



Spotlight on Dan Gemeinhart: A Dedicated CASA Volunteer

Tell us a little about yourself. Where are you from? What's your background?

I was an Army brat, so I was born on the military base in Frankfurt, Germany. After that we moved around a lot until I was in middle school, so I'm not really "from" anywhere. I've lived most of my adult life in Washington state, though, so I definitely consider myself a Washingtonian.

What attracted you to this cause?

I used to be a teacher, and have always loved working with kids and being a part of the team. After I stepped away from teaching in 2016, I really missed that feeling of connection and service. I'd already known vaguely about the CASA program, but when I saw an ad for it at the movies one day, I knew it was time. Since I had experience working with kids and I now work from home, I thought it could be a great fit. And it is!

Why is your CASA work meaningful to you?

My CASA work is meaningful because you get to really help these kids and their families during a very challenging, difficult time. The system does the best that it can and it's full of plenty of great people, but it's all stretched pretty thin. A CASA is so important because you are focused solely on the best interests of the child and interact with them and their family more than anyone else, so you're really in a unique and special position to be an informed and effective advocate. It's a responsibility, sure, but it's also a real privilege to have the opportunity to help families heal and reunite.

What was most surprising to you about being a CASA Volunteer?

I think what surprised me most is how much of the job is dealing with and handling the adults on the case. Even though the job is all about advocating for the kids, I found that most of the work and challenge was with the adults. The kids are fun and easy! It's all interesting, though, and important, and has been a really positive experience.

How has being a CASA Volunteer changed you?

It's really given me a window into what other folks out there are dealing with: adults, kids, families, and communities. It's one thing to hear a news story or a statistic about, say, opiate addiction; it's another thing to see it tear apart a family that you've grown close to. There are people right here in our community who are really facing some incredible challenges, and it feels great to be able to help offer some help.

Is there a particular CASA moment or memory that stands out for you?

Meeting the kids and hanging out with them, for sure! It was so lovely to be able to be in their lives and visit them in their home and play games with them and watch them grow and flourish.

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Just how impressed I've been with the Chelan Douglas CASA program. The support and assistance I got on my case from CASA staff all along the way was remarkable. The children and families in our community are so lucky to have such an amazing organization working on their behalf!