

Investing in our Neighbors Improving Lives Strengthening Communities



Winter 2019



Grandpa Norm - A CASA Success Story

The SENCA CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) Program provides advocacy for Otoe and Nemaha County youth who are introduced into the child welfare system through no fault of their own.

Trained CASA volunteers, appointed by the Judge, are assigned to the child's case and provide a voice for the child in the courtroom, helping determine what is best for them and their situation. The ultimate goal is to secure a safe and healthy home for the child. CASA's are asked to connect with the child at least once a month in some type of activity as a way to interact and get to know them better. However it is not unusual for the CASA and the child/children to form a special bond as the CASA is often the one true constant in the child's life.

"Grandpa Norm", a retired Otoe County farmer, has been a CASA volunteer for the past nine years.

In 2016 the local Judge appointed him to a case involving three young children, ages 5, 2, and a newborn. The children were removed from their biological parents due to the parent's substance abuse problems and domestic violence. The mother tested positive for substance abuse when the baby was born and, unfortunately, the baby also tested positive for having an illegal substance in its system.

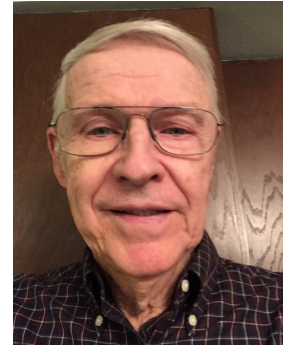
Assigned to the case within 19 days after the children were removed from the parents, Norm played a vital role in visiting the children at least once a month. He also remained in continuous contact with the foster parents attending family team meetings and scheduled court dates.

When the case transferred to a county that did not offer a CASA Program, the foster parents asked that Norm be allowed to continue as the children's CASA for the vital stability he provided.

The Juvenile Judge agreed. Norm remained as a constant in the children's lives affording them with an influential voice in the courtroom.

The children's parents gave up their parental rights in May 2018. Knowing it was in the best interest of the children to be in a safe, permanent, and supportive home, Norm advocated for the children to be adopted by their grandparents. Throughout the days and months that Norm advocated for the three children he donated more than 123 hours of his time and traveled in excess of 1,700 miles to and from home visits, team meetings, and court proceedings. All to help ensure a wonderful outcome for the children he truly cared for.

Within three months, on August 30th, the adoption was official. The children



were secure in their safe, loving, forever home with their grandparents.

"Grandpa Norm" as he was fondly nicknamed by the oldest child, was joyfully invited to help celebrate the "happiest day ever party."

CASA's really do make a difference in the life of a child.

For more information on becoming a CASA Advocate please contact Debbie Green, CASA Coordinator at 402-713-5405.



Making a Difference One Child at a Time

During the 2017-2018 fiscal year there were a total of 45 children in the Juvenile Court System within Nemaha and Otoe Counties. SENCA CASA served 34 of those children with an active volunteer or by staff. The remaining 11 children's cases were monitored by the CASA Coordinator.

Out of the 45 children in the Juvenile Court System:

- 9 (20%) have been reunified with their parent(s)
- 5 (11%) have been adopted
- 31 (69%) remained in foster homes

A total of ten active Volunteer Advocates and one CASA staff member visited the children, obtained information regarding the case and wrote court reports to the Juvenile Court Judge speaking on behalf of these children.

CASA is one of the programs available through Southeast Nebraska Community Action Partnership, Inc. (SENCA's) Family Outreach Program. For more information regarding CASA or other programs such as: Case Management; Budgeting; Job Skills; Nutrition; Youth Initiative; or Emergency Assistance with food, rent, or utilities, please contact Pam Armknecht, Community Services Director at 402-862-2411 extension # 105 or visit www.senca.org or "like" www.facebook.org/Senca1.