

Ashley Rhodes-Courter can speak with authority on the difference one CASA advocate can make in the life of one child in protective custody.

She may have a masters in social work, may be a published author and may even be both an adoptive and foster parent, but her real authority is born of personal tragedy. Removed from her home after her single teen mother was arrested, Rhodes-Courter bounced from foster home to foster home for almost a decade with only a small bag of possessions to call her own.

Speaking to 375 Cherish the Children luncheon attendees at the Dallas Country Club May 7, Rhodes-Courter credited one CASA advocate, who discovered her living with 15 other children in a two-bedroom mobile home, with saving her childhood and her life.

“All the horror stories you hear about on the news?” she said. “They all happened in that house. And my story is not unique. It’s not even the worst story I’ve heard. And it’s still happening.”

In a time of constant upheaval, her CASA advocate worked tirelessly on her behalf. Now the author of “Three Little Words” and the soon-to-be published “Three More Words,” Rhodes-Courter recalled a time when her most basic needs were barely met.

“For me, as a kid, she was this lady who just kept showing up,” she said. “She made sure I had my hair cut, got my teeth cleaned, had clothes for school, even a cardboard for my science project. She followed me through everything. She was the one who made things happen.”

And that one CASA advocate accomplished for Rhodes-Courter in five short months what had not happened in almost ten years. After 14 different foster homes, Rhodes-Courter was adopted at age 12.

Finding a loving, permanent home after so many years in foster care was a game-changer for Rhodes-Courter. She had someone to get her a prom dress and a yearbook, someone to take her to get a driver’s license, someone to provide a home for her to come home to in college.

But Rhodes-Courter emphasized her need for permanency didn’t end after childhood. She needed parents to walk her down the aisle and be at the hospital for the birth of her first child. And she needed the grounding and sense of permanency that comes with a family.

“I find I need family more than ever,” said the mother of three boys under three, including one adopted through the foster system. “We need to have that forever home.”

And for Rhodes-Courter, one CASA advocate was the voice, the difference, the one person working on her behalf. “My CASA saved my life,” she said.