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Making a difference: **Chris Resau**

Erin Fettig / The Grand Rapids Press

EDITOR'S NOTE: "Making a Difference" profiles someone whose good works make our community a better place. When Chris Resau saw a special on television more than 10 years ago about a CASA volunteer, she saw her future.

Resau was touched by the impact made on the life of a child by the Court Appointed Special Advocates volunteer. She knew one day she wanted to become one.

Because she still had children at home, the timing wasn't right. A few years later, after a move to Grand Rapids, she was ready.

Volunteers with CASA help abused or neglected children who have been removed from their homes and have entered the legal system. The workers get to know the children personally and speak for their best interests.

A volunteer usually works with one family of children during the entire legal process. It can take 18 months or more to work through the system. The volunteer stays with the case for the duration.

"You are predictable," Resau says. "Lawyers can change, social workers can change, foster families can change, but you are there. You are committed to being there."

Resau's latest case involving five children has taken nearly six years. Not all cases take this long, but complications kept the case from closing, she said.

She is in constant contact with the children and meets with them once a week. Occasionally, she takes the kids shopping or swimming. At other times, they meet at the children's foster home. When court dates arise, she attends.

Most months, she clocks about 15 hours of volunteer time, although some months see her putting in many more hours on a case.

"It requires a commitment, compassion, persistence -- but the positive aspect is that you can see clearly how you can facilitate a better life for children," Resau said. "They deserve it."

Her strong belief in advocacy started young. Her brother is disabled, and she has helped him find the services he needs to be more independent. In her career as a speech pathologist in schools, she has worked with many children, helping them navigate the educational system. She works with National Heritage Academies two days a week as the system's at-risk coordinator.

As a CASA, "Her common sense and instincts for the children are just so on-target," says Julie Mauer, program director. "She won't quit until they are out of the system."

Volunteering with CASA is an outlet for Resau's passion of advocating for children.

"They didn't ask to go into foster care. They didn't ask for this. They deserve to have people care about their best interests," Resau says.

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