

# CASA CONNECTION

CHILD ADVOCATES OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

## Meet Ellie and Diane

At 5 years old, Ellie's life was shattered. Ellie and her mother had lived with Ellie's maternal grandparents since her birth. However, Ellie's mother began a new relationship, and after dating five months, Ellie and her mother moved in with the boyfriend. Shortly thereafter, her mother severed all ties with Ellie's grandparents, and Ellie was frequently left alone in the care of the boyfriend.

Something had caused a noticeable change in Ellie's usually bright personality. Her teacher noticed that the once "bubbly, happy, giggling" girl was withdrawn, no longer participating or flashing her radiant smile.

After a CPS investigation, it was discovered Ellie had been sexually abused.

Investigations into Ellie's immediate family revealed several family members had a history of STD and a few were registered sex offenders. Unable to name her perpetrator and with no immediate family found capable to care for her, Ellie was placed in a foster home until a suitable alternative could be found.

After a lifetime as an only child, Ellie found herself in a strange place with strange people and only a garbage bag of her own things.

Then CASA Child Advocate, Diane, met Ellie. Diane made the 120-mile round trip to Ellie's foster home twice a month, understanding how important it was for her to have a stable adult in her life, solely there to comfort and care for her through the process.

During Ellie's stay in foster care, her grandparents were not granted visitation privileges. Striving to keep the family connected, Diane delivered cake, party favors and gifts to Ellie from her grandparents on her 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. Because of this and similar kind acts, Diane soon became Ellie's "favorite human."

Meanwhile, Diane worked diligently to find a suitable home for Ellie. Ellie's mother suggested her boyfriend's parents might care for her. However, Diane's inquiry found they had only met Ellie once. After exhausting all options, Diane recommended that Ellie be placed with her much-loved grandparents.

A home study was required before Ellie could move in with her grandparents, during which Ellie would remain in foster care. Diane once again stepped up for Ellie, expediting the process by taking on the completion of the home study herself. Within 2 weeks, Ellie was happily reunited with her grandparents.

These days, you may find Ellie running down the soccer field, practicing her dance routine or taking swimming lessons. She also enjoys weekly visits with her mother.

Though Ellie will have to struggle with the effects of her abuse for the rest of her life, her grandparents and doctors are working to manage the symptoms. Because of her CASA Advocate's tireless efforts and her grandparents' loving nature, Ellie can now grow, learn and thrive in a safe and healthy environment.



### 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.*

## ON THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD TO GALA 2014

### *Gala committee planning CASA's main event*

*By Cliff Hazel*

The theme for this year's Gala is: A Night in Oz – There's No Place Like Home. It's a fantastic theme, isn't it? There's no place like home... captures the total essence of what CASA does for children every day. Finding safe and permanent homes for abused children is much more than our mission – it is our drive and our passion. It is the right of every child to have a safe home – it is a right that is pure.

This wonderful evening of food, dancing, and entertainment will be held Saturday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, at The Woodlands Marriott Hotel and Conference Center. The Gala committee, under the leadership of Deanne Biles as Chair, and Joni Barker as Vice-Chair, has been planning this exciting evening the past several months. We hope you will join us.

The CASA annual Gala is an evening dedicated to celebrating the year-long efforts of the Advocates, donors, and volunteers who make it possible for abused children throughout Montgomery County to say, "there's no place like home." You'll have a fantastic time, but more importantly, it's an opportunity to celebrate you, helping to find homes for children.

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

My dad was in his 30's in a small town in Florida when he and his friends founded a junior college. Today, that little local school is now a four-year college, ranked as one of the top southern public colleges. I am so proud of my dad, and grateful that he passed on his lifelong love of learning to me.

I'm thinking about learning this time of year, as kids return to school, traffic gets heavy in the morning, we work with our community partners to plan a back-to-school party for kids in the foster care system, and a hoard of books are stacked on my desk (OK, and around the room a bit too.)

One way that we make a measurable difference with the time and money you give so generously to CASA is by being a learning organization. An organization that always asks, "What can we do better? What can we learn from this?"

I'm excited that we have just finished training our largest Advocate class ever! Nineteen Advocates finished the class. Wanda Smith, our Recruiting and Training Director, is a great example of continually asking what we can do better.

One thing I hear consistently from you is that you'd like for CASA to be better known in our county. We recently finished a "mini-retreat" to help the board, Advisory Council, and staff learn new ways to make CASA more well-known in our community, and yes, to do better at finding new friends for CASA, as both Advocates and donors. We were able to bring in a distinguished consultant, Gail Perry, to do this training—funded by the Cameron Foundation.

It takes a good bit of work and some nerve to be a learning organization, but the potential payoff is huge. We appreciate the questions you ask us, and your suggestions for how we can do a better job of changing the lives of the children who so need a voice—a CASA voice. Learning is in the air, and we love it!



Ann McAlpin



## CASA INTRODUCES GROUNDBREAKING INITIATIVE

### *New Young Professionals for CASA Starting Soon*

*By Casey Barrons*

CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County founded a new group, Young Professionals for CASA (YPC). This groundbreaking mix of young professionals will serve as a friend-raising and fundraising branch to CASA.

Young Professionals for CASA provides an opportunity for people with busy schedules to really do something for abused children. Whether it's joining the Facebook group, attending networking events, or planning a fundraiser, members of YPC have varying commitment levels.

"Over the past 3 months, the YPC Executive Committee has really come together to organize this networking event," says CASA Board Member Cheryl Sellers. "It's a group dedicated to our CASA kids and unique to the community."

YPC hosted its kickoff networking event at America's The Woodlands on Thursday, October 10<sup>th</sup>. Potential members heard what YPC has planned for the year, how to get involved, and met the YPC Executive Committee.

Each networking event features a philanthropy activity. October's activity benefits those families participating in Montgomery County Adoption Day on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

If you're between the ages of 21-45, check out the Young Professionals for CASA on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/group/YP4CASA](http://www.facebook.com/group/YP4CASA) or contact Casey Barrons, email: [Casey@CASASpeaks4Kids.com](mailto:Casey@CASASpeaks4Kids.com)

# WALK, RUN, AND LEAP TALL BUILDINGS FOR CASA KIDS!

## 4th Annual CASA SuperHero 5K

By Casey Barrons

Themed runs seem to be an autumn staple the past couple of years (Color Runs, Warrior Dash, Run Through the Woods, etc...) The CASA SuperHero 5K also raced through Montgomery County this year. Why did CASA choose SuperHeroes as our theme? Two reasons: First, Superheroes are cool (obviously).

Second, many Superheroes did not have a traditional upbringing, much like the children for which CASA advocates. For example, Superman was adopted, Batman was an orphan, and Peter Parker was raised by his aunt and uncle. And yet, despite a difficult beginning, they grew up to accomplish great things.

The CASA SuperHero 5K was held on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at WG Jones State Forest. Thank you to our generous title sponsor Mike Seder Realty. Photos and race results are posted on the CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County Facebook Page.

The race may be over, but it's not too late to be a Superhero! We need your help in supporting our Advocates and CASA Kids. Sign up to volunteer or make a donation at [www.casaspeaks4kids.com](http://www.casaspeaks4kids.com)



## BRINGING SUMMER READING TO SINCLAIR CHILDREN

### Advocate starts library at Residential Treatment Center

Educators agree, during the summer months, keeping learning alive for children is vital. Many children can lose ground in reading while out of school or start the next school year at a lower reading level.

Children in residential treatment centers (RTC) struggle even more with this issue. RTC's service children who are in the foster system, but require a higher level of care due to learning disabilities, health impairments, and emotional disturbance.

At RTC's, children have limited access to libraries over the summer months, with the logistics of transportation and the requirement of constant adult supervision. Kahne Smith, a new Advocate, coordinated the initiative to create an in-house

library at Sinclair Children's Center, an RTC located in Woodville, TX servicing children between 5-12 years old.

As a gift to CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County, Lone Star College – Montgomery's Human Services Student organization donated over 500 books to initiate the library.

The library at Sinclair allows for easier supervision by staff and greater accessibility so children may now visit a library weekly over the summer. As a result of the creation of this library, the children are actively engaged in summer reading programs. In fact, a group of dedicated children won a trip to Moody Gardens Water Park for logging the most reading hours.





CASA  
Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

Child Advocates of Montgomery County

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## CONGRATULATIONS ADVOCATES!

Congratulations to our newly sworn-in advocates! We're proud to say our August class is our largest to date. A total of 19 people were officially sworn-in by Judge Jerry Winfree on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Each new Advocate coming on board brings us one step closer to providing a voice for every child in Montgomery County.

Become an Advocate. Email Wanda Smith, Director of Training and Recruitment at [Wanda@CASASpeaks4Kids.com](mailto:Wanda@CASASpeaks4Kids.com)



### OUR NEWLY SWORN-IN ADVOCATES

Lori Begin  
Francis Bourgeois  
Lisa Chagala  
Courtney Cronkhite  
Gary Fultz

Sharon Howerton  
Debbie Kelley  
Janet Loeffler  
Shelly Lynch  
Paul McKelvey

Bonnie Moore  
Eugenia Osborn  
Chuck Simmons  
Debbie Stofcheck  
Angela Troth

Curtis Troth  
Karen Vegas  
Shari Wood  
Kathryn Wynn

