

## *Abused children can't wait*

Claudia was assigned a Dallas CASA volunteer, who worked on Claudia's behalf while the courts decided where she could safely and permanently live.

Her advocate, Dolores, discovered Claudia's aunt was willing to take her in and recommended to the court she be placed there. Dolores advocated for therapy, special educational services and necessary medical treatment for Claudia.

Dolores soon became Claudia's one point of consistency, her calm in a swirling sea of chaos and change. Claudia invited her advocate to school events, sports games and her baptism. Dolores took Claudia to the zoo and the Texas State Fair. Dolores befriended Claudia's aunt, helping her find social services and became a support to the aunt as she adjusted to life with a preteen in the home.

An unbreakable bond had formed between advocate, child and family.

But then Claudia faced her most frightening challenge yet. She had to testify in criminal court against her mother's boyfriend. Since her aunt was also testifying and therefore could not be in court for other testimony, Claudia was going to have to enter the big courtroom alone to confront the man who had stolen her childhood.

Then she remembered her advocate, the one person who'd been by her side as she navigated changing legal and family situations. She called Dolores.

Claudia's advocate came to court and sat with the child for two days. She bought her lunch when she had no money. She offered emotional support as Claudia confronted her abuser and testified in court. Once again, she stood up for Claudia when no one else could.

Today Claudia's abuser is in jail and Claudia lives with her aunt in a home she returns to every night. She goes to school every weekday and church every Sunday. She wears pajamas and sleeps in her own bed every night. For the first time in her short life, she is learning what it is like to have a safe home and a family she can count on.

