

# A voice in the dark

## CASAs a source of resilience for kids caught in legal limbo

By BROOKLYN FLINT  
Of the Keizertimes

Even though National Child Abuse Prevention Month is winding down, the need for adults volunteers to advocate for children in courtroom proceedings will continue.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are advocates for abused and neglected children who are in need of a safe home. Shaney Starr, executive director of CASA for five years, helps run the organization. Starr originally wanted to be a volunteer at CASA, but the training schedule with her personal schedule didn't allow her to. However, it ended up working out for her in the end.

"When the opportunity to lead the organization came available, I didn't hesitate," Starr said.

Since then, Starr has led CASA to get more volunteers on board and help the organization.

"CASA serves children who are in the custody of the state and serves as their voice throughout their case in the juvenile dependency court process. Our CASA volunteers advocate for the best interest of the children," Starr said.

Most of the assistance CASA provides arrives through volunteers who spend hours training to be advocates for the kids.

"We require volunteers to be at least 21 years old, go through a rigorous application, interview and background check process, complete 32 hours of training and be able to dedicate 8-10 hours a month to working on their case and be able to make a two-year commitment to ensure consistency and stability for our children in the



child welfare system," Starr said.

Soraida Cross is one of the volunteers at CASA and has been there for a year and a half. One of the most challenging things for her is how tough some of the cases are and bearing witness to what some of the kids have been through.

"This is their life, this is what they're living," Cross said.

Cross also acknowledges the severity

of child abuse and how these kids are people we might know.

"These kids aren't in another country or another state, they're in our county," Cross said.

Another volunteer, Bob Russell, has worked with the organization for almost a year. He encourages potential volunteers to be aware of how tough some cases may be and how it can be hard to handle

emotionally.

"It can be absolutely heartbreaking at times and people should definitely be aware of that," Russell said.

Jim and JoAnn Griffin are also volunteers who have been in the organization for 10 years. Both Jim and JoAnn explained how important it is to understand the role of the volunteer.

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