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COMBATING CHILD ABUSE

CASA provides voices for society's youngest victims

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Publisher of The Texas Catholic

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Special to The Texas Catholic

On any given day in Dallas County alone, nearly 2,000 children live in foster care. They've been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect, and now they wait for courts to decide when, or if, it will be safe to go home.

Judges need as much information as possible to make crucial decisions about children's lives, but with overwhelming caseloads among attorneys and Child Protective Services staff, getting that information can be difficult.

For many children, there is a CASA or Court Appointed Special Advocate. Dallas CASA is a non-profit organization of volunteers appointed by judges to gather facts

HOW TO HELP

To learn more about Dallas CASA, visit dallascasa.org or call 214-827-8961. For information on volunteering for CASA across Texas, visit becomeacasa.org.

and make recommendations on behalf of abused children who come under the protective care of the courts. Volunteers work with case-workers, attorneys, foster parents and others to advocate for the best interests of these child victims, to help them access crucial services necessary for them to heal and to help them find safe and permanent homes where they can thrive.

A CASA volunteer can make an immediate and critical impact on the life of an abused child. A volunteer may be the one constant during a

frightening and uncertain time.

One such child was 18-month-old Danny, who came into foster care with injuries so severe he was not expected to live. Even after emerging from a coma, Danny had special needs that would cause him to require skilled care for years.

Danny's CASA volunteer, Jim, learned that Danny had experienced his abuse while with a babysitter and that Danny's mother was willing to make any changes needed to earn the trust of others and regain custody of her son. Jim realized that the incident had served as a wakeup call for the mother. He spent time getting to know her and giving the court information about her progress. Thanks in part to Jim's recommendations, Danny returned home and now lives safely with his mother.

Although we lead different faith communities, we have much in common when it comes to caring

for those who need a voice. In recognition of Dallas CASA's 30th anniversary, we invite other faith communities to join us in standing up for abused children like Danny.

Children have a fundamental right to be safe and to be loved. We all have a moral imperative to make that a reality for all children, especially our most vulnerable. We need servants from all faiths to help keep abused children safe from further harm.

You can help by becoming a CASA volunteer. You do not need to be an attorney or a social worker—only a caring individual willing to invest the time needed to give children the best chance for the decent childhood that they all deserve.

For three decades, dedicated volunteers have sought justice for these children. More volunteers are needed to continue that tradition of service. Dallas CASA is able to serve only one-third of the children

in protective care who need a CASA voice in court.

Faith-based organizations serve as a voice of conscience in the Dallas community. For all of us, social justice is a core value, and Dallas CASA has enlightened us to a need that we can work together to address.

We must work toward a common goal: to help provide a CASA volunteer for every child who comes into foster care so that they may be kept safe from further harm and have the best chance at the decent childhood they deserve.

Please consider becoming involved in this greatly needed effort to bring hope to hurt children.



The Most Rev. Kevin J. Farrell is the seventh bishop of the Diocese of Dallas. His blog can be found at texascatholic.com, cathdal.org and bishopfarrell.blogspot.com.