ABOUT CASA of Jefferson & Gilpin Counties

CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN
Jefferson & Gilpin Counties

Every year in Colorado, more than 50,000 reports of child abuse and neglect are filed, and more than 11,000 children enter foster care. The 1st Judicial District, which includes Jefferson and Gilpin Counties, has consistently ranked in the top five in the number of child abuse and neglect cases in the state.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Jefferson and Gilpin Counties was established in 2000 and serves the 1st Judicial District. "CASA volunteers are a set of eyes and ears for the court," says District Court Judge Brian Boatright, who handles juvenile cases. "They spend time with the child, go to their doctor, go to their school—they really get to know the children. They make a huge difference in every case, and I rely on what they say."

Anyone can be a part of CASA. Whether you donate your time, services, or financial support, you can be a powerful voice in the life of a child. CASA of Jefferson and Gilpin Counties is a nonprofit organization. We are not affiliated with the government and rely on private funding.

CASA of Jefferson and Gilpin Counties is one of nearly 1,000 CASA organizations across the country. National CASA has more than 68,000 volunteers appointed by judges to serve as independent investigators and advocates for abused and neglected children.

Our volunteers receive 40 hours of training before they are assigned to a case, which can last up to 18 months. They provide judges with invaluable information but perhaps more importantly, they offer a consistent and caring adult presence in the lives of the children they serve.

And they make a difference. Children with a CASA volunteer are half as likely to spend time in long-term foster care. Cases with a CASA volunteer are more likely to be permanently closed.

To learn more, visit **www.casajeffcogilpin.com**.

CASA: The Numbers

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- Colorado ranks third in the nation for deaths resulting from child abuse. Colorado's state funding to battle child abuse ranks among the lowest in the nation.
- More than 50,000 reports of child abuse and neglect are filed each year in Colorado, and more than 11,000 children enter foster care.
- The 1st Judicial District, which includes Jefferson and Gilpin Counties, ranks fourth in the state for the number of abuse and neglect filings.
- In 2009, CASA volunteers were assigned to 193 child abuse and neglect cases in Jefferson and Gilpin Counties, serving more than 347 children.
- Since its inception in 2000, CASA of Jefferson and Gilpin Counties has served more than 900 abused and neglected children.
- In 2009, CASA volunteers in Jefferson and Gilpin Counties donated more than 18,000 hours and drove more than 100,000 miles.
- Children with a CASA volunteer are substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care, defined as three years or longer.
- A child is less likely to move from foster home to foster home when a CASA volunteer is involved.
- A child with a CASA volunteer is 95 percent less likely to re-enter the foster care system.
- CASA of Jefferson and Gilpin Counties is a nonprofit organization with an annual budget of $562,500.00. We rely on donations from individual members, corporations, and foundations.
- More than half of our annual budget is funded by foundations and grants. The rest is funded by individuals, special events and corporate sponsors.

BE THE DIFFERENCE: Donate

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Anyone can be a part of CASA. Whether you donate dollars or in-kind support, you can be a powerful voice in the life of a child. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, we rely on private funding sources to remain operational.

These are some different ways to contribute your financial support:

Monthly Pledge Partners

CASA of Jefferson and Gilpin Counties is looking for monthly Pledge Partners who will commit to helping us meet our financial and in-kind donation needs.

- $100 per month will fund advocacy for one child for one year
- $75 per month will fund recruitment and screening of 10 prospective volunteers
- $50 per month will fund training for 2 program staff who supervise volunteers
- $25 per month will fund pre-service training for one volunteer advocate

Donate online at www.casajeffcogilpin.com

In-Kind Donations

Desirable in-kind donations include:

- Children's items such as toys, books, school supplies, tickets to events suitable for children, etc.
- Office supplies such as copy paper, card stock and stamps
- Provider needs such as phone cards, grocery certificates and gift cards (Target, Wal-Mart, King Soopers, etc.)

Endowment Donation

Our endowment fund provides long-term funding and organizational stability. To donate to our endowment fund through the Community First Foundation, please contact our offices at 303-271-6535. We will be happy to assist you!

Bequests

If you plan to make a charitable gift by will, please contact our office for the official bequest language of CASA Jefferson and Gilpin Counties. We hope that you will inform us when you have named CASA Jefferson and Gilpin Counties in your will so that we may ensure that your wishes are carried out.

Corporate Matching Gift Programs

Many employers sponsor matching gift programs and will match 100% of their employees

designated charitable giving. This is an easy way to double the impact of your financial gift to CASA Jefferson and Gilpin Counties. Find out if your employer has a matching gift program and how you can sign up.

Workplace Giving

Designate CASA Jefferson and Gilpin Counties as your preferred charity when contributing to community campaigns such as United Way, Combined Federal Campaign and Caring Connection. For more information, contact your Human Resources Department.

Need more information or have another idea?

We would love to help! Please contact Executive Director Leah Varnell at 303-271-6536.

NEEDED: CASA Volunteers

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Imagine the satisfaction of helping children in need. Imagine that you can do so by dedicating just three to four hours each week. Imagine being the difference in an abused or neglected child's life. All of these things become a reality when you become a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).

We rely on more than 200 volunteers, but many more are needed. There are simply not enough CASA volunteers to go around and historically only 20 percent of cases are covered.

A CASA volunteer is an ordinary citizen willing to become the voice for an abused or neglected child. CASA volunteers go behind the doors of juvenile and family courts to ease the pain and trauma of children in crisis. They visit the child regularly, and provide judges with invaluable information about the child's case.

CASA volunteers are teachers, accountants, librarians, retirees, homemakers. They are people like you. They come from all walks of life, but they share a strong desire to speak on behalf of abused and neglected children in Jefferson and Gilpin Counties.

CASA volunteers must be at least 21 years old and pass a background check. After receiving 40 hours of training, they are assigned to one or two cases at a time. They donate an average of 15 hours of service each month. Our volunteers work alongside attorneys and caseworkers as appointed officers of the court, compiling information about their cases and reporting back to the court on a regular basis.

Because CASA volunteers are assigned to just one or two cases at a time, they develop meaningful relationships with children who are often overlooked. They visit children in their foster homes, and sometimes they take them to a sports event or to the park. They visit their schools. They talk to teachers, neighbors, doctors, and caseworkers. They act as investigators, carrying out a systematic examination of the children and their situation. Judges rely heavily on information and recommendations provided by CASA volunteers.

Through regular contact with CASA volunteers, children learn that there is someone who listens and truly cares until the case is resolved or until the children turn 18.

We get results. Studies show that children assigned a CASA volunteer have fewer relocations while in foster placement, receive more necessary services, and end up in safe and permanent homes more quickly than children without CASA volunteers.

CASA volunteers are ordinary people who do extraordinary things for our community's most vulnerable children. They make a difference. Want to learn more? Visit www.casajeffcogilpin.com.

MEET THREE of Our CASA Volunteers

CASA Court Appointed Special Advocates FOR CHILDREN Jefferson & Gilpin Counties

Lee Ann Robbins, 48 years old
Case Coordinator
When Lee Ann Robbins saw an ad in a local newspaper asking for CASA volunteers, she was inspired to make a commitment. She had been a "big sister" before and enjoyed the experience, but with CASA, she'd have more responsibilities, and perhaps greater impact.

After 40 hours of training, Lee Ann was assigned to a case involving four sisters, whose parents were divorced and had lost custody of the children due to neglect. When Lee Ann looked at police reports involving this family, the file was eight inches thick. "It was a huge, long, sad case," she says. "This was a dysfunctional family with a lot of issues going on."

Lee Ann began making weekly visits to get to know the four sisters—ages 8, 11, 13, and 15—who had been placed into two separate foster homes. Sometimes, she would take them out to dinner or to the mall; other times, she'd simply spend a couple of hours with them in their foster homes. Once, she arrived with beading materials to make necklaces to break the ice. "I did that so it wasn't just another adult getting in their business asking question after question after question," she says.

As a CASA volunteer, Lee Ann's primary responsibility was to ensure the safety and well-being of the sisters, so she would gather pertinent information from the girls, the foster parents, teachers, counselors, case workers, and therapists. Every three months she would file a report with the judge assigned to the case. Over time, she developed close ties with the girls.

"To be honest," she says, "I think the biggest thing is that these girls understood that I was a volunteer, and that I was there for nobody but them."

When the oldest sister, Kate, was a sophomore in high school, she and her sisters were transferred to a new foster home in a small town east of Colorado Springs. Kate, who was active in her high school's debate team, had been planning to compete in the state tournament. But moving to a new foster home stood in the way. Lee Ann met with school officials and convinced them to let Kate participate in the tournament, even though she had transferred to a new school.

"It was really important for her," Lee Ann says, "and I'm glad I was able to help things work out. These kids are used to asking for something and not getting much back."

Kate, now 20, graduated as valedictorian from her new school, and she is a student at the University of Northern Colorado. She and Lee Ann remain in touch. "I still get birthday presents from her," Kate says. "She went to my graduation from high school, and she went to my sister's

graduation. It was nice having somebody who remembered these things."

Lee Ann, who is 48 and now works as a case coordinator with CASA of Jefferson and Gilpin Counties, remains a CASA volunteer for Kate's youngest two sisters, and she has also taken on a second case involving a 17-year-old boy. She intends to volunteer for CASA for "a long time."

"It is very rewarding," she says. "It is heart-wrenching at times, but I think we make a huge difference in these kids' lives. And that's why I want to continue to do it."

Greg Loendorf, 65 years old
Retired
When some people retire, they take up golf or bowling. Not Greg Loendorf. After turning 57 and retiring from his career as an accountant, he decided to volunteer for CASA. Now 65, he's had eight cases, and he plans to volunteer for more. And he'd like to see more men follow in his footsteps.

Greg's first case was about as tough as they come. He was assigned to a 4-year-old boy who had been severely neglected by his family and was placed in a foster home. "Basically, he had not received any love," Greg says. "For two years, I tried to see him every week if I could. I'd take him to the park, to McDonald's. Sometimes we'd go to the library. Just normal kid things."

Over time, the boy developed a close bond with Greg. "I became his person in the world," he says. "I was his difference." But Greg knew that what the boy needed most was a stable home. And when he was adopted, he finally got that. Six months later, the case was closed. Greg considered it a successful outcome.

Greg says his main objectives as a CASA volunteer are to make sure the children he's been assigned to are getting "the basics" and not falling through the cracks. "I want to know that they're getting food, clothes, medicine, that they're going to school, that they're being treated properly," he says. "If you can go beyond those things and establish a deeper bond, then so much the better."

Vikki Ehrhart, 45 years old
State employee
Vikki Ehrhart just happened to be at the Jefferson County Courthouse one day when she came across a brochure about CASA. "I had always wanted to do something like that," she says, "but I didn't know how to get involved." Seizing the opportunity, Vikki found her way to the CASA office and signed up for training. At her "graduation," Judge Brian Boatright told Vikki and the other new CASA volunteers, "These are some of the toughest cases that come across my desk."

True to Judge Boatright's words, Vikki's first CASA case involved three young children whose parents were both recovering heroin addicts. The youngest child was an infant who had been born addicted to methadone and placed in a foster home. The other two children—a 2-year-old

boy and a 10-year-old girl—were still living with their parents. Vikki first met the parents in court, where they were trying to regain custody of their baby. They succeeded after fulfilling their treatment plans.

Vikki, a divorced mother of three grown children, began visiting the family about once a week. The 10-year-old girl, Roxanne, kept her apprised of the family's situation. "She would tell me what was going on with the family," Vikki says, "and she'd ask for my guidance." Vikki would take Roxanne and her brothers to the zoo, to the mall, to restaurants, and she would help monitor court-ordered appointments. After each visit, Vikki would write up notes, and then, every three or four months, she'd write a formal report for the judge.

"I felt like I was making a difference by helping the parents keep on track with their treatment plan," Vikki says. "And I was there for Roxanne. The parents had so much going on, sometimes Roxanne got left out."

After about a year, the family had met their court-ordered obligations, and the case was closed. Roxanne told Vikki, "I don't want you to get another CASA case, because then I won't see you anymore." But Vikki promised she would continue to stay in contact with Roxanne and her family, and she has honored her pledge – even though it was not required.

"The family knew they could count on me," Vikki says. "And the most important thing was that I was able to develop a relationship with Roxanne, at a time when she really needed someone."

Roxanne, now in middle school, says, "If something ever happens again, and we had to get a CASA lady, I'd like to have Vikki again."

CONTACT INFORMATION for the Media

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If you're a member of the media, we invite you to contact these individuals to learn more about our work on behalf of abused and neglected children in Jefferson and Gilpin Counties:

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Jan Podoll, *Board President*
CASA of Jefferson and Gilpin Counties
Cell: 303-915-3044
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jpodoll2238@msn.com

Judge Brian Boatright
Colorado First Judicial District
Office: 303-271-6434 (clerk)

Feel free to contact us at 303-271-6535 to learn more about our program or to speak to one of our volunteers!