

SUMMER
2023



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

DENTON COUNTY

The mission of CASA of Denton County, Inc. is to advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse and neglect. Our trained and supported community volunteers build a strong, consistent relationship with each child and their family, promote community resources, and make informed recommendations to the court.

PERSEVERANCE PAYS OFF FOR CASA TEENS

it takes a special commitment to support a teenager during their time in substitute care

Gavin and Ishai are two young people who have beaten many odds with the help of their volunteer advocates. CASA of Denton County took time out in June to celebrate these two recent high school graduates.

While most of our cases involve those between birth and 5 years old, our trained volunteer advocates recognize that it takes a special commitment to support a teenager during their time in substitute care.

Teens affected by abuse and neglect may face extra challenges, and only half of teens in foster care will graduate from high school, while educational problems may be exacerbated by a lack of stability in these critical years (National Foster Youth Institute).

Ishai had Teri, however, and Gavin had John, both trained and dedicated to keep the teens moving forward and working with the other professionals to make sure the young peoples' needs were met. Against the odds, Gavin and Ishai even completed college applications, were accepted, and are preparing for their next adventure.

"Ishai is doing great!" Teri told us in late July. "She is working this summer at a movie theatre and taking driving lessons. She has been very proactive getting everything needed for starting college this fall."

Teri said Ishai is a quiet young lady when you first meet her. "Until she gets to know you, then she will tell you everything," Teri said. "She has a beautiful soul!"

Likewise, John said Gavin "is a full-of-life 19-year-old with a big, outgoing personality" who will start classes at a trade school very soon. John said Gavin and his peers at the placement where he lives have a lot of laughs, and Gavin's nickname is "the president."

Working through the Care4Kids fund, CASA of Denton County was able to provide both Gavin and Ishai the means to purchase a computer and related equipment for their studies. This fund has for years supported the specific needs of children we serve, including such diverse items of need as clothes, beds, soccer uniforms, and museum trips. (For more on the Care4Kids fund, see page 5)



Gavin is shown with Denton Mayor Gerard Hudspeth, who came to wish him well at his graduation party.



State Rep. Kronda Thimesch, left, is shown with Ishai and Advocate Teri Weber at the graduation party. County Judge Andy Eads told both graduates their community is behind them as they work to get an education.

DEAR CASA OF DENTON COUNTY SUPPORTER,

The recent news that Denton County's population had topped 1 million quickly brought a sigh of resignation as I read the Denton County Judge's weekly newsletter. But just as Judge Andy Eads views our collective future with optimism, I was able to think beyond the fact that our case numbers would likely continue to increase, and consider the upside of this news. Now there were more people in Denton County to help us in our fight to ensure every child who needs a CASA can have a caring, trained adult by their side.

Surely population growth would mean more potential CASA volunteers. Now all we have to do is reach them.

Eighty-two people move into Denton County, Texas every day, and our community remains one of the fastest growing in the United States. We face significant challenges along with that growth, including lack of an adequate social safety net. But across this great county I believe there are dozens more men and women who could take the challenge of speaking up for a child.

At CASA of Denton County, for more than 30 years we have advocated to keep children safe, while staying connected to their families, their culture, and their community. Our trained volunteers get to know the child and their family, while gathering critical information from professionals, including teachers, therapists, medical staff, and many

others. In 2022, our 226 volunteers served 589 children, logging more than 20,000 hours of advocacy work, and driving more than 185,000 miles.

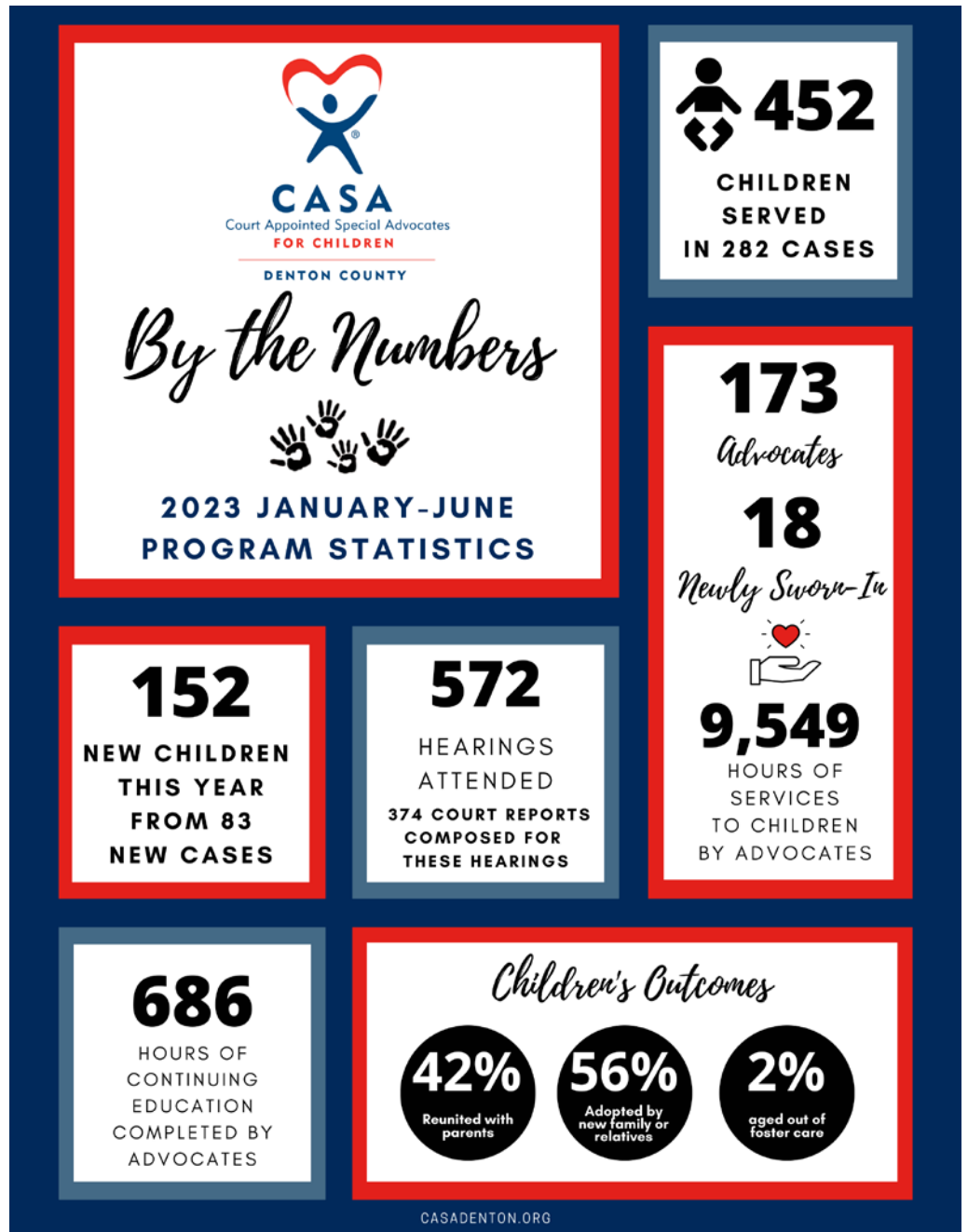
The informed recommendations of our volunteers and staff make a positive impact on well-being and outcomes. In 2022, 94% of CASA's final recommendations to the court were accepted by judges and juries, 88% of the children whose cases were closed were in safe environments, and less than 1% of children served, re-entered the child welfare system within six months of the closure of their case. But as I write this, more than 50 children have no CASA volunteer assigned to them – a need that could easily be met if more people just heard the call.

I often say that while not everyone can be a CASA, everyone knows someone who can find the time, patience, and grit to work in this rewarding and challenging arena. Please share our need with someone you know, and help us reach the folks for whom this work is a calling. If you can't serve, or can't serve right now, please make a donation to help us find those who can.



Debbie Jensen
Executive Director

Denton County children are counting on you.



452
CHILDREN SERVED IN 282 CASES

173
Advocates
18
Newly Sworn-In

9,549
HOURS OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN BY ADVOCATES

152
NEW CHILDREN THIS YEAR FROM 83 NEW CASES

572
HEARINGS ATTENDED
374 COURT REPORTS COMPOSED FOR THESE HEARINGS

686
HOURS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION COMPLETED BY ADVOCATES

Children's Outcomes
42% Reunited with parents
56% Adopted by new family or relatives
2% aged out of foster care

24TH ANNUAL EVENING OF ELEGANCE

OCT
29
2023

AT
6
PM

JOIN US AT BISTECCA
2300 HIGHLAND VILLAGE RD • LEWISVILLE, TX

PRESENTED BY



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As fall approaches, CASA of Denton County will be gearing up to host one of the organization's most endearing events – Evening of Elegance. Presented by DATCU Credit Union, the dinner will take place on October 29 at the highly acclaimed BISTECCA Italian Steakhouse in Highland Village. The honorary chair will be Judge Darlene Whitten, a founder of the CASA program more than 30 years ago.

But before we talk about this year's event, let's take a moment to remember last year's Evening of Elegance, also presented by our good friends at DATCU Credit Union. The evening included a wine reception and a five-course gourmet meal prepared by Chef Morris Salerno and served by celebrity waiters including numerous Denton County judges and officials. Special guests at the dinner included Senator Jane Nelson, who served as honorary chair. Sen. Nelson was presented with a gift from Executive Director Debbie Jensen in recognition of nearly 30 years of service in the Texas Senate working to improve the child welfare system in Texas. The evening concluded with a lively auction featuring auctioneer Mike Trent and the kickoff to the annual Fund A Child campaign. All in all, over \$350,000 was raised by the event, which goes directly to advocacy for children from Denton County affected by abuse and neglect.



This year's event promises to be just as memorable, with special guests, unique live auction items that will include a photo safari to South Africa, and Chef Morris Salerno's above-and-beyond dining experience. We hope you will consider joining us for this one-of-a-kind event that helps to fund the important work of our Advocates in the community.

For more information about Evening of Elegance contact Ryan Wofford at rwofford@casadenton.org or go to casadenton.org.

LeadsOnline

PRESENTED

22ND ANNUAL

FOR **PULLING**
KIDS

SPORTING CLAY TOURNAMENT
BENEFITING CASA OF DENTON CO.

EST. 2000



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- Walmart Distribution Center #6068

The sun was bright, the clays were flying, and the chatter was loud at this year's 22nd annual Pulling for Kids Sporting Clay Tournament presented by LeadsOnline!

Held at Elm Fork Shooting Sports in Dallas on May 5, this year's signature event featured two challenging courses, a high stakes gun raffle and of course an awesome barbecue lunch and steak dinner with complimentary beer. Over 250 shooters participated in the clay tournament which included a morning and afternoon shoot with awards for both outstanding teams and individuals.

Since its beginning in 2001, Pulling for Kids has raised over \$1.75 million in proceeds to provide court advocacy for children in Denton County who have been affected by abuse and neglect.

This year thanks to the dedication and hard work of the PFK committee and volunteers, as well as the support of the event sponsors and teams, over \$183,000 was generated in gross proceeds.

“Our loyal PFK sponsors and teams never fail to come out for a great day of shooting,” said Debbie Jensen, Executive Director. “It’s one of the most exciting days of the year and we are so thankful to everyone who competes, sponsors, and volunteers to make it a success.”

THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO

Our volunteer Advocates are at the heart of what we do at CASA of Denton County. Over the last several months we have been busy recruiting, celebrating and recognizing the important work of our volunteers.



In March, CASA of Denton County invited community leaders to participate in a recruitment breakfast hosted by Denton Assistant City Manager and CASA Board Member Frank Dixon (pictured below). The focus of the breakfast was to generate new ideas of how to engage more volunteers who reflect the diversity of the children we serve.



CASA of Denton County is blessed to have a dedicated, inspired group of volunteer Advocates who are driven to achieve the goal of providing the best advocacy for the children we serve. While we are thankful for the valuable work they do every day, each year we take the opportunity to spoil them with love and appreciation at a celebration event. The following Advocates were recognized for their 2, 5, 10 and 15 years of service at our annual Advocate Appreciation event.



2 YEAR AWARDS

- Hobbs, Chelsi
- Edwards, Risha
- Gorton, Angela
- Gray-Johnson, Mychelle
- Tripp, Catherine
- Weber, Teri
- Whisenhunt, Amy
- Gavina, Caitlin
- Kimes, Angela
- Holder, Raymond
- Cronyn, Kevin
- Galan, Christine
- Chang, Rebecca
- Rawlings, Sharon "Renee"
- Doolin, Pamela
- Kestila, Lori
- Schultes, Bruce
- Fisher-Hathey, Jessica
- Hamilton, Eric
- Hamilton, Karli

- Hunt, Kerri
- Morris, Matthew
- Finamore Maneiro, Maria
- Lewis, Kevin
- Sherrouse, Melinda

5 YEAR AWARDS

- Cox, Jennifer
- Cromwell, Sharon
- Bacon, Linda
- Grill, Danita
- Murphy, Lee
- Yeatts, Karen "Rachel"
- Ramsey, Kathy
- Holland, Lacey
- Podborschi, Tania
- Barrett, April
- Finley, Deborah

10 YEAR AWARDS

- Cole, Carol
- McCord, Tracy

THANK YOU FOR MAKING SUMMER SENSATIONAL

Because of your generous donations, our **#Care4Kids** fund has provided kids affected by abuse and neglect amazing summer experiences like camps, museums, amusement parks and more!

Here are quotes from our Advocates who know just how much these summer time adventures meant to the children we serve.

Jacob LOVED the swim lessons and asked about them daily even though they were only on Sundays. He loved having a one-to-one activity to do with his foster dad and he felt right at home in the space. They taught him floating, kicking, holding on to the wall and climbing in and out of the pool safely. We're so grateful for the opportunity!

My child received one week of tuition for a day camp. She will be starting middle school this year and when I initially asked her about camp, she said, "It's okay." But later she shared that the pool is fun, she gets two meals a day, she went to a jump zone and to the movies for a field trip. She also told me she made a new friend at camp. My CASA child was quite animated for a camp that was just "ok." She was having a blast!

CASA of Denton County, Inc.
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www.facebook.com/casadentontx

CASA of Denton County is a member agency of Texas CASA, Inc., the National CASA Association, and the United Ways of Denton County and Metropolitan Dallas.

If you received two CASA newsletters, please give one to a friend and notify CASA at 940.243.2272 or info@casadenton.org. Thanks!



DENTON COUNTY

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SPEAK UP FOR ME IN COURT

EVERY CHILD DESERVES A CHANCE — IT'S YOU.

As a Court Appointed Special Advocate, or CASA volunteer, you can keep abused and neglected children safe while they reach a safe, permanent home.



While the holidays are a few months away, it's not too early to make sure that children who are affected by abuse and neglect have reason to celebrate the season. Unfortunately, many of these children often go without gifts due to circumstances beyond their control. It's simply heartbreaking. But you can help by either donating gift cards or making a monetary gift donation that will be used to purchase gift cards for the children we serve.

This past holiday season we provided gift cards between the value of \$100 and \$125 (depending on the child's age) to 165 children. Our volunteer advocates will purchase holiday gifts using the donated gift cards; they know their assigned children well and can ensure that a child's specific holiday wishes are fulfilled.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Donate gift cards so our volunteers can choose exactly what their assigned child might want or need. Gift cards to Target, Walmart, or Amazon as well as Visa and MasterCard gift cards in denominations from \$25-\$100 are preferred.
- Monetary donations can be made online at casadenton.org/give/donate. Look for the DONATE NOW button and make sure to select Gift Card Drive under the donation category.

We will accept gift cards for the holidays from now through the middle of December. Should you have any questions concerning our holiday gift card drive please feel free to email rwofford@casadenton.org.

COMING EVENTS

NORTH TEXAS GIVING DAY

September 21

Give at northtexasgivingday.org/organization/casaofdentoncounty
Or Scan the QR Code



EVENING OF ELEGANCE

October 29

For more information visit our event page at casadenton.org

FUND A CHILD CAMPAIGN

October 29

to December 31
For more information go to Ways to Give at casadenton.org

**Become a Hero of Hope,
make a recurring
donation to CASA**