

Abused children can't wait

"Sometimes CASA is a roller coaster," she said. "Some days you think you made a difference and other you want to throw your hands in the air. But I believe that every person deserves to have someone on their side."

A mother of three daughters and Plano resident, Heather is heading to the classroom as part of a career change after completing her doctorate. As a former mediator working on international peacebuilding issues, her interest in kids, social justice and education is not new.

"Being a CASA volunteer is part of what motivated me to join Teach For America in Dallas," Heather said. "I have always been passionate about education and believe education is the key to social justice. But that became really clear to me when I began working with Dallas CASA. Working with kids, their placements, the court system and their parents showed me that educational inequality is a real problem here in Dallas. Working on ending educational inequality is one way I can impact the lives of many children."

She's hoping the education she can provide as a teacher will be a jumping-off point for students and that education will give these children a voice both while they are children and as they become adults.

For Heather, the small things can be the most impactful on her CASA cases. On one case, she brought the five-year-old girl she was working with a big coloring book. On her next visit, the child already had the coloring book laid out and ready to go when Heather arrived.

"She told me we were going to color and she had been waiting to color the pages until I got there," she said. "I told her she didn't have to wait for me, and she said she waited because I was her 'grown-up best friend.' I knew then that she knew I cared about her because your best friend cares about you. To me, that was powerful."

So how does she plan to keep doing it all? Being mother, new teacher and an advocate? Heather credits a supporting family and spouse, passion and list-making.

"If you want to do something, then you can," she said. "I turn the TV off. I get my family involved. I try to see the positive in every situation because mistakes are really just opportunities."

