



Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

Phelps/Harlan

County CASA

Spring Newsletter

## Men In Tights Success!

THANK YOU for sharing the passion for Phelps/Harlan County CASA and partnering with us on the Annual Men in Tights. This Community event was a huge success because of YOU, our donors and volunteers! We sold out at 308 guests, we raised \$20,459.65 and your generous support helps us to continue serving 100% of the children in foster care in our program area. We sincerely appreciate YOU!!! Thank you from our CASA staff and board.



*Thank  
You*



## Quarterly Report: February 1, 2019 to April 30, 2019

|                  |    |                             |                     |
|------------------|----|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Children served: | 38 | <u>Children's Age Range</u> | <u>Case Outcome</u> |
| Cases Closed:    | 5  | 0-5: 13                     | Adoption: 2         |
| Waitlist:        | 0  | 6-11: 11                    | Reunification: 1    |
|                  |    | 12-15: 6                    | Other: 1            |
| Male:            | 17 | 16-17: 6                    | Guardianship: 1     |
| Female:          | 21 | 18+: 2                      |                     |

| <u>Our Volunteers time w/ CASA</u> | <u>Ages of Our Volunteers</u> | <u>Type of Cases</u> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| < 1 year: 3                        | 21-29: 2                      | Neglect: 15          |
| 1 year: 2                          | 30-39: 3                      | Physical Abuse: 4    |
| 2 years: 2                         | 40-49: 1                      | Sexual Abuse: 12     |
| 3 years: 3                         | 50-59: 5                      | Other: 7             |
| 4 years: 2                         | 60+ : 9                       |                      |
| 5 years: 5                         |                               |                      |

|                                |      |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Miles driven by our Advocates: | 1960 |
| Hours our advocates put in:    | 179  |
| # of New Advocates:            | 2    |
| # of Active Advocates:         | 15   |

## CEU CENTRAL: 2018-2019

Each year our CASA advocates are required to complete 12 CEU's or continuing education units. Our fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th. The following advocates who have worked very hard and earned their CEU's for this fiscal year 2018-2019 are:

Teresa Carey  
Donna Ehrenberg  
Mary Hock  
Brynn Jordahl

Jessica Knoell  
Bryce Langenberg  
Rita Skiles  
Angelia Upthagrove



**CASA Volunteer Training starts May 14th in Holdrege.**  
**This is a 30 hour class held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 5:30-9pm. If you or someone you know is interested call 308-995-2102 to get enrolled.**



**We asked and you helped and one young man is getting a new pair of boots! Thank you so much Amber Larson for purchasing these boots that a foster child was wishing for and thank you for everyone else that offered to help as well. We are so grateful for giving hearts in our community!**



After 301 days of being a state ward a young lady finally got permanency through a guardianship. We love to see a child in a safe, appropriate and loving home and succeeding in all aspects. If you are wanting to be part of a child's life like hers call 308-995-2102



# Nebraska Dials Down Drug Testing in Child Abuse, Neglect Cases

OMAHA, Neb. —

Nebraska judges and prosecutors say key evidence has disappeared from courtrooms when it comes to child abuse and neglect cases. Under a new policy change, Nebraska child welfare workers are no longer allowed to conduct drug testing on parents being investigated for abuse or neglect. In addition, children are not being tested for exposure to drugs. Judges said child welfare workers are being instructed to not even mention drug tests to the courts.

"They can't even talk about it. It's become kind of a circus," said Douglas County Juvenile Court Judge, Elizabeth Crnkovich, who said the policy was rolled out quickly and quietly without consulting child welfare stakeholders or getting them involved in the process.

"I don't quite understand the thought process here," said Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine, who saw the policy for the first time when Newswatch 7 shared it with him.

"That's just poor work, frankly. The huge disappointment is that it was not a policy well thought out. It was not a policy studied," Crnkovich said.

Crnkovich is one of at least two judges and two county attorneys sounding the alarm on the new policy.

"The drug testing keeps parents honest and sometimes it allows them to demonstrate they really are trying to make the changes. And most often, that's what they try to do," said Sarpy County Juvenile Court Judge Lawrence Gendler.

Nebraska's department of Health and Human Services formalized the policy in October of 2018. Child welfare workers stopped asking for urine analysis and hair follicle tests starting in the spring of 2018 under orders from the department.

"I feel really good about the policy," said Matt Wallen, director of the division of Children and Family Services.

"How do you engage a family if you come in and say I'm going to drug test you and then I'm going to punish you? And then I'm going to hold this against you?" said Wallen.

The policy states that if needed, the courts can order a drug test. Prosecutors said that delays getting an immediate picture of what's going on in a home. If the parent is under a current treatment plan, then those drug tests can be used in decision making.

Lancaster County Attorney Patrick Condon said the new policy is at the very least, misguided and removes a key tool in understanding a family crisis.



*Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine said he's very concerned about the new policy which severely limits drug testing of parents and children in child abuse and neglect investigations.*



*Nebraska has significantly reduced the number of urine analysis tests conducted on parents in child abuse and neglect investigations.*

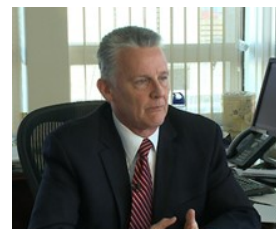
"It's a definitive thing we can point to, to say this child is at risk," said Condon. He pointed out that DHHS even quoted a research study on drug testing in its new policy—he finds it ironic that it's a study which emphasizes the benefits of drug testing to hold parents accountable. Judge Crnkovich, who's served on the bench for 24 years, said the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services does not advocate similar policy across the board. And she said the new policy shows, "a lack of reasonable effort" to keep children out of risk of harm.

"I have said on many occasions, this absolute ban on recommending testing could be a lack of reasonable effort which could profoundly affect the ability to draw down federal money on individual cases," Crnkovich said.

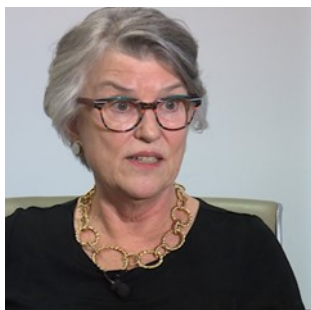
Judge Gendler, who's served the bench for 26 years, said we may be putting children at risk. He's the Project Chair of a program linking 25 juvenile judges across the state to improve the court process in child protection cases. It's called the Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative. He said the policy needs to change to encourage drug testing on a case by case basis, when necessary.



*Matt Wallen is the Director of Children and Family Services for Nebraska's DHHS. "I'm a firm believer that parents make the best parents. The state doesn't make very good parents," he said.*



*Pat Condon is the Lancaster County Attorney. He says drug testing keeps parents honest.*



*Douglas County Juvenile Court Judge Elizabeth Crnkovich says the new policy is, "just poor work, frankly."*

"The fear all of us has is that when you have a blanket policy, you're missing a need," Gendler said. Some county attorneys and former child welfare workers said Nebraska's new policy is like turning a blind eye to parents who use drugs. They say the pendulum has swung too far in not asking for testing and there must be a middle ground with more oversight and input.

"We don't know if this person is continuing to use meth, or whatever. How do we know if we are in a position to leave these kids in the home?" said Don Kleine.

Judge Crnkovich had a similar concern. "How do you determine how much meth is too much for child safety?" she said.

According to the journal Pediatrics, children exposed to meth in the womb, can experience behavior problems, learning disabilities, delays in growth and an impact on mood. Exposure in early childhood causes similar problems including aggression and ADHD symptoms. Advocates also worry about meth addicts and their ability to care for the basic needs of children.

In addition, child advocacy centers like Project Harmony are no longer allowed to take hair samples from children brought in for abuse or neglect, without a court order. The agencies were drug testing the hair to see if children were in the presence of drugs. In 2014, Gene Kleine, Executive Director of Project Harmony, told KETV Newswatch 7, their agency drug tested more than 600 children a year.

"About 75-percent tested positive for cocaine, meth, PCP or marijuana. Some had all three in their system. This just tells us they've been exposed," he said at the time. That evidence could also be used to connect those children with services. The agency would not comment on the policy change.

But DHHS maintains the policy is a good one based on safety of the child and preservation of the family.

"I'm not saying every home is safe with a drug user. I'm not saying every home is unsafe with a drug user. That's kind of like saying you test positive for a drug test you've abused your child of if you test negative, you didn't abuse your child. It tells us very limited information," said Wallen.

But county attorneys and judges say the presence of drugs is a fact that must not be overlooked. They said a parent who is addicted to meth is only concerned about satisfying the addiction.

"If you have a child that has drugs in the hair follicle to me that's a sign that neglect is going on there. The parents are using in front of the child," said Condon.

The state said their effort to keep children in their own homes is working.

"Over the last year, we've seen a pretty significant reduction in the number of kids in out-of-home care, about a 12-percent reduction—which is pretty phenomenal that kids get to stay home," said Wallen. He said the state has to meet certain standards to get 50-50 federal matching dollars based on the Families First Prevention Act. The program emphasizes serving families in their homes.

"Well, you can change the numbers. It doesn't mean you're meeting the needs of families. It doesn't mean children are safe," Crnkovich said.

Wallen acknowledged the state is willing to accept a certain amount drug use if the child is deemed safe, because he said over the long term, it's more traumatic to remove a child from their parents. For example, he said it might be acceptable that a parent takes a child to the home of a relative while the parent uses drugs. But Judge Crnkovich said the issue is not just whether the child is safe, it's whether the child is at risk of harm, and she said ignoring drug addiction doesn't fix the problem.

"What I'm seeing in my court and my colleagues are, is the department is just silent and waits for others to bring it (drug testing) up," she said.

Right now, about 3,000 children are in out-of-home care in Nebraska, including those living with relatives or in foster care. The number of state wards in Nebraska was once 2 to 4 times the national average.

"What does that trauma manifest into one, two, three, four years down the road?" said Wallen.

Can a child be safe in the home of a drug user?

"That's one of the things that our team of trained professionals do. They go in and decide what are the safety factors in a particular home," said Wallen.

Judges and former CPS workers all acknowledge that many of the current child welfare workers lack proper training and experience in dealing with serious family dysfunction. Take away the drug test, and they have even fewer tools to do their jobs. Judge Gendler is most concerned about rural areas where they lack resources and looked to drug tests to answer critical questions.

Wallen said assessment workers check the condition of the home, whether there's food, and they look for evidence that kids are attending school and whether parents are working. Former CPS workers told KETV Newswatch 7, they also looked at the drug test results as a holistic piece of that puzzle—an important piece that's now missing.

"I'm not trying to investigate to prosecute parents or punish parents. I'm trying to understand the crisis in the family home," he said.

Crnkovich wants to be part of the solution. She said she wishes DHHS would have asked for help and reasonable solutions.

"Let's talk about drug testing and get people together and let's come up with some protocols," said Crnkovich



*About 3,000 children are in out-of-home care in Nebraska. That includes children in foster homes. It's a 12-percent reduction over the last year.*



# CASAblanca Gala

*Here's looking at you, kid!*

Board members, staff and a few of our programs volunteers enjoyed attending the annual CASAblanca Gala in Lincoln on April 27th. The event was to celebrate CASA Volunteers which features a silent auction, dinner and a program followed by a dance. Keynote speaker for the evening was Dr. Stephen Lazoritz, who is a celebrated pediatrician and co-author of "Out of the Darkness: The Story of Mary Ellen Wilson." This is the story of a nine-year-old girl rescued from a home where she was beaten, burned, cut, locked in a closet, and not allowed to leave her tenement home in over 7 years. Her story led to the charter of the first organization of its kind to prevent cruelty to children.

Nancy Freeburg donated a 7 night stay to Star Island Resort in Orlando, FL for the event and all proceeds came back to Phelps/Harlan County CASA. We would like to thank both Nancy for donating the package along with Emily for purchasing it. Emily, we hope you and your family enjoy your vacation!



Help a child  
weather life's storms.  
Become a CASA.





**April is  
Child Abuse  
Prevention Month.**



On April 2, 2019, The Alma 6<sup>th</sup> grade class, along with CASA were at the Harlan County Courthouse placing pinwheels to remember the 62 children that CASA advocated for in 2018. JOIN US, as we use our voices against abuse, neglect and injustice! Pledge to stand up for the right of children to feel safe and protected!

Together as a community, we can stand up and speak up to help improve the way we represent, protect and treat our kids in America. There's an epidemic of child abuse and neglect out there. Let's spread the word! Thanks for making a difference! To volunteer for CASA, call 308-995-2102.





# Volunteer of the Quarter

Phelps/Harlan County CASA Volunteer, Heidi High, is making a difference in the lives of abused and neglected children one at a time. Heidi was sworn into the court system on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and was appointed her first case immediately. Since that date, Heidi has advocated for 4 children in the court system and seen their cases through. With logging a total of 134 hours and driving 1,485 miles. One of Heidi's cases did not have the Department of Health and Human Services involved which is generally not the case for most foster children in the system. Volunteer Supervisor Kelly Jensen states, "Heidi went above and beyond in advocating for that child as DHHS was not involved, so no one was there holding the parents accountable for the sake of the child. Heidi initiated visits between the child and parents and played as a mediator at times between the parents as well. Heidi never batted an eye when it came to stepping up and helping for what was in the best interest of this child, in this rare occurrence." When one asks Heidi why she does what she does with CASA Heidi stated, "I had been interested in CASA for a long time. It wasn't until my own kids got older that I finally decided to go through the training. Becoming a CASA volunteer has greatly enriched my life and opened my eyes to the needs in this area. I received a case the day I was sworn in, and even though I didn't know exactly what to do the staff was always there ready to answer all my questions. Every case is different but each one involves a child that needs to be heard. It only takes a few hours a month but can make a huge impact in a child's life." Heidi encourages anyone and everyone that would like to help make the difference in an abused and neglected child to take the CASA training and become a CASA Volunteer.



## CASA Advocate Birthdays

### JUNE

Kirsten Deakin

### JULY

Kelly Jensen

Heidi Anderson

Marjean Schultz

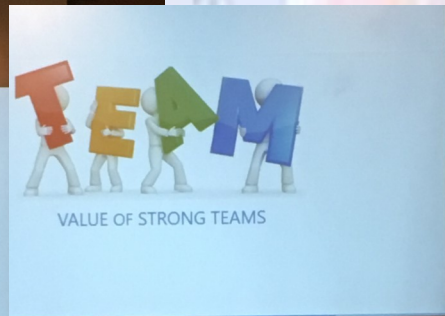
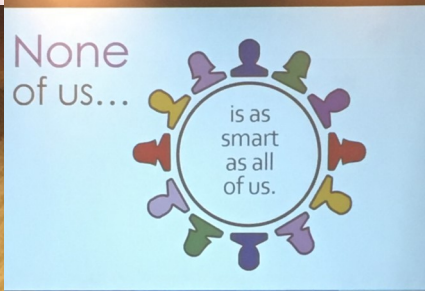
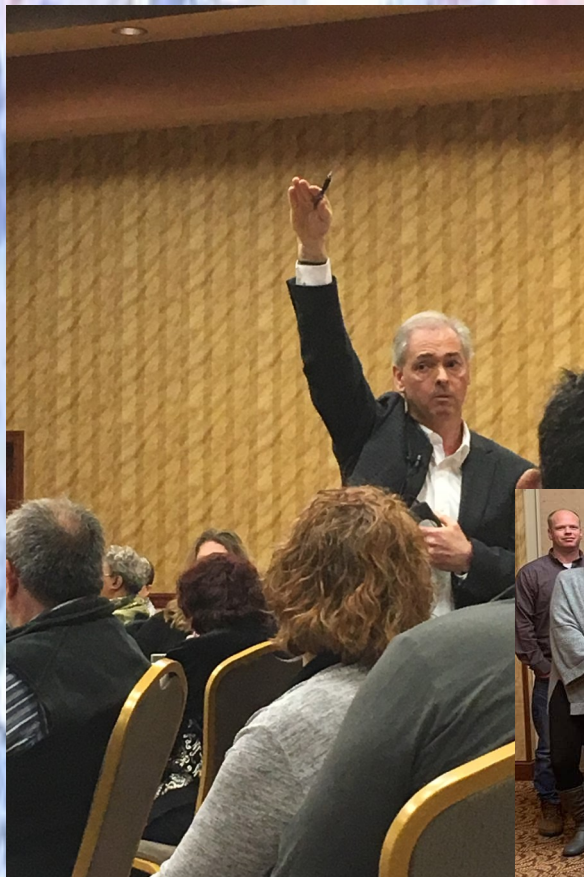
### AUGUST

Bryce Langenberg

Brynn Jordahl







## Nebraska CASA State Conference



### Youth Thrive

Faith Mills, Director of the Panhandle Partnership

Learn about : Adolescent Brain Development  
Supporting Foster Youth  
Reducing the Impact of Trauma  
Brain Development and the Effects of Trauma  
How Social Connections Impact Our Youth

### Conversation with Judge Michael Burns

Judge Burns has experience as a GAL and on a CASA Program Board of Directors. Have a conversation with him and remember to **BRING** the questions you've always wanted to ask a judge.



On April 13th CASA Staff along with a few volunteers attended the Annual Nebraska CASA State Conference in Kearney. Judge Michael Burns was one of the speaker for the day with answering questions from CASA Staff and Volunteers from around the state. On thing that Judge Burns said that the CASA Report is the first report that he reads when reviewing a case and that he wished there were more CASA Volunteers throughout the state. In the afternoon the Volunteers were all trained in Fostering Families while all CASA Staff went through Emergenetics to see what kind of thinking attributes they use, and how to be aware of how others think and ways to effectively communicate with others.



# Meet our New CASA Volunteers



**Angelia Upthagrove**  
Holdrege, NE



**Mary Hock**  
Holdrege, NE

On March 7, 2019, the Honorable Judge Rademacher swore in 6 volunteers as CASA Volunteers—Court Appointed Special Advocates for abused and neglected children. CASA staff gathered in the Buffalo County Courthouse to watch the volunteers take an oath promising to advocate for the best interest of the child. Angelia Upthagrove and Mary Hock, both from Holdrege were among the 6 that were sworn in that day after completing the 30 hour training.





# Phelps/Harlan County CASA would like to thank the following donors from February, March and April 2019:

Bruning State Bank

Daake Law Office, LLC

Family Medical Specialties

BD

Edward Jones

Rite Way Milk, INC.

Lost Way Brewery LLC

Andrew & Amy Weides

Oxford Fire Department

St. Mary's Altar Society Orleans

WFS Ag Partnership

Firstier Bank

Kearney Area Barbershop

Hogeland Market INC

Jerry & Jodi Ehrke

Holdrege Rotary Club

Nancy Freburg

Along with everyone who purchased tickets to Men In Tights





### **Board of Directors**

President—Christy Pelton  
Vice President—Carley Bruning  
Secretary—Barb Allen  
Treasurer—Bryce Langenberg  
Susan Biskup  
Justin Daake  
Shawna Hammond  
Patricia Johnson  
Micayla Koelling  
Christina Millsap  
Theresa Puls  
Nicholas Wells

### **Phelps County Resource**

Barb Allen  
Kelly Jensen  
Bryce Langenberg  
Ginger Linder  
Emily Lyons  
Christina Millsap  
Brandy Orme  
Matthew Simpson  
Angelia Uphagrove  
Corey Wiese

### **Harlan County Resource**

Susan Biskup  
Jaclyn Daake  
Jodi Ehrke  
Jessica Howsden  
Kelly Jensen  
Bryan Lubeck  
Tresadi Prietauer  
Tricia Weatherwax



### **Our CASA Advocates**

Bard Alexander  
Heidi Anderson  
Robert Bennetts  
Teresa Carey  
Judy Carr  
Kirsten Deakin  
Gale Dorn  
Donna Ehrenberg  
Julianne Fitch  
Heidi High  
Mary Hock

Brynn Jordahl  
Jessica Knoell  
Bryce Langenberg  
Ginger Linder  
Emily Lyons  
Ramona Mix  
Marjean Schultz  
Rita Skiles  
Kurt Tarkington  
Angelia Uphagrove

# Phelps/Harlan County CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates are appointed by the Court judge to represent the best interest of abused and neglected children in the court system. A CASA advocate acts as the "eyes and ears" of children involved in court proceedings, and offer judges a critical perspective of what is in the best interests of each child, based on information gathered first-hand through research, interviews, and observations. Studies show that once a CASA advocate is assigned to an abused or neglected child that the child is much more likely to receive vital services such as health care, education, and therapy. By getting involved as a CASA, you can help create healthier families and communities and change the course of a child's life.

**Follow us on:**

**Facebook: Phelps/Harlan County CASA**

**Twitter: @PhelpsCASA**



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