

The CASA Advocate



October 2020

CASA Spotlight

Connecting with Children

Submitted By: Angela Johnson, Volunteer Coordinator

As children across the nation have returned or are preparing to go back to school amid the pandemic – whether in-person or virtually, the work of a volunteer continues to be essential now more than ever. Our program, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so every child who has experienced abuse or neglect can be safe, have a permanent home, and the opportunity to thrive.

A child's time in the system can be chaotic and uncertain, and during a pandemic, even more so. Volunteers advocate with respect to a child's living situation and school placement, with the child's best interest in mind. Volunteers are needed to advocate for children inside and outside of the courtroom, by interacting and building relationships with everyone in the child's environment who has a hand in their education—parents and foster parents, teachers, school counselors, social workers, attorneys, therapists and others.

Here are some examples of how a volunteer can stay connected to the children they serve during the new school year:

1. Many children may experience excitement or anxiety about starting school, especially during the pandemic. Volunteers can check in with the child and family they serve with a phone call or virtual meeting and ask them to share their feelings and anticipation about the new school year.
2. Volunteers can engage with the child's parents, sometimes serving as a coach or an advocate for parental involvement in education matters.
3. If a child is receiving tiered response to intervention, special education, volunteers can attend virtual school meetings and recommend strategies that support the child's success in school such as tutoring, therapies, assistive technology, and other accommodations. They can also advocate for placement stability, knowing that frequent school transfers can cause a child to fall behind.
4. During the pandemic, programs and volunteers are seeing significant gaps in distance learning technology (e.g. laptops, chrome books, iPads and/or internet access) for the children and families we serve. Volunteers can make sure those resource gaps are known to the child's team, and in some cases, CASA and GAL programs are able to collaborate with community organizations or corporate partners to identify solutions.

Children who have experienced abuse or neglect are involved with multiple systems—the court system, the child welfare system, the school system, and the health care system. volunteers can help connect the dots between these systems to ensure that information is shared, when appropriate, to get the best possible outcomes for children. They can work with the school social worker or child protective service staff member to advocate for comprehensive wraparound services for the child, including primary health, mental health and dental care, pandemic food assistance, mentoring, and post-secondary education awareness.

Advocacy does not stop during a pandemic. The complexities of the times cause volunteers to view the situation with a different lens and be aware of the need for different resources given the "new normal." As the nation's most vulnerable children head back to school, having caring, consistent adults to listen and put their best interests before all others can make all the difference.

Today...

I will be a child's Superhero.



MISSION

ACCOMPLISHED

303 Children

143 Cases

71 Volunteers

180 Children

placed in safe,
permanent &
loving homes

CURRENTLY

SERVING

117 Children

53 Cases



FEATURED ARTICLE:

Making a Difference

Submitted By: Fred Stark, CASA Board President/Volunteer of the Month

The first time I heard about CASA was when I was invited by Kathy Taylor to join the Steering Committee for forming a CASA program. After completing all the organizational requirements, we were chartered, formed the original Board of Directors, then hired Brenda Dees as our Executive Director. We opened for business on November 2, 2015, in facilities donated by the First United Methodist Church of Beeville.

I became a CASA Volunteer Advocate on Feb. 22, 2018 and worked on two cases with a co-advocate. One of these cases went well while the other one was a heartbreaker. The second case ended with the State of Texas ruling that they had no jurisdiction in the case and the children were returned to their previous, unhealthy, out of state environment.

The next three cases involved children being placed permanently with their foster caregivers. The fourth case was with two children which reached 18 years of age and "aged out" of the system. The last case involved children who had a family reunification after the parent successfully completed all requirements of her court ordered program. This case was probably the most satisfying case of all. These cases have required to travel to Harlingen, Houston, Kerrville, Edna, and Port Lavaca for child visits. In all, I have served on seven cases involving nineteen children. This has been one of the most rewarding and satisfying experiences of my life. I came from a dysfunctional home environment and helping these children is very important to me.

Some of our duties as a CASA is first and foremost working to get the children a safe and loving "forever home." The primary goal is family reunification when possible. Sadly, that is most often not the case. We also make sure that the children are in a safe home, are receiving the proper education and receive the dental, medical, and counseling help that they require. Our main goal is to advocate for what we see as the best possible final resolution of the case.

*"Children are a gift from the Lord;
They are a reward from Him."*

Psalms 127:3

-Fred Stark



CASA of the Month: **Fred Stark**

Our CASA Volunteer of the Month is Fred Stark. Mr. Stark has served as a CASA Volunteer for 2 years and served on 7 cases involving 19 children. Mr. Stark began with CASA as a steering committee member which helped to initiate our CASA program, and is also a Board member, currently serving as Board President. Because of Mr. Stark's support and advocating for these children, they are in a safe, stable environment. We are grateful for his desire to be of service.

A Word from Our Director...

Put In A Good Word For Us

Submitted By: Brenda Dees, Executive Director

Imagine a child at home with their parents in the only home and with the only adults/parents they have ever known. They hear a knock on the door to see a police officer with two adult strangers; Child Protection Investigator/Case Worker (CPS) and a police officer. They overhear a conversation they don't understand that consist of their parents being told their children must be removed from their home and temporarily placed with a relative, friend of the family and if they do not have someone they know, their children will be place in a foster home. These strangers ask for the young child/youth to go with them, because they are told it is unsafe in their parent's home (examples of unsafe environments include: your child living in cars or on the streets or in a home where they are exposed to poisonous materials, convicted sex offenders, temperature extremes or dangerous objects , no food, shelter, etc.)

During this time, CPS believed the child to be in imminent danger of physical abuse or neglect. The removal can happen without the parent's consent and without a court order. This is done only in the upmost serious situations. A Texas court is then required to hold an emergency hearing on the 1st working day after the removal. The Judge decides whether the child should be returned to his parents or if the risk of abuse or neglect is significant enough to require continued foster care.

From the moment, they are removed from their home, you can imagine the fear, anxiety and stress the child is experiencing. Their school, friends and family are all left behind. Many times, they are placed in a foster home or with a friend or relative in another city away from their only known community. This is where they remain until it is determined that it is safe or unsafe for them to return home. Usually, it takes one year for all parties; CASA, Attorneys and County Attorneys, to make their individual recommendations at each hearing to the Judge. During this time, the parents have to meet their individual family service plan developed by CPS. This is why our Volunteer Advocates are crucial to the Judge making the right decision for placement for a child in a permanent safe home.

We are asked by each child(ren) to, "Put in a good word for Us." We in essence are a voice for a child in court. Next time, you see one of our signs around town, please think sincerely about how you can truly help a child find a home and go tell their story in court.



OCTOBER UP COMING EVENTS

20th - Brown Bag

27th - In-Service
(Zoom)

Brandi Purswell -
Texas Education
and Training
Vouchers

OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

2nd - Christopher
Cano

9th - Frank
Dehnisch

11th - Christina
Ponce

23rd - MaryEllen
Ruiz

29th - Cassie
Krueger



CASA of Bee, Live Oak & McMullen Counties Also Serving San Patricio County

113 E. Cleveland St.
P.O. Box 184
Beeville, TX 78104
(361) 542-4407

beeacasa.org

211 S. McCall
Sinton, TX 78387
(361) 587-3234

Mission Statement: To help abused and neglected children of Bee, Live Oak, McMullen and San Patricio Counties find permanent homes by empowering citizens as volunteers to advocate for the foster child's best interest.