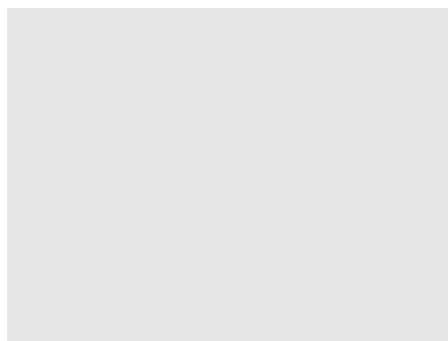


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Schwartz: Help CASA help children in need

By Sid Schwartz

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Sid Schwartz

As my wife, Julie, and I raised our now-adult daughters, we often talked about what we could do to help other children.



Our daughters and their friends told about the difficult circumstances of young people they knew, confirming what Julie and I had seen ourselves in the community.

After Julie's death and my subsequent retirement in 2021, I decided the time was right to try and help. I chose the CASA program because I admire the ground-level work volunteers do to help children during the most difficult periods of their lives.

The 6-year-old boy I was assigned had been removed from his home because of drug abuse. During my first visit with him at his foster home, we played with wooden blocks and Legos. I made up funny voices for the plastic people in our pretend world. I wasn't sure how well we had connected, but when it was time for me to go, he climbed onto my back, wrapped his arms around my neck and asked me to stay.

We've since played at the park, gone sledding and hung out at his house. Our growing relationship has been the most rewarding part of my work as an advocate.

Every quarter, I write a report to the court about my CASA kiddo to give Judge Michael Haakenson more information as he makes decisions in the case.

If volunteering as an advocate isn't right for you, consider these other ways to help the CASA program in April, which is Child Abuse Prevention Month:



Help plant Pinwheels for Prevention at Lower Courthouse Park in Janesville at 11 a.m. Saturday,

- April 2. The 3,000 purple pinwheels represent the approximate number of calls of suspected child abuse fielded each year by the Rock County Department of Human Services. Last year, the calls resulted in 61 children being removed from their homes. Many of those kids now are getting help from CASA.
- Watch for blue silhouettes of children outside businesses and in other locations throughout Rock County. The silhouettes are intended to remind the community that children should have happy childhoods free from abuse. They will be on display through Child Abuse Prevention Month.
- Attend the Break the Cycle Luncheon at 11 a.m.

Thursday, April 28,

- at Glen Erin Golf Club between Beloit and Janesville. The guest speaker will be best-selling author Ashley Rhodes-Courter, who has written two books about her years as a child in foster care. She credits a volunteer advocate for getting her out of foster care and into an adoptive home and changing her life.

CASA is looking for sponsors to help cover the expenses of the event. Tickets are \$40 and are available online at CASARockCounty.org.

I would tell anyone considering joining the CASA effort that it is a well-run organization of dedicated staff and volunteers focused on helping children when they need it most. You'll get thorough training and support from smart and caring supervisors.

And along the way, you'll make a difference in the lives of children who need help.

Sid Schwartz is retired editor

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