

## **RICK ALDRIDGE SELECTED AS CASA VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH**

CASA of Northeast Oklahoma is pleased to announce Rick Aldridge has been selected as CASA Volunteer of the Month for February. Aldridge has been a CASA volunteer for 2 years, serving 7 children on 4 cases.

Aldridge was born and raised in Vermont but left the great state to dedicate his life to serving his country. In 1977 he joined the Air Force and spent most of his career stationed in Europe. He served in Desert Shield/Storm, Bosnia, and Operation Enduring Freedom, serving as Security Police but then moving into Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Management in 1981. Aldridge retired from duties in 2003.

After retirement, Aldridge spent several years as a defense contractor, served as the Program Manager for the newly formed Air Force Medical Homeland Defense Program, and married his soulmate, Summer. Together they have a daughter, Aslyn, who is 12 years old. Aldridge also has three older children: Michael, Coraline, and Aurelien. Aldridge owns a farm on the Kansas/Oklahoma border and Summer breeds English Bulldogs.

Aldridge has a serving heart. Not only does he volunteer his time with CASA to speak for the best interest of abused and neglected children, he also owns and operates an all-volunteer disaster response team that was recognized for their work during Hurricane Harvey by Ellen DeGeneres and Harry Connick Jr. This same team was recognized as the Non-Profit of the Year by the Miami Regional Chamber of Commerce. Aldridge also managed the Miami Good Neighbor Project that fed thousands of families during the COVID outbreak. He serves as a member of the state Volunteer Active in Disaster (VOAD), the Northeast Oklahoma Disaster Recovery Committee, and the County Local Emergency Planning Committee. Aldridge is also Head Coach to the Chetopa Kansas Varsity Football Team, Boys' Basketball, and Softball.

Aldridge opened up when asked why he wanted to volunteer with CASA. He explained, "I was physically and verbally abused most of my childhood receiving beatings from either the belt (on a good day) or the horse whip. I was told that I needed to learn that life is tough." With the lack of or access to organizations to help children in his situation, Aldridge ran away at the age of 12 and lived with his grandparents. CASA is a great way to help children in similar situations. Aldridge credits Lead Advocate Coordinator, Melinda Stotts for introducing him to CASA.

Aldridge says of his work with CASA, "For me, the biggest reward of being a CASA volunteer is at the end of the day, doing what is not only in the best interest for the child(ren), but being the voice for them and seeing them smile and knowing that I was able to give them a chance at a life that all our children deserve."

Aldridge's Advocate Coordinator, Tonya Ratliff, said of Aldridge, "Rick is a dedicated volunteer who goes above and beyond for the best interest of the children he serves. He takes the time to understand the situation that landed the children and their families in the courts purview and provides exceptional advocacy for the children in court. Rick understands his role as a CASA volunteer and exceeds my expectations every time."

"If you have the time to volunteer, have both a passion and compassion for children, and want to give all children a chance at growing up in a safe and loving home then you are on your way to becoming a team member in one of the most rewarding volunteer organizations there is, CASA. Give all our children the opportunity to thrive and have a chance to grow up to be successful in life. Every child deserves a chance, and YOU can make the difference," says Aldridge.

The mission of CASA of Northeast Oklahoma is to speak up for the best interests of abused and neglected children in the courts of northeast Oklahoma. CASA promotes the recruitment and training of quality volunteers who work to Change A Child's Story for the better.

CASA of Northeast Oklahoma is a regional multi-district court-appointed special advocate program serving abused and neglected children with volunteer advocates in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial Districts. CASA of Northeast Oklahoma serves the district courts in Craig, Delaware, Mayes, Ottawa, Rogers, and Washington counties, as well as the Quapaw and Shawnee Tribal Courts.

More CASA volunteers like Aldridge are needed in northeast Oklahoma. The next training class is scheduled to begin in early March. Additional courses are planned in various areas of the region in the future. To volunteer, go to [www.casaneok.org](http://www.casaneok.org) and click on "Get Involved," and then "Apply Now." The application takes 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

For more information about CASA of Northeast Oklahoma, please visit the program's website or call (918) 544-6452.