**11 New Volunteers Sworn In as Advocates for CASA of Bell and Coryell Counties**

On Monday, June 26th 2023, 11 new volunteers took an oath to be a voice for children in the child welfare system as Court Appointed Special Advocates. The ceremony was presided by the Honorable Judge Dallas Sims at the Bell County Courthouse in Belton, and was the second-largest group of advocates to join in the history of CASA of Bell and Coryell Counties. In their oath, the new advocates swore to carry out their duties as a CASA with their paramount concern being the best interests of the children to whom they’re assigned.

The swearing-in ceremony followed 33 hours of training over the course of 5 weeks, which included in-classroom training, online modules and courtroom observations.

Judge Dallas Sims expressed her joy at the addition of more advocates to speak for children in the courtroom as a reporter for our judges, stating, “I was honored to swear in such an awesome group of advocates. We are so grateful for such a strong CASA team supporting the youth of Bell and Coryell Counties!”

New advocates taking the oath included Denia Woods, Steve Wood, Tiffani Gregg, Miesha Elliott, Selene Sullivan, Michaela Denazen, Amber Peipert, Cheryl Lewis, Shirley Flowers, Martha Vazquez, and Luther Harris.

Speaking about why she wanted to take the leap and become a CASA, new advocate Miesha Elliott stated, “Having a voice is such a key part of your identity, but what happens when you don't have a voice or someone to advocate for you? You get lost in the shuffle. Being a part of CASA allows me to advocate/be the voice of a child within the community. They WILL be heard”.

Another new advocate, Michaela Denazen, spoke about what motivated her to join, saying “As a mom, I know what it feels like to want to protect a child and not get help. As a CASA advocate, I get to be on the other side - I am able to take action, provide resources, support and empowerment for children and their families. I am proud and honored to be a part of an organization dedicated to help families”.

For some, the desire to be a part of CASA is closer to home. Cheryl Lewis’ daughter is a foster mother in Kentucky, so she’s excited to learn more about how the foster care system works. “Children are the most vulnerable in our society. CASA provides a great opportunity to show love and kindness to those who are the most deserving in their time of need,” said Cheryl.

The next training class begins on Tuesday, July 25th 2023 at 5:30 pm. If you are interested in learning more about becoming a CASA advocate, please go online at [www.casabellcoryell.org](http://www.casabellcoryell.org)/volunteer for more information or call the CASA office at (254) 774-1881.