

VOICES RAISING VOICES

In 2016, Georgia CASA launched a project, Voices Raising Voices, for CASA volunteers throughout the state to share their volunteer stories. The goal is to help recruit a new wave of CASA volunteers so that even more children can have a voice for their best interests in court. By raising more volunteer voices, we can all help ensure more children across Georgia benefit from CASA volunteers by their sides. Here's the story of a CASA volunteer in Cartersville, GA.

MEET CONNIE

Connie has had a lifelong passion for children, volunteering, and community service. When her children were young, she supported their activities by serving as a board member, officer, and team mom. As they flew the nest, Connie searched for opportunities where she could continue to fill her calling in life.

A co-worker, who was a foster parent and was aware that Connie had experience working with attorneys and disabled adults, shared a local newspaper article about the CASA program with her. When Connie moved into a role at work that could accommodate CASA volunteer requirements, she contacted Bartow County CASA in Cartersville to sign up for the next volunteer training class.

Since becoming a CASA volunteer in late 2014, Connie has advocated for 19 children on nine cases, and is currently serving 11 children on four cases. One of her memorable cases involved six children who were removed from the care of their mother. The oldest three children shared a father who had not been engaged in the case. Connie and the DCFS case manager reached out and worked with the father to help him gain custody of the children. They've been in their new family group for a year and are doing great!

Throughout the process, Connie and the former foster parent provided counseling, patience, and support. Connie is still in touch with the family, visits often, and is a part of their lives forever. She describes her work with CASA as a gift that has given her joy and purpose in life.

Connie and her husband Ron have been married for 36 years, have two grown sons, and share life together with their two dogs, Gunner and Ruby. Connie is an accounting graduate of Kennesaw State University and works in Cartersville for Ely Concrete Construction.

Connie was a nominee for the 2018 CASA Volunteer of the Year in Georgia. Upon learning of her nomination, she sent the following correspondence to Georgia CASA about the impact CASA has had on her, including the incredible support she receives from CASA staff.

Dear Georgia CASA,

Frankly, I have been at a loss for words, and for those who know me, it may be a first.

I am honored and deeply humbled. I have attended the last three Georgia CASA conferences and have seen the amazing work of the prior recipients of this award. Their work has been awe-inspiring and motivating. It is magical to attend the conference; it restores faith in the power of simple acts to change lives.

As a CASA since only November 2014, I certainly never expected to be nominated for such a prestigious honor in my short tenure. The body of work of prior recipients, over oftentimes decades, is something I hope to achieve. The credit for any impact I have had in this short time belongs to the support and training received from the local CASA program.

The training program, led by our local director, along with her ongoing support and counsel, allowed me to hit the ground running. Her guidance, support, and omnipresence provides the base camp from which our volunteers gain strength, confidence, tools, and a map to strike out on what I describe best as a walk from dark to light; with the hands of the children firmly in ours.

And then there is my CASA Coordinator. While I can be loud and direct, sweet Emily is the ying to my yang. She is patient, kind, and has harnessed my fiery redhead passion into effective advocacy on too many occasions to list. Often, her experience and insight is metered out after she has endured my outrage. Her calming, wise words always make me see the bigger picture and the path needed. She is a master at channeling my fire effectively. She is a mentor extraordinaire and anything I have accomplished, I assure you her guiding hand was on my shoulder every step of the way.

In closing, I look forward to the upcoming Georgia CASA conference and meeting you and the recipient of the CASA Volunteer of the Year. But most of all, I look forward to years of service as a CASA. It has given me so much joy and purpose in my life during the time when I lost both my mother and father. As I struggled with their loss, the opportunity to let their legacy live on through my work as a CASA filled the gaping hole in my heart. Without this organization, I would not have been able to do so, and for that I am eternally grateful to the entire CASA organization. So you see, it is through helping the children that I too have been helped. I suspect that is true for all CASAs.

Every child deserves an advocate!

Deeply honored and humbled,

Connie