All Children Have the Right to be Safe
Dallas CASA volunteer advocacy

Abused children can't wait
Introduction
A Court Case Begins

- Report and confirmation of abuse or neglect
- Child is removed from home and placed into protective care of state
- CPS files a court case that remains open, generally for a year
- Judges make decisions, including where children can live safely and permanently in nurturing home
- To make well-informed, appropriate decisions, judges need current, detailed and accurate information
- Information is provided by CASA volunteers
Dallas CASA History

- During 1970s, child welfare legislation led to overwhelmed courts and child protection agencies
- CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) was developed by a Seattle Superior Court Judge in 1977
- In 1979, Dallas was one of 3 pilot programs in the country, brought to Dallas by the National Council of Jewish Women
- Dallas graduated first class of 10 volunteers in 1980
- CASA is endorsed by the American Bar Association, National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges and state & federal legislatures
- Network of nearly 1,000 CASA organizations across nation
The Need
The Need

• On an average day in Dallas County, nearly five children enter the foster care system because it’s unsafe for them in their homes

• Last year, 4,382 Dallas children were in the protective care of the state due to confirmed allegations of abuse or neglect

• 1,314 advocates served more than 3,100 abused and neglected children

• However, 1 out of 4 children removed from unsafe homes in Dallas County and placed into protective care do not yet have a CASA volunteer
Dallas CASA
What is Dallas CASA

- **CASA** stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates

- **Dallas CASA** is a non-profit agency that trains and supervises community volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children living in protective care

- **Dallas CASA** is the largest CASA organization in Texas and the only nonprofit agency in Dallas authorized to train and provide volunteers to represent foster children in court.

- **Dallas CASA’s** board is comprised of more than 40 highly engaged members in leadership positions at AT&T, ExxonMobil, Pioneer Natural Resources, Goldman Sachs and more.
Who Is A CASA Volunteer

- All backgrounds and experiences
- Evenly distributed across ages 21-65+
- 90% have college through post-graduate degrees
- Primarily full-time employees
- Primarily Caucasian, but many more African American and bilingual Spanish-speaking volunteers are needed
- Primarily female, but more male volunteers are needed
CASA Volunteer Role
Volunteer Role

- CASA volunteers:
  - Are appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of children living in protective care
  - Ensure that child’s needs are met while living in foster care
  - Protect a child from further harm and help identify and evaluate the best option for a child to grow up in a safe and loving home
  - Make recommendations to the court to help judges decide the best permanent homes for the children.
Volunteer Responsibilities

- **Fact-finding**
  - ✓ Review records, research information and talk to everyone in a child’s life – family, teachers, doctors, caseworkers, attorneys – gathering facts for judges

- **Facilitation**
  - ✓ Meet children’s needs
  - ✓ Share information with other case-related partners

- **Monitoring**
  - ✓ Safe environment and court-ordered services

- **Advocacy**
  - ✓ Medical, therapeutic, educational, safety and permanency with a loving family
Commitment & Expectations

• Average of one year commitment, per case

• 5-20 volunteer hours per month, primarily self-scheduled (can partner with friends, spouses on cases)

• 8-10 court hearings and CPS meetings during year

• Minimum once per month visits with child(ren)

• Maintain confidentiality

• Build relationships with many kinds of people

• Enhance CASA reputation for effective advocacy and relationships in child welfare and the community
Screening, Training & Supervision

- Volunteer information session

- Application and in-person interview

- Criminal and CPS background checks

- 30-hr training program (4 weeks & make-up classes)

- Sworn in by a Dallas County District judge as a Court Appointed Special Advocate

- CASA supervisor who provides support and guidance
Challenges & Rewards

• Challenges
  – Hearing emotional stories of child abuse and neglect
  – Working with an overwhelmed system
  – Traveling distance to visit child in the Metroplex

• Rewards
  – Developing relationships with the children
  – Building advocacy and communication skills
  – Changing a child’s life from living in an abusive home or foster care to living in a safe home with a loving family
A Volunteer’s Experience
What does it mean to be a CASA Volunteer?

Caring  Focus  Proximity

Rewarding  Persistent  Child’s Needs

Challenging  Child’s Best Interest  Eyes & Ears

Opportunity to Make a Difference
Our Vision
Dallas CASA envisions a day when every child in protective care has a powerful voice in the court and in the community.

The goal of serving every abused and neglected child who needs us is within our reach.
To learn more, visit dallascasa.org
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