Strengthening Core Advocacy: Centering Well-Being

and Belonging for Children and Parents Talking Points

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*Note: This document is intended to be a FAQ on the 2023 Strengthening Core Advocacy (SCA): centering well-being and belonging for children and parents training for Executive Directors and other local CASA leaders to communicate the importance of this new resource to board members, staff and volunteers. The five sections below reflect the five SCA modules. Alternate answers are provided for a handful of questions below. A more in-depth talking point document for LGBTQ+ can be found* [*here*](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/jkn4g50sduxtjtjyo0rf4/Trans-Youth-LGBTQ-Talking-Points_2023.docx?rlkey=oettmdsmchz9vdbvwtmbz57jb&dl=0)*.*

**CENTRAL ADVOCACY POINTS**:

The CASA network is committed to ensuring the highest quality of advocacy possible for **all** children in the child protection system — regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, expression or disability status.

We recognize that disparities exist in all aspects of society, including the child welfare system, and we support the network’s efforts to become inclusive, welcoming and safe for all children and youth. We also believe that listening to those harmed by injustices helps us become better advocates for all children and families.

*Question: How does this training align with my work?*

**Answer: Each topic of the five modules touches on real-life situations that you could encounter in your work. The topics of this training are also covered in** [**Texas CASA’s Guiding Principles**](https://texascasa.org/2020/11/30/texas-casas-guiding-principles/#:~:text=Texas%20CASA%20believes%20advocacy%20should,to%20health%2C%20happiness%20and%20healing.)**, our** [**Normalcy Guide**](https://texascasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/TexasCASA-NormalcyGuide-Final-for-WEB.pdf) **(pg.15) and our standards for local CASA/GAL programs, which we encourage you to review.**

* Acknowledging and stepping into discomfort is part of your job as a CASA staff or volunteer and will help you create safe spaces for vulnerable children and youth in the foster care system — which shouldn't depend on the type of child you support or their background.

*Question: What will this training encompass and why is it important?*

**Answer: The main exercises you’ll work through include reading about key topics and definitions, exploring the origins of some of your thinking processes, learning about how detrimental disparities can be, discovering real life examples and solidifying your knowledge of the CASA role in all of it.**

* Understanding the key concepts and definitions within these five modules helps you become equipped to be in important conversations in the child welfare space, and to have the knowledge to advocate for *specific* needs of a child or youth.
* Assessing yourself and the origins of your thinking is a healthy practice within and outside of the child welfare system; bias exists outside of this field too. Reflecting on your origins of thinking helps you send a message to children and youth that you and your environment are welcoming and safe.
* Learning about real life examples that CASA volunteers have experienced can help you prepare for you own work or time with a child or youth in foster care.

MODULE #1: ADVOCATING FOR EQUITY

*Question: Why is it important to have advocacy training specific to equity?*

**Answer #1: If we stand by the most vulnerable and the people most harmed by injustice, then understanding and practicing equity helps us become better advocates for all children and families.**

* Equity refers to fairness and justice in the way people are treated; people should be treated without bias or prejudice.
* Equity is rooted in many other issues, but when it comes to child welfare, it’s linked to creating a more inclusive culture where every child and youth can be heard.

MODULE #2: SOCIOECONOMIC ISSUES

*Question: Why is it important to have advocacy training specific to socioeconomic status?*

**Answer #1: Children who live in poverty are more likely to be removed by CPS, [[1]](#footnote-1) but poverty should not be automatically equated with a failure of character or parenting skill.**

* Recognizing the historical and systemic causes of wealth disparity in our communities help you understand where a child or youth in foster care and factors that are out of a family’s control no matter how hard they try to provide financial stability.
* Socioeconomic hardships can become a cycle of struggle that’s passed on from generation to generation within families; it’s not an easy fix, especially without the right policies and practices in place.

**Answer #2: Data supports that families of color are more likely to be living in poverty. Being aware of this reality can help you understand why these families have less access to resources.**

* For example, Black and Hispanic Texans are more than twice as likely to live below the poverty line as white and Asian Texans. [[2]](#footnote-2)

MODULE #3: RACE AND ETHNICITY

*Question: Why is it important to have advocacy training specific to race and ethnicity?*

**Answer #1: Biases exist within ourselves, and awareness and action towards these biases help us see race, ethnicity and language as valuable aspects of identity that should be honored and celebrated.**

* Biases and stereotypes that go unchecked can negatively affect your interactions with children and youth, and potential outcomes for families.
* Supporting children and families includes proactively understanding their unique cultural identities, practices and everyday activities.
* You’re not expected to become an expert on antiracism, but learning about the history and impacts of racism can help you understand and support children, youth and families of color.

**Answer #2: Children and families of color are overrepresented throughout the stages of the Texas child welfare system and are more likely to experience negative outcomes. [[3]](#footnote-3) For example, 11% of the state’s child population are Black, but Black children account for 18% of CPS reports, 20% of CPS investigations and 20% of the children removed from their families. [[4]](#footnote-4)**

* Examples of negative outcomes include: [[5]](#footnote-5)
  + Establishing permanent placement
  + Experiencing poor social, behavioral and educational outcomes
  + Being less likely to be reunited with their birth families
  + Experiencing multiple foster care placements

MODULE #4: PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

*Question: Why is it important to have advocacy training specific to people with disabilities?*

**Answer #1: People with disabilities face significant barriers to equal treatment in the child welfare system, and deserve quality understanding and advocacy that’s free of ableism.**

* Disabilities can be both seen and unseen, physical and mental, and can be in the form of mobility, sensory or developmental impairments. This also includes people who are chronically ill.
* Disabilities can be an important part of a young person’s identity and can shape their strengths, interests and perspectives on the world around them.
* Ableism is a set of beliefs that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual or physical disabilities and rests on assumptions that people with disabilities need to be fixed in some way. **[[6]](#footnote-6)**

**Answer #2: Although children and youth with disabilities aren’t overrepresented in the foster care system, they’re more likely to face abuse and neglect. [[7]](#footnote-7)**

* Nearly 10% of children under the age of 15 have a disability.[[8]](#footnote-8)
* Once they enter foster care, these children face negative outcomes like: [[9]](#footnote-9)
  + Having a higher likelihood of not finishing high school
  + Having a higher likelihood of incarceration
  + Having a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness
  + Being half as likely to experience permanency through reunification with their family or adoption
  + Being institutionalized if they age of out the system
* Leaders, staff and volunteers who are equipped with this knowledge can help turn the statistics around, one child at a time.

MODULE #5: SEXUAL ORIENTATION & GENDER IDENTITY

*Question: Why is it important to have advocacy training specific to LGBTQ+ youth?*

**Answer #1: CASA volunteers are trained — and have been trained for decades — to care for every child and youth in foster care.**

* For 34 years, CASA volunteers in Texas have been trained to advocate for children who have been abused and neglected, including LGBTQ+ youth. Caring for every type of child and youth in need is not new to our organization and network.
* The CASA network believes advocacy should be free of sexism, heterosexism and transphobia.
* Respecting how a person chooses to be identified does not mean you are endorsing a lifestyle.
* The best way for volunteer to advocate for a child in court is to learn about the child's individual culture and gain an understanding of the needs of the child.
* All children and youth in foster care experience trauma, but LGBTQ+ youth face higher rates of rejection, bullying, violence, harassment and other forms of trauma. [[10]](#footnote-10)

**Answer #2: LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented in foster care.** Youth who identify as LGBTQ+ make up around 30% of the foster care population. This is approximately 3X the LGBTQ+ population outside of child welfare settings, which means that LGBTQ youth are significantly overrepresented in care. [[11]](#footnote-11)

* + Disproportionately represented means that the percentage of youth in foster care who are LGBTQ-identifying is larger than the percentage of LGBTQ+ youth in the general population.
* Part of this overrepresentation is because LGBTQ+ youth may experience family harm or rejection because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.
* The people who work in the child welfare system in Texas — including CASA and its volunteers — don’t represent the makeup of children and youth in the system. Having staff and volunteers with diverse backgrounds, experiences and knowledge helps build stronger and trusting relationships more quickly.
* Even the most LGBTQ-inclusive agencies can struggle to find qualified foster parents who are ready and willing to welcome LGBTQ+ youth into their homes.

**Answer #3: LGBTQ+ youth in care have a higher likelihood of poor outcomes within and outside of the foster care system than their peers, including: [[12]](#footnote-12)**

* Intensified bias, discrimination, and harassment
* Increased physical and sexual violence
* Poorer school functioning
* Higher numbers of foster home placements
* Higher rates of homelessness
* Elevated probability of depression and substance use
* Elevated poverty

1. <https://www.dfps.texas.gov/About_DFPS/Reports_and_Presentations/CPS/documents/2006/2006-07-01_Disproportionality.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://everytexan.org/2020/09/17/new-census-data-confirms-texas-needs-to-equitably-invest-in-anti-poverty-programs/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.dfps.texas.gov/About_DFPS/Reports_and_Presentations/Rider_Reports/documents/2019/2019-10-01_Rider_40_Report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://txchildren.org/posts/2020/9/14/racial-justice-requires-improvements-to-the-texas-cps-system> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://policingequity.org/resources/blog/the-adultification-of-black-children> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://cdrnys.org/blog/uncategorized/ableism/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.academia.edu/23247460/Youth_with_Disabilities_in_the_United_States_Child_Welfare_System> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/disabilities#_ftn1> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://texascasa.org/2022/07/05/fighting-for-children-with-disabilities-foster-care/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://texasfosteryouthconnections.org/lgbtq-youth-practice-guide/practiceguidelines-safety-and-wellbeing> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/child-welfare#\_ftn [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/HRC-YouthFosterCare-IssueBrief-FINAL.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)