

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Trinity Valley, Inc.

Program Summary

CASA of Trinity Valley provides a trained volunteer advocate for every child who has been removed from their home due to abuse or neglect across Anderson, Cherokee and Henderson Counties. CASA volunteers advocate for the best interests in the Child Protective Services court system, ensuring that their needs are met and they reach a safe, forever and loving home. It is CASA's priority to help the child be reunited with his or her parents when it is in their best interests. If not possible, then the volunteer will explore other possibilities including placement in a permanent home with either relatives or an adoptive family.

CASA of Trinity Valley believes every child who has been abused / neglected deserves to have a dedicated advocate speaking up for his or her best interests in court. To accomplish this, CASA of Trinity Valley educates and empowers every-day people from their community who ensure each child's needs remain a priority in an over-burdened child welfare system. When the state steps in to protect a child's safety because the responsible adults for him / her have not, our judges appoint CASA of Trinity Valley to assign a volunteer who will make an independent and fact based recommendation to help the judge decide what is in the child's best interest.

CASA of Trinity Valley has as our goals to increase community awareness and recruit additional volunteers. The communities we serve need to understand that child abuse / neglect does exist and that our organization is here to help these vulnerable children. CASA volunteers come from a broad cross section of our community and share a commitment to improve children's lives, a willingness to learn and an open mind toward life experiences different from their own.

Unfortunately we are experiencing an explosion in the number of cases each year, i.e., the number of children served in 2013 was 510, in 2014 the number increased to 633. **That is a 24 % increase in one year.** This year we are again experiencing the same dramatic increasing trend. Therefore, we are asking your help because of this extraordinary situation.

We are requesting funding to enhance our already existing efforts across the three counties we serve. We need to increase community awareness of our CASA organization and the issues children are facing. This will be accomplished through presentations, attending community events, etc. Also we are in desperate need of additional volunteers. They are ordinary citizens that do an extraordinary task ... speaking up for children who have been abused or neglected in court.

Grant Request: \$6,850 dollars to: a) raise community awareness, b) recruit and train 30 to 35 volunteers next year and c) in addition, recruit and train 10 volunteers to diversify the racial and ethnic mix of CASA child advocates.

Given what is at stake I'm compelled to respectfully ask that you make our children a priority in your decision. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Ms. LeeAnn Millender, Executive Director (903-675-7070)

Grant Application

Section 1: Contact Information

- a) Ms. LeeAnn Millender, Executive Director, CASA of Trinity Valley,
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- b) CASA of Trinity Valley, Inc.

Section II: Organization Description

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Trinity Valley, Inc. established its non-profit status in December 1994. Our office is located in Athens, Texas. A volunteer Board of Directors supervises and sets the direction for CASA of Trinity Valley. Originally CASA of Trinity Valley served only Henderson County. In 2004 the organization expanded to include Anderson and Cherokee Counties. Program staff includes the executive director, a program director, 2 full time and 4 part time advocacy supervisors, and a recruiter / trainer.

Our mission is to provide highly trained and supported community volunteers for every abused / neglected child that enters our court system. The volunteer speaks up for the right of each child to have a safe, forever and loving home. We also educate the community on child abuse / neglect, emphasizing the importance of nurturing, healthy families.

During 2013, CASA of Trinity Valley provided services for 510 children across the three counties we serve. In 2014 the number of children served increased to 633. That is a 24% increase in one year. During 2015 we are experiencing the same dramatic increasing trend. The vast majority of children removed from their homes was the direct result of parent's involvement with drug abuse. There also are children who suffer sexual / physical / emotional abuse and neglect. The primary goal for children removed from their home is family reunification. The parents are offered services to work over a one year time frame to help turn their lives around. The services include random drug testing, parenting classes, mental health, therapy, etc. In most cases if the parents complete the service plan the court system will allow the children to be returned. If this happens, CPS and CASA volunteers make un-announced visits to the home to ensure parents and children are becoming a family again. Unfortunately, in many cases the parents are forced to relinquish their parental right or the rights are terminated. The children are then placed up for adoption. CASA volunteers continue to visit the children for the next six months until the adoption is consummated in court.

Accomplishments:

- a) We are only 1 of 6 CASAs out of 72 offices across the state that provides an advocate for every child removed from their home;

- b) We are 7th in the state in the number of children served, behind major metropolitan areas;

- c) Our volunteers save the state money by finding safe, forever homes as soon as possible. Children with an assigned CASA volunteer spend less time in foster care and are less likely to be moved from home to home and are more likely to do better in school;
- d) The volunteer is in most cases the only consistent face the child will see from beginning to the end.

Section III: Program Description

CASA of Trinity Valley's intent is to apply for a recognition grant. Through this grant we will continue to build our Child Advocacy program in multiple ways. The Child Advocacy program is the heart of our organization as described above. Through this grant, our goals are to increase community awareness and to recruit community members from each rural county to become CASA volunteers who will advocate for the best interests of the children. The following goals have been established with potential funding through the Texas Rural Communities Grant.

Objective #1: Raise community awareness of the children issues involved. It is imperative that the citizens become educated about CASA's role and the impact CASA volunteers have on the lives of children who are in the foster care system.

Plan: We will identify businesses, agencies, organizations, churches, and service groups throughout the three counties we serve. Then offer to present the CASA story, with overhead slides and handouts to raise awareness.

Goal 1: Increase Community Awareness

- Track the number of presentations given, including audience size and location
- Track the number of community events CASA participates in by county, audience size and location.

Timeframe: January - December 2016

Objective #2: We need to recruit 30 – 35 additional volunteers who will passionately advocate for their assigned children. We will seek adults who are interested in making a difference in the lives of children.

Plan: Provide orientation / information sessions in each of the three counties we serve;
Provide volunteer training in each county, tracking the class size and location;
Track the number of participants sworn in as CASA volunteers advocate;
Track the number of new volunteers taking one or more cases.

Goal 2: Recruit 30 – 35 additional volunteers

- Track the number of presentations given, including audience size and location
- Track the number of community events CASA participates in by county, audience size and location.

Timeframe: January - December 2016

Objective #3: Diversify the racial and ethnic mix of CASA volunteers to include people representative across the broad spectrum of the communities we serve.

Plan: Seek out minority churches, clubs and organization in each of the three counties we serve; Provide personal presentations on the crucial need for CASA volunteers who have the same ethnic background.as the children we serve.

Goal 3: Recruit 10 – 15 additional minority volunteers

- Track the number of presentations given, include audience size and location
- Track the number of community events CASA participates in by county, audience size and location.

Track the number of participants sworn in as CASA volunteers advocate;

Track the number of new volunteers taking one or more cases.

Timeframe: January - December 2016

Program Budget:

Travel expense	\$2,800.00
Develop slide and handout presentation	\$1,600.00
Reproduce handout materials in color	\$1,500.00
Refreshments (water / fruit / cookie plate)...	\$500.00
Contingency	\$450.00
Total	\$6,850.00 (Yes, we will accept less if necessary)

CASA is a mechanism for communities to care for their children with trained, supervised citizen volunteer advocates. CASA of Trinity Valley runs solely on our committed volunteers. It is our intention to raise community awareness and increase our recruitment of volunteers. It is imperative that each child who is removed from their home due to abuse / neglect has a trained volunteer to represent their best interests in court. We will provide orientation and information sessions in each of the three counties we serve. During these sessions citizens will be provided with an overview of the role of a CASA and can ask questions. After completing our 30 hour training program the volunteer will be sworn in by a county judge. CASA advocates will be able to accept a case. We then continue to track all the information listed above.