

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Hill Country Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)

Advocating for Children and Families in Gillespie County and Comfort

CreateHealthy

Impact You Can See

Grantee:
Hill Country CASA

Create Healthy Strategic Funding Priority:
Healthy Living

Mission:
To provide trained community advocates for children and families involved in the child welfare system

Create Healthy Support:
Grants to support a permanent home for the organization and ongoing volunteer recruitment, training, and retention

2025 Impact:
22 children from Gillespie County and town of Comfort across 14 cases; 79% reunification rate; 12 CASA volunteers assigned

Hill Country Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) trains and supports community volunteers to advocate for children involved in the child welfare system.

Established in 1989, the organization serves Gillespie, Kerr, Kendall, and Bandera Counties and works from the belief that children belong with family when family is safe. Hill Country CASA's work involves serving as an advocate for children and families from the time a child is removed from their family's care until the child is reunified with their family or placed in a permanent home. Hill Country CASA provides consistent and reliable advocacy through a process that can be long and complex.

How the Work Happens

When the state removes a child from their home, Hill Country CASA is appointed to the case on day one. Volunteers and staff build trusted relationships with the child, stay in contact with caregivers and service providers, monitor the child's wellbeing, and advocate for the child in court and across the broader care team.

The goal is to help families get the services and support they need so children can safely reunify whenever possible. Many cases involve overlapping challenges such as drug abuse, domestic violence, criminal history, mental illness, poverty, and lack of support systems, which makes consistent, reliable, and thorough advocacy especially important.

A Consistent Advocate in a Complicated System

Trained, trusted, and reliable volunteers are integral to Hill Country CASA's work. Community members who want to serve as CASA advocates go through a lengthy screening process and complete 30 to 35 hours of pre-service training before they are sworn in as officers of the local child protection court. Once appointed, they serve as guardian *ad litem*, advocating for what is in the child's best interest and remaining involved throughout the legal proceedings.

"Children and families involved in the child welfare system need someone who will stay with them, speak up for their best interests, and keep showing up no matter how complicated the case becomes. That advocacy helped children and families move toward safer, more stable outcomes in 2025, and we're grateful to Create Healthy for helping make that work possible."



Stephanie Cash
Executive Director
Hill Country CASA

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Create Healthy's Support in Action

Building upon an initial Healthy Living grant in 2024 to support CASA's ongoing Community Volunteer Recruitment, Training, and Retention Program, in 2025, Create Healthy gave two additional grants:

$125,000
to help provide a permanent office space for Hill Country CASA, helping ensure the legacy of strong advocacy for Hill Country families.

$190,000
to support the volunteer recruitment and training retention program.

In total, Create Healthy has **contributed more than $330,000** to Hill Country CASA since 2024.

Why It Matters

Reliable and supported volunteers are particularly important given the length of time a child welfare case can last. In Gillespie County, children whose child welfare cases closed in FY 2025 spent an average of 20.1 months in foster care.

Local Impact

In 2025, 12 CASA volunteers were assigned to 22 children from Gillespie County and Comfort who were involved in child welfare cases. They donated 265 case hours and logged 4,399 miles of travel on behalf of their assigned children. Children are placed in foster care outside the county if no placement with a relative is available. One Gillespie County child, for example, was placed in Arkansas for part of 2025, underscoring how far advocacy sometimes must stretch to stay connected to a child.

These children served by CASA had an average of 3.6 placements in 2025, and two children experienced as many as six placements.

Eleven of the 14 children whose cases closed in 2025 were reunified with their parents, resulting in a 79 percent reunification rate, compared with just 33 percent statewide.

"Hill Country CASA provides something every child deserves: consistency, advocacy, and a trusted adult focused on their wellbeing. Their work in Gillespie County and Comfort reflects the kind of steady, community-based support that can help children stay connected, help families move toward reunification, and strengthen long-term health and stability."



Jayne Pope, RN
President & CEO
Create Healthy



About Create Healthy

Create Healthy is on a mission to invest in the health and wellness of the Hill Country and empower its communities to build a healthy future. Create Healthy's vision is a Hill Country where all can contribute and thrive. Led by Jayne Pope, the foundation is overseen by a volunteer board of directors.

Learn more about our community investments at CreateHealthy.org