

April 2024

My CASA kid turned 18 this year and will be graduating from high school this spring. The first time I met her, she hadn't started 1st grade yet. She stood by the side of the sofa, the furniture between me and her. It was a classic protective stance, but her eyes met mine straight on as I explained to her that I was her Court Appointed Special Advocate. **I told her that, as her CASA volunteer, it was my job to get to know her and the important people in her life and to make recommendations to the court about what I thought was in her best interest.** I said that sometimes what I thought was best for her, might not be what she thought was best. But, I promised, I would always listen to her and let the judge know what she wanted as well.

Visiting my CASA kid meant I listened to musical performances, saw fashion shows, admired crafts, went along on school shopping trips. I met her family, friends, and pets. I learned what was important to her, her hobbies, fears, dreams, interests, and ideas. It took almost a year of visits before my CASA kid decided she could trust me with what she had to say.

During that year, she moved with her placement. Visiting her there required a 7-hour roundtrip drive, but I wanted to keep being her advocate. A child in foster care can have several different placements, CPS workers, doctors, counselors, attorneys and even judges as the years go on. **I knew I wanted to be this kid's constant throughout her time in care. I wanted the court to know this special child as I knew her.**

When the court ordered my CASA kid to keep contact with someone she was not comfortable with, she told me she wanted to speak to the judge about that decision. I advocated for her right to do that. **I wanted this child to know that, though this was an incredibly vulnerable and unstable time for her, her voice was heard, and her feelings were valid.**

Eventually, my CASA kid was safely settled in an amazing placement and no longer needed an advocate. I couldn't have been happier when she asked me to stay in touch and keep visiting. This spring I will be attending the high school graduation of a lovely, young woman. The courageous child I came to know through adversity has become a strong, gifted woman, and I am so honored she considers me part of her beautiful family.

Your tax-free donation will help us continue to provide an advocate for children in the 9th Judicial District. Please consider making a donation today.



With Gratitude,

Devonna

Devonna Neal McCartney
CASA Volunteer