
DECEMBER 30, 2020

Terri Whitehead

Illinois CASA Mission Moment



CASA OF
WILLIAMSON
COUNTY

Southern Illinois

Court Appointed Special Advocate

My name is Terri Whitehead. I am an advocate with CASA of Williamson County in southern Illinois. I have been involved with the program for about three and a half years. I became familiar with CASA from a life-long friend who is a CASA and from a former co-worker who was involved in a CASA program in another county. Both strongly believed in their work and the positive impact they made on children at risk. Seeing the sense of their accomplishment when affecting improvement in children's lives made me want to become involved. Good communication skills are necessary to be an effective CASA. Parents, foster parents, children, and caseworkers must be regularly contacted to monitor case status and progress. Expectations and encouragement should be given to those involved as well.

Written communication is provided to supervisors and the court system. Organizational skills are needed to track parents' progress and to provide findings. The greatest challenge as a CASA volunteer is realizing that change is slow to happen. The process was put into place with checks and balances and periodic reporting to the judge. Also, there is significant turnover in caseworker oversight. This makes the role of the CASA valuable, as a foster mother recently told me, "you and the judge are the only two original people left on this case". As the CASA, I sometimes update a new caseworker. On one of my closed cases, a teenager wanted to stay with the foster family who took guardianship of her. I advocated for her and she remains there. Another case recently closed with the children returning home after their mother completed all services. Other successes take different forms, such as removing children from unsafe environments. Having some impact on a child's life cannot be over-emphasized. Every child deserves a safe environment. Being greeted with a shout of "Hello, CASA Terri, I've missed you" is heart-warming and worth the effort. Please give it a try!