

The CASA Advocate



May 2020

CASA Spotlight

The Effect of COVID-19 On Our Mission

In the face of the turmoil and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, CASA of Bee, Live Oak, McMullen & San Patricio Counties continue to be a major source of stability for children and families in the child welfare system in our four-county area. The need for CASA advocacy is heightened in this time of stress and crisis. Together, we are amplifying and adapting our work to advocate for the best interest of children and families during the rapid changes faced by the system.

CASA volunteers have swiftly adapted to a virtual model, using videoconferencing to connect with children, participate in the legal process, keep in contact with families, and ensure children's safety and well-being. CASA programs are working collaboratively with CPS and care providers to identify safety issues and other unmet needs for children in state care and find innovative ways to remedy these.

We are dedicated to exceptional advocacy for children and youth, building positive adult connections for them, supporting families as they seek reunification or other permanency outcomes, and finding the best ways to do so while everyone in the system navigates new challenges.

Children in the Child Welfare System are our most vulnerable population and CASA's top priority is assuring their safety and well-being. We also need to maintain urgency to reunite children with their families of origin when this is safe and possible. CASA continues to work toward these goals in collaboration with courts, CPS, care providers, families and other system stakeholders. CASA commends Governor Abbott, the legislature and our judiciary for their leadership, support, innovation and effective response to this crisis. Whatever the future holds, CASA will continue to collaborate to support successful outcomes for children and families in the Texas Child Welfare System.

5 Best Kid Friendly Video Chat Apps to Keep Them Safe

Facebook Messenger Kids (Ages 6-12)
JusTalk Kids (Ages 6-12)
Google Hangouts
Skype
Kindoma



HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

255 Children

117 Cases

62 Volunteers

**158 Children
placed in safe,
permanent &
loving homes**

CURRENTLY SERVING

91 Children

41 Cases



**Every Day Is
Mother's Day!**

Featured Article:

Perseverance

By Kathryn Belcher, Guardian Ad Litem

A good friend of mine came to me and asked me if I would be interested in helping start a CASA organization in the Beeville area. Of course, I said, "Sure I would." Well time went by and I heard little tidbits that were happening but never really did much. Becoming a CASA Volunteer was easy for me since I have worked with children for over 40 years. Then, one day my friend called and told me they were having a meeting to start CASA of Bee, Live Oak, and McMullen Counties organization. As they say, the rest is history. I went to the meeting and before I knew it, I was sitting in a training class. I was sworn in on January 28, 2016.

In the last four years, I have served on seven cases involving seven children. If I were to say what my most successful case was, I would have to say all of them. My cases have been challenging with the success of permanent placement or a child aging out of the system and starting their life as a young adult. We always advocate for what is "in the best interest" of the child and sometimes the Court agrees with us and sometimes they do not. Perseverance is what makes us successful. One of my cases ended with permanent placement in the grandparent's home. The placement was done with reservations. There was a concern that the grandparents needed help understanding the child may have some developmental, cognitive, or mental health issues in the future. At the final hearing, the Judge did give permanent custody to the grandparents and dismissed everyone in the case but the CASA Volunteer. The Judge listened to the concerns that were presented to the court and decided I would be the person to help them get the education needed to prepare for the future. So, I stayed on the case to locate the necessary training for the grandparents and assist the facilitation of that training. Without the push to ensure the grandparents understood what they may encounter in the future, the Judge may have decided it was not the right place for the child and the child might have been in temporary placements for a much longer period of time. **Our goal is to find PERMANENT placement for the child.**

This particular child may have been in foster care for a long time if paternity had not been established in a timely manner and the child had not been placed with the grandparents. Locating a permanent home for these children is a collaborated effort of all the entities involved in the case, which may include CASA, Texas Department of Family Services, law enforcement agencies, attorneys, family members and the Court.



CASA of the Month: Kathryn Belcher



Ms. Kathryn Belcher is our CASA of the Month. Ms. Belcher was part of the founding members of CASA of Bee, Live Oak & McMullen Counties. She was one of the original eleven Volunteer Advocates that were sworn-in in February 2016. She has served on seven cases involving seven children in her four years of CASA work. CASA is forever grateful for her diligence in ensuring every child's voice is heard.

A Word from Our Director...

Brenda Dees, Executive Director

Celebrating Our Volunteers - The Heart of CASA

Last month, during the week of April 20th, was National Volunteer Appreciation Week. Due to COVID-19, we were unable to celebrate as a group their hard work and dedication they continually and consistently provide to children. We would like to thank our GAL Volunteers for their incredible dedication for helping children who have experienced abuse or neglect. As we reflected back on all that our volunteers have contributed to the lives of our local children, we were astonished at their contributions and significant impact on their lives. Through FY2016 – 2019 (3 years), 53 GAL Volunteers to date have donated:

- 21,749 unpaid hours for a total value of \$478,486
- \$26,033 of their own money for children's birthday gifts, taking them out to dinner, paying for other costs and needs and driven
- 226,047 miles in their personal vehicles to visit children and other parties in the cases/family for a total of \$31,647.

In addition, they also served **255** children, on **117** cases and have helped placed **158** children in safe, permanent and loving homes.

Our volunteers are ordinary people who have chosen to stand up and be a voice for our most vulnerable children. They work tirelessly to help change a child's story. For many children in the Child Protection System, their volunteer becomes the one consistent person they can depend on. We are more committed than ever to making sure that every child we serve knows they are not alone and that their volunteer is standing beside them.

Our deepest thanks to all of the GAL Volunteers across our nation. Every day, they demonstrate an unwavering commitment to our nation's most vulnerable children during a time of crisis and unprecedented uncertainty. Thank you and we sincerely appreciate each one of you!



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: CASA of Bee, Live Oak & McMullen Counties Also Serving San Patricio County's mission is 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.



UP COMING EVENTS

- 5th – Giving Tuesday
- 17th – Community Baccalaureate Service
- 19th – Brown Bag (Tentative) CASA Board Meeting
- 25th – Memorial Day (Office Closed)
- 26th – In-Service (Tentative)

MAY BIRTHDAYS

- 3rd – Eric Sztraky
- 4th – Myrtle Lucke
Joanna Delgado
- 7th – Javier Cardenas
- 18th – Brenda Wheeler
Elsa Crawford
- 20th – Karen Kibbe
- 25th – Kathlyn Patton
- 29th – MaryAnn Featherston