

*Dallas CASA's Cherish the Children luncheon featured
Ashley Rhodes-Courter, author of "Three Little Words"*

DALLAS, MAY 20, 2015 – Speaking to a record-breaking crowd of more than 370 at Dallas CASA's Cherish the Children luncheon, Ashley Rhodes-Courter credited her own CASA volunteer advocate with saving her life after a decade languishing in foster care. Rhodes-Courter, the author of *The New York Times* best-selling "Three Little Words" and the upcoming "Three More Words," spoke of her harrowing childhood, her journey through the foster system and, ultimately, the difference one person made in her life.

The luncheon, held May 7 at the Dallas Country Club, raised more than \$175,000 for Dallas CASA, a non-profit organization that trains and supervises volunteer advocates to serve as voices for abused and neglected children in court. Advocates work for the best interest of each child, researching and making recommendations to judges about where a child can safely and permanently live.

Rhodes-Courter entered the foster care system at age three after her single teen mother was arrested. For the next nine years, she was moved from foster home to foster home, with only a small bag of possessions to call her own. After a CASA advocate discovered her living with 15 other children in a two-bedroom mobile home, she was removed from that home at age 12. In a time of constant upheaval, Rhodes-Courter's CASA volunteer worked tirelessly on her behalf.

"For me, as a kid, she was this lady who just kept showing up," Rhodes-Courter said. "She made sure I had my hair cut, got my teeth cleaned, had clothes for school, even a cardboard for my science project. She followed me through everything. She was the one who made things happen."

The CASA volunteer helped find a loving, adoptive family and Rhodes-Courter was adopted at age 12. Now a college graduate living in Florida with her husband and three young boys, Rhodes-Courter continues her advocacy for children in the United States and abroad. She encouraged luncheon attendees to speak up and become the voices for voiceless children.

"These kids end up in protective care through no fault of their own. They are desperate to be heard and listened to," Rhodes-Courter said. "And they need one person to speak just for them."

In Dallas County alone, nearly five children enter protective custody each day after being removed from their home due to abuse or neglect. Only about half of these children have a CASA volunteer to speak for them, but funds raised at the luncheon will help Dallas CASA recruit and train more advocates. By 2019, Dallas CASA plans to have an advocate for every child in Dallas County.

“In ways a child may never know, we are helping,” said Kathleen LaValle, Dallas CASA executive director and president. “Each child matters, and each child deserves a powerful voice to speak for them.”

The following individuals, retailers and manufacturers designed and donated delightful children’s chairs and furniture which were auctioned at the luncheon: Matthew Benys, COUTURE – Nicolas Villalba, Creative Room Arrangements, Kay Dalton, Desilynn Faith, Fossil – Casey Green, Chelsea Green, Liz Conrad Graphic Design, Blake McElroy, MURALICIOUS, Nancy Newbern of Rare Assets, Inc., Phelan’s – Amy Bailey, Pigment School of the Arts – Tori Pendergrass and Susie Brennan Interiors.

About Dallas CASA:

Established in 1980, Dallas CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is a nonprofit organization of community volunteers who serve as voices for abused and neglected children in court. CASA volunteers are trained and supervised to advocate for the best interests of children in protective care and to make recommendations that help judges decide what is best for each child. For many children, a CASA volunteer is the one constant during a frightening, uncertain time. A CASA volunteer can have an immediate and critical impact on the life of a child. In 2014, more than 770 volunteers served nearly 2,300 abused and neglected Dallas County children. However nearly half of abused children in Dallas County are still waiting for CASA volunteers to help them find safe, loving homes.

To learn more about advocating for abused children, call 214-827-8961 or visit dallascasa.org.