



Meet Charlene Johnson, Executive Director of CASA of the Southern Tier, Inc.

1. Describe Your Business:

CASA of the Southern Tier, Inc. (CASA) is a non-profit in Schuyler, Steuben and Chemung Counties. Providing services since 1989, the mission of CASA of the Southern Tier, Inc is to recruit and train volunteers to advocate for the best interest of abused and neglected children in Family Court. The needs of the children are lost in the

family unit and priorities are skewed which places their welfare at risk. Family stressors that are faced often puts the children at a higher risk for abuse and neglect. These children often fend for themselves for their basic needs and become an object of stress to the caregivers, leading to abuse and/or neglect. No child should live in an atmosphere where he or she feels unsafe and/or unwanted. The children are removed from the primary care figure. Many children move from foster home to foster home, school to school, and have difficulty acclimating. The Child Advocate is trained to observe, gather information, provide advocacy for permanency and interventions to help the child cope. Life in general is tough enough for children to handle without the added factor of no stability!!

2. Tell us your story:

Court appointed by a judge, our volunteers, known as CASA Advocates, are assigned a child when they enter family court due to a neglect or abuse situation. The CASA remains an advocate and supports the child throughout the court process until permanent placement is secured. The CASA gets to know the child's world. The CASA advocate also monitors court orders such as visitation, therapies, parental commitments, etc. for attendance and follow through. A court report on the current situation of the child, concerns, and recommendations are forwarded to the court/judge. CASA advocates become the "voice for the child". Benefits of having a CASA Advocate being able to ensure the appropriate services are being provided to the child and family, assistance in facilitating a positive collaborative relationship with the caseworker and other parties needed to provide permanency as quickly as possible, and much more. At the current time, we serve 60 children throughout Chemung, Schuyler, and Steuben Counties. We seek grant opportunities, do fundraisers, and accept donations throughout the year to maintain program costs.

3. What has helped you succeed and gain experience?

CASA, as an agency, and individual Child Advocates need to have an understanding of the court systems, social service delivery systems, and other support resources in the communities to fully succeed in advocating for the children. Each case is different and brings about new information, contacts, and experiences to be able to gain confidence in fully advocating for each child assigned.

4. What inspires you?

Each success story, when a child finds a safe-loving home and flourishes, inspires the staff and advocates to keep going and help another child, and then another.....

5. What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?

The main challenge that CASA continues to struggle with is finding enough volunteers who can give 5-10 hours a month to foster a positive relationship with the child(ren) and make the necessary contacts to advocate for their best interest. We have ongoing recruitment and provide trainings at least quarterly to those interested in becoming a CASA Volunteer Advocate.

6. What is your favorite local activity?

One of our favorite activities is training! Training gives the perspective CASA Volunteer fundamentals to begin working with the child(ren). CASA Advocates must also take 12 hours of training a year to maintain their advocacy role. We offer trainings and networking 10 months out of the year to help build their "toolbox" to be the best child advocate! It is a nice reward to also see the personal growth that each volunteer will often go through because of the trainings and the general volunteer experience.

7. Is there anything else we should know about you?

We often post fundraisers and other parental information. Please follow us on our Facebook page and Website!