

# *Loving*

## OUR CHILDREN THROUGH

BY SAVANNAH NELSON



Sometimes, kids need help. When children in the community go through unimaginably difficult circumstances, local nonprofits offer programs of support: River Bridge Regional Center, CASA of the Ninth, and YouthZone provide resources and services for children in need.

Miraculously, these three organizations work together, weaving their contributions jointly for a singular cause: to advocate for, and lend support to, struggling kids in the Roaring Fork Valley.

The result is a network of volunteers and professionals working to guide children through their struggles, loving them and seeing them through their traumas.

## Advocating for Children

River Bridge, CASA of the Ninth, and YouthZone are three separate organizations in Garfield County that synergize for the benefit of local struggling children despite their varying missions and goals.

River Bridge Regional Center (RBRC) provides collaborative services to child abuse victims and their families while offering community prevention and education; they work with law enforcement and child protection to investigate abuse allegations. There are two sides: mental health therapists, medical providers, and victim advocates work with children to heal; they also seek justice to hold offenders accountable.

***“River Bridge serves four counties,” Mary A. Cloud, Assistant Director of River Bridge, said. “Collaborating with all of the different agencies and partners (law enforcement, district attorneys, human services caseworkers, mental health therapists) and making sure communication is clear and information is shared can be tricky. We are extremely proud of the relationships we have been able to build with our partners, and they understand how important our services are to children and to the work they do.”***

CASA of the Ninth is an organization that provides trained court-appointed volunteer advocates to abused and neglected children within Colorado’s 9th Judicial District. They advocate for kids in the foster care system, ensuring that all of their needs are met. They aim to support a safe, permanent, and nurturing home for each child they work with.

Because Glenwood Springs’ CASA is rural, it can be challenging to travel significant distances to visit children placed in communities far from Glenwood Springs. However, that doesn’t sway the 40 community caseworkers.

***“We have a very high retention rate of our volunteers,” CASA Executive Director Traci D. Gurley-Tomashosky said. “That’s one of the most significant achievements of CASA locally.”***

YouthZone has programs for teenagers and their families, focused on safety, compassion, and education to help overcome personal struggles ranging from drug and substance abuse to history with the court system to various mental health issues. Several options are available, centered on individualized and comprehensive programming to maximize self-esteem and security and inspire healthy relationships between youth, families, and the local community.

## Collaboration over Competition

Though each organization is singularly impactful and critical, there's strength in numbers; collaboration is a powerful tool that lends success to children at every corner.

When children are involved in multiple programs, volunteers and coordinators work together across all organizations to ensure success. Often, kids and their families can share resources across the nonprofits in the valley.

For example, if a child witnesses domestic violence, River Bridge connects the parent with Response or Advocate Safehouse. In cases where children are also involved with CASA or YouthZone, River Bridge works with the organizations to ensure that children get the therapy, advocacy, support, and other resources they need.

***“We work together so that kids don’t have the chance to fall between the cracks,” Cloud explained.***

## Success Stories

Success is seen differently between the organizations. At YouthZone, there are many victories of all sizes, starting with a person asking for help. For CASA, it's often the conclusion of cases when children find a home. “We had a case open for four very long difficult years, and CASA stayed on the case,” Gurley-Tomashosky said. “When the child was finally adopted, we celebrated with him.”

And while justice is one form of achievement through River Bridge, sometimes success has nothing to do with court. Kat Stenquist, the lead forensic interviewer, can see success through the healing journey. “A female child, age 12, came back to the interview room with the weight of their trauma on her shoulders, very closed off and timid,” Stenquist said. “But as we talked, I could see her start to open up, release her secrets and this burden she held as she disclosed her abuse. She was a different person leaving that interview room.”



## How to Help

Continuous support for these organizations is critical, and the community can help. CASA and YouthZone, for example, need volunteers.

“There are many children in need in our community, and adults can make a difference by volunteering,” Gurley-Tomashosky explained.

Donations, too, are always welcome. “As a nonprofit organization, much of our funding for our services come from federal, state, and local government sources, as well as private foundations and community grants,” Cloud said. “However, the support from local businesses and individual donors and volunteers in the community is vital in helping us support and grow our programs to fit the demand that we continue to see each year.”



Thanks to the efforts of these invaluable nonprofits and their abilities to work together to aid children in their various stages of healing, kids can see and reach the other side. They are loved and supported and encouraged through, each and every step of the way.



### CONTACT INFO

#### River Bridge

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#### CASA of the Ninth

Call Colorado Child and Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-844-CO-4-KIDS (1-844-264-5437) to report concerns about a child's safety and well-being. All calls are confidential and will be routed to the county where a child resides.

**CasaoftheNinth.org**

#### YouthZone

**YouthZone.com**