

PRESS RELEASE

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Abused Children Can't Wait

Dallas CASA hires Kersten Rettig as Development Director as it looks to close its campaign goal to give every abused child in Dallas foster care a CASA volunteer by 2019

DALLAS, March 20, 2015 – Dallas CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) announces the hiring of **Kersten Rettig** as its new **Director of Development**. Ms. Rettig most recently served as the Chief Marketing Officer for Highland Park Village where she led all marketing initiatives for the historic shopping center, including cultivation of partnerships with local philanthropies for collaborative marketing programs. Previously, Ms. Rettig was Director of Corporate Public Relations for Rosewood Hotels & Resorts. “The opportunity to lead Dallas CASA’s development group is a perfect match with where my heart leads me,” says Ms. Rettig. “Anyone who learns about the impact Dallas CASA volunteer advocates have on the lives of abused children will understand why I am so proud to be joining this impressive organization at such a pivotal time in its 35-year history.”

Ms. Rettig’s hiring comes as Dallas CASA looks forward to concluding its **Abused Children Can’t Wait – The Campaign for Dallas CASA**. In 2013, Dallas CASA announced its \$37 million campaign to ensure that all abused and neglected children living in protective care in Dallas have CASA volunteer advocates by the year 2019. These advocates are community volunteers who are trained and supervised by Dallas CASA and appointed by our local courts to gather information that helps judges decide the best outcomes for children in protective care.

Campaign Chair Jim Lozier, former CEO of the Archon Group of Goldman Sachs and a Dallas CASA board member, along with Vice-Chair Christie Carter, past president of the Junior League of Dallas, the 2016 Crystal Charity Ball Chairman, and a Dallas CASA board member, have led the fundraising effort.

Mr. Lozier recently announced that to date **the campaign has raised \$ 34.8 million** with contributions and pledges from Dallas-area foundations, businesses and individuals, including the Dallas CASA Board of Directors. Dallas CASA is seeking **support from the Dallas community to raise the remaining \$ 2.2 million** to complete the campaign so that our community’s most vulnerable children are safe and protected from further harm.

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In 2014, the Texas Department of Family Services (DFPS) had legal custody of 4,382 Dallas County children who were removed from their homes due to confirmed allegations of abuse and neglect – a dramatic 8 percent increase compared to 2013. **Almost half of these abused and neglected children in protective care did not have CASA volunteers.** To address this overwhelming need and growth of children living in care, Dallas CASA has to double the number of volunteer advocates to accomplish its goal of annually serving each of these children by 2019.

It costs \$2,129 per year to provide a CASA volunteer to help an abused child in protective care. To serve all these children means that Dallas CASA needs increased levels of support to recruit and train the additional volunteer advocates and to hire additional program staff to supervise them. **With the community's support** of the *Abused Children Can't Wait* campaign, **all victims of child abuse will have strong voices advocating for them as they navigate through the overburdened child welfare system.** This is not a one-time goal, but instead requires growth of our donor base and our future annual revenue sources in order to sustain this significant expansion of program capacity.

"Children who come into foster care deserve to have dedicated advocates who speak only for them with no agenda other than the children's best interests," Ms. Carter said. "Our vision is to give each of these children the chance to heal from their abuse and a reason to believe in their own potential to be successful."

Dallas CASA has a strong and steady history demonstrating its ability to grow the number of children it serves. Over the last 10 years, Dallas CASA has increased the total number of children served annually by 137 percent. During 2014, Dallas CASA served 2,264 children, representing a 29 percent increase over the number of children served when the campaign first launched. The program also recruited and trained a record 288 new volunteer advocates during the year, a 35 percent growth over the prior year, increasing its number of active CASA volunteer advocates to 907.

"Amidst an overwhelmed child welfare system, a CASA volunteer can make all the difference in the life of an abused or neglected child. CASA volunteers focus on the needs of the children, working directly with them, getting to know their families and others involved in the case so they can make the best recommendations to the courts," said Kathleen LaValle, Dallas CASA Executive Director and President. "The children benefit emotionally from the steady support of caring, consistent volunteers devoted only to them throughout a very difficult and frightening time. Few volunteer roles have such a critical and immediate impact on the life of a child as that of a CASA volunteer."

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A CASA volunteer also makes recommendations to the court about how best to meet the child's immediate educational, emotional and medical needs, so that a child who has been exposed to trauma is supported and can begin to heal. When a child cannot safely be returned home, the CASA volunteer researches and makes recommendations as to alternatives, such as adoption by a relative or non-relative, or permanent conservatorship with a relative.

"In my mind, the greatest service of a CASA volunteer is to be the voice and the constant presence in a child's life," Lozier said. "Through this consistency and compassion, a child's anger and fear can recede and they can begin to dream again. Every abused and neglected child who comes into care scared will be provided a voice, a constant presence and the opportunity for their dreams to become plans and for their plans to become reality."

All children have the right to be safe. Texas ranks low among states in a variety of child welfare related categories. Achievement of Dallas CASA's goal to become the largest urban non-profit CASA program in the United States to serve all abused and neglected children is an accomplishment Dallas CASA wants to reach and wants to celebrate alongside the Dallas community.

About Dallas CASA

Established in 1980, Dallas CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is a nonprofit organization of community volunteers who advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children living under the protective care of the courts so they will have safe, permanent homes where they can thrive. CASA volunteers are trained and supervised to gather information and make recommendations that help judges decide the best outcome for each child. In 2014, 771 volunteers served 2,264 abused and neglected Dallas County children. Sadly, almost half of abused children living in protective care in Dallas County are 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.