

# CASA CONNECTION

CHILD ADVOCATES OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

## FOSTER CARE LEGISLATION UPDATE

Dan Vertrees, CASA Board of Directors and CASA Legislative Committee Chair, traveled to Austin on May 29 to witness Governor Rick Perry sign House Bill 915 and 1227, two bills which passed both chambers with bipartisan support to improve the efficacy of the Texas foster care system. CASA volunteers and Legislative Advocacy Teams play a key role in campaigning for representation of the needs of foster youth to our Texas Legislators. The bills passed last month ensure CASA volunteers have easier access to a child's information, and require increased oversight of prescribing psychotropic medicine.

HB915 provides a foundation for greater communication between foster children, guardians, and the court system. Children in the foster care system are now able to voice an opinion on their medical care to the courts and at the age of 16 or older able to act as their own medical consentor. This helps older foster youth to take responsibility for their healthcare and prepare for transitioning out of the foster system. HB 915



also requires physicians prescribing psychotropic medicine to provide the guardian with information on side-effects and alternatives to the prescription. In addition, if medications are prescribed, the physician is mandated to conduct a 90-day follow-up with the guardian on the child's medical care.

The second piece of legislation, HB 1227, gives CASA volunteers easier access to their foster child's information through means of an internet-based system. This bill requires Department of Family Protective Services to create an online database for CASA volunteers to view and enter information regarding their foster child, keeping all records as up to date as possible and improving communication between CPS and CASA. This bill is designed to increase transparency and accuracy of a child's information.

Both bills are to become law on September 1, 2013.



## OUR NEWLY SWORN-IN ADVOCATES

Tamara Ashmore  
Susan Canter  
Joan Floyd  
Debbie Jones  
Lisa Josefsen

Tammy Turner  
Brenda Teas  
Wanda Woodworth  
Lydia Lothrop  
Ann Moore

Namita Lamsal  
Kimberly Thigpen  
James Pung  
Angela Pung  
Paige Mann

Joyce Lyle  
Sherry Lane  
Kristen Carter  
Brittany Atkinson

## Development Corner

On April 1, CASA Child Advocates launched its first-ever organized major gifts effort, the *I Am for the Child* campaign. Under the leadership of Judy Larson, Senior Vice President for Woodforest National Bank, volunteers asked people in Montgomery County to help us raise \$50,000 to support children who are the victims of child abuse. To date, more than \$63,000 has been raised!

We want to say a big **THANK YOU** to Judy and her team and everyone who made so many generous contributions. You have honored us with your gifts, and we will honor you by being good stewards of your donation and continue our work to be a very loud voice for the children in Montgomery County who need us.

At this year's Gala, we launched the Blue Ribbon Society as a way to recognize donors who give an undesignated gift at a minimum \$1,000 a year to support CASA's programs and services for abused children in Montgomery County. The blue ribbon is the national symbol of child abuse awareness and was chosen as the best recognition for those who generously support CASA with their gifts of treasure. We are proud to announce that as of this date, we have 64 members of the Blue Ribbon Society! Please look for a special Society reception scheduled for October 27.



**FIND US  
ON FACEBOOK**

[www.casaspeaks4kids.com](http://www.casaspeaks4kids.com)

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

I read this morning that only one in ten people "strongly agree" that charitable organizations are honest and ethical in their use of donated funds. I hope that's as horrifying to you as it is to me.



CASA recently completed — and passed! — both our program and financial audits.

Audits send some people shrieking and running for the hills. But I really like audit time. Seriously! It's a time of making sure we're well organized, that all our i's are dotted and t's are crossed, and reflecting on what we need to do better in the coming year. It's a great discipline for CASA, and it's a good thing for those of you who generously donate your money or your time. You're entitled to know that CASA handles your gift of money with honesty and integrity, and your gift of time with deep respect.

And we do.

We are profoundly grateful to those of you who give in any way—advocating, organizing events, giving money, helping us keep the kids' files up to date, donating printing services, maintaining our website and more—you are making a real difference in the lives of kids who seriously need a break in life. I'm convinced there is a special place in heaven for you!

Audit season is over for this year. The financial audit is available now, and the program audit will be available in July. I invite you to ask about the results, or read them for yourselves. You are entitled to trust the organizations to whom you give time and money.

Thank you for the amazing, generous and effective work you do to help kids.



Ann

## Lone Star Proud/ CASA License Plate

Texas has issued a license plate for CASA featuring a child holding the Lone Star in front of our Texas state flag. More than 1,000 CASA plates are on the road, raising over \$25,000 for grants toward CASA programs.

The license plate can be purchased at any time, regardless of when a vehicle registration expires.

Of the \$30 annual fee, \$22 goes to the credit of the Attorney General Volunteer Advocate Program account for funding recruitment for Texas CASA volunteers. The remaining \$8 fee is deposited into the state highway fund to cover administrative costs.

Applications for the Lone Star Proud specialty plates are available at county tax offices, on TxDOT's web site ([www.dot.state.tx.us](http://www.dot.state.tx.us)), or by calling the TxDOT Help Desk at (512) 465-7611.



## "ALWAYS PURSUE": GRADUATING CLASS OF 2013

In collaboration with our community partners, CASA volunteers participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual "Always Pursue" graduation event on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 for Montgomery County foster youth graduating high school. While all students are graduating and celebrating this spring, supportive volunteers organized a special dinner to highlight foster system youth who graduated high school. For all of these students, this incredible endeavor is a vital step in life, especially those entering the work force or pursuing college.



One of CASA's dedicated Advocates, Dr. Jan Taylor Morris, facilitated the Adopt-a-Grad program, for which Sam Houston State University students organized and donated 40 baskets filled with college and life essentials, such as laundry detergent, towels, hair brushes, and other necessities. With the help of a CASA volunteer, Denise Inman, graduates received suitcases for traveling. Angel Reach donated over 40 fully-loaded iPads. Thank you to all volunteers and Advocates who participated and congratulations to our graduates!



## HOUSTON ENDOWMENT INC. GRANT

CASA of Montgomery County was awarded an operational grant of \$100,000 from the Houston Endowment. This grant allows CASA to expand our services to better assist Advocates and raise awareness about CASA programs. The Houston Endowment donates over \$175 million to greater Houston area educational institutions and non-profits to improve the health and human services, and support the arts, environment, and education. This is the first grant CASA of Montgomery County has received from the Houston Endowment. Learn more about the Houston Endowment at [www.houstonendowment.org](http://www.houstonendowment.org)

### AUGUST ADVOCATE TRAINING

All training sessions are from 9am-4pm

Day 1: August 6th, Tuesday

Day 2: August 8th, Thursday

Day 3: August 13th, Tuesday

Day 4: August 15th, Thursday

Swearing-in Ceremony: August 19th, Monday

In-services

July 11th, 9am-11am

September 12th, 11am-1pm

Want to make an impact in the life of a child?

Become an Advocate.

Contact Wanda Smith at  
(936)441-5437 ext.209 or  
[wanda@casapeaks4kids.com](mailto:wanda@casapeaks4kids.com)

21 YEARS IN OPERATION

WITH CHILDREN PLACED  
IN OVER 30 CITIES ACROSS  
TEXAS

239 HOMES FOUND FOR  
CHILDREN BY ADVOCATES  
IN 2012



CHILDREN ARE  
**44% MORE**  
LIKELY TO  
REENTER THE  
FOSTER SYSTEM  
WITHOUT AN  
ADVOCATE

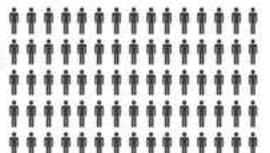
1  
PAID



SUPPORTS  
**25**  
ADVOCATES



WHO SERVE  
**75**  
CHILDREN





CASA  
Court Appointed Special Advocates

FOR CHILDREN

Child Advocates of Montgomery County

412 West Phillips  
Suite 107  
Conroe, TX 77301



[www.casaspeaks4kids.com](http://www.casaspeaks4kids.com)  
936.441.5437

## WOMAN OF DISTINCTION: ROBYN WEST

We are proud to announce that Robyn West is CASA's 2013 Woman of Distinction. Robyn joined the team of CASA volunteers in 2006, becoming an Advocate to speak up for children who've been removed from their homes for abuse or neglect. Since 2006, Robyn has served as an Advocate for 25 children, often taking some of CASA's most difficult cases—older children who have been in the care of the state for many years.

Realizing that fundraising is critical to having an Advocate for every abused and neglected child in Montgomery County, in 2010 Robyn joined the CHAMPS fundraising team, became a Board member and co-chaired the CASA Gala!

In 2012, Robyn served as Chairman of the CASA Board, and is currently serving as Board Vice Chair and Chair of the Governance, Planning and Policy Committee. In addition to her many other contributions, Robyn serves on the Legislative Advocacy Committee, taking her passion to Austin to advocate for legislation that better serves our foster youth.

Robyn's leadership and her insistence that CASA serve "every child who needs us" has been fundamental to CASA's strategic growth, and her passion and dogged determination to provide "her kids" with a better life has been life-changing for each of them.



## JUDGE'S BRUNCH

Every other month, CASA Advocates are invited to have brunch with Montgomery County Court-at-Law Judge Jerry Winfree at the CASA office. These informal meetings are helpful in getting to know Judge Winfree and a great opportunity for our Advocates to better serve the children in CASA care. "Our Judge's Brunches are one of CASA's best kept secrets. Advocates who attend have been very pleased about the opportunity to have an open exchange with Judge Winfree," said Ann McAlpin, CASA Executive Director. The bi-monthly brunches started at the first of this year and have been attended by 28 Advocates. If you are an Advocate and would like an opportunity to attend a Judge's Brunch, please contact your Case Supervisor.

### OUR MISSION

*To provide and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused and neglected child can have the opportunity to thrive in a safe, nurturing permanent home.*