



**Tippecanoe County CASA**  
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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **During Pandemic and Child Abuse Prevention Month, Local Volunteers Work to Ensure At-Risk Children are Safe: CASA Volunteers Still Needed**

Lafayette, IN – Child abuse and neglect is likely on the rise in the face of this pandemic, as families are put under more financial and emotional stress. Children are no longer in the public eye. They are not attending schools, daycares, or other locations where caring individuals would be able to monitor their well-being. April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and one group of volunteers in Tippecanoe County is working hard to ensure that the voices of abused or neglected children are heard.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) are community members who volunteer with Tippecanoe County CASA. They work with children in the child welfare system who have already experienced abuse or neglect.

CASAs meet with children in person at least monthly and provide information to judges. These reports help judges make well-informed decisions about each child. Visits provide an opportunity for CASAs to check in on children's safety and well-being. But right now, meeting in person with the children they advocate for is nearly impossible.

However, this does not mean that it is impossible to gauge how children are coping. CASAs are working with program staff to find creative ways to continue to meet with children. For example, volunteers are conducting regular virtual visits with children, caregivers, and other professionals in the child's life. They write updates for the judge to read, and the Tippecanoe County CASA attorney attends essential court hearings in person.

During the pandemic, program staff continue to support volunteers with frequent virtual check-ins. They are also using their time for professional development by attending online learning seminars on relevant topics, including LGBTQ youth in the child welfare system, human trafficking awareness, and youth mental health.

“Despite the unique challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, our CASAs have shown tremendous commitment to children,” said Coleen Connor, Tippecanoe County CASA Executive Director. “The tools we use to communicate with and advocate for children are different right now. But our mission has not changed. Tippecanoe County CASA remains a voice for abused and neglected children in our community.”

Because cases of child abuse will most likely continue to rise, Child Abuse Prevention Month is crucial. To help prevent child abuse and neglect during the pandemic, community members can:

- Reach out to families with children. Offer to talk to children virtually to give parents a break.
- Research [available community resources](#) for parents or caregivers who may be busy or overwhelmed.
- Offer to pick up and drop off groceries or medicine for families who need that support.
- Use social media or neighborhood group chats to check in with neighbors, friends, or family. Consider starting a neighborhood chat if one does not exist.
- Report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect at 1-800-800-5556. If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Despite community efforts, children in Tippecanoe County need advocacy now more than ever. Apply to become a CASA volunteer online at [www.tippecanoe.in.gov/casa](http://www.tippecanoe.in.gov/casa).

### **About Tippecanoe County CASA:**

CASA's goal is to ensure that every child has the chance to reach their full potential in life. Every child has the right to be treated with dignity and respect and to grow in a safe and permanent home. Tippecanoe County CASA trains volunteers to be a voice in court for abused and neglected children. Volunteers take the role of independent factfinders to advocate for the best interest of the child. Each volunteer is a stable and consistent adult presence in the child's life until they reach their permanent home.

Tippecanoe County CASA has advocated for children since 1987 and currently supports over 130 active volunteers. Learn more at [www.tippecanoe.in.gov/casa](http://www.tippecanoe.in.gov/casa).