

May 2020 Volunteer Spotlight
Katusha Zeller and Gerry Urso

Katusha Zeller and Gerry Urso were sworn in as CASA Volunteers in June of 2018. The two have been outstanding advocates and displayed great commitment to making a difference to their CASA kids! Gerry and Katusha have had three cases since becoming CASA Volunteers in June 2018; touching the lives of nine children. Two of the cases ended with parents successfully reuniting with their children and one case ended with an adoption! The two describe the case that closed with an adoption as being a part of helping the kids have a new but very happy “forever” family.

Their CASA Supervisor describes them as the dynamic duo. Gerry and Katusha report that they have learned a lot in their almost two years of service and still want to do more! When being interviewed for this spotlight, Gerry stated, “The personal and emotional reward of being a CASA far outweighs the effort. You almost wish that you had the CASA training when you were raising your own children”. When asked to reflect on her experiences as a CASA, Katusha said, “When Gerry asked if I, too, wanted to be a CASA and join him in the upcoming training I immediately replied “Yes!” The training and experience I have enjoyed thus far could have been useful as a parent a few years back. However, I am looking forward to using my new found skills as a CASA and a grandparent”.

While working as a team is not always the norm, for Gerry and Katusha being Co-CASA Volunteers offers a great advantage when working cases. They report that sometimes they divide and conquer, alternate time between children and foster parents, and that following visits they cross check each other’s notes.

Katusha and Gerry reside in Tangipahoa Parish. The two are retired and enjoy spending time with their friends, traveling, cooking, and ballroom dancing. Between the two of them, they have three adult children, all who live out of state. They recently became grandparents and are excited to welcome a second grandchild in a few months.

When Gerry was asked why he became a CASA, he related that he knew when he retired he wanted to give back in some way. He says the he first learned about CASA five years ago when he was still working and then a few years later he met a volunteer who shared more about being a volunteer. Gerry says that the third time he heard about CASA was “the charm” because when he got ready to retire, he was given more information about CASA. He says that he just knew that CASA was where he needed to be and that he wanted to help children through difficult times.

CASA Supervisor, Jerri Pevey, reports that Gerry and Katusha do an outstanding job in connecting with their CASA children and getting to know everyone that is involved in the child’s life. She also stated that the two of them manage to do an outstanding job as volunteers and that their work as CASAs is always rewarding in spite of the two being very busy. She asked them to share some advice with new volunteers or those considering becoming advocates. Gerry and Katusha stated volunteers should prioritize making a connection with the child. Find out what they like to do; sports, academics, board games, video games, etc. and spend some time engaging with the children in their chosen activity. They encourage advocates to ask the kids what they like to be called. The two also report that they find out what the kids’ favorite foods are and surprise the kids with a special dinner or lunch with permission from the foster parent. They also say that communication with your supervisor is key and that keeping timely and accurate notes guide their work.