

TIFFANY LEAL: Looking to volunteer? Consider CASA

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By Tiffany Leal Guest columnist

Every two weeks at the Justice of the Peace No. 33 courtroom in Comal County, the Child Protection Court docket is held. The Child Protection court handles Department of Family and Protective Services cases, commonly referred to as Child Protection Services cases.

It is in this courtroom that, unfortunately, children often experience some of the worst moments of their lives — and, occasionally, the best day of their lives.

Obviously, it's a hard thing for children to understand why they cannot return to their parents' home. It's a terrible realization at times for children knowing that their parent has put drugs or remaining with an abuser ahead of the children's needs.

In contrast, it's an uplifting moment to see these children reunited with a parent who turned his or her life around, and it's inspirational to see the joy on a child's face as he or she is adopted into his or her forever home by loving adoptive parents.

CASA of Central Texas provides volunteer advocates to help children through the court system and these pivotal moments in these children's lives. CASA stands for court-appointed special advocate. The purpose of CASA is to provide a voice for abused and neglected children in the court system by recruiting, training, and supporting community volunteers to be guardian ad litem in Child Protective Services cases.

The vision is that every child has the right to a safe, nurturing, permanent home.

Through my position at the District Attorney's office, I have seen first-hand the wonderful works of CASA volunteers. The bond that forms between a child and his or her CASA is truly special and unique. CASA volunteers not only advocate for the best interests of the child in court, they also visit the child at home or in placement, monitor how the child is doing in school, observe visitations between the child and parents, and keep in regular contact with the child about how he or she is coping with life.

The relationship they build gives a different perspective for the judge to consider in each case, regarding what is in that child's best interests.

In 2013, CASA of Central Texas provided trained advocates for 55 percent of the children statewide placed in foster care. In Comal and Hays counties, however, that number is 72 percent of children in foster care. In order to reach and impact this many children's lives, it requires a tremendous amount of community support through volunteerism and financial contributions.

Last year alone, CASA of Central Texas trained 220 volunteers who were assigned to cases as advocates. CASA is also frequently hosting community events to raise funds to support the non-profit organization.

On April 4, Under the Big Top — CASA Carnival for a Cause will be held at the Texas Old Town - Tejas Hall in Kyle. This fund-raiser is a carnival-themed evening, including dinner, silent and live auctions, carnival acts and live music. During the event, CASA of Central Texas will honor Judge Todd Blomerth, 421st Judicial District, and Judge Jack Robison, 207th Judicial District.

For information on this event or how to get more involved with CASA of Central Texas, contact the CASA office at (830) 626-2272 or email info@casacentex.org.

If you have a charity, civic organization or individual you would like me to spotlight, please contact me at tiffanyleal@gmail.com.

Guest columnist Tiffany Leal is a Comal County prosecutor who writes

occasional columns that spotlight the efforts of local non-profit agencies.

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