

CLERGY, CASA AND COMMUNITY:

A CALL FOR FAITH LEADERS



TEXASCASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF CASA STATEWIDE



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OUR VISION

Texas CASA envisions a safe and positive future for all Texas children and families.

OUR MISSION

Texas CASA's mission is to support local CASA volunteer advocacy programs and to advocate for effective public policy for children and families in the child protection system.





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Welcome Letter from Vicki Spriggs, Texas CASA CEO

Dear Faith Leader,

At Texas CASA, we know that the faith community is one of the strongest and most vital links in creating a healthy world for children and families.

I am honored to share this guide with you and to invite your congregation into a meaningful relationship with your local CASA program. Our work is deeply linked, in that we each are driven by a vision of a safe and positive future for children and families, and an awareness that creating this future takes the service of people with integrity and commitment.

If this guide is in your hands, it means that the CASA program in your community believes your faith community is a great asset, with strength and skills. Your program hopes to partner with your faith community in order to serve the most vulnerable among us: young people in foster care who have experienced traumatic events and are in need of caring adult connections. It means that CASA seeks to build a holistic, long-term relationship with your members, which will do two things: create an opportunity for people to live out their deepest callings of service, and bring support to children in foster care and orphans.

The crisis of foster care in Texas is an area which cannot be understated, yet there are solutions and meaningful actions. If your faith community adopts foster care or the work of CASA as one of its ministries, a significant impact can be made in your own backyard.

We hold to The CASA Way, which states, We have an uncompromising belief that we will achieve what others think is impossible, and each of us is an essential part of the solution.

We hope you will join us.



Texas CASA CEO



WE PRAY FOR CHILDREN

By Ina Hughs

We pray for children
who sneak Popsicles before supper,
who erase holes in math workbooks,
who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those
who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,
who've never squeaked across the floor in new sneakers,
who never had crayons to count,
who are born in places we wouldn't be caught dead,
who never go to the circus,
who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children
who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions,
who sleep with the dog and bury goldfish,
who give hugs in a hurry and forget their lunch money,
who cover themselves with Band-Aids and sing off-key,
who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink,
who slurp their soup.

And we pray for those
who never get dessert,
who watch their parents watch them die,
who have no safe blanket to drag behind,
who can't find any bread to steal,

who don't have any rooms to clean up,
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
whose monsters are real.
We pray for children
who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,
who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their
food,
who like ghost stories, who shove dirty clothes under the bed,
who never rinse out the tub,
who get visits from the tooth fairy,
who don't like to be kissed in front of the school,
who squirm in church and scream in the phone,
whose tears we sometimes laugh at and
whose smiles can make us cry.
And we pray for those
whose nightmares come in the daytime,
who will eat anything,
who aren't spoiled by anybody,
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,
who live and move, but have no being.
We pray for children who want to be carried,
and for those who must.
For those we never give up on,
and for those who never get a chance.
For those we smother with our love,
and for those who will grab the hand of
anybody kind enough to offer.

WHAT IS CLERGY, CASA & COMMUNITY?

Clergy, CASA and Community is an effort by Texas CASA to build a network of faith communities and leaders that will champion speaking up for local children in foster care. Our goal is to see communities and clergy leaders coming together to live out their calling and be a voice for the children who need them.

THE CLERGY, CASA AND COMMUNITY MODEL



We invite your faith community to partner with your local CASA program in serving the most vulnerable children in our state. While we know that your community is probably already engaged in many charitable works, we also know that people are always looking for more opportunities to serve others in real ways.

Becoming a CASA volunteer is an extraordinary path which allows people to serve individual children and families and to strengthen the fabric of society as a whole. It is also a thorough volunteer opportunity, with extensive training, strong infrastructure, and ongoing support and training for advocates. All of these facts combined can allow people to make a profound difference in the world, and we are seeking your support as a faith leader to help us offer the opportunity to your congregants—a bridge between those good people and a very real need in your community.

The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers, and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize... Each of us, let repeat from the heart: no family without lodging, no rural worker without land, no laborer without rights, no people without sovereignty, no individual without dignity, no child without childhood, no young person without a future, no elderly person without a venerable old age.

**- POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS AT THE
WORLD MEETING OF POPULAR
MOVEMENTS, BOLIVIA**

WHAT IS THE NEED?

At any given time, there are over 30,000 children in foster care in Texas.

These children have experienced trauma, and are often placed into foster homes or facilities far from their family and home community. They may be moved from place to place and school to school, and are often searching for stability. At the same time, their families are going through crises and also need support. Parents are often working to stabilize their lives, overcome substance use disorders or develop the capacity to provide a healthy home for their children.

We need more people to speak up for these children, and to engage their families.

There are more than 10,000 CASA volunteers in Texas, and with that remarkable corps, CASA programs in Texas are able to serve about half of the youth in foster care. However, we need to be able to serve all youth in foster care. This means that we need to recruit thousands more dedicated volunteers—and we need your help, and the help of your faith community.

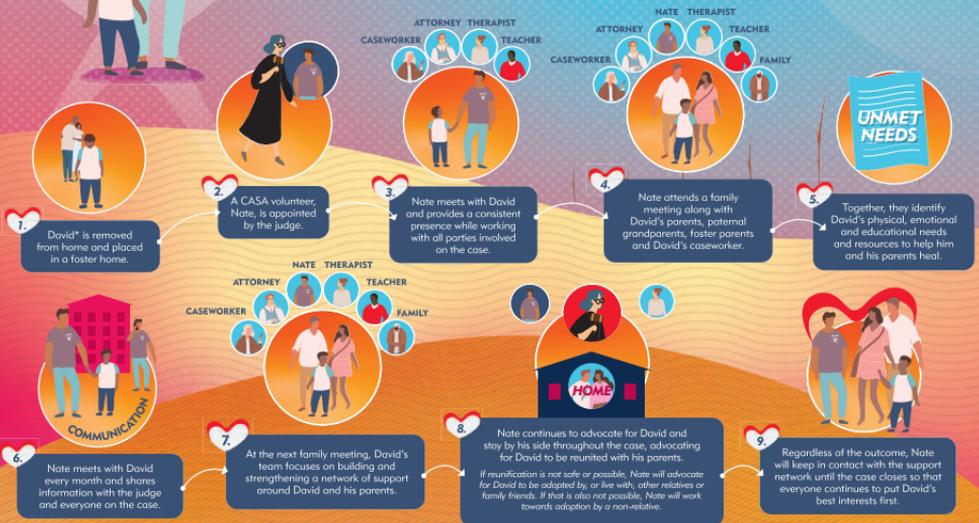


WHAT DOES A CASA DO?

CASA volunteers provide a consistent presence in a child's life while working collaboratively with everyone involved on their child welfare case. CASA volunteers stay by the child's side during their time in foster care, advocating for the child's voice to be heard and for the needs of the child and family. A volunteer receives extensive training and is supported by a coach-supervisor in all aspects of their case.

WHAT DOES A CASA DO?

When a family is in crisis and becomes involved in the child welfare system, a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer may be appointed by a judge to advocate for the child. This highly trained volunteer is someone from the child's community whose responsibility is to get to know the child and their family and advocate for their safety, permanency and well-being while in foster care. This is just one example of the difference a CASA volunteer can make in a child's life.



¹This is a fictional story based on real-life situations that many children in the Texas foster care system face. This is one example and does not reflect the process and ending of all cases.

A CASA VOLUNTEER WORKS TO:

- Identify and address risks to the child's safety;
- Establish supportive connections for the child and provide information on support available to those connections for better placement stability;
- Ensure appropriate physical and mental health assessments are completed and any health needs are understood by the family and everyone involved in the case;
- Verify educational assessments are completed and educational supports are in place; and
- Provide recommendations to the judge based on the child's best interest.



THE SPECTRUM OF CARE

Most calls to Child Protective Services are about neglect, which often results from a family's lack of access to necessary financial, health, substance abuse and mental health resources. Becoming involved in foster care may mean that you are called upon to help a family of origin address their underlying needs.

The Spectrum of Care is the whole ecological cycle of ways that ordinary people can be involved in the lives of vulnerable children and families in their communities. Communities of faith can provide support throughout the Spectrum of Care by partnering with their local CASA programs.

Child Abuse Prevention

CASA programs are experts in child welfare and can provide training to a faith community on a variety of subjects that would benefit members, like child abuse prevention and trauma-informed care.

Advocacy for Children in Foster Care

CASA volunteers speak up for children in the foster care system by building a caring relationship, advocating for their needs and working for their best interest.

Family Finding and Building

CASA volunteers support families and advocate for children to stay connected with their families. They advocate first for reunification with a child's family of origin, if safe and possible; secondly, for adoption by a relative or family friend if returning home is not safe or possible; and, if necessary, for adoption by a non-relative.

Transition to Adulthood

CASA volunteers support older youth in learning life skills and advocate for their needs in the case that they age out of the system at age 18 without a permanent home. CASA volunteers connect these young people with resources to become successful adults.

HOW CAN YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY GET INVOLVED?

Communities of faith can support CASA and the children they serve in many ways.

- A critical need of all CASA programs is to recruit and train volunteers to advocate on behalf of children while they are in foster care. Your faith community can assist in this mission by hosting an information session in partnership with your local CASA program regarding how members can get involved.

AN EVENT OF THIS NATURE WOULD INVOLVE YOUR COMMUNITY PROVIDING:

- A space to host the meeting
- Announcements during worship, in the bulletin or newsletter or at other events about the information session

YOUR CASA PROGRAM WOULD PROVIDE:

- A Faith Outreach Team member to speak knowledgeably on the role of a CASA volunteer and the connection to your faith community
- Information on CASA volunteering and ways members can learn more



OTHER WAYS TO GET INVOLVED:

- Go with a CASA program to Clergy and Coffee to learn more about CASA's role in the courts.
- Partner with your CASA program to pray or stand up for children in foster care during annual events like Stand Sunday/ Orphan Sunday, Blue Sunday and Children's Sabbaths.
- Support kids that your local CASA program advocates for with a back-to-school drive, clothes, hygiene supplies, holiday gift drives, birthday parties or support for school extra-curricular activities (like band instruments or sports uniforms).
- Show appreciation and support for CASA volunteers in your community.
- Invite your CASA program staff and volunteers to participate in your faith community's existing events and/or ministry, like picnics or holiday dinners.
- Pray for children in foster care, their parents and families, child welfare workers, foster/adoptive parents, CASA volunteers and all those involved in the foster care system.





WHEN A COMMUNITY OF FAITH MEETS THE NEED:

A STORY FROM TEXAS

Bishop Aaron Blake was the pastor of a small church in Brownwood, Texas. He and his wife Mary were also foster parents and felt called to share and expand upon this experience. Bishop Blake knew that there was a need for more foster families in their community so that children did not have to be moved away from their local networks of school, friends and extended family to a foster placement in a different town.

One Sunday, Bishop Blake asked his church members to stand with him in this cause, and most of them did! Remarkably, this call to action spurred a movement in the community and around the country. This small church of 200 members was able to form and support enough foster families to ensure that no child in Brownwood was waiting for a foster home or placed outside their own town.

This movement evolved into what is now known as Stand Sunday, which is a Sunday in November when faith communities around the world pray and commit resources to serve children in foster care. This type of passionate action is replicable in other faith communities across rural, suburban and urban locales.

WHAT IS YOUR CALL?

The Roots of Care for Children & Families in All Faith Traditions

We offer this collection of prayers and words from sacred texts in major religions as inspiration and motivation. These words can help light the fire in your congregation as it considers its role in the lives of children and families in crisis.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...
(James 1:27)

And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do. (Deuteronomy 14:29)





Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and the needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

Charity given out of duty, without expectation of return, at the proper time and place, and to a worthy person is considered to be in the quality of goodness. (Bhagavad-gita 17.20)

They will ask you what they should spend in charity. Say "give to your parents, relatives, orphans, the poor and the wayfarer. And whatever good you do, God knows it." (Quran 2:215)

And hand over to the orphans their belongings. Do not substitute worthless things of your own for their valuable ones and devour not their property by adding it to your own. For that is a big sin. (Quran 4:2)

If your brother falls low, and his hand falters beside you, then you shall strengthen him—sojourner or resident — and he will live with you. (Leviticus 25:35)



When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. (Deuteronomy 24:19)

You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict them in any way – for if they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry. (Exodus 22:22-23)

Bodhisattva Prayer for Humanity

May I be a guard for those who need protection,
A guide for those on the path,
A boat, a raft, a bridge for those who wish to cross the flood.
May I be a lamp in the darkness,
A resting place for the weary,
A healing medicine for all who are sick
A vase of plenty, a tree of miracles.
And a servant for all in need.

May I bring sustenance and awakening,
Enduring like the earth and sky
Until all beings are freed from sorrow
And all are awakened.
- Shantideva

TESTIMONIALS

“ Even though the work of a CASA volunteer can be demanding, it exceeds everything that we go around doing every day. You find a purpose to serve this community which you are a part of. I often think of the Prophet Mohammed’s saying – “The best in the sight of your Lord are those who are most beneficial to each other.” I’ve become a lifetime supporter of CASA and more sensitive to the needs of others who cannot help themselves, because of being an advocate. My faith emphasis has been to be a social activist and a catalyst for change. This experience taught me how big of a difference you make in a child’s life, which will impact them for life.

- Syed Masood, Dallas CASA Volunteer



“ While I signed up for plenty of one-time volunteer opportunities, my heart called me to something more lasting and personal. One day I saw a billboard for Dallas CASA, and I just knew.

I admit it can be emotionally draining and frustrating, but what keeps me going is the child – the smile of the little boy who recognized me, the first time a teenager made eye contact with me and laughed at my joke. While the start of this journey was with the vision to support children who needed someone, I’ve quickly learned that this experience has taught me so much about my own values and mission.

- *Amanda Parades, Dallas CASA Volunteer*

“ Every child deserves someone to answer the call to action. My Bible tells me that faith without works is dead. We can pray for these children all we want, but at the end of the day it takes someone willing to give their time to act. We need more people that can do something about to actually do something about it. Every child deserves the right to have a bright future. For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord... Those plans don’t include hurt and pain. However, when malevolence tries to destroy a child’s life, we can make a difference and show them that they have a choice to overcome and take their future back. They can control their own destiny. They can choose to rise above the malevolence and choose life.

- *Voices for Children Volunteer*

“ I’ve felt called to do this work through my faith. I wanted to be more involved in a child’s life and truly help them on another level. I was telling my mother how I felt this need of being in a child’s life, but I didn’t know how or where to go. I was thinking maybe coach a kickball team or start volunteering through the Boys and Girls Club. Although these are great options, it didn’t help with the feeling of needing to do more.

I’d heard of CASA but didn’t know what CASA was about. [Then I saw] a short presentation about CASA. I immediately knew that I wanted to become a CASA volunteer after their presentation. I prayed about it and talked to my parents about it. I gave it some time but I was extremely excited. I went to the info session and wanted to start training as soon as possible. I went through training and I knew I was there for the right reasons.

That’s how I became a CASA volunteer. I love this work and it’s amazing to know that my presence is changing my CASA child’s life. There’s also so much love and support in the CASA staff and volunteers that I’m not alone.

- Elizabeth Soliz, CASA of the Coastal Bend Volunteer



“ As I embark on this effort to encourage others to serve the ministry of foster care and adoption, I’m reminded of what drives me. I have this saying, “Zeal is short-lived, but passion is permanent.” I hold on to those words because it always keeps me connected to my passion which always leads to discovering my purpose. You see, zeal has an expiration because it has an initial excitement but no willingness to go the distance. Passion will always cause others to ask, “Do you get paid to do this?” That’s when you know it’s passion, because passion looks like you should be receiving a paycheck. But it’s really your passion that pays you. So, live out your passion with purpose!

- Pastor Eric Hallback, Rock Faith Center, El Paso



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