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# IN My OPINION

By Jane Dvorak, APR, Fellow PRSA *Jane*



## Giving back changes lives. It's just WOW!

Each and every day we all have a chance to change a life. Sounds monumental, doesn't it!? Actually, it takes so little.

I don't know about you, but I'm not famous, nor am I wealthy beyond worries. I face the very same challenges as most. One thing I do, though, is give back. I'm not sure when this was instilled in me, but I know that my mother was an amazing role model in this regard. And, my dad, he was always helping others either through his network of connections, and boy was that web spread far and wide, or by just being a good friend.

I know that I get great joy from giving back. I do that professionally through my internship program. It is so incredibly rewarding to see aspiring PR professionals make the start of their journey and the many accomplishments they make along the way. Interns 67 and 68 are soon to pass through the doors of JKD. That's pretty cool to have been a part of so many careers that have traveled just as many different paths to success. Poppin' buttons like a proud mama and "the best boss ever."

I'm proud of that contribution to my profession, I'm also overwhelmed to have been named the 2022 Colorado CASA Advocate of the Year for my work with children in the court system as a result of abuse and neglect. WOW! I mean, really... WOW!

I've had the opportunity to work with 16 CASA children – that's Court Appointed Special Advocate – over the last decade. They have ranged in age from newborn to 17 and all facing trauma that no child should have to bear...ever. Helping these children to navigate the upheaval in their lives – some are in foster care, some are placed with family – and what will come next can tear your heart apart. At the same time, my heart overflows knowing I can be the example – the role model – they have never had. In that one moment I have the chance to change how they see the world, find trust in people and know they can find the courage to get through this. They have a champion at their side.

These chances can be long or brief. You never know how long a case will be or what the ultimate outcome will be. Returning to their family is always the goal, sadly, it doesn't always mean that is the safest permanent option. I've learned so much from each CASA child. They are all different, handle their situations differently and make their way independently. Some keep in touch, others never to be heard from again. While the time together can be good, fulfilling, I am a part of their lives that wasn't so stellar. You just never really know how you've affected a person by your actions, time, words, or even your silent understanding as they rage. It's the hardest work I have ever done and some of the best work I have ever done.

To be asked to attend a graduation 10 years after you've been a CASA – WOW! Of course, with my cow bell in hand and hoots and hollers when their name is called and they cross that stage. To be the one they call when they are alone and have no one else they feel they can turn to – WOW! Making time for lunch so they can treat you with money earned from their first job – WOW! Making that connection from the audience, when they know you're at a school program, sports event – WOW! Those are little things that turn into big things in a person's life. Easy, huh?!

Take this season of gratitude and thankfulness to reflect. Send a handwritten note to a friend, new acquaintance. I think I personally keep the postal service in business for the number of cards I send! HA! Again, it doesn't take much, but it means everything to the person who receives it. Smile at the homeless person, they deserve it. Help an older adult with an extra arm if needed. Put away the abandoned grocery cart. I think you'll find the rewards will boost you as much as the ones touched by your actions. And, imagine the example you set for those around you.

Sometimes we don't need to learn things through a book or classroom, but through modeling it for others. I hope in the season of gratitude you will find a way to give back, however big or small that gesture may be. Know that when you do, you'll have set in motion the chance to change someone's life for the better. And when it happens, it's just WOW!