



# MESSAGING BOOK

## SPEAKING IN ONE VOICE



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# LETTER FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

Dear ICAB Family,

Thank you for the work you do. Daily I see and hear about how you put forth your best effort to advocate for the protection of Iowa’s children and improvement of the child welfare system. The commitment and passion you share allows ICAB to provide high-quality programming that best serves Iowa’s children who have been adjudicated as Children in Need of Assistance due to abuse and neglect. Your work is greatly appreciated.

In order to continue providing high-quality programming, we must keep up with the changing world around us. It is evolving every day, and we must too. We thank Texas CASA for creating and sharing this book, adapted by the Iowa Child Advocacy Board which operates the Iowa CASA and ICFCRB programs, as part of an exciting effort to transform and update our language nationwide.

Our hope is to establish a common language that we consistently use in providing a united message that is respectful and inclusive of the children and families we serve and of the professionals we work alongside in the child welfare community.

Our words matter. What we say. How we say it. To families. To stakeholders. In court reports. Our message has a lasting impact. I encourage all of you to review this book and see where you can begin to implement its contents.

*Steffani Simbric*

Steffani Simbric, Administrator  
Iowa Child Advocacy Board



## CORE MESSAGING

This wording sets the foundation for our messaging when it comes to recruitment, fundraising, working with other professionals, and most importantly in our service to children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect and their families. While all ICAB messaging may not directly fit both our ICFCRB and CASA programs, the general focus/emphasis is applicable to them.

We encourage you to emphasize these three main tenets at every opportunity:

- ICAB supports children and families involved in the child welfare system,
- ICAB advocates to improve the well-being of the children who have been adjudicated “Children in Need of Assistance.”
- ICAB is in, of, and for, the communities we serve.

Previously, ICAB programs have offered statements and statistics about the impact ICAB volunteers have on a child’s life, reunification, permanency and adoption to show the impact of our presence on a case. However, we acknowledge that it’s not so easy to measure those results. In response, we determined what is most certain about ICAB’s presence.

### **ICAB SUPPORTS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES INVOLVED IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM.**

- We provide a consistent presence for the child and family
- We facilitate nurturing relationships for the child
- We help find, engage and strengthen a support network for the child and family
- We support individualized child-focused advocacy.

### **ICAB ADVOCATES STRIVE TO IMPROVE THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ADJUDICATED CHILDREN IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE.**

- We take a trauma-informed approach
- We assess mental, physical and educational needs
- We work to ensure children's safety
- We help keep children connected to their culture and cultural identity
- We advocate to keep families connected and together when safe and possible.

### **ICAB IS IN, OF, AND FOR, THE COMMUNITY.**

- ICAB volunteers are everyday people who support children and families in crisis
- ICAB volunteers advocate for the health and well-being of the community
- ICAB volunteers bring a unique level of dedication to children, families and their communities
- ICAB volunteers are well-trained, supported and supervised by professionals
- ICAB volunteers are appointed by their local courts

## TAGLINE & KEY PHRASES

### ICAB taglines

ICAB supports children and families involved in the child welfare system.

ICAB is in, of, and for, the communities we serve.

ICAB volunteers advocate for the best interest of the children they serve.

ICAB volunteers advocate to improve the well-being of children.

ICAB volunteers collaborate with professionals to safely reunite families when safe and possible.

ICAB volunteers work to help ensure the child is safe during their time involved in the child welfare system.

### CASA taglines

Every child has a chance – it's you. ® (TX)

CASA volunteers are assigned to one or two cases at a time, focusing solely on that one child or sibling group and their family.

CASA volunteers help reestablish healthy family connections.

CASA volunteers provide a consistent presence in a child's life during their time involved in the child welfare system.

CASA volunteers stay by the child's side throughout the duration of the case, advocating that the child's and family's needs are met.

A CASA volunteer for every child.

### FCRB taglines

FCRB volunteers advocate for timely permanency for children in foster care.

FCRB volunteers assess case planning and progress towards meeting the child's and family's permanency goal.

FCRB volunteers advocate for systemic improvements to the child welfare system.

## TRANSFORMING OUR VOCABULARY

Over time, we have grown and transformed in our understanding of how best to support children and families. We have also grown in understanding how to position ourselves as a truly collaborative partner helping to connect the dots between systems and services. The role of an ICAB volunteer has not changed, but how we practice and approach our advocacy has.

The child welfare system has also grown, in recent years, to understand the crucial importance of family bonds, the trauma caused by removal and separation, and the benefit of having a lifetime network of connections from within a child's own community. It has also shifted to recognize the humility required by any individual or organization working to bring positive interventions into a family's life. Additionally, American culture has shifted to honor the many shapes and forms that family can take. *We want our language to reflect this growth in all three areas.*

With those changes in mind, we have taken a look at our more detailed messaging, the ways that we discuss our role, what we do to fulfill our role of representing best interest and the ways we refer to the children, youth and families we serve.

In the next few pages, we outline wording that we consider outdated, offer suggestions for new wording and explain the reasons behind the shifts.

Please read these with an open mind, and consider how you might revise your materials and talking points to adopt the more inclusive language being proposed here. New language represents new ideas, and we have learned these ideas from the fine work, reflection, and excellent advocacy being done by similar programs across the nation.

***NOTE:** This is not an extensive, full list of all ICAB messaging and talking points. This book is meant to be a launching point showcasing the direction ICAB messaging is moving.*



## OUTDATED WORDING & NEW/CURRENT LANGUAGE

### What Does an ICAB Volunteer Do?

When talking with potential volunteers and donors, as well as with anyone involved in a case like the parents, family and teachers, it's important that we are accurately describing the role of an ICAB volunteer. Even among volunteers, there is some confusion around what is and isn't within their role. Here, we've outlined a few of the key actions that ICAB volunteers do to support children and families.

An ICAB volunteer strives to:

- Identify and assess risks to the child's safety and well-being.
- Identify supportive people in the child's life that ICAB volunteers can work with to promote safety and well-being for the child during their time in the child welfare system.
- Help ensure appropriate physical and mental health assessments are completed and that the child's needs are understood by the family and everyone involved in the case through a trauma-informed approach, and
- Verify educational assessments are completed and educational supports are in place.

OUTDATED	NEW/CURRENT
<i>ICAB volunteers give a voice to a child.</i>	<p>ICAB volunteers help ensure a child’s voice is heard.</p> <p>ICAB volunteers amplify a child’s voice in court</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> Children have their own voices. The new language points to the true intention of the sentiment. ICAB volunteers can lift up the child’s voice to make sure they are heard and honored.</p>	
<i>ICAB volunteers get to know the child.</i>	<p>ICAB volunteers get to know the child, parents, and their family.</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> Families are their own experts and know what they need. By getting to know the parents and family, we can better serve the children and help make sure everyone has what they need to heal and thrive.</p>	
ADDITIONAL WORDING	
<p>ICAB volunteers advocate for the best interest of a child and make informed recommendations for the child’s physical and emotional well-being to the judge.</p>	



## How Does an ICAB Volunteer Make a Difference?

Until the ICAB network has consistent, sound quantitative data, messaging around the ICAB difference is based on qualitative information like stories and testimonials. This approach puts more emphasis on the ways ICAB volunteers aim to help children and families.

OUTDATED	NEW/CURRENT
<p><i>Children with an ICAB volunteer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Spend less time in care</i></li> <li>• <i>Have fewer placements</i></li> <li>• <i>Are less likely to age out of care</i></li> <li>• <i>Move through the system more quickly</i></li> <li>• <i>Are more likely to find a permanent home</i></li> <li>• <i>Are more likely to be reunified (end up with their family)</i></li> </ul>	<p>An ICAB volunteer works to ensure a child's best interest is being met by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying and addressing risks to the child's safety and well-being,</li> <li>• Identifying supportive people in the child's life that promote safety and well-being for the child during their time in the child welfare system and beyond,</li> <li>• Advocating appropriate physical and mental health assessments are completed and that the child's needs are understood by the family and everyone involved in the case through a trauma-informed approach, and</li> <li>• Verifying educational assessments are completed and educational supports are in place.</li> </ul>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> ICAB has moved away from language that infers ICAB volunteer advocacy causes specific outcomes that are actually decisions of the court. The updated language on the right focuses on the ways ICAB advocacy influences and impacts case specific outcomes and decisions of the court that facilitate better outcomes for children and families.</p>	

## How Does an ICAB Volunteer Make a Difference?

OUTDATED	NEW/CURRENT
<p><i>ICAB volunteers work to find children a safe, permanent home.</i></p> <p><i>AND</i></p> <p><i>Find a forever family/forever home</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ICAB volunteers review the child’s circumstances throughout the life of the case, advocating first for reunification, when safe and possible.</li> <li>If reunification is not safe or possible, ICAB volunteers will advocate for the child to be adopted by, or live with, other relatives or family friends. If that is not also possible, ICAB volunteers will advocate for adoption by a non-relative.</li> <li>No matter what, ICAB volunteers will keep in contact with the child’s team until the case closes so that everyone continues to put the child’s best interests first.</li> </ul>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> Children have families no matter the circumstances. Emphasis should be placed on locating, connecting, engaging and supporting the child’s parents and family of origin.</p> <p><b>RATIONALE:</b> Children’s family of origin will always be their family of origin even after adoption.</p>	
<p><i>ICAB volunteers work to move children out of the system as quickly as possible.</i></p>	<p>ICAB volunteers help maintain a sense of urgency to all children’s cases and recognize that permanency (both legal and relational) is essential to well-being.</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> ICAB volunteers are in a unique position to help keep a child’s case on track and moving forward, avoiding delays in achieving permanency.</p>	

## What is an ICAB Volunteer?

OUTDATED	NEW/CURRENT
<p><i>CASA volunteers are the only constant in a child's life.</i></p>	<p>ICAB volunteers are a consistent presence in a child's life while working collaboratively with the child's team.</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> Children need connections in their lives to heal and thrive. An ICAB volunteer may be one of many people helping to fill this need for a child.</p> <p><b>RATIONALE:</b> ICAB volunteers are equal partners to caseworkers, attorneys, and GALs, and respect their relationship and role within the child's life.</p>	
<p><i>CASA volunteers are the eyes and ears of the judge.</i></p>	<p>ICAB volunteers provide information through court reports and testimony and make recommendations in the child's best interest to the judge to help them make informed decisions.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>ICAB volunteers provide valuable information to the judge and others involved in the case to help ensure a child's best interest is being met.</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> "Eyes and ears" conveys that the ICAB volunteer works directly with the judge and sounds, in a sense, like spying. The phrase can lead to mistrust and misunderstanding between the volunteer, the parents and family.</p>	

## What is an ICAB Volunteer?

OUTDATED	NEW/CURRENT
<p><i>ICAB volunteers are superheroes.</i></p>	<p>ICAB volunteers are community members working collaboratively to support children and families involved in the child welfare system.</p> <p>_____ <i>OR</i> _____</p> <p>ICAB volunteers are community members advocating for the best interest of children involved in the child welfare system.</p> <p>_____ <i>OR</i> _____</p> <p>ICAB volunteers come from different backgrounds, neighborhoods and communities just like the kids they help.</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> The child’s welfare is a team effort and ICAB volunteers collaborate with all parties to serve the best interest of children.</p>	
ADDITIONAL WORDING	
<p>ICAB volunteers go through training to learn how to advocate for the best interest of children before being assigned to a case(s) by a judge.</p>	

## RESPECTFUL ADVOCACY

The theme throughout this guide is that words matter and hold power. In this case, the words we use can either send the message “you are welcome” or “you are not welcome.” From recruiting new volunteers to engaging with parents and families, we want it to be clear that ICAB is an inclusive organization. We also recognize that some of the wording may not be used by all parties involved in the case and is considered standard wording in court reports. We encourage programs to use the new wording with the community and general public and incorporate into court reports as they see fit.

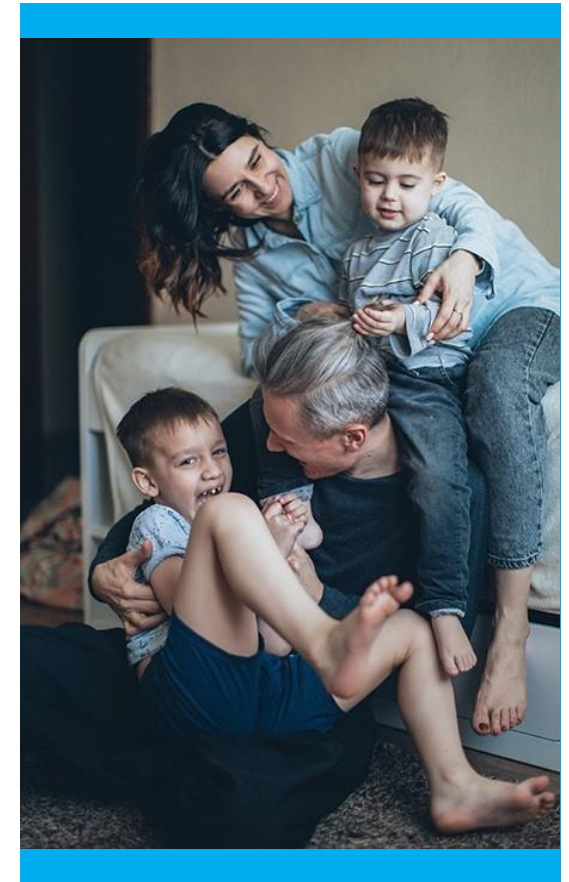
## OUTDATED WORDING & NEW/CURRENT LANGUAGE

### Working with Parents & Families

ICAB volunteers advocate for legal and relational permanency with families. Additionally, as we have heard from the judiciary, attorneys and other stakeholders, the entire child welfare system as a whole is attempting a greater engagement with families. We are all working towards building a more family-focused network to better serve the best interest of children. The overarching goal with family engagement is to help achieve strong connectivity and permanency, preferably reunification or adoption by relatives.

Building on this, ICAB’s wording when engaging parents and families and talking to judges, community partners and volunteers is important, and should be carefully and intentionally considered. Programs should look to use person-first language as well as a resource lens – not a deficit lens. The lens you choose will also influence your work with others involved in the case, as well as any partnerships.

**“The kids you say you love... their parents were those kids. As change agents, the big change is growth and healing around the adults... If we care about kids, we’ve got to care about their parents.”** – Kevin Campbell, Developer of the Family Finding model



OUTDATED	NEW/CURRENT
<p><i>Child</i>            Example: CASA volunteers get to know the child...</p>	<p>Child, parents and family; Child and family            Example: ICAB volunteers get to know the child, parents, and their family...</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> Advocating for a child’s best interest means getting to know the child’s parents and family. ICAB volunteers strive to include parents <u>and</u> family in written and spoken word to set the expectation from the very beginning that volunteers are there to support children and their parents and families.</p>	
<p><i>When a child is removed from home due to abuse or neglect, a judge may appoint a CASA volunteer.</i></p>	<p>When a family is in crisis and becomes involved in the child welfare system, a CASA volunteer may be appointed by a judge to advocate for the child.</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> By reframing our messaging around a family in need of support instead of focusing on the words abuse and neglect, we can reach volunteers and community partners that want to help families and end child abuse and neglect by building stronger families.</p>	
<p><i>My child (spoken by the volunteer about child)</i></p>	<p>The child I advocate for             OR             The child for whom I advocate</p>
<p><b>RATIONALE:</b> Specifying the CASA volunteer role provides clarity and sets boundaries, both for the volunteer and for other stakeholders. We do not want to sound like the volunteer is claiming the child.</p>	

# OUTDATED WORDING & NEW/CURRENT LANGUAGE

## Person-First Language

ICAB programs can demonstrate our commitment to supporting and understanding the children, parents and families we serve by using person-first language as much as possible. This wording can help build strong relationships with children and their families.

OUTDATED	NEW/CURRENT
<i>Foster child or youth</i>	A child or youth in foster care
<i>APPLA child or youth</i>	A child or youth who is in another planned permanent living arrangement
<i>High-risk youth/At-risk youth</i>	Youth at an increased risk of [specified outcome]
<i>Addict/alcoholic/drug user</i>	Person with a substance use disorder
<i>Abused and neglected children</i>	Children who have experienced abuse or neglect
<i>Former foster youth; foster care alumni</i>	Person who experienced foster care

**“People-first language, also called person-first language, is language that avoids conscious or subconscious marginalization or dehumanization when discussing people. People-first language is best known for referring to people with health issues or disabilities, but applies to any group that is defined by their condition or situation.”**

– Valerie Johnson, Generosity



**“Inclusive language acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.”**

*- Linguistic Society of America*



## Inclusive Language

To create a culture of inclusivity in ICAB and within your program, you can start by swapping exclusionary phrases with inclusive phrases. Below are recommended inclusive alternatives to common exclusionary wording. Wording can be adapted to fit a specific audience as needed. For example, when creating materials around male recruitment, it is appropriate to use he/him pronouns.

OUTDATED	NEW/CURRENT
<i>Mom and dad/Mother and father</i>	Parent(s)
<i>He/she</i>	They (if discussing people generally, or if someone's gender is unknown, undisclosed or nonbinary)
<b>RATIONALE:</b> Merriam-Webster added the singular pronoun "they," to refer to a person whose gender is unknown or is intentionally not revealed, as well as "a single person whose gender identity is, undisclosed or nonbinary." When gender is unknown, use "they" instead of "he or she." Also use "they" as a default pronoun for both children and adults when discussing people generally.	
<i>Boy/girl</i>	Child (if discussing people generally, or if someone's gender is unknown, undisclosed or nonbinary)
<b>RATIONALE:</b> In place of the binary boy/girl, use "child."	
<i>Boyfriend/girlfriend and husband/wife/paramour</i>	Partner; significant other; spouse
<b>RATIONALE:</b> Use of gender-neutral language signifies a welcoming environment for all people.	
<i>Birth family/Biological/Bio family*</i> *Can still be used in court reports and when reporting to the judge and other parties.	Family of origin
<b>RATIONALE:</b> Families of various types come into the child welfare system and saying bio family excludes some types, such as a same-sex couple who adopted, and families where only one parent is biologically related. Using family of origin includes everyone.	

## PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

### Stories and Testimonials

Stories are an important part of ICAB messaging, and should reflect the same wording and considerations. Try to include stories featuring all genders and involving people of various races. Showcase reunification, building connections, adoption by family and other outcomes for which we strive.

Testimonials are a clean, concise way to tell the ICAB story. When collecting quotes from volunteers, donors and stakeholders, make sure to adjust quotes as needed to follow messaging guidelines. Key things to look out for are not using the phrase, “my child,” but instead, “the child I advocate for.” Reinforce that these children have families, and it is our role to advocate for and support them.



## Positive Word Lists

Whenever there is a chance to speak on ICAB, either on behalf of CASA and/or FCRB off-the-cuff, add to the core message with positive words that convey the value that ICAB programs bring to a child’s case.

Accountable	Empowers	One child at a time
Advocacy/Advocate for children	Everyday people	Positive future
Best interest of the child	Family-focused	Premier volunteer opportunity
Breaking the cycle	Healing	Quality
Bright future	Highly trained and supported volunteers	Safe/Safety
Carefully screened volunteers	Holistic	Solution-oriented
Collaborative	Hope	Stability
Community-based	Influential	Strengthen families
Compassion	Investment in future	Support system
Consistent	Life-changing	Team player
Court appointed	Making a difference	Thrive
Create connections	Make informed recommendations	Trusted partner
Dedicated	Objective	Well-being

## CONCLUSION

As a part of the ICAB programs, we are offering and equipping you with this Messaging Book because it's critical that we are all communicating the same messages. Most importantly, it's crucial that we share our message in an inclusive way that appeals to a wide audience and shows that ICAB truly is in, of, and for, the community.

With this book as a guide, programs are encouraged to review all of their reports to court, as well as printed materials like handouts, presentation materials, flyers, brochures, rack cards, annual reports, news articles, AND all of their digital assets such as websites, social media accounts including FB, auto signatures, e-newsletters, and reflect upon what modifications can be incorporated into local practice:

- within one month
- within six months
- within the year

This shift in our messaging is part of a larger shift within the ICAB network and child welfare system as we put more emphasis on family reunification and connections. We recognize that these changes won't happen overnight: we are also building a culture. ICAB will continue to provide support and resources for programs using this messaging. Together, we can create a consistent ICAB message that showcases the unique and essential contributions, impact and best interest advocacy of ICAB.

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