

Cleveland County CASA volunteers give a voice to area's children

By Jessica Bruha Transcript Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, September 29, 2015 8:08 pm

Cleveland County Court Appointed Special Advocates was the first CASA program in the state and continues to serve children and families today.

A CASA volunteer is a voice for children in the court system, said Tiffany Page, Cleveland County CASA supervisor.

“The CASA program was designed to be able to provide the courts with kind of a third party, unbiased layman perspective on the case. So the CASA volunteer’s sole purpose is to serve as advocates for children that are in DHS custody and to speak up for their best interest,” Page said.

One of the most important things volunteers offer to cases and children is that they are most often the one consistent person in children’s lives as they change DHS workers, schools and placements.

Karen Nobles said as a volunteer, she can devote more time to the case than a DHS worker and it becomes more than just visiting the child or children once a month, writing a report and going before the judge.

“You just get to know these children. You fall in love with these children and, luckily, they kind of get attached to you, as well,” Nobles said. “I do feel like I make a difference. I’ve made a difference in the life of a child.”

Many of the children Nobles has worked with were taken out of abusive, unstructured and sometimes unclean environments. Once they’re in a home where there is structure, it’s rewarding to see them find happiness.

Page said Nobles has seen both ends of the spectrum. She’s seen kids who got to go back home with their parents and have had kids be adopted, although more children go home than get adopted, according to statistics across the state.



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Cleveland County CASA staff and volunteers pose at Crosspointe Church during an Olympics event for children and volunteers in the program in August.

Volunteer Lisa Roberts said research shows it only takes one person to make a positive influence on someone else. She wants to be that positive person.

“It fills my soul,” Roberts said. “I’ve always been the type of person that has always rooted for the underdog, no matter what. I feel like I get to speak for the children because they literally cannot speak for themselves in court.”

Roberts has also rooted for the underdog when that underdog was a parent, as well.

“It’s very rewarding, especially if you see the parent’s lightbulb come on. That’s, like, yay! You want to give them a star or something,” Roberts said, clapping and laughing.

Page said that’s something they always encourage volunteers to do, metaphorically, because a lot of parents were never encouraged themselves. They never had a support system or people motivating, encouraging them or being a positive influence in their lives.

“We see a lot of successful cases here where kids go back home, and parents, the lightbulb clicks and through the plan, they correct those conditions,” Page said. “Those are happy days in court.”

Last year, Cleveland County CASA served more than 200 children with 105 volunteers, but they only served about 15 to 20 percent of children in care. Recently, they were told that there are about 400 open cases in Cleveland County.

“We are definitely always looking for more volunteers,” Page said. “There’s always a need for it.”

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