



STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF CASA STATEWIDE



CASA ACT PROGRAM GUIDE

September 2024

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) [Children and Youth Missing from DFPS Conservatorship & Human Trafficking Data: Fiscal Year 2023 Report](#) stated 31,475 children and youth were in DFPS Conservatorship at some point in FY 2023. Of these, 386 children and youth were identified as either suspected-unconfirmed or confirmed for human trafficking (sex or labor) victimization. Of the 386, 369 were identified as experiencing sex trafficking victimization, and eight were identified as experiencing labor trafficking victimization. Nine were identified as experiencing both sex and labor trafficking.

The intersection of youth missing events and trafficking was also reported. In 2023, there were 1,164 unique children and youth missing from DFPS Conservatorship. Of those, 1,095 were recovered, and 106 confirmed incidents of victimization, 53 unique victims identified as sex trafficking victims during missing episodes, and one unique victim identified as labor trafficking victim during missing episode. 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, E. (2018), Statistically Speaking: The Overrepresentation of Foster Youth in Sex Trafficking.

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, D.A. (2019). *Child Labor Trafficking within the U.S.*

[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.

Care Coordination Team (CCT):

The Office of the Governor’s Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSTT) and local communities are establishing CCTs to implement the Texas Model for Care Coordination, which creates a commercially sexually exploited youth (CSEY) care continuum. The Texas Model for Care Coordination Model is a consensus-driven, collaborative approach to identifying and recovering youth who have been trafficked and facilitating tailored, accessible, trauma-informed and holistic resources through a network of providers. The goal is that every identified child survivor of sex trafficking and exploitation has access to non-punitive, responsive, high-quality, community-based services that meet their unique short-term and long-term needs. CCTs may receive referrals from both non-investigatory entities, such as CCT partners, and from investigatory partners, such as law enforcement and DFPS. Community members seeking resources for a young person can utilize CCT partners to make a referral to care coordination. CCTs are overseen by care coordinators who could be CSEY Advocate Agencies, CACs or other nonprofits. Any agency can be a care coordinator if they meet requirements set forth by the Texas Model for Care Coordination.

Members of the CCT may include Children’s Advocacy Centers, community stakeholders, Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), CSEY Advocate Agencies, Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), medical providers, service providers, Juvenile Probation Department, law enforcement, county and district attorneys, legal service providers, prosecutors and sexual assault programs. CCTs build trust, transparency and solutions with team members to mitigate duplication of work, ensuring that local and statewide partners are bridges instead of barriers to services for children, youth and families. CASA volunteers and staff are essential in care coordination meetings, as they work alongside care coordination partners and CSEY Advocates. Many decisions are made in CCT meetings, and it is imperative that the CASA volunteer be present whenever possible. To better understand Care Coordination, read the [Texas Model for Care Coordination Overview](#), [Endorsement Process](#) and [Care Coordinator Responsibilities](#).

A local CCT often has existing relationships. Introduction into the local CCT is usually done through the CSTT Regional Advisor. Discuss your local program’s desire to engage with CCTs, explain CASA ACT and the extensive training CASA volunteers receive. CASA staff will reiterate that CASA volunteers will participate on a case-by-case or topic-specific basis. As described above, CASA staff and volunteers are never involved in criminal cases of the youth they serve.

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Care Coordination Team (CCT) Continued:

Some areas of Texas do not have CCTs established. If there is no CCT in your area, the human trafficking protocols revert to the Children's Advocacy Center Multi-Disciplinary Team process established within the local CAC (see definition below). In these cases, CASA volunteers are even more vital. Without a CCT, the CASA volunteer can fill the gap and advocate for the youth's best interest. CASA staff and volunteers can discuss the process in their area with CSTT Regional Advisors.

Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSTT):

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 Multi-Disciplinary Team (CAC MDT):

Created through statute in accordance with Texas Family Code 264.403 Local Children's Advocacy Center Multi-Disciplinary Teams (CAC MDTs) support and coordinate the efforts 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 CAC MDT in many communities. In the neutral setting of the CAC, CAC MDT members can collaborate on strategies that will aid investigators and prosecutors without causing further harm to the child. The CAC MDT increases the likelihood of a successful outcome in court and long-term healing for the youth. CAC MDTs 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; and coordinate medical and mental health services.

CAC MDTs receive referrals from an investigative partner, either law enforcement or DFPS. A CAC MDT cannot respond to situations outside of these parameters. Therefore, CCTs and CAC MDTs serve the same population, but in different capacities. While both CCTs and CAC MDTs provide therapeutic services, only CAC MDTs are involved in the criminal investigation process. CAC MDTs play a vital role in CCTs. They focus on situations with an active investigation to secure safety, justice and healing for youth who have been trafficked.

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. Local law enforcement and DFPS Statewide Intake should be called. CASA programs should not report trafficking suspicions to the DFPS Statewide Intake online option. A phone call is required to report suspicions of trafficking. More details can be found in the [CSE-IT Resource Guide](#).

Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth (CSEY):

While not best practice to refer to children or youth as an acronym, sometimes CSEY is used to refer 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 AAs are nonprofits that employ staff (known as advocates) to provide individualized 24/7 crisis response and ongoing trust-based relational support to the child, youth and young adult survivors until the age of 21. CSEY AAs 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 AAs 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, E.W., et al. (2013). *Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States*.

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.

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



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](#) (scroll to the bottom of the page to access "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 age ten and up 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 advocates 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, M. E., et al. (2018). *Trafficking Prevalence and Child Welfare Risk Factors Among Homeless Youth*.

[7] Pereda, N. et al. (2022). *Giving a Voice to Adolescents in Residential Care*.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

EXPLORATION

Research local human trafficking task forces, coalitions, Children Advocacy Center multi-disciplinary teams and care coordination teams to understand their roles and objectives in the CASA program's geographic area. Research the Commercially Sexually Exploited-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 advocacy 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 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 or Friends of the Court, 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, religious leaders, government officials, counselors and others. CASA volunteers role is to be a member and an active voice on this team. This is where they can share their trainings and gain insight into community resources. It is vital for the CASA volunteer 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 resources 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 CAC MDTs, being mindful that CASA volunteers are never involved in the criminal case associated with the youth they serve. Their role in the CAC 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. Local programs can engage with CAC 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 their 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 your 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 Children Advocacy Center 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 your 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.

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 is 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 casaaacts@texascasa.org for more information.



CASA ACT ESSENTIAL APPROACH

An overall Anti-Child 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] In this text, 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.

[8] Baylor University (n.d.). *How to Talk about Human Trafficking with Children and Adolescents*.

CASA ACT SPECIALIZED APPROACH

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

CASA ACT volunteers are CASA volunteers who specialize in anti-human trafficking advocacy work.

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 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 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 specialized training for CASA volunteers to become "CASA ACT volunteers" for youth who are trafficked.

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 (CCTs) often have existing relationships. Introduction into the local CCT is done through CSTT Regional Advisors. If a CCT is not in your area, the protocols revert to your local Children's Advocacy Center Multi-Disciplinary Team (CAC MDT). Discuss your local program's desire to engage with CCTs and CAC MDTs, explain CASA ACTs and the extensive training CASA volunteers receive. 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 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 and more information 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

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, resource 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 CAC 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.

[9] Lederer, L. J. and Wetzel, C.A. (2014). *The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities*.

[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 Resource Guide](#), 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.

The CSE-IT Resource Guide details specific protocols for completing screenings. 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. If a youth receives a possible concern, it is advisable to actively monitor them to fully assess their needs and initiate preventative actions to ensure that exploitation does not occur. The goal is to increase protective capacities through trusted, nurturing and safe adult relationships. Preventative actions can include completing Sentinels, referrals to mentoring programs or referrals to prevention programs provided by CSEY AAs. CASA programs can also contact their CSTT Regional Advisor to identify ways to expand capacity within their local communities to serve youth with a possible concern score. If a youth receives a score of clear concern, contact their caseworker, report to DFPS Statewide Intake at 800-252-5400 and report to local law enforcement.

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 volunteer. 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/CAC MDT. 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 for introductions to CAC 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/CAC MDT 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/CAC MDT.

(Continued on next page)

STEP THREE: ADVOCATE WITH AND FOR YOUTH

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 CAC 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 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 with questions and for guidance.





CONTACT US



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