

Making a Difference: Carolyn Guyton

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By **The Grand Rapids Press**

EDITOR'S NOTE: "Making a Difference" profiles someone whose good works make our community a better place.

As the mother of eight children, Carolyn Guyton is a natural advocate for kids.



Hollyn Johnson | The Grand Rapids Press Carolyn Guyton

While her own were growing up, she was always at their school, trying to make things better for children and their parents.

And that is how she got started running an after-school program at Oakdale Elementary -- her children's school -- for Camp Fire USA.

The program led to her career at Camp Fire USA West Michigan Council, 1257 East Beltline Ave. NE. She works as program director, overseeing the after-school programs at nine area sites.

Her paid work at Camp Fire USA introduced her to a volunteer job she loves, too.

Doing what? Advocating for children, of course.

"Children are really my mission," Guyton said. "I really believe it takes a village to raise a child."

At a committee for work, she heard a local judge talking about the important role CASA volunteers can have on a child going through the court system. Her ears perked up, and she wanted to know more.

FACT SHEET

CASA of Kent County -- Court Appointed Special Advocates

Where: 180 Ottawa Ave. NW, Suite 3500

Volunteers: A 30-hour training program that takes places over three to four weeks is required.

Contact: Julie Mauer, executive director of CASA of Kent County, 632-5112; **Julie.Mauer@kentcountymi.gov**.

When she heard CASA volunteers -- Court Appointed Special Advocates -- help abused and neglected children navigate the court system, she was intrigued. She already was working with children who often come from difficult backgrounds, so she felt like she could help.

That was in 2000. Nearly nine years later, she still is a CASA volunteer and has helped on seven cases.

Often the CASA volunteer is the only constant face during sometimes years-long court cases. Lawyers change, judges change and social workers change, but a CASA volunteer will stay until the end.

That commitment is what Guyton thrives on.

"I feel whatever I can do to help a child grow up to be a fulfilling adult, I will do it," she said. "It takes patience, it takes love, you have to be for real, and you need to be honest."

If you know someone who is making a difference in the community, contact Your Life at 222-5585 or e-mail **yourlife@grpress.com**.

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