

Texas Rural Communities Grant Request  
Program Overview, 2015

CASA for Kids of East Texas recruiting and training program is unique and successful. Our program is unique because we are unique, and no one does what we do. We recruit by attending community functions such as Rotary and/or Kiwanis Club. We participate in other organizations events such as fun runs, activities in the park, or any other activity in our community. We speak at organizations such as churches and schools. This exposure in the community helps us to make our name known, and when people know about us, they want to join us. Recruitment is the beginning and a volunteer is the result.

We train our new volunteers with a classroom curriculum designed by Texas CASA, our parent organization in the state. Although this curriculum comes to us, we are responsible for its reproduction and the explanation thereof. Our online curriculum was designed by a staff member and based on information provided by Texas CASA. This training helps to ensure that our volunteers are knowledgeable about children of neglect and abuse. Our volunteers recognize abuse, work to meet the basic needs of our foster children and seek permanency for them. This all happens because they are well trained.

CASA for Kids of East Texas is proud of its reputation for excellence and for the high standards to which we adhere. We know the welfare of our children depend on this excellence. CASA for Kids requests \$2,575 to help defray the cost of recruiting and training in Van Zandt and Wood Counties.

## Texas Rural Communities Grant Request

### Section I: Contact Information

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- b. CASA for Kids of East Texas, Inc.  
3728 Southpark Drive, Tyler, Texas 75703

### Section II: Organizational Description

CASA for Kids of East Texas was founded in 1990, we mark 25 years this year. We are a professional staff of 10, have 18 board members and 169 volunteers. We are a team of people with determination and unwavering commitment to abused and neglected children. CASA for Kids of East Texas is a non-profit organization that recruits, educates and supervises community volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children in Smith, Wood and Van Zandt counties. When a child is removed from their home by Child Protective Services, that child becomes a ward of the court, and a trained CASA volunteer then becomes the child's Guardian Ad Litem. We serve children who may be of any ethnic group by speaking in court for the best interest of the child.

CASA for Kids maintains the highest standards of excellence as we seek permanency for children in the foster care system. Our vision is to assign an advocate for every child in the foster care system. Our mission is to educate the community regarding its responsibility to abused and neglected children by recruiting, training and monitoring court appointed volunteers to serve as independent voices in the children's best interest and to advocate for these children through the state foster care system and the District Court of the State of Texas.

CASA was created to help ensure that the abuse these youngest victims have suffered does not continue at the hands of the child welfare system. Our advocates give these children the ability to live, dream and care about their futures. In the words of a former foster youth, *Being in foster care is living in a constant state of flux. Homes, schools, families... everything is always changing, often suddenly and without warning. The only constant was my CASA volunteer. Without her I would have been lost in the system.* In the past fiscal year, CASA volunteers helped 132 children find permanent placement.

### Section III: Program Description

- a. Our program will meet the need for more volunteers to serve the children in foster care in Van Zandt and Wood counties specifically. This need is identified by the numbers published by the Dept. of Family Protective Services. For the year ending in Sept. 2015, Van Zandt County had a total of 128 children in foster care. CASA for Kids was able to

serve 94 of those children. Wood County had a total of 108 children in foster care, and we were able to serve 68 of those children. We have a great need for more volunteers to speak for children and to seek permanency for those children.

- b. We are asking you to fund part of a program that will allow us to recruit and train more volunteers. Our primary goal is to have 15 more volunteers who will be able to advocate for more children in court. Recruiting is where this process begins, and that requires our presence in the community. We attend community functions where we talk with people and distribute materials that explain who we are and what we do. Reaching more people in the community equates to more volunteers because once people know about CASA, they immediately want to help. The ability to be a volunteer advocate is accomplished by volunteer training. Our volunteers receive 32 hours of training that consists of classroom training, online training and court observation. Our materials are of the highest standards and our trainers are masterful. We will recognize success when we have 15 new volunteers serving up to 30 new children who are benefitting from the advocate relationship. One foster child said it so well when he said, *Everyone knows you are always attached to your advocates, they are the ones you trust more than anyone else. Everyone knows that.* Our children learn to trust again because they have an advocate, and statements like these made by CASA children help prove success.
- c. The beneficiaries of this program are the foster care children who may be of any ethnic group and fall into any income group. We will be able to serve up to 30 new children with 15 extra volunteers. Our children and community benefit because foster children with an advocate are more likely to become functional adults, less likely to drop out of school and less likely to be runaways. Because the State of Texas mandates that children in foster care receive a Guardian Ad Litem, the community at large benefits from the huge tax burden that we remove. This allows us to know the quantitative impact that we have on the community, but qualitatively, the community benefits when our children become functional adults because they were cared for in a time of need.
- d. Our program is unique because no one else does what CASA does. We are the only group who speaks to the child's best interest in court. Texas mandates that each foster care child have a Guardian Ad Litem, and this burden is passed on to the taxpayers of our state unless a CASA advocate steps into that position. We are unique in the level of training we offer that ensures the advocate is well aware of how to meet the basic needs of the foster child, and how the court system works. We are a model to other communities as we become the voice for our youngest victims. We communicate through FaceBook, other social media, newspapers as well as TV news and word of mouth.

- e. Profit/Loss Statement is attached. A budget for the program is attached. If TRC were unable to fund the total amount, a smaller amount would be accepted.
  
- f. The expected outcome for this program is that we would recruit and train 15 more volunteers. The direct answer is that we will measure success by the extra volunteers, but success is so much more when you examine the impact on a child, and when you consider the impact to the community. Relationships built, permanency achieved, a child learning to live, trust, dream and hope is what CASA volunteers are all about. We are about the child and our volunteers are the heartbeat of our organization.
  
- g. The timeline for this program is ongoing through August 2016 and all funds would be spent by that time.

Texas Rural Communities Grant Request Budget  
For  
CASA for Kids of East Texas, Inc.  
November 2015

Volunteer Recruitment and Education Budget:

15 New Volunteers in Van Zandt and Wood Counties

Recruiting Materials:	\$ 750
Training Materials and Related Expenditures:	\$1,000
Background Checks:	\$ 600
Online Training Fees:	\$ 225
Total Budget:	\$ 2,575