



## Be a Voice for Abused Children

**By Ann McAlpin, Executive Director, CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County**

Every year, countless children are abused and neglected by the ones they love and trust. It's time for each of us to speak up for these children so that they may live safe, happy lives.

Last year, 222 Texas children died from abuse and neglect. That means an innocent life was taken every 40 hours.

April is a time for us to take a break from our busy schedules, acknowledge these children and say that their lives – and deaths – were not in vain.

Many of us will wear blue ribbons, attend special events or say that these children are in our hearts. But, these actions alone are not enough. In 2016, 559 children were in the custody of CPS in Montgomery County, and 36 percent of them were under 5 years old. It's time for us to act on their behalf, for they are **OUR** children.

The traumatic experiences that abused children face early in life can greatly affect their lives as adults. These children often grow up with mental health problems and trust issues. Bounced about in a broken and overburdened system, too many drop out of school and turn to crime or live on the streets. This spiral not only threatens the future of the child, but also the fragile social safety net of our great state.

Too many children in the dysfunctional foster care system are slipping through the cracks. You have the power to change this. By becoming a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates®) volunteer, you can change the life of a foster child simply by speaking up for them.

Each of us has an obligation and an opportunity to break the cycle of child abuse and neglect. If you see abuse, report it to (800) 252-5400 or go to [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org). If a child's life is in danger, call 911. If you want to leave a legacy of positive change, become a CASA volunteer. Call (936) 441-5437.

We challenge you to use your voice and speak up for the children who cannot speak for themselves. If we unite, maybe someday we won't need a Child Abuse Prevention Month.

***Ann McAlpin***

*Ann McAlpin is the Executive Director of CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County, which recruits, trains and supports volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children in Montgomery County.*