perez  
 Nicole Saalfeld  
 Kiara Ziemba

# Volunteer Advocates

Mike Applegate	Julie Anderson
Traci Barnes	Rolaine Blaser
Dan Britt	Jean Britt
Tom Cleary	Dee Condon
Robbin Cutsor	Joy Dannelly
Tracy Duncan	Tricia Dusatko
Mike Goos	Renee Held
Scarlett Johnson	Kaye Karmann
Carrie Kreber	Lynsey Kime
Keith Luedders	Jeanne Quinn
Kim Schmidt	Theresa Seipel
Joan Smith	Casey Spitz
Tara Svatora	Karmen Thompson
Carrie Trofholz	John Weeder



## CASA Connection

### Office Location:

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2610 14th Street

Columbus, NE 68601

**Phone:** 402.563.4944

Find Us | *We're Social*

### Website:

[www.casaconnectionne.com](http://www.casaconnectionne.com)

### Facebook:

CASA Connection, Columbus, NE

**Twitter:** @CASAConnectNE

### Instagram:

@casa\_connectionnebraska



## Staff

Susan Jarecki: Executive Director  
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Lisa Rosendahl: Outreach Coordinator  
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**CASA Connection is affiliated with  
the Nebraska CASA Association &  
the National CASA Association  
CASA Connection is a Columbus  
Area United Way agency.**



Columbus Area  
United Way



# **CASA Connection sends a huge THANK YOU to the following for all of their past support, funding and in-kind donations**

Platte County, Nebraska  
Colfax County, Nebraska  
Columbus Area United Way  
Nebraska CASA Association  
National CASA Association  
Nebraska Crime Commission  
Cornhusker Goodwill Fund  
Linda K. Price

## Current 2021 Program Statistics

52 Children referred to our program  
43 Children served with an advocate  
33 Family groups

9 Cases Monitored  
28 Volunteers  
3 Volunteers sworn in

## Birthdays

Carrie Kreber	May 10
Theresa Seipel	June 3
Rolaine Blaser	June 7
Tom Cleary	June 13
Nicole Saalfeld	July 14
Mike Applegate	July 22
Lynsey Kime	July 31

**CASA Connection has AMAZING VOLUNTEERS and we're not afraid to show that. In April yard signs were placed in the yards of all of our volunteers**



**“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say ‘It’s not my child, not my community, not my problem.’ Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.” -Fred Rogers**