Greetings from the Kansas Bar Association (KBA).
Welcome to this edition of Law Wise, the sixth of the 2016-2017 school year.

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“I ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”
– John F. Kennedy

This famous quote was made during President Kennedy’s Inaugural Address on January 20, 1961. Throughout his presidency, President Kennedy emphasized the importance of civic action and public service. This month, Law Wise features an organization that was inspired by the vision of a judge and operates primarily through the generosity of volunteers. This issue also highlights a new program with the Kansas Department of Education called Civic Engagement Network.

Speaking for the best interests of the child...
Kansas CASAs provide a valuable link to the Court

If you could name an adult who has given you a feeling of security and safety, who would it be? For many of us, we would say our parents do that. We go about life knowing that each day we have a father and or a mother who will make sure we have things we need like food, clothing, and shelter. In addition, most parents watch out for their children and do special things for them that make them feel loved and wanted. In Kansas, each year there are over 4,000 children who are removed from their homes and placed in temporary and sometimes permanent foster care. They are removed because it is not safe for them to be at home. Most of them have suffered abuse or neglect from a parent.

What happens next is a long process. The child will most likely already have a caseworker from the Kansas Department of Children and Family Services...

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Caseworkers in Kansas assist an average caseload of 60-90 children at a time. This makes it virtually impossible for a caseworker to provide all the services that each child needs and complete reports, appear in court and coordinate services for the family.

Forty years ago, a judge in Seattle, Washington created the CASA program. CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. Judge David Soukup noticed that he did not have enough information to make decisions about the best interests for abused or neglected children. He designed a program to train adults who would like to volunteer to help a child by speaking for their bests interests. Since he started the CASA program in 1977, forty-nine states have adopted the CASA program or similar programs. In Kansas, CASA started in 1981 in Wichita. Today, there are twenty-three CASA programs in Kansas. In 2016, 915 CASA volunteers served 1,994 children.

A CASA provides services for children but also looks for resources for parents.

Here is an example:

GeorgeAnn, a new CASA volunteer, was assigned to three young children ages one, two, and three. The children were brought to the attention of the court due to malnourishment and low weight. They also found that the children were developmentally behind. GeorgeAnn went to work and immediately gathered resources to assist the foster parents in caring for the children. She also developed a special relationship with the children and visited them frequently. The parents of the children were particularly weary of the child welfare system, having been children in the system themselves. They refused to work with the service providers and made excuses for their lack of progress. GeorgeAnn knew that to help these children, she had to also work closely with the parents. GeorgeAnn helped ease fears the parents had and helped them identify and access resources by building a trusting relationship through frequent contact.

The children and parents began to work with the service providers, many of whom GeorgeAnn had recommended specifically for the family. Over time, the children gained weight. They caught up with their peers developmentally. The parents learned how to care for the children and manage their time and resources. The children have now gone home to their parents and are thriving in their parents’ care.

Who can be a CASA?

In order to be a CASA, you must be at least 21 and attend a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training. Part of the training includes observing court hearings and learning about the social service system. A criminal background check is conducted on anyone interested in being a CASA. Once a volunteer has received training, passed a background check and has been approved by the Court to advocate for the best interest of children, he or she is assigned a family to assist.

The next step…

Here are some of the things a CASA does to assist the Court in making decisions.

Gather Information

A CASA will begin by reviewing documents and records and then interview the children, family members and professionals in their lives.

Document

A CASA must document the visits, information and records received.

Appear in Court

The CASA will be notified of court hearings. At times, the CASA may be asked to provide testimony or information.

Help the children understand what is going on

Often court is confusing and intimidating to a child. The CASA is there to explain what is happening and to ease the stress the child may have about being in court.

Continuity

A CASA provides a consistent voice for the children. He or she helps others involved understand the services that are in place and or what else may be needed.

Keep the Court informed

A CASA monitors the plan established by the Court and keeps written reports on the developments in the child’s life.

Build Rapport with the Child

The CASA is able to work with the child throughout the duration of the case. The child can feel secure knowing that one adult is always watching out for his or her best interest.

Who pays for a CASA?

The CASA program is designed to utilize volunteers so that costs are minimal compared to what it would cost to hire advocates. It is estimated that the value of one hour provided by a CASA is $20.88. Each year, over one million dollars in services are donated by CASAs. There are several partners that work with Kansas CASA to provide funding for the program. The funding is primarily used for training new volunteers. The Kansas Bar Foundation is one of those partners. You can learn more about the partners at www.kansascasa.org/donate. In 2015, three partners donated the CASA Bug, a VW Bug used to attend various events that help promote and engage volunteer recruitments. It is basically a moving billboard.

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Lesson Plan

Name someone in your life you can count on to speak up for you, listen to you and help you.

What are some of the things this person does that show you he or she cares?

Read the following situation and share your ideas on how a CASA could help.

Jordan, Emily, and Sarah are sisters. They were removed from their mom due to her drug involvement and poor home conditions. The girls were eventually separated in foster care. Their CASA, Lisa, fought hard to get the girls back together. She was successful in reuniting 2 of the sisters (Jordan and Sarah.) Emily was stable in her foster home, and close to the community her sisters lived in. Because all 3 girls couldn’t live together, the state made sure that the girls had regular visitation. Eventually, Emily’s placement disrupted her, and the closest home that could be found for her was 75 miles away from her sisters. Lisa knew as the CASA, she had to do something to make sure the girls would still see each other. The girls continued to have visits; however, the visits were occurring on Thursdays, for 1 hour. This meant that the girls were missing some school, and Emily was getting home late from her visit with her sisters. The girls had no time to regroup after visits and often struggled the next day at school.

Do you have ideas on how to help the girls see each other and not disrupt their performance at school?

Here is how the CASA solved the problem:

Lisa asked the court to order 3 hour visitations on Saturdays so the girls would have time to visit each other, and so their education was not disrupted. This also meant that Emily would get back to her placement at a decent time and wouldn’t be tired the next day. The court ordered this arrangement and the girls saw each other for 3 hours every week.

Describe some of the things a CASA might document after a visit with a child.

Possible answers:
- Observed behaviors
- Mood
- Hygiene
- Physical appearance
- Disclosed information, such as opinion of recent visit with family members, who their friends are, how school is going, etc.
- What a child indicates he or she needs (new shoes, winter coat, to be allowed “time out” space to cool off when upset, etc.).
- Observed interactions with others such as foster parents, siblings, parents, etc.

Describe some of the things a CASA would teach a child about what it is like to go to court.

Possible answers:
- Appropriate behavior
- How to speak to the judge

In addition, a CASA helps prepare the child for court by ensuring there are no “surprises” in court and sharing information with them prior to hearing it in court. A CASA also ensures that, when appropriate, the foster care agency arranges transportation. In some situations, CASA volunteers may also ask the youth what they would like the outcome to be. However, it is important to be clear that their “wishes” for outcome are not perceived by the child to be “promises” of what the outcome will be.

Terrific Technology for Teachers

Kansas CASA
http://kansascasa.org/about/kansas-casa

Kansas Department for Children and Families
http://www.dcf.ks.gov/Pages/default.aspx

iCivics Students Engage Unit
https://go.ksbar.org/2pYNpat

Civic engagement lesson Plan for grades 3-6 provided by the JFK Library
https://go.ksbar.org/2pwTl4j
In 2016, the Kansas State Board of Education authorized the creation of the Civic Advocacy Network as an award program to encourage schools to provide more instruction, discussion, experiential learning, community service, student engagement, and practice opportunities around the topic of civic engagement. The goal is to provide an environment that encourages students to become active members of their communities. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement (NCLCE) created a document titled Guidebook: Six Proven Practices for Effective Civil Learning. This is the document on which the Civic Advocacy Network Award will be based. Schools will be asked to provide evidence that they are addressing the 6 areas in their schools.

Evidence would consist of one or more of the following: professional learning for teachers; implementation of a school created or state, regional, or national program; student performance in state, regional, or national competitions related to engagement; or recognition by an agency outside of the school district for work done in that area.

Knowing civic education strategies that allow students to investigate the complexities of our governmental system can equip them far more effectively to participate than those that require little more of students than simply digesting key historical facts, dates, and events. The Civic Advocacy Network program was established to help recognize the Kansas schools who are working with students and communities to implement a local program for their students.

“This award program was created by the Kansas Board of Education to encourage schools to make regular civic engagement a part of their school culture. The Board recognizes that only with civically engaged businesses, communities, patrons, educators, and students can Kansas lead the world in the success of each student,” Don Gifford, Educational Program Consultant for History, Government, and Social Studies at the Kansas State Department of Education stated. “The practices championed in this program will assist schools in creating a culture of collaborative engagement with their communities.”

The program was introduced at various locations throughout the state in March and April. Schools participating in the program will be invited to submit their progress in each of the six areas. A team of experts will evaluate the progress and determine which schools will be selected. Award-winning schools will be recognized in the fall during a Constitution Day ceremony.

To learn more about this program, contact Don Gifford, Kansas State Department of Education dgifford@ksde.org 785.296.3892

Kansas Can Civic Engagement Fact Sheet:
https://go.ksbar.org/2pLZpX9

Civic Engagement General Resources:
https://go.ksbar.org/2p1U0kp

Guidebook:
Six Proven Practices For Effective Civic Learning:
https://go.ksbar.org/2pKNTcJ
Over the last 20 years, the Hon. G. Joseph (Joe) Pierron of the Kansas Court of Appeals has made about 400 presentations to approximately 50,000 students and adults throughout Kansas. The program is known as “You be the Judge” and usually lasts for about 50 minutes or less. The program is interactive and members of the audience help to present it.

The program gives the audience a basic understanding of how the U. S. Constitution and the United States Supreme Court work. Two somewhat amusing Supreme Court cases are used to demonstrate how our constitutional protections are applied. The participants enjoy their parts in the program.

While schools are the usual locations for the programs a growing number of adult groups are requesting the FREE presentation. The program has won local, state and national awards for its educational and entertaining values. The program is very flexible and has been presented to K-12 classes, university students and adult learning groups.

Anyone wishing to see if a FREE program might be presented at a school or to adults can contact Judge Pierron. pierronj@kscourts.org; 785-296-5408.

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