

## *Abused children can't wait*

By the time his adored abuela returned from Mexico, Tobias had been transferred to a foster home. His grandmother did everything she could to get him back, but CPS would not approve his return until they could assure he would be safe in the home.

Abuela faced a choice – her drug-addicted son or her beloved grandson. She chose her grandson, but she faced legal challenges, language differences and cultural barriers on her journey to bring Tobias back to the only home he'd ever known.

That's when Dallas CASA advocate Estela stepped in. Estela helped Tobias' abuela understand legal documents written in a dialect of Spanish she did not know. And Estela helped Tobias' abuela understand requirements CPS was laying out for her to take custody of her grandson.

Today, Tobias is back home with his grandmother, toddling now into the safe embrace of her arms. And Estela is a changed advocate.

"His grandmother truly didn't understand what needed to be done, and if I had not been there, CPS would not have returned Tobias to the only home he'd ever known," she said. "And that would have been devastating to his grandmother and Tobias. She truly loved the boy and he loved her."

Dallas CASA has a critical need for bilingual, Spanish-speaking volunteer advocates who can help children in need bridge a language gap during a frightening and uncertain time. According to statistics from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, about 35 percent of children removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect in Dallas County in 2014 were Hispanic. A bilingual and bicultural volunteer working for each child can play a critical role in finding a safe, permanent home for the child by establishing credibility and trust in the family, guiding families through the foster care system and uncovering cultural nuances which can be helpful in handling a case.

