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Organization Provides Volunteers for Every Abused, Neglected Child in Need *CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County Realizes Mission, 23 Years of Progress*

CONROE, Texas (July 2, 2015) -- When J. C. Harvel, a court-appointed volunteer Advocate for CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County, accepted an abuse case two weeks ago, he was unaware that he was helping more than the 11-year old boy involved in the case. The retired school administrator for Spring I.S.D. had enabled CASA, a local non-profit organization, achieve their mission to provide an Advocate for every abused and neglected child in need.

CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County's mission is 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, and permanent home." Trained volunteers speak up for the best interests of abused and neglected children so they can live happier, safer lives. CASA volunteers – Court-Appointed Special Advocates – make sure kids don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service systems or languish in unsupportive foster homes. They serve as the "eyes and ears" for the judge in child welfare cases. Each Advocate is assigned to help one child or set of siblings at a time, so they can focus on giving that child or sibling group the individualized advocacy and attention they need. CASA volunteers stay with children until their court case is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home.

The path to serving every abused and neglected child has been a long and sometimes difficult one. CASA Child Advocates began in Montgomery County in 1992 when 18 volunteers were appointed to 28 children. The organization grew over the years, but sometimes the ability to serve every child seemed elusive. CASA Executive Director, Ann McAlpin, explains, "As little as 2 years ago, we didn't even have a way to *count* the percentage of all the children and were reduced to watching a percent of the kids coming into the system. We believe it to have been around 65% 4 years ago." By September of 2014, 215 CASA volunteers were serving about 94% of children who needed Advocates. While this seemed an impressive feat, it still fell short of the organization's ultimate goal. At least until two weeks ago.

CASA staff and volunteers were elated to hear about the success of their program, but McAlpin and staff aren't the only ones celebrating this momentous accomplishment.

"Texas CASA congratulates CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County for achieving such an important milestone, and the entire CASA community celebrates this incredible accomplishment alongside them," said Texas CASA CEO Vicki Spriggs. "Even as we celebrate this great success, we know that Montgomery County will continue its work to be able to provide a CASA for those children who, through no fault of their own, will end up in the state's foster care system."

Terri Jagers, President and Chair of the Montgomery County CPS/Child Welfare Board, adds, "It is a tremendous accomplishment and it certainly demonstrates the successful vision, not only of CASA, but of all of those who support CASA in making sure that every abused and neglected child has a voice in court."

Although CASA is providing an Advocate for every abused and neglected child in need at this moment, McAlpin is quick to remind the community that this could change in an instant, "Of course, we are grateful to have reached this achievement, but it does not diminish our need to recruit and train more Advocates. Children are coming into the foster care system in Montgomery County at a rate of almost 4 each week, and we want to maintain our ability to accept every single case and speak up for every child."

If you believe a child is being abused or neglected, report your suspicions confidentially to our state's toll-free child abuse hotline at (800) 252-5400 or go to www.txabusehotline.org. If you think a child is in immediate danger, don't hesitate. Call 911. For more information about becoming a CASA volunteer or about CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County in general, visit the website at www.CASASpeaks4Kids.com or call (936) 441-5437.

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Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are appointed by the Court to speak up for the best interest of children who have been removed from their parents and are under the Court's jurisdiction. CASA's goal is to provide a court-appointed volunteer to serve as Guardian ad Litem for every child in the foster care system. For the past 23 years, CASA has been training volunteers, raising awareness in the community, and working to stop the cycle of child abuse in Montgomery County. Learn more about CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County at www.casaspeaks4kids.com and on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CASACHildAdvocatesofMontgomeryCounty>