

Investing in our Neighbors Improving Lives Strengthening Communities



Winter 2023

To learn more about CASA and other
Family Outreach programs, please call
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Community Services Director
402-862-2411 ext. 108
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People Let Me Tell You 'Bout My Best Friend... A CASA Story

If you grew up in the 1960's and early 1970's you might remember a popular TV sitcom that centered around a widowed dad in his 30's who was trying to raise his six-year old son the best way he could, despite the ups and downs of life. The show's theme song eluded to the close relationship the son had with his father as the song's lyrics described him as "a warm hearted person who'll love me 'til the end."

Even without a mom in his life, the young son in the show knew he was loved, wanted and cared for. Unfortunately, in real life, not all children are as fortunate. For children who live in a world where parents are not warm hearted and kind, but abusive and neglectful, children struggle to feel loved or wanted and are often hungry, cold and scared. While it is typically in the best interest of the child to be removed from the home and placed in foster care, it can be overwhelming and frightening for children to be in unfamiliar surroundings with people they don't know.

Thankfully there are kind and caring people who volunteer their time as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate). CASA volunteers, assigned by the Juvenile Court Judge, provide a voice for the child in the courtroom, as well as being a constant adult in the child's life. CASA volunteers often go above and beyond to help ensure the child they advocate for are in homes with warm hearted people who will make sure the child is safe, cared for and loved.

Lee is one of SENCA CASA's dedicated volunteer advocates. Lee helps ensure children, like 7 year old Carl, have a voice in the courtroom as well as a caring adult who is there cheering them on at sporting events and celebrating special occasions, like birthday parties.

The child's name was changed to protect his identity.

Even though Carl's situation was a bit challenging, Lee residing in one county, Carl in a different county and court hearings in yet another county, Lee was at every court hearing and saw Carl at least once a month. Enjoying a Runza shake was a favorite treat!

It was 2 1/2 years from the time Carl was removed from his previous abusive situation to when he was officially adopted by the foster parents who gave him a forever home. Lee was there every step of the way advocating for Carl. Lee's dedication as a CASA volunteer was instrumental in helping Carl get the loving home he needed, along with a warm hearted family and caring support system he deserved.

CASA volunteers, like Lee, help ensure Carl and other abused and neglected children in the court system due to no fault of their own, experience love, a safe home and real life, happy endings. If interested in becoming a CASA Volunteer please contact Debbie Green, SENCA CASA Coordinator, 402-209-0446.

CASA Outcomes for the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year

- A total of 82 children, due to no fault of their own, were in the Juvenile Court System in Otoe, Nemaha, Johnson, Pawnee and Richardson counties.
- 17 Volunteer Advocates, and Debbie Green, SENCA CASA Coordinator, served 45 of those children by obtaining case information, writing reports to the Court Judge and speaking on behalf of the children in court. The remaining 37 children were monitored by the CASA Coordinator.
- Of these 82 children, 9 (11%) have been reunified with their parent (s); 5 (6%) adopted; 4 (5%) entered into a guardianship and 64 (78%) remained in foster homes.



SENCA SMART Impacts Approximately 400 Students in 7 Schools in 2022/2023

SENCA SMART (Strategic Money and Resource Techniques) Financial Literacy program helps strengthen the value of budgeting and money management for 8th through 12th grade students. The simulation utilizes real life scenarios of low-income households: grandparents raising grandchildren, working single parents, seniors on fixed incomes, etc. to create a better understanding of the challenges faced by those with limited incomes.

The goal is for each household to utilize available resources to improve their situation during the course of four 15 minute weeks. This includes increasing

income, reducing expenses, paying bills on time, asking for receipts, communicating with service providers, and thinking outside the box.

Participants learn about local resources, such as SENCA, that provide a variety of programs to assist low-income households experiencing an emergency situation. Participants also gain a better understanding of how skills such as money management, budgeting and education are essential in achieving and maintaining economic stability.

When asked their 'take away' after participating in the event some students shared "Life is hard", "Just because you start out poor you can still be successful" and "I need to budget and be smart with my money."