



**TEXASCASA**  
Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF CASA STATEWIDE



# CASA ACT PROGRAM GUIDE

**September 2023**

*CASA ACT (Anti-Child Trafficking) is a call to action for the CASA network to do more than 'see something, say something' (a common phrase in the anti-trafficking movement), and to ACT.*

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# INTRODUCTION



CASA ACT (Anti-Child Trafficking) is a call to action for the CASA network to do more than ‘see something, say something’ (a common phrase in the anti-trafficking movement), and to ACT. Caring is not enough. We all can do something. Local CASA programs will not know if there are underlying sex trafficking issues in their areas until they begin to research sex trafficking within their communities and begin screening for it.

While not every child in foster care is a victim of trafficking, they are at a disproportionate risk of being trafficked.[1] The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Rider 29 Human Trafficking Identification, Deterrence and Response Rider, cited that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, 45,870 children and youth were in DFPS Conservatorship at some point during FY 2021. Of these, 173 unique children and youth were identified as either suspected-unconfirmed or confirmed for human trafficking (sex or labor) victimization. Of the 173, 167 (96.5%) were identified as experiencing sex trafficking victimization, and six (3.5%) were identified as experiencing labor trafficking victimization.

The intersection of youth missing events and trafficking is also reported by DPFS. In FY 2022, the DFPS Children and Youth Missing from DFPS Conservatorship & Human Trafficking Data reported 1,334 unique children and youth missing from DFPS Conservatorship. Of those, 1,111 unique children and youth were recovered, and 226 confirmed incidents of sex trafficking were identified as victimized while missing. With regards to trafficking victimization while missing, 143 unique youth were identified as experiencing sex trafficking victimization. These numbers are conservative estimates of trafficking victimization given the challenges and inability of victims to self-identify, as well as the lack of recognition of trafficking by key stakeholders who intersect with such victims.

Youth in DFPS conservatorship who age out of the foster care system without healthy supportive relationships are at an increased risk of experiencing homelessness which increases their vulnerability of being trafficked. However, there is limited research and data on young adults who age out of foster care and experience trafficking victimization.

[1] Selig

***NOTE: For the purposes of this guide, the focus will be on child sex trafficking, and the word 'youth' will refer to children and youth who are at risk of or who have been trafficked or exploited.***

From identification of at-risk youth, to advocacy for those who have been harmed, CASA programs and volunteers can, and must ACT. The strategies and recommendations provided in this program guide can be used by local CASA programs that wish to be active partners in the anti-child trafficking and exploitation movement within their own communities. There are many agencies involved in this work locally, regionally, and at the statewide level. It is important to have a clear understanding of roles and expectations so that CASA programs can contribute meaningfully within their lane of advocacy for youth in the conservatorship of the state, whom they are appointed to serve by the court.

In the nation, the child welfare response to trafficking is under continual development. Since 2014, efforts toward addressing the child welfare response to sex trafficking have been prioritized through federal legislation. However, labor trafficking is a crime and an abuse/neglect category that has intersectionality with sex trafficking and the child welfare system but is often even more difficult to detect and is underreported. There are incidences where labor trafficking occurs with sex trafficking. Common labor trafficking industries include agriculture, construction, domestic service, landscaping, restaurant, and food services.[2] Jobs susceptible to labor trafficking require the victim to be isolated and away from school, caseworkers, and CASA volunteers--isolation which should be a red flag to helping agencies.[3]



[2] Gibbs

[3] Human Trafficking by the Numbers: The Initial Benchmark of Prevalence and Economic Impact for Texas [HTBTN]



# CASA ACT KEY TERMS

Within the anti-child trafficking community, many key terms are used. To better understand this program guide, it will be helpful to understand and know the common phrases, key terms, and acronyms that may be encountered in anti-trafficking work. Please note that some of the acronyms are similar, and their definitions are evolving.

## ▶▶ **Care Coordination Team (CCT):**

The Office of the Texas Governor's Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSTT), Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas, Inc. (CACTX), the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), and local communities are establishing CCTs for Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth (CSEY) across Texas to promote sustainable autonomy, healing, justice, and stability for youth ages 0–18 who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation. The CCT is made up of professional organizations in the community that provide services for trafficking victims or who investigate and prosecute trafficking cases. In most Texas communities, the Children's Advocacy Center lead the CCT development process and serve as the local Care Coordinator. Care coordination employs awareness, education, creativity, collaboration, and capacity-building to identify and recover youth who have been trafficked and to facilitate tailored, accessible, trauma-informed, and holistic resources through a coordinated network of providers. CCTs build trust, transparency, and solutions with members of the team to mitigate duplication of work and so that local and statewide partners are bridges instead of barriers to services for children, youth, and families.

## ▶▶ **Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSST):**

A division in the Office of the Texas Governor (OOG), the CSST mission is to build sustainable capacity, enhance expertise, promote policies, create new and leverage existing collaborations to protect children from sexual exploitation, help the public recognize signs of sexual exploitations, help victims/survivors recover, support healing, and bring justice to those who exploit children. CSST divides Texas into five regions and provides a Regional Advisor to each area to support communities in building a response to child sexual exploitation. Additionally, CSST leverages funding through grants from the Office of the Governor to advance efforts across Texas.

## ▶▶ **Children's Advocacy Center (CAC):**

There are 70+ CACs across the state of Texas that facilitate interagency multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) made up of representatives and service providers to coordinate investigations, prosecutions, as well as services for victims of child abuse and neglect rising to the level of a crime. Professionals at CACs work collaboratively to provide the services that are necessary for children/youth to begin the emotional and physical healing process. The CAC is a child/youth-friendly facility that provides a sensitive, trauma-informed environment for evaluating and treating the victims and their non-offending family members, which minimizes further trauma. Additionally, some CACs facilitate the staffing of CSEY cases through Care Coordination Teams (defined above).

## ▶ **Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT):**

A research-based screening tool that helps improve early identification of commercially sexually exploited youth (CSEY). The tool was developed by West Coast Children’s Clinic and is currently used in Texas and multiple other states and across various sectors, including juvenile justice, education, advocate agencies, runaway/homeless youth agencies, and limited areas of child protection. The CSE-IT has eight key indicators: housing and caregiving, prior abuse and trauma, physical health and appearance, environment exposure, relationships and personal belongings, signs of current trauma, coercion, and exploitation. Many of the questions relate to the last 90 days. The results of the screening are no concern, possible concern, or clear concern.

In Texas, a CSE-IT score of clear concern for a minor means that a child/youth is a Presumed Victim for mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and service delivery. If a CASA staff completes the CSE-IT and a score of clear concern is received, the CASA staff should notify the youth’s caseworker, who will then refer for services. The DFPS hotline should also be called. CASA should not notify the CCT. Please see the CSE-IT protocols for more details.

## ▶ **Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth (CSEY):**

CSEY refers to youth who are confirmed or at-risk of sex trafficking, prostitution, sex tourism, pornography, early marriage, performance in sexual venues, online or electronic transmission of youth engaged in sexual activities, among other crimes.[4] For the purposes of this program guide, CSEY also includes children.

## ▶ **Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth Advocate Agencies (CSEY AA):**

CSEY AA are nonprofits that employ staff (known as advocates) to provide individualized 24/7 crisis response and ongoing trust-based relational support to child, youth, and young adult survivors until the age of 21. CSEY AA may also provide robust case management that is flexible to support and not duplicate, replace, or interfere with the efforts of other service providers. CSEY AA work collaboratively with other stakeholders to support the victim-centered goals pursued by the survivor and their family, law enforcement, prosecutors, child welfare, juvenile justice, healthcare, and other partners. They help survivors gain the strength and empowerment needed to participate in the investigation and prosecution of exploiters.

A child or youth in DFPS conservatorship who is a Presumed, Suspected-Unconfirmed, or Confirmed victim of trafficking can have both a CASA volunteer as well as a CSEY advocate. DFPS and CSEY advocates have approved MOUs guiding their work together.

[4] Clayton, et al., 2013



## **Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS):**

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) conducts civil investigations of child abuse or neglect in coordination with law enforcement and, when appropriate, takes necessary actions to protect the child/youth from further abuse/neglect. DFPS investigates allegations of abuse or neglect, including sex trafficking and or labor trafficking, when the alleged perpetrator is traditionally responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare in accordance with Chapter 261 of the Texas Family Code. The decisions made concerning protecting a child/youth shall be based upon the professional judgment of DFPS staff in conformance with current DFPS policy, statutory law, and placement factors.

## **Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation (HTCE):**

A division of DFPS established in 2017, the HTCE Division/HT Division serves all 254 counties, and all child welfare stages to:

- Strengthen continued compliance with all federal and state human trafficking mandates,
- Develop policy, practices, and service identification to address and/or prevent trafficking, and
- Improve DFPS's capacity to identify, report, recover, and support victims of trafficking in their restoration journey.

To accomplish this work, the HTCE Division collaborates with DFPS staff, partners, and community stakeholders, including but not limited to law enforcement, city/county/state government, advocacy agencies, and faith-based organizations. The HTCE also provides technical assistance, training, and case consultation. The HTCE is the main point of contact for local, regional, and statewide trafficking matters (at a local CASA program level) even when the community is involved in community-based care.

## **Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs):**

Created through statute in accordance with Texas Family Code 264. Local Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) support and coordinate the efforts of a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) of professionals consisting of law enforcement investigators, prosecutors, Child Protective Service workers, medical professionals, mental health professionals, and victim advocates, which can include CASA. Other local service providers may also serve on the MDT in many communities. In the neutral setting of the CAC, MDT members can collaborate on strategies that will aid investigators and prosecutors without causing further harm to the child. This innovative multi-disciplinary approach significantly increases the likelihood of a successful outcome in court and long-term healing for the youth. CAC multidisciplinary teams collaborate to coordinate investigations; limit, when possible, the number of times each child is interviewed; provide comfortable, child-friendly settings for interviews; reduce the child victims' travel to investigative agencies; coordinate medical and mental health services; and increase public awareness about the incidence and impact of child abuse.

# PREVENTATIVE ADVOCACY

While CASA programs and stakeholders diligently seek to provide restorative services and resources for youth victimized by sex trafficking, it is imperative that CASA programs “share the dangers of sex trafficking with youth and challenge myths and misconceptions that glamorize sex trafficking.”[5] CASA programs should be a key partner to help youth in the child welfare system to recognize dangerous situations, understand factors that may make them vulnerable, and know how to respond to concerns. Through education and awareness, youth in the child welfare system are empowered to be able to protect themselves.

Preventative Advocacy is when CASA programs implement human trafficking education with youth ages ten and older as an upstream preventative measure. Additionally, CASA programs can support youth who have been exposed to sexual exploitation. CASA volunteers can be at the forefront of educating the youth for whom they advocate.

To help prepare CASA volunteers to advocate with youth who are trafficked, the [Advocacy for Youth Affected by Sex Trafficking: A Guide for CASA Volunteers and Staff](#) may be utilized as a resource.

[5] [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/trafficking\\_agencies.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/trafficking_agencies.pdf)





# PREVENTATIVE ADVOCACY IN ACTION

One of the main deterrents from commercial sexual exploitation is to have a mentor for youth, a person who will advocate with them, support them, and build rapport.[6] Each visit that the CASA volunteer has with the youth, they can spend balanced, incremental portions of their time talking about human trafficking in an age and developmentally-appropriate way.

CASA volunteers can utilize [Unbound Now's Sentinels](#), a five-part series of anti-human trafficking training that helps youth understand the dangers of sex trafficking. CASA volunteers watch a 12–20-minute episode by themselves to understand the material, then plan to review it with youth.



The most important part of educating youth about sex trafficking is the opportunity to ask questions and talk freely with someone they can trust. Sentinels offers discussion questions and activities to facilitate communication between CASA volunteers and youth in foster care. The Sentinels information is easy to understand, not graphic, and features high school students, teachers, principals, and caregivers. These videos may be watched with youth who are in junior high or high school, as is age and developmentally appropriate. They should be watched with the youth, not sent to them to watch alone. During visits, CASA volunteers share the videos with youth using a digital device (cell phone, iPad, or another device connected to the internet). Other trusted adults, like the caseworker, foster parent, or the youth's parent, may also like to be a part of this learning opportunity if the youth so desires. The CASA volunteer should ensure that the youth has a support person available to them after any difficult topic, such as this, is discussed with them. To start using Sentinels, follow [Unbound Now's Sentinels Fact Sheet](#).

It is not feasible nor recommended for youth who are at risk of trafficking to watch five 20-minute lessons and be expected to remember these lessons several years down the road. Once CASA volunteers finish the Sentinels program, they could consider adding lessons learned from the [CASA ACT Advocacy for Youth Affected by Sex Trafficking: A Guide for CASA Volunteers and Staff](#). This can include reviewing vulnerabilities, types of traffickers, stages of change, or safety planning.

An international qualitative study of youth in the child welfare system revealed that youth want stakeholders to explain the risks, teach about dangerous situations using case studies, and talk more about the issue.[7] CASA volunteers can be the catalyst to help prevent sex trafficking.

[6] Wolfe, Greeson, et.al.

[7] Pereda et al., p. 4

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## EXPLORATION

Research local human trafficking task forces, coalitions, multi-disciplinary teams, and care coordination teams to understand their roles and objectives in the CASA program's geographic area. Research the Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT) process and partners who use it.

## PREPARATION

Study human trafficking and train volunteers in sex trafficking awareness. Perform the preliminary registration steps to implement the CSE-IT to identify youth at risk of victimization.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Begin direct services with youth who are trafficked or at risk of trafficking, including information sharing and CSE-IT screening with all youth ten years and older.

## INTEGRATION

Incorporate trauma-responsive and wellness support practices to make sure CASA volunteers appointed to youth who have been trafficked understand self-care and receive support from their CASA program.

# EXPLORATION

Sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation may differ depending on your program's geographic location in Texas. Smaller cities may not have sexually oriented businesses like strip clubs or illicit massage businesses, and street trafficking may not be evident, but most, if not all, communities will have online sexual advertisements. Sharing your local program's efforts to use the CASA ACT Program Guide and the intention to become a stakeholder in this space requires knowledge of trafficking information in your immediate area.

Equally important is to explain to key stakeholders what CASA ACT is and how CASA staff and volunteers can support survivors involved in the child welfare system. As Guardians ad Litem, judges have appointed CASA volunteers to advocate for and provide recommendations in the youth's best interest to the court. For youth who have been trafficked, it is imperative that CASA volunteers become part of the healing process.

Human Trafficking Coalitions and Community Awareness Teams are local organizations actively involved in anti-trafficking work. They can include social workers, law enforcement, attorneys, nurses, first responders, activists, religious leaders, government officials, counselors, and other professionals from diverse backgrounds. CASA's role is to be a member and an active voice on this team. This is where CASA can share their trainings and gain insight into community resources. It is vital for CASA to be present in this space, sharing their work. There is a wealth of knowledge in a collaborative group for CASA programs to grow and learn more about what is going on in their local communities. CASA programs will decide who is best from their program to represent them at their local coalitions.



CASA programs should ask to be included in MDTs, being mindful that CASA volunteers are never involved in the criminal case associated with the youth they serve. Their role in the MDT is to fill in any gaps about what is going on with the youth and share any updates the CASA volunteer may have or information they may need to know as an investigatory team. CASA volunteers may attend meetings regarding the youth for whom they are appointed. The CASA staff and/or volunteer is present to be a resource guide for members of the team, but in no way should CASA volunteers or staff ask questions about the details of a criminal case or be involved in the legal proceedings.

Sometimes, the CASA volunteer will have the most knowledge about what is going on in the lives of youth who are trafficked. They may be able to provide information about the history, status, and what is in the best interest of the youth. Courts have established CASA volunteers as Guardians ad Litem and friends of the court to advocate with and for youth who are trafficked in foster care. Local programs can engage with MDTs in their communities and be contributing partners as appropriate.



# TO ENGAGE IN THE EXPLORATION STAGE, LOCAL CASA PROGRAMS CAN:

1. Reach out to [DFPS' Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation \(HTCE\) Division](#) to let them know of the CASA program's interest in supporting sex trafficking efforts in your area. The HTCE can facilitate a joint meeting to support the Exploration stage and provide geographic specifics on existing DFPS HT initiatives and efforts, including Care Coordination, CSEY Advocate Services, known Taskforces/Coalitions, and DFPS data, and complete E-introductions to all known stakeholders.
2. Contact the CSTT's Regional Advisor to notify them of the CASA program's interest, involvement, and work in this area. If needed, contact [CASA ACT](#) for the CSTT Regional Advisor's contact information in your region.
3. Learn about multi-disciplinary teams, care coordination teams, anti-trafficking diversion courts, law enforcement victim service departments, juvenile probation offices, human trafficking task forces or coalitions, and community awareness teams to understand their roles and objectives for your geographic area.
4. Research local community and/or county statistics on sex trafficking/commercial sexual exploitation of youth. Prevalence ratings will help show the magnitude of trafficking in your area. This can begin with an online search like "sex trafficking in (city/county)." Take note of other stakeholders mentioned in these online results.
5. Visit the local [Children's Advocacy Center \(CAC\)](#) to share about CASA ACT and discuss collaboration regarding child sex trafficking.
6. Coordinate with [CSEY Advocate Agencies](#) for information on their sex trafficking workload.
7. Speak with the District Attorney's office to ask about the magnitude of sex trafficking prosecutions. The local CAC can also introduce CASA staff to the District Attorney's Office because they have well-established relationships with them.

Once you become familiar with the landscape of sex trafficking in your area, it is time to get involved. There are multiple opportunities to get involved locally, which may vary depending on what organizations are established and what services are offered.

Once your local program explores anti-trafficking work in your area, communicates with DFPS about their intention to advocate in this space, and becomes familiar with local stakeholders, a CASA program can enter the Preparation Stage.



# PREPARATION

The preparation stage for local programs involves defining your program's anti-trafficking roles, readiness, and developing an implementation, communication, and training plan. Local DFPS should be apprised of local CASA intentions so that DFPS can also assess local DFPS staff readiness and training needs. Once these steps are taken, local programs will have staff and volunteers who are prepared to best advocate for and support youth who have been or are at risk of being trafficked or exploited.

Local programs can discuss their readiness considering such factors as supporting the training of volunteers, which volunteers are best to advocate with youth who are trafficked, and who will be a point person in their program.

## **STEP ONE:**

*EDUCATE AND TRAIN STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS*

## **STEP TWO:**

*JOIN YOUR LOCAL ANTI-CHILD TRAFFICKING COMMUNITY*

## **STEP THREE:**

*UTILIZE THE COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED IDENTIFICATION TOOL (CSE-IT)*





# STEP ONE: EDUCATE AND TRAIN STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Ideally, all CASA staff and volunteers would receive anti-sex trafficking and prevention education. There are two approaches to training presented here that can be considered:

1. CASA ACT Essential Approach is an overall Human Trafficking training that is targeted to all volunteers, staff, and programs.
2. CASA ACT Specialized Approach is a training for specialized CASA volunteers who will become "CASA ACT volunteers" for youth who are trafficked. CASA ACT volunteers are CASA volunteers who specialize in human trafficking advocacy work. Dallas CASA has a similar model for anti-trafficking work that this approach has been built on.

There are many factors that will determine your program's education and training approach, but education and building a knowledge base are key, no matter the training plan. Training and educating staff and volunteers are an ongoing endeavor as research, learning, education, and materials continually emerge and evolve.

As part of general CASA advocacy, CASA supervisors can regularly review any safety concerns with the volunteer, including trafficking or exploitation red flags, and document in the case management system accordingly. You may also discuss as a program whether to include safety information in the court report. Texas CASA may have sample language and/or a template for court reports, please reach out [casacts@texascasa.org](mailto:casacts@texascasa.org) for more information.





# CASA ACT ESSENTIAL APPROACH

*An overall Human Trafficking training that is targeted to all volunteers, staff, and programs*

Regardless of whether a CASA volunteer is appointed to a youth who has been trafficked, it is important for them to understand sex trafficking and have a general knowledge of how it occurs within the foster care system, including an understanding of vulnerabilities and indicators of child sex trafficking. If a CASA volunteer becomes appointed to a youth where sex trafficking is a possibility, they can complete the advanced CASA ACT Specialized Approach. Local programs should discuss how training and support of volunteers and staff will be organized.

The CASA ACT Essential Approach is intended to be used for all CASA volunteers within the local program. Adding these trainings into your local program's existing opportunities, such as pre-service and in-service, or offering as a stand-alone training will ensure that all CASA volunteers are ready to ACT.

To complete the CASA ACT Essential Approach, CASA staff and volunteers should:

1. Review the [Advocacy for Youth Affected by Sex Trafficking: A Guide for CASA Volunteers and Staff](#). This guidebook is not meant to be memorized but used as a resource when CASA volunteers are appointed to a youth who has been trafficked.
2. Read [How to Talk About Human Trafficking with Children and Adolescents](#). Human trafficking may seem like an unusual topic to bring up with a child. The subject matter can be frightening, particularly for younger children, and educators and parents may be uncomfortable starting the conversation. Data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline suggests that human trafficking is a relevant topic, especially for children.[8] You will find recommendations for beginning these conversations with children and teenagers for each age level (ages 2-6, ages 7-12, and ages 13-18).
3. Complete the [Advocacy for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children \(CSEC\)](#) e-learning course produced by Saving Innocence and Dallas CASA. This 2 ½ hour course includes nine lessons and was created specifically to equip CASA volunteers to identify victims of trafficking, understand the unique needs of exploited children and youth, and provide them with the highest level of advocacy. A [companion guide](#) to this training is available. The e-learning and companion guide are available in the CASA Learning Center.
4. Complete the [Innovations in Advocacy to Combat Child Sex Trafficking](#) webinar. This 70-minute webinar hosted by Texas CASA explains the collaboration between Dallas CASA and Saving Innocence, a Los Angeles-based advocacy organization. This webinar expands on the above-mentioned e-learning (Advocacy for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children), with Dallas CASA sharing about their work to date and the role of the CASA volunteer with youth who have been trafficked. This is available in the CASA Learning Center.

[8] Baylor University

# CASA ACT SPECIALIZED APPROACH

*A training for specialized CASA volunteers who will become "CASA ACT volunteers" for youth who are trafficked.*

CASA ACT volunteers are CASA volunteers who specialize in human trafficking advocacy work. Dallas CASA has a similar model for anti-trafficking work that this approach has been built on.

For programs wanting to support anti-trafficking advocacy with designated volunteers appointed to youth who have been trafficked, this Specialized Approach outlines a methodology. This approach will be implemented after, or alongside, the Essential Approach that sees a baseline of training and knowledge for all CASA staff and volunteers. To complete the CASA ACT Specialized Approach:

1. Train CASA staff and Advocacy Specialists first.
2. Select volunteers to be designated as CASA ACT volunteers. Considerations include:
  - Volunteers should have at least two years of experience with the CASA program.
  - Their supervisors should nominate them based on their past case experience and level of commitment to and trust in the organization.
  - All CASA volunteers will not be able to perform in this capacity. Volunteering to become a Guardian ad Litem for youth who are trafficked is not a decision to be made lightly. Youth who are trafficked have experienced polyvictimization at the hands of many who were supposed to protect and provide for them. It is imperative that volunteers are chosen who will be able to handle the emotional impacts associated with sex trafficking.
  - Many youth who are trafficked will be suspicious of their CASA ACT volunteer. It will take time to build rapport and create trust with them. This requires a CASA ACT volunteer to be consistent, dependable, patient, understanding, flexible, and trauma-informed. Additionally, a CASA ACT volunteer should also understand the stages of change and the unique needs of working with these youth. Although the task sounds daunting, walking through healing with these youth is a rewarding experience that becomes easier as the volunteer gains experience.
3. Logistical Considerations:
  - Consider designating a current staff member as the CASA ACT Coordinator (staff). They are the point person or lead at your local program for this work.
  - Some programs may choose to ask a trusted, knowledgeable volunteer to oversee their anti-child trafficking efforts. This CASA ACT Mentor (volunteer) works under the direction of the CASA ACT Coordinator (if applicable). CASA ACT Mentors potentially allow programs to be conscious of budgetary concerns as they initiate this process if, for example, the staff person is not able to take this on completely but can support the mentor. CASA ACT Mentors can oversee and provide guidance to other CASA ACT volunteers as they navigate resources for youth who have been trafficked.
  - Notify Texas CASA at [casaacts@texascasa.org](mailto:casaacts@texascasa.org) if your program implements the CASA ACT Specialized Approach. Texas CASA can be a valuable resource for navigating the planning process and providing contacts and resources.

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# CASA ACT SPECIALIZED APPROACH

*A training for specialized CASA volunteers who will become "CASA ACT volunteers" for youth who are trafficked.*

*(Continued)*

#### 4. CASA ACT Specialized Approach Training Plan:

- Complete CASA ACT Essential Approach trainings.
- Complete Dallas CASA's Train the Trainer, and then train selected CASA ACTs volunteers, using the Dallas CASA Course Facilitator's Guide.
  - Dallas CASA offers a Train the Trainer for local programs on the above-mentioned training, which equips trainers to train the content within their own programs. Contact Dallas CASA for more information.
  - Dallas CASA's Facilitator's Guide for their Advocating for Commercially Exploited Children and Youth course is a train the trainer guide to educate CASA ACT specialized volunteers.
  - Along with the Facilitator's Guide, there are coordinating materials, including a PowerPoint presentation to use. This is an extensive 12-hour training, including online courses and group training. Local programs can adapt the PowerPoint for their own program by adding their own logos and human trafficking stories from their communities.





# STEP TWO: JOIN YOUR LOCAL ANTI-CHILD TRAFFICKING COMMUNITY

Becoming involved in your local anti-child trafficking community may look different everywhere, based on many factors. Local Care Coordination Teams (CCT) often have existing relationships. Introduction into the local CCT is usually done through the CAC in your region; however, sometimes, it is best done through the CSTT Regional Advisor. Staff members of the CACs are usually the care coordinators for CCTs; therefore, they may be able to make introductions to the group. Discuss your local program's desire to engage with CCTs, explain CASA ACTs and the extensive training CASA volunteers receive. CACs can connect the CASA program to CCT members. Again, CASA staff will reiterate that CASA volunteers will participate on a case-by-case or topic-specific basis. If unsure of who represents your area or who is the best person to reach out to, please email us at [casaacts@texascasa.org](mailto:casaacts@texascasa.org) for assistance.



CSEY Advocate Agencies (CSEY AAs) work closely with CASA volunteers in instances of sex trafficking. CSEY AAs support law enforcement operations, immediate crisis management, and long-term case management for survivors. Regions may have more than one CSEY AA. CSEY AAs can be found [here](#). CASA programs should build relationships with CSEY AAs because they are a resource to help introduce and connect CASA programs and volunteers to the anti-sex trafficking community.

Reach out to your local human trafficking task force or community advocacy teams. If there is one in your area, try to attend the monthly meetings. Share with them the trainings and activities your program is involved in, being mindful of confidentiality. There is a wealth of knowledge from these collaborative groups and the speakers they have each month. Being present on an ongoing basis and becoming a voice in the anti-trafficking space will allow CASA programs to advocate better for youth today and in the future.

Talk to your DFPS/SSCC partners to inform them that your local program engages in CASA ACT.

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# STEP TWO: JOIN YOUR LOCAL ANTI-CHILD TRAFFICKING COMMUNITY

*(Continued)*

To become an active voice in the local anti-child trafficking community, programs can also:

1. Consider launching human trafficking social media campaigns primarily in January or July. January is National Human Trafficking Awareness Month. July 30th is World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. Participate in local community events, Scholarship Awards for Survivors, Resources Fairs, and Networking Opportunities (local task forces and coalitions will have this information typically).
2. Attend monthly Task Force and Human Trafficking Community Awareness Team meetings. Request Training from local Task Forces and Anti Trafficking Coalitions.
3. Attend MDT and CCT meetings on a case-by-case basis.
4. Request to meet with local law enforcement, CSEY AAs and anti-trafficking nonprofits for relationship building, bridging gaps, and opportunities for collaboration.





# STEP THREE: UTILIZE THE COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED IDENTIFICATION TOOL (CSE-IT)



Research shows that 88% of victims of trafficking say they interacted with a professional who missed the chance to help them. Most victims of sex trafficking do not self-identify.[9] 75% of youth who are trafficked are exploited for at least two years before their abuse is identified.[10] Screening tools such as the Commercially Sexually Exploited-Identification Tool (CSE-IT, pronounced “see it”) allow victims to be identified sooner and restorative services to begin. Evidence has proven that the sooner victims receive treatment, the better the outcomes.[11] CSE-IT screenings are not used for investigative purposes but are tools for eligibility for services. A CSE-IT screening is recommended for youth ages ten and up.

Currently, DFPS conducts the CSE-IT in Bexar, Dallas, Harris, Tarrant, Travis, and Webb Counties. CASA programs within these counties should still perform their own CSE-IT screenings. Some community-based care providers also conduct CSE-IT screenings. CASA programs completing CSE-IT screenings can help support the identification of risk factors and the need for their caseworker to connect a youth to CCTs or CSEY AAs in operation.

Local programs should become familiar with CSE-IT protocols and complete the CSE-IT training offered by Texas CASA.

[9] Lederer

[10] <https://www.westcoastcc.org/cse-it/>

[11] <https://www.westcoastcc.org/cse-it/>



# IMPLEMENTATION

Once your program has completed the exploration and preparation stages, you enter the third stage, implementation.

## **STEP ONE:**

*IMPLEMENT PREVENTATIVE MEASURES FOR ALL YOUTH AGED 10 AND OLDER*

## **STEP TWO:**

*BEGIN CSE-IT SCREENINGS*

## **STEP THREE:**

*ADVOCATE WITH AND FOR YOUTH*



# STEP ONE: IMPLEMENT PREVENTATIVE MEASURES FOR ALL YOUTH AGED 10 AND OLDER

CASA programs can review “Preventative Advocacy” and incorporate it into your program’s practices.



## STEP TWO: BEGIN CSE-IT SCREENINGS

Using the [CSE-IT Recommended Protocols for Local Programs](#), CASA programs will begin their implementation of the CSE-IT screenings. Once screenings begin, programs will be able to identify those youth who are considered a clear concern. This tool is important because it allows victims to be identified earlier and become eligible for specific services tailored to the needs of these youth. With identification, youth who are trafficked will begin a journey of healing with their CASA volunteer.

The CSE-IT tool can be repeated every six months, especially when circumstances are believed to have changed, a youth is missing and recovered, if new safety information comes to light, or a new safety incident has occurred.

If a youth receives a score of clear concern, follow the [Care Coordination Team Response](#). Programs may add their local program name to the title of the document and begin to use it in their program. If your program implements CASA ACT Specialized Approach as outlined above, CASA ACT volunteers can be assigned.



## STEP THREE: ADVOCATE WITH AND FOR YOUTH



Youth who are missing or have missing events are vulnerable to sex trafficking. CASA programs should follow the Missing from Foster Care Protocols. DFPS has separate protocols found in their Protocol for Care Coordination, but that does not interfere with CASA Protocols. If some protocols are duplicated, the CASA program should still complete them.

As the CSE-IT tool is used in your program, youth may receive a score of possible or clear concerns. Some CCTs are willing to serve victims with possible concern CSE-IT results. However to support youth who score a possible concern, CASA programs may also choose to implement the Preventative Advocacy steps outlined above, an intervention process through education and advocacy.

If a youth is a confirmed trafficking victim or suspected-unconfirmed trafficking victim, and/or an identified victim via a score of clear concern on a CSE-IT and their CASA volunteer is not trained in anti-sex trafficking/CSEY protocols, CASA staff will communicate with the CASA volunteer to complete the anti-sex trafficking training outlined above. The goal is not to disrupt the rapport building or the relationship between the youth and CASA volunteers. CASA staff can help navigate the process while the CASA volunteer completes the training.

During the Exploration stage, CASA staff will introduce their local program to members of the CCT. Once a case is assigned and a CASA volunteer begins their case, it is ideal that CASA volunteers will attend meetings thereafter. Programs can reach out to Texas CASA at [casacts@texascasa.org](mailto:casacts@texascasa.org) for introductions to MDTs and CCTs.

A CASA volunteer works to build a relationship with the child, reviews DFPS/SSCC case files and other available records and gathers information from those involved. As part of their advocacy, the CASA volunteer reaches out to caseworkers, caregivers, educators, medical personnel, attorneys, therapists, family members, and anyone else who might be able to provide relevant information about the child/youth. The volunteer provides recommendations to the court to help the judge make the best decisions regarding youth. If a CASA volunteer is aware of the services recommended by the CCT for a youth who has been trafficked, CASA volunteers can add it to their court report. To advocate for the youth's best interest, CASA volunteers can provide information and advocate for youth in court to accomplish the goals of the CCT/MDT. *(Continued on next page)*



# STEP THREE: ADVOCATE WITH AND FOR YOUTH

*(Continued)*

CASA volunteers and staff are important in CCT meetings. They are expected to work alongside the CCT partners and CSEY Advocates. Many decisions are made in CCT meetings, and it is imperative that the CASA volunteer is at the table whenever possible.

Some areas of Texas do not have Care Coordination Teams (CCT) established. If there is not a CCT in your area, the human trafficking protocols revert to the MDT process established within the local CAC. In these cases, CASA volunteers are even more vital. Without a CCT, the CASA volunteer can fill in the gap and advocate for the youth's best interest. CASA staff and volunteers can discuss with CSTT Regional Advisors about the process in their area.

Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) may be especially helpful for youth who have been trafficked, as a supportive and positive network of people lend to safety. CASA staff and volunteers should focus on finding supportive connections for these youth.

Youth who have been trafficked and recovered often face severe social alienation. Many victims will return to the life of trafficking multiple times before permanently leaving. CASA volunteers' response should be supportive when a youth who has been recovered from trafficking situation. Having CASA volunteers who understand sex trafficking will allow them to better advocate with these vulnerable youth.



# INTEGRATION



As programs implement these practices, the integration stage begins. Local programs should include the strategies laid out in this guide with their current processes.

1. Youth who have been trafficked have different needs than their peers who have not experienced exploitation. Being appointed to these youth can be more demanding because their needs are extensive. Working within a trauma-intensive situation can be overwhelming. For CASA volunteers, many times, this will be their first exposure to sex trafficking. CASA programs should check in and support staff and volunteers who are exposed to trafficking stories, accounts, examples, information, and trainings.
2. For CASA ACT volunteers, local programs can recommend a monthly meeting for CASA ACT volunteers to network, share concerns, and speak with CASA staff. If appointed, the CASA ACT mentor can oversee these monthly meetings. This time may also be spent on continuing education by discussing current topics affecting these youth.
3. During an appointment with a youth who has been exploited, CASA programs should look for regular opportunities to check in with the volunteer. A monthly note sharing how thankful they are for their service or recommending a good self-care book to read are little ways to show that you care about the volunteer and will go a long way in volunteer retention.
4. Programs should discuss wellness and provide self-care recommendations and trainings for staff and volunteers. This will help with volunteer satisfaction and retention. Having a stable volunteer base will, in turn, help them to better advocate for youth who are trafficked.



# CONCLUSION

Youth in foster care who are trafficked or are at risk of trafficking are a special population served by the CASA network in Texas. Involvement in the foster care system creates additional vulnerabilities for youth due to issues of felt safety, worry, and coping in an unknown environment. CASA volunteers play an important role in the life of the youth they are appointed to and can be one of the constant, stable people supporting their healing.

We hope that this CASA ACT Program Guide helps equip your local program to engage as an anti-child sex trafficking partner in your community and lays the groundwork for a survivor-centered advocacy approach.

Texas CASA is available to help programs as they navigate advocating with youth who have been trafficked. Contact [casaacts@texascasa.org](mailto:casaacts@texascasa.org) with questions and for guidance.







# CONTACT US

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