



**FALL
2025**

THE POWER OF HUMAN GENEROSITY

*By Carrie
Shoesmith*



When Humans of CASA was launched in January this year, I thought it would simply be a way to spotlight the incredible people who make CASA of Kent County what it is. I never expected it to become such a powerful journey into the hearts of those who quietly, faithfully, and generously give of themselves for the good of others.

This project has been a gift to me. Every conversation—whether over coffee or during a quick call—has reminded me why this work matters. I’ve been moved by the motivations behind their giving and honored to share their stories with our community. My hope is that by sharing, we inspire others to step in and give too.

Each story begins with a nomination from a CASA staff member—someone who has noticed a spark of something special in a volunteer, donor, caseworker, foster care partner, board member, or community supporter. These are the humans who show up day after day, not for recognition, but because generosity is simply part of who they are.

What strikes me most is how humble they are. Many were hesitant to be featured, not out of shyness, but because they didn’t think they were doing anything extraordinary. I often reminded them that the beauty of their giving is exactly that: They’re not doing grand things—they’re doing ordinary things with extraordinary love. They’re showing up consistently, listening compassionately, and offering steady care. That, to me, is love in action.

As I listened to their stories, I noticed a pattern. So often, their generosity is rooted in someone else’s example—a parent, a mentor, a friend who showed them what it means to give. It makes me pause and ask myself: What kind of example am I setting? Who might be watching me, and are they learning what generosity looks like?

These conversations have given me more than I could have imagined. One hour with a “human” often unfolds into a tapestry of memories—childhood moments, hard seasons, small but life-shaping acts of kindness. **What I’ve discovered is this: Generosity isn’t about recognition or applause. It’s about love quietly lived out in ways that ripple far beyond what we can see.**

CASA of Kent County is made up of humans, yes—but more than that, it’s made up of hearts. Hearts that give time when it’s scarce. Hearts that lend talents without seeking applause. Hearts that give financially, not for status, but for impact. Every act of giving—big or small—creates ripples, not just for the children we serve, but for all of us.

Humans of CASA started as a project. It’s become a reminder—of the power of generosity, the beauty of ordinary kindness, and the truth that when we give together, we can change everything. And I’m inspired to keep showing up and giving, just like the humans who’ve shared their hearts with me.

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Connect provides regular updates from CASA of Kent County. CASA is the only local volunteer organization that empowers everyday community members to advocate for vulnerable children who have experienced abuse or neglect.



VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DINNER 2025

At CASA of Kent County, celebrating our volunteers is one of our favorite traditions—and this year’s Volunteer Appreciation Dinner was no exception.

Held at Ivanrest Church in Grandville, the evening featured a cheerful picnic theme. Volunteers and their guests enjoyed a delicious dinner from Wealthy Street Bakery, followed by time to relax, connect, and share stories with one another. It was also a wonderful opportunity for advocates to meet new members of the CASA staff and strengthen the sense of community that makes our program so special.



So far in fiscal year 2025, 102 CASA volunteers have advocated for 175 children—a powerful reminder of the difference they are making in the lives of Kent County’s most vulnerable kids.

To every CASA volunteer, thank you for the countless hours you dedicate to ensuring that children in foster care have a voice. You are the heart of CASA of Kent County, and we are so grateful for you.

CASA AROUND TOWN

At CASA of Kent County, we believe that spreading the word about our mission is key to helping children in foster care receive the advocacy they deserve. That’s why we regularly present at local organizations and attend community events. We love to share how CASA volunteers make a difference and to invite more Kent County residents to get involved!

Recently, our team had the opportunity to connect with the community at events and organizations, including:

- West Michigan Jazz Society’s Jazz in the Park
- Barnes & Thornburg
- Baxter United’s Family Field Day
- Kent County’s North Community Fest
- Plante Moran

These engagements allow us to raise awareness, recruit new volunteers, and build relationships with local supporters who are passionate about our mission. We love meeting new friends in the community and sharing the impact that CASA volunteers have every day!

Do you want to raise awareness about CASA’s work? Invite us to your workplace, church, book club, or community event!

Contact our team at casa@kentcountymi.gov to learn more.



A NOTE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STEPHANIE SHELER

How long can a child live in uncertainty? For one girl, the number at the top of her court report gave the answer: 534 days in out-of-home care, spread across several foster homes.

Think about that for a moment: 534 days of uncertainty. 534 days of not knowing how long she would stay in one place or when she might be moved to the next. 534 days of wondering if she’d have to change schools again. 534 days of waiting for an answer to the most basic question a child can ask: Where do I belong?

For this child, reunification with her parent was no longer an option. So what would come next? Adoption? Guardianship? Or might she turn 18 without ever having a safe, loving, permanent home?

Here’s the hard truth: 534 days actually falls short of the average. Most children spend closer to 1,000 days—nearly three years—in foster care. Which means this child may be just over halfway through her journey in the child welfare system.

You might be wondering: how does a child survive this? (You might even be wondering how you would survive this.) The answer is that others step in to walk alongside them. Every child has an attorney to help navigate the judicial system. Every child has a foster care worker to guide them through the child welfare system. And a judge ultimately makes decisions about what is in the child’s best interest.

And then there are Court Appointed Special Advocates—CASA volunteers. A CASA volunteer has just one case and just one focus: the child they’re appointed to. Because of that, they have the time to really get to know the child’s world and gather information from teachers, caregivers, therapists, and others. They bring all of that perspective together and share it with the court—so that, alongside the work of the attorney and the caseworker, the judge has the fullest picture possible to make decisions. Most importantly, a CASA is a steady, caring adult who shows up—week after week, month after month—through all 534 days, or 1,000 days, or however long it takes.

That’s the difference CASA makes. When everything else feels uncertain, a CASA volunteer is the steady presence a child can count on.

And that includes you. Your care and support—whether through your time, your advocacy, or your generosity—make it possible for children in foster care to know they are not forgotten. Thank you for being part of the community that makes this possible.



Stephanie Sheler
Executive Director

OUTCOMES UPDATE

April 1, 2025 – June 30, 2025

Our shared mission to provide a voice for children who have experienced abuse and neglect continues. We use outcomes to measure our progress. Thank you to our generous donors and committed volunteers for supporting this work.

128	CHILDREN SERVED	9	NEWLY TRAINED VOLUNTEERS
79	ASSIGNED VOLUNTEERS	8	CHILDREN ACHIEVED PERMANENCY
73	COURT REPORTS WRITTEN		

AG ROUNDTABLE



CASA program representatives from across Michigan pose for a photo with Attorney General Dana Nessel.



“We are so grateful for the opportunity to bring CASA organizations together for a meaningful conversation with Congresswoman Scholten and Attorney General Nessel. CASA programs help fill critical gaps in the child welfare system by providing best-interest advocacy for children who need it most.”



Congresswoman Scholten, AG Nessel, and CASA program representatives discuss changes to federal funding.



This year has brought uncertainty for nonprofits in Kent County and across the nation. Federal funding shifts and economic challenges have sparked urgent conversations about how organizations like CASA can sustain their mission long term.

In response, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, Rep. Hillary Scholten, and Michigan CASA representatives came together this summer to discuss the impact of federal funding changes and strategies for building sustainability.

Reflecting on the roundtable, Executive Director Stephanie Sheler shared:

“We are so grateful for the opportunity to bring CASA organizations together for a meaningful conversation with Congresswoman Scholten and Attorney General Nessel. CASA programs help fill critical gaps in the child welfare system by providing best-interest advocacy for children who need it most.”

She added, “Last year, 180 Kent County children benefited from CASA advocacy—but still, more than 400 children navigated foster care without a CASA volunteer. Sustained support at the federal, state, and local levels is essential to change that reality.”

Thanks to the generosity of individuals, businesses, and organizations in West Michigan, CASA of Kent County is not dependent on federal funding or National CASA for operations. However, strong national oversight and consistent funding are vital to ensure children in foster care have the advocacy they deserve. Collaboration with leaders like Congresswoman Scholten and Attorney General Nessel amplifies our message about the importance of CASA’s program.

While the future of federal and state funding remains uncertain, CASA of Kent County remains focused on ensuring children in foster care have the advocacy they need. Community support, combined with strong national oversight and consistent funding, will be key to pursuing the vision of a voice for every child.

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL ESTATE PLANNING MONTH

A perfect time to think about the legacy you want to leave. By including CASA of Kent County in your estate plans, you can ensure that children in foster care continue to have a voice for years to come.

If you’re considering making an estate gift to support CASA, we’d love to hear from you. We can provide our official name, tax ID, and sample language to share with your estate planning professional, and we’d be honored to know of your plans.

DID YOU KNOW YOU CAN ACCESS TRAINING RESOURCES ONLINE?

Current CASA volunteers can continue building their skills and knowledge anytime by exploring the Michigan CASA website. These tools are offered to support you in providing high-quality advocacy for children in foster care.

Scan the code below or visit michigancasa.org/training-resources to access the latest training materials and stay connected with ongoing learning opportunities.



JOIN OUR NEXT TRAINING COHORT!

Are you ready to make a real difference in the life of a child? CASA of Kent County is now accepting applications for our October/November volunteer training cohort!

Join a community of dedicated advocates who provide children in foster care with a consistent voice in court and a caring connection they can rely on. Scan the code below to apply today and start your journey to changing a child’s life.



DONOR SPOTLIGHT: BERGER CHEVROLET

We'd like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to our friends at Berger Chevrolet for featuring CASA of Kent County as their charity partner at their first employee luncheon of 2025!

Employees enjoyed a delicious meal from Two Bones BBQ while raising funds to support our mission of advocacy for children in Kent County's child welfare system. Their generosity helps connect community volunteers with the family court, ensuring that children who have experienced abuse and neglect have a consistent, dedicated voice to advocate for their best interests.

The event also gave us the chance to share CASA's story more broadly. Executive Director Stephanie Sheler joined FOX 17 Morning Mix to talk about our work and the ongoing need for more CASA volunteers.

Berger's marketing team shared:

"Berger Chevrolet is proud to stand with CASA of Kent County in giving a voice to children in our community's child welfare system. We were honored to host CASA at our employee luncheon, where our team not only learned more about their vital mission but also raised awareness and funds to support it. CASA's work makes a lasting impact for children who need it most, and we are grateful for the opportunity to help amplify their mission."

We are so grateful to Berger Chevrolet for their generosity, creativity, and commitment to making a difference. By spotlighting CASA through their Berger Gives Back campaign, they are helping us expand our reach and serve more children who need advocacy. Thank you, Berger team, for championing community connections—and for helping Kent County's children find their voice.



meet the humans. feel the heart.
support the mission.

HEART OF CASA 2025

Thursday, October 16, 2025

5:30 – 6:45pm
Cocktail hour & strolling dinner

6:45 – 8:30pm
Dessert, award ceremony & program

The High Five

19 La Grave Ave. SE, Grand Rapids,
MI 49503

RSVP at tiny.cc/heartofcasa
or scan the QR code
Please respond by 10.6
Business attire



Recognizing Award Recipient

Heidi Hendricks



Volunteer

Be a voice for a child in need. CASA of Kent County trains new volunteers four times a year. To learn more, visit our website or give us a call. We'd be happy to chat.

Donate

Consider donating to support CASA's mission of advocacy. Donations are accepted online or by mailed check. If you would like to learn about other options, reach out to us.

Partners

Michigan CASA
National CASA/GAL Association for Children
Heart of West Michigan United Way

Spread the word

Tell others about CASA of Kent County and the needs of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Encourage them to learn more and to visit our website.

Contact us

casa@kentcountymi.gov
casakentco.org
616.632.5311

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