



2015 MEDIA KIT



Be a Voice for Abused Children

By Ann McAlpin, Executive Director, CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County

Every year, countless children are abused and neglected by the ones they love and trust. It's time for each of us to speak up for these children so that they may live safe, happy lives.

Last year, 156 Texas children died from abuse and neglect. That means an innocent life was taken every 60 hours.

It's time for us to take a break from our busy schedules, acknowledge these children and say that their lives – and deaths – were not in vain.

Many of us will wear blue ribbons, attend special events or say that these children are in our hearts. But, these actions alone are not enough. In 2014, 567 children fell victim to abuse in Montgomery County, and 46 percent of them were under the age of 5. It's time for us to act on their behalf, for they are **OUR** children.

The traumatic experiences that abused children face early in life can greatly affect their lives as adults. These children often grow up with mental health problems and trust issues. Bounced about in a broken and overburdened system, too many drop out of school and turn to crime or live on the streets. This spiral not only threatens the future of the child, but also the fragile social safety net of our great state.

Too many children in the dysfunctional foster care system are slipping through the cracks. You have the power to change this. By becoming a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates®) volunteer, you can change the life of a foster child simply by speaking up for them.

Each of us has an obligation and an opportunity to break the cycle of child abuse and neglect. If you see abuse, report it to (800) 252-5400 or go to www.txabusehotline.org. If a child's life is in danger, call 911. If you want to leave a legacy of positive change, become a CASA volunteer. Call (936) 441-5437.

We challenge you to use your voice and speak up for the children who cannot speak for themselves.

Ann McAlpin

Ann McAlpin is executive director of CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County, which recruits, trains and supports volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children in Montgomery County.



2015 Organization Overview

Name: CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County

Location: 412 W. Phillips Street, Ste. 107
Conroe, TX 77301

Phone: 936.441.5437

Website: www.CASASpeaks4Kids.com

Officers: Jim Funke, Chairman of the Board
Ann McAlpin, Executive Director

Summary: **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)** are trained community volunteers appointed by the court to speak for the best interest of children who have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect. They advocate for children to be in safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible.

CASA Advocates complete an interview, background checks, fingerprinting and 33 hours of intensive training, including courtroom observation. After being sworn-in by a judge, volunteers are appointed to a child or family of children and spend an average of 10 hours a month advocating for these children for at least a year. In addition to getting to know the child, a CASA Advocate also gathers information from the child's family, teachers, doctors, care-givers and anyone else involved in the child's life.

In 1992 eight volunteers established CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County. Twenty three years later, our community's CASA supports 215 volunteers who served 606 of the children in Child Protective Services last year.

CASA's goal is to provide a court-appointed volunteer to serve as Guardian ad Litem for every child in need in our community, and to break the cycle of abuse, one child at a time. Last year, CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County served 94% of abuse/neglect cases in Montgomery County.

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2014: FACT & IMPACT

CASA Makes a Difference¹

In **1992** eight volunteers established CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County. **Twenty three** years later, our community's CASA supports **215** volunteers who served **606** of the children in Child Protective Services.

2013 Closed Case Outcomes for Children:

Family Reunification	29%
Permanent Conservatorship to a Relative/Kin	31%
Adoption	29%

Giving a Child a CASA Volunteer means:

She is substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care.

He is half as likely as other foster youth to re-enter foster care.

Her family is offered more services to help keep the family together.

His odds of finding a safe, permanent home increases by half.

Children In Montgomery County¹

668 children placed in Child Protective Services

72% of cases were neglect

23% of cases were physical abuse

5% of cases were sexual abuse

46% of children were under **5** years old

Outcomes In Long-term Foster Care

25% experience **3** or more placement changes per year⁴

65% experience **7** or more school changes from grades K-12²

3-6 times more likely to have emotional, behavioral, and developmental problems³

22% have been homeless after aging out²

25% suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder²

50% have chronic medical problems²

3-11% earn a Bachelor's degree²

¹ Data from CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County, National CASA "I am for the Child" Campaign, and Department of Family and Protective Services. Please contact Crystal@CASASpeaks4Kids.com / 936-441-5437, ext. 214 for further references and resources.

² *Foster Care by the Numbers*. (2011) Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

³ Pecora, P.J. et al., (2005). *Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs

⁴ Leslie, L.K. (2008) *Testimony of Laurel K. Leslie, MD MPH FAAP on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics*. Washington, D.C.: Department of Federal Affairs



Role of a CASA Child Advocate

FACT FINDER FOR THE COURT, VOICE FOR THE CHILD AND MONITOR FOR THE CASE

CASA Child Advocates are trained community volunteers appointed by the court to speak for the best interest of children who have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect. They advocate for children to be in safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible.

WE TRAIN AND SUPPORT A **CHILD ADVOCATE** TO...

- Maintain a dependable, trusting relationship with the child by visiting at least once a month
- Advocate and, when needed, provide testimony for the best interest of the child by obtaining a firsthand and clear understanding of the child's needs and situation
- Cooperate with teachers, therapists, doctors, relatives, caseworkers, and any other parties who may be involved to determine facts, meet the child's needs, and monitor court orders and case progress
- Investigate alternatives available for the child, such as placement and services if needed
- Prepare court reports and appear for each court hearing, making new recommendations and bringing significant changes to the court as needed, until a final disposition is made. Attend other meetings pertaining to the child involving caseworkers, parents, social workers, and others
- Maintain case records, monthly mileage, and contacts logs and comply with CASA's National, State and local code of ethics, policies and guidelines

Each Advocate will be supported by a full-time staff member throughout service

REQUIREMENTS

21 years or older | Access to transportation

Willing to volunteer *on average* 10 hours a month for at least one year

(You cannot currently be a foster parent or in the process of adopting a child from Child Protective Services)

FOUR STEPS TO BECOMING A CHILD ADVOCATE

1. Submit an Application (available at www.CASASpeaks4Kids.com)
2. Complete Criminal and Child Protective Services background and fingerprint checks
3. Observe 3 hours of Child Protective Services Court & interview with Training Director
4. Take 30 hours of training (several schedule options available)



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Child Advocate?

A Child Advocate (also known as a Court Appointed Special Advocate or Guardian ad Litem) is a trained community volunteer who is appointed by the court to speak for the best interest of children who have been removed from their homes because of abuse and/or neglect.

As a Child Advocate, how would I differ from being a social worker or lawyer?

A social worker first investigates the alleged abuse or neglect, and then works with families to develop plans and services to facilitate change. A lawyer acts as the child's representation in court and provides legal advice. The lawyer communicates a child's *wants* while the Child Advocate communicates the child's *best interest*.

The role of an Advocate is to act as a "Fact Finder" and ensure that the Court is presented with the most accurate information and recommendations regarding the child and his or her physical, medical, and educational needs. As the voice for the child, an Advocate speaks on behalf of the child *and* advocates for what is in the child's best interest. Advocates provide crucial background information that may assist attorneys and social workers in presenting their cases, and the judge in making decisions.

Is there a typical Child Advocate?

Being a Child Advocate requires no specialized degrees or legal experience. Child Advocates come from all walks of life and backgrounds. What Advocates have in common is the belief that children deserve a safe, permanent home. Advocates must be over 21 years of age, have access to transportation, and have a clean criminal history.

What would my relationship with the child be?

Advocates offer the child consistency and continuity: in the course of a typical case, the child may experience several foster homes, new schools, caseworker turnover and ONE Advocate. While building trust with the child is essential to understanding their best interest and needs, an Advocate must remain objective and must recommend, not provide, counseling or direct services.

How much time would it take me to volunteer?

Advocates spend, on average, 10 hours a month on a case (including travel and phone calls,) Advocates commit to at least one year of volunteering. More time is spent at the beginning of a case as you gather facts. As the case moves toward resolution, it will require less time. Advocates are required to attend court hearings (4-5 over the course of the year, set in advance) to present a report with recommendations to the judge and attend meetings pertaining to the case.

Can someone who is employed full-time volunteer as a Child Advocate?

Employment status does not affect eligibility to volunteer, though some flexibility during business hours is necessary to attend court, meet with businesses that may provide information, and attend meetings with others involved on the case. An *estimated* 3 - 5 hours a month may be spent during business hours. Other volunteer work, such as visiting the child and meeting with caregivers, happens on your schedule.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

What training and support will I receive?

In preparation, you will be asked to observe 3 hours of Child Protective Services Court and interview before taking a pre-service training. Pre-service training is a 30 hour class which will thoroughly prepare you for all aspects of your volunteer experience. You will be paired with a full-time Case Supervisor throughout service to guide you through your case, review your recommendation, and accompany you to court.

After the first year, each Advocate must complete 12 hours of “in-service” training per year. CASA offers opportunities to receive training through readings, films, and monthly workshops.

Will I be safe?

Volunteers are never asked to put themselves in a situation which may make them feel unsafe. If there is a concern for safety, your Case Supervisor is available for support and can arrange to accompany you.

Which children will I be working with?

Children who have been abused or neglected in Montgomery County and removed from their homes by Child Protective Services are assigned a Child Advocate. Children can come into care at any age, from birth until reaching the legal age of 18. Children may be placed in a suitable home anywhere in Montgomery County, and in some cases, in neighboring counties. While you will know the initial placement before agreeing to a case, the child may be moved if a more appropriate home (such as with a relative) is found.

Do I transport or take a child home with me?

No, you may not transport a child nor will you assume the responsibility of caring for and housing a child, only in ensuring the child receives adequate care from caregivers.

Will my time make a difference?

Absolutely! CASA volunteers offer hope and assistance as the children go through a difficult time in their lives. Children represented by a Child Advocate are more likely to receive the services and resources their families need, maintain stable placements while in foster care, and avoid re-entering foster care in the future. The judge will take your recommendations into account when making decisions.

How do I become a Child Advocate?

A completed application (found under the Volunteer section of the website) must be submitted for review. There is a CPS and criminal background check completed on each applicant, which will include fingerprinting. You will then be called for a Child Protective Services court observation and an interview with the Director of Recruitment and Training before training (class schedules available online).

Is there someone I can speak with before I apply?

Yes! You may contact Judi, our Director of Recruitment, for more detailed information at **936.441.5437 ext. 209** or **Judi@CASASpeaks4Kids.com**