

Abused children can't wait

An advocate since 2007, North Dallas resident Pat Stein tells us what she has learned from being a Dallas CASA volunteer.

What brought you to Dallas CASA?

I worked as a nurse practitioner in Parkland's newborn nursery, and I sometimes interacted with Child Protective Services there. I got to see the effect of maternal drug use on babies firsthand. But I also got to see the pain of mothers who could not take their babies home. I developed a strong sympathy for everyone involved.

What have you learned from being an advocate?

I've really learned the value of family. I'm a strong proponent of kinship placements. Sometimes a mother and father might not be able to care for a child, but someone else in the family can. The child can still see they got their blue eyes from this uncle or their basketball skills from that aunt. They know where they came from, and that the whole family cares about one another.

Tell us about a moment when you knew you were making a difference.

On my first case, I worked with a teenager on a rocky road. Removed from home due to her mother's drug use, she was placed with a family member where she was sexually abused. Her third placement was with a foster family who soon grew to love her and eventually adopted her. I was invited to the girl's birthday party two years later and brought a small gift. The thank you note the girl wrote reinforced for me the value of advocacy.

"We've been through a lot together," the girl wrote. "But I knew you'd always be there for me."

In the end, a CASA volunteer has the time to see things other might not notice. These children need our voices as they go through the system.

