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## Texas' most at-risk children need your help

Volunteers can be voice for abused kids, say **Beverly Levy** and **Paul Coggins**

**W**e're No. 1!  
And we should be  
ashamed.

Texas leads the nation in the number of child deaths due to abuse or neglect.

According to a report released last month by Every Child Matters, a national child advocacy group, about 200 children die of abuse or neglect in Texas each year. From 2001 to 2007, 1,509 Texas children died from these causes. Florida was a distant second, with 785. California, with a larger population than Texas, had 763.

Last year, 24 Dallas County children died from abuse and neglect.

Compounding the tragedy of the deaths of defenseless youngsters is the shocking news that nearly half of all children killed in Texas by abuse belong to families previously investigated by Child Protective

Services.

How can this happen?

CPS doesn't cause these deaths. Perpetrators do. By and large, they died at the hands of their caregivers, usually someone they loved or trusted.

CPS caseworkers are caring and hard-working. They want to protect kids. The department has a mandate to do so, but it lacks resources. Despite efforts to improve child protection since 2005, Texas still ranks near the bottom in funding devoted to protecting our at-risk children.

What can we do?

We have to make our community safe for all children, especially the most vulnerable. Watch for signs of abuse, and if a child is being victimized, report it.

We have to make sure abused children are safe from further harm. More funding is needed to keep them safe and to help them heal from their abuse. If they aren't safe, sometimes children must be taken from their homes and placed under the protective care of the courts. Our communi-

ty becomes their family until theirs can be made whole again. And when their families fail, we find them new families who will love, protect and help them thrive.

More people must get involved in the lives of our most vulnerable children.

One of the most powerful ways is to volunteer for CASA. Dallas CASA is an organization of volunteers who serve as powerful voices in court for abused and neglected children.

Judges need facts concerning these children in order to decide when — or if — they can return home. Volunteers are trained and supervised to collect facts and make recommendations that help judges decide the best possible outcome for each child.

For many children, a CASA advocate is the only familiar face and constant support during a frightening, uncertain time. Few volunteer roles offer the kind of immediate and critical impact on the life of a child as that of a CASA volunteer.

The time to act is now. Every day in Dallas County, there are nearly

2,000 abused children waiting in protective care for the courts to decide where they can safely live. Yet, only half of those in need of a CASA voice in court have one. They desperately need your help. Now.

Helen Keller said, "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do."

Please, do something today.

To find out how you can help, visit [www.dallascasa.org](http://www.dallascasa.org) or call 214-827-8961.



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