

qrco.de/NYCI



NEBRASKA

— Young Child Institute —

www.NeYoungChildInstitute.com

#NYCI2026

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA): Amplifying Children's Voices in Child Welfare

Dawn Rockey and Corrie Kielty



- **CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocate for children.**

**CHANGE A
CHILD'S STORY.™**



**← A CASA Volunteer &
Child in Court**

Mission:

- **CASA for Lancaster County provides a voice for abused and neglected children in the court system so they can thrive in safe, permanent homes.**
- **Nebraska has 21 local CASA programs serving 56 counties. In 2025, 809 volunteers advocated for 1,876 children in Nebraska.**
- **In 2025, 118 CASA for Lancaster County volunteers advocated for 311 abused, neglected, truant and ungovernable children and 97 children reached permanency.**

Description of a CASA Volunteer:

- An individual who has been screened and trained by a CASA program and appointed by the court to advocate for children who come into the court system primarily as a result of alleged abuse or neglect.
- An individual who respects a child's inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe environment that meets that **child's best interests**.
- An individual who assures that the child's best interests are represented in the court at every stage of the case.

What is best interest??

- A safe home
- A permanent home
- As quickly as possible



Children in Nebraska- 2024

*Source Kids Count Report 2025 – Nebraska Voices for Children

- 484,312 children live in Nebraska (ages 18 & under)
- 3,411 children were substantiated victims of child maltreatment
- 7,909 children were involved in the child welfare system, including non-court involvement.
- In Nebraska, the number of children who were in foster care – 5,499
- In Nebraska, the number of children adopted from foster care – 490
- In Nebraska, the number of youth (19-21) in Bridge to Independence – 389
- 1,181 children entering care in 2024 had previous child welfare system involvement.
- 1,597 children exited out-of-home care in 2024.

The number of children receiving services from DHHS – CFS as of 4/29/26 (Point-in time) is 5,304 statewide (includes out of home, in home & Alternative Response.)

WHAT IS A CASA VOLUNTEER?



CASA volunteers advocate for the best interest of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Here's what that means.

LEARN

Learn all you can about the child, their family, and life.

REPORT

Report what you have learned and observed to the court.

ENGAGE

Engage with the child during regular visits.

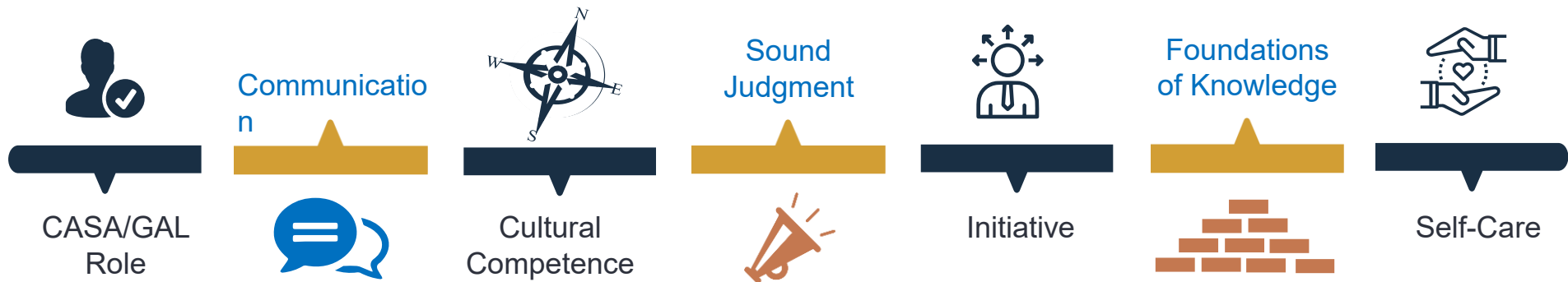
COLLABORATE

Collaborate with others to ensure that necessary services are provided and are in the child's best interests.

RECOMMEND

Speak up for the child's best interests in court, make recommendations regarding the child's placement and needed services, and monitor the child's situation.

Competencies for Volunteer Advocates



CASA volunteer advocates learn about state and federal abuse and neglect laws, court procedures, DHHS/CPS procedures, issues that bring families into the system (mental illness, domestic violence, substance use, poverty), services we have available in the community to assist and educational advocacy.

A Volunteer Completes Pre-Service Training – then what?

- Volunteers must complete pre-service training (30-hour curriculum provided by National CASA)
- Volunteers are then sworn-in by one of our Juvenile Court Judges.
- Volunteers review cases on our wait list and choose a case.
- CASA staff send the appointment request to the judge and assign a Volunteer Coordinator (CASA staff) in Lancaster County. This varies by program.
- All CASA Volunteers are supervised and supported by staff and/or by a Peer Coordinator

What does a child need?

- Physical
 - Food, clothing, medical care, safety, protection, adequate housing
- Emotional
 - Attachment between parent and child
 - A stable adult they can trust
- Developmental
 - Education plan, special help for children with disabilities



Issues that bring families into the child welfare system

- Lack of supervision
- Safety risks to children
- Physical abuse
- Neglect – including medical, educational and emotional
- Domestic/Family Violence
- Substance Use
- Mental illness – parents and children
- Poverty/Lack of resources



Abuse and Neglect Risk Factors:

- Age of child(ren)
- Attachment
- Unwanted child(ren)
- History of abuse or neglect
- Parent's mental health
- Parent's substance abuse
- Parent's mental capacity
- Poverty
- Cultural child-rearing differences
- Domestic Violence
- Child's disability



Family Stressors:

Economic

Illness

Incarceration

Childcare/lack of

Employment status

Unemployment

Death

Education/lack of

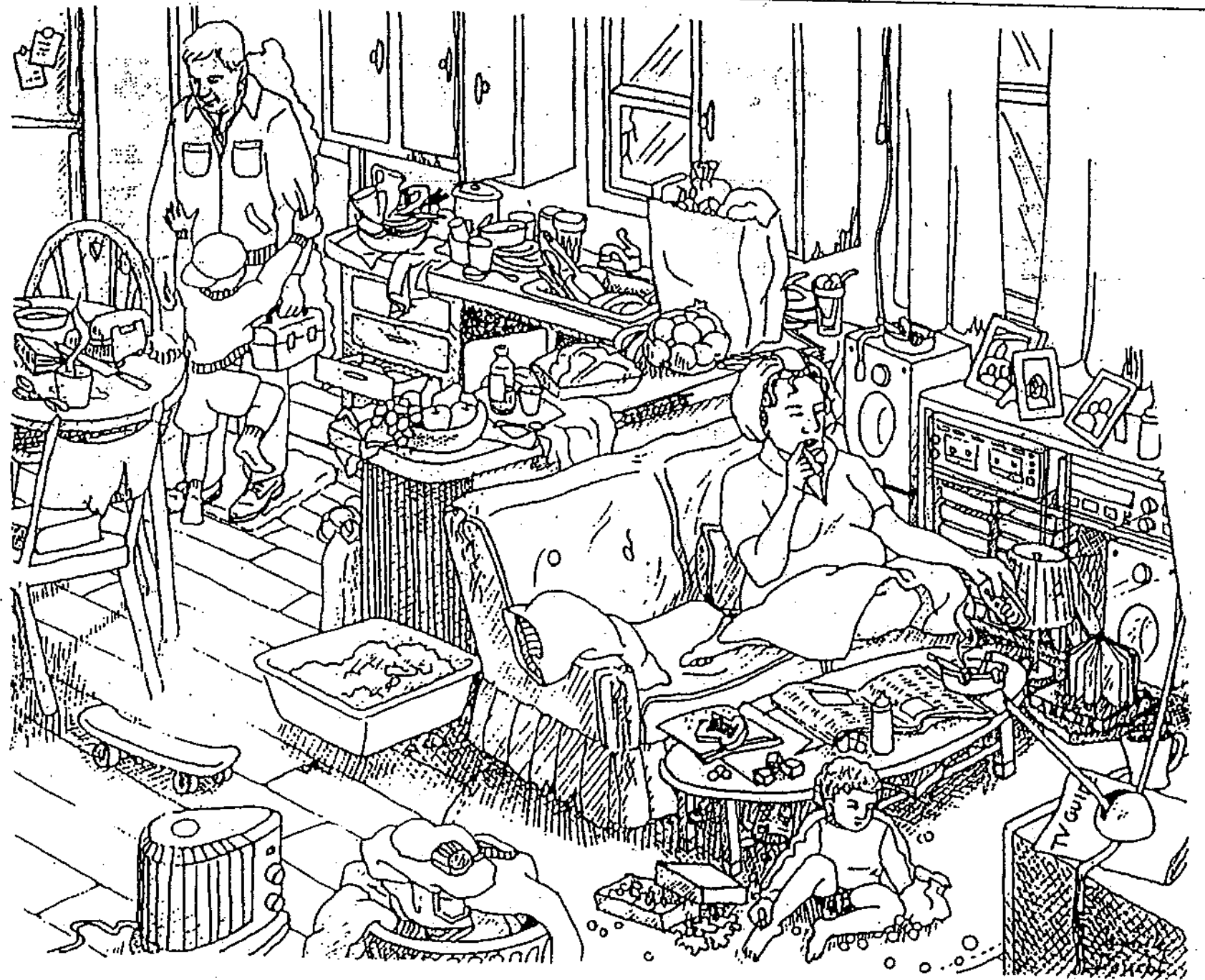


- Divorce
- Separation
- Drugs/Alcohol
- Domestic Violence
- Criminal Record
- Family Size

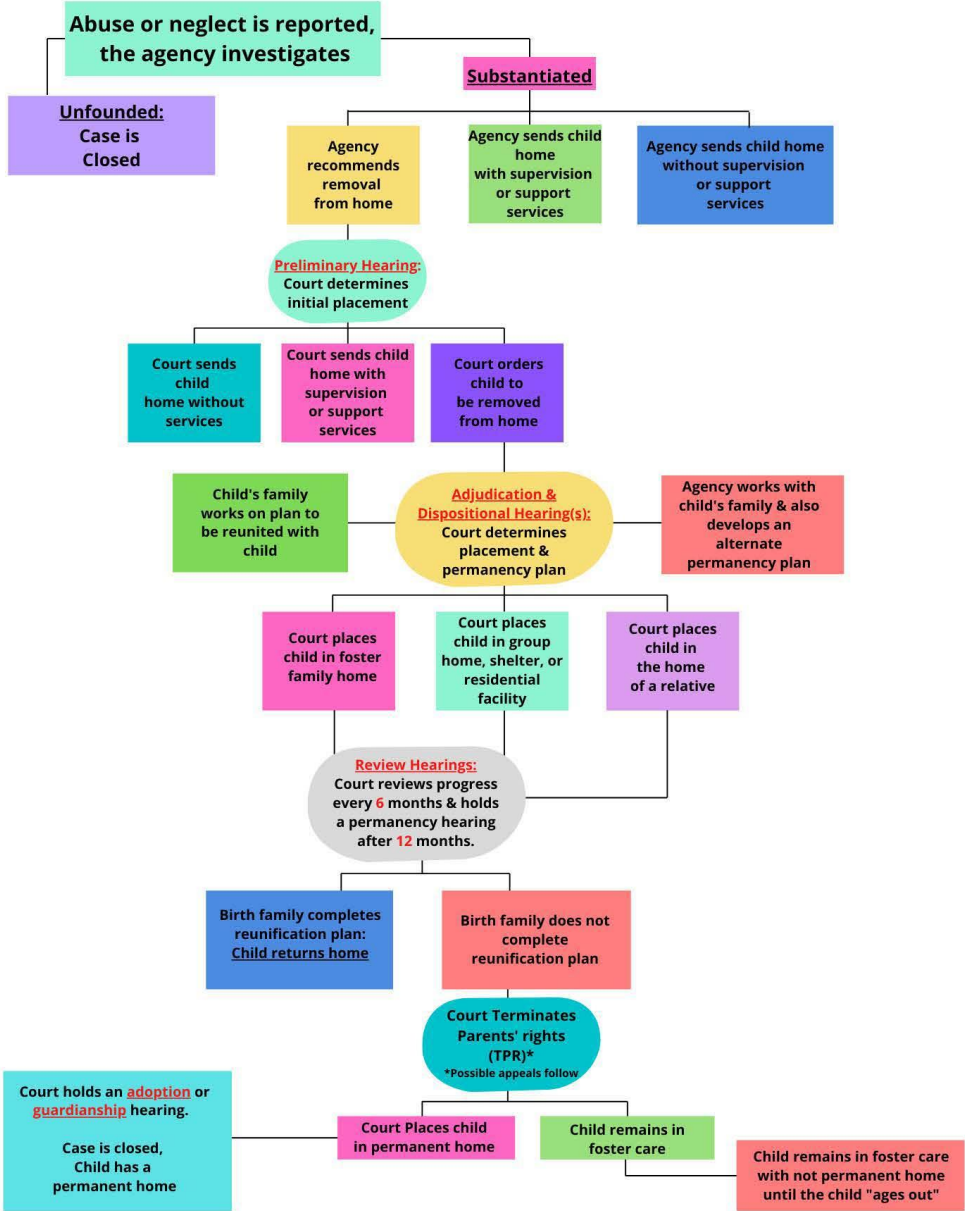
Strengths in Families

- **CASA Volunteers look for strengths in families such as:**
 - **Parent-Child Relationship**
 - **Parental Support System**
 - **Past Support System**
 - **Family History**
 - **Parent's Self-Care**
 - **Child's Development**





A Child's Journey Through the Child Welfare System



Case Participants

- **Law Enforcement** – Only legal party to remove a child
- **County Attorney** – Prosecutor, files petition in court
- **Judge** – County Judge or Specialty Juvenile Court Judge (Lancaster, Douglas, Sarpy)
- **Guardian ad Litem (GAL)** – Child’s attorney, represents their best interests
- **CASA Volunteer** – Provides valuable, first-hand information to the court, advocates for the child’s best interests
- **Parents** – bio or adoptive parents, guardian named in the petition
- **Parent Attorneys** – Attorneys, usually court appointed, who represent a parent in the case
- **Children and Family Services Specialist (CFSS)** – DHHS case manager, legal parent if child is a state ward.
- **Foster Parent** – can be a trained foster parent, relative or kinship (adult known to the child) provides a safe placement for a child
- **Foster Care Specialist** – provides support to the foster parent and works to stabilize the placement
- **Therapist** – Mental Health practitioner working with the child, parent or family
- **Visitation Worker** – Outside agency staff who supervise visits between the child and their parents
- **Family Support Worker** – Outside agency staff who provide one on one support to parents and/or older youth

Permanency Plans:

- Reunification with the mother, the father, both parents, or the legal guardian
- Adoption
 - Termination of Parental Rights or Relinquishment
 - Legal parent even after age 19
- Guardianship
 - Rights end at age of legal adulthood, 19
- Independent Living/APPLA
 - Can be a dorm, apartment, or other housing option
- Family Preservation
 - Children remained in home with services put in place
- Other Permanency Arrangement – Aging out of the system. Bridge to Independence Program available to aid with transition to adulthood.

- **CASA volunteers serve on the case until the court's jurisdiction is terminated.**
- **CASA volunteers can maintain contact with their CASA child(ren) after case closure as long as all parties (parent, adoptive parent & child) agree.**
- **CASA volunteers are assigned to one case at a time. Case workers can have as many as 25 cases and attorneys often have 40 or more cases at any one time.**
- **CASA volunteers keep cases moving so that children aren't languishing in the system.**



"You can't control where abused children come from, but you can have something to do with where they end up."



Questions??

- Thank You! For more information, our contact information is below:

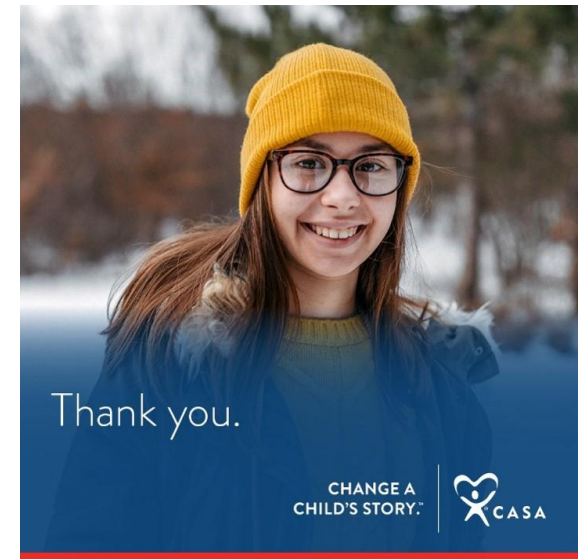
Dawn Rockey – 402-474-5161

- drockey@casa4lanaster.org

Corrie Kielty – 402-477-2788

- necasa.corrie@gmail.com

CHANGE A
CHILD'S STORY.™



Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA): Amplifying Children's Voices in Child Welfare

Thank you for attending this session.
Please be sure to **submit your feedback** online!

qrco.de/NYCI



NEBRASKA
— Young Child Institute —
www.NeYoungChildInstitute.com

#NYCI2026