

A Heart for Advocacy: Lillian Oexmann's Journey as a CASA Volunteer

Annabel Thompson

For 29 years, Lillian Oexmann dedicated her life to teaching in the public school system, guiding children through their education. But even after leaving this job, her passion for helping kids never ended. Instead of slowing down, she found a new way to make a difference—becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer for children in foster care in the Tarrant County area of Fort Worth, Texas.

"I had all this free time, and I knew there were kids out there who needed guidance," she says. "It just made sense to put my time to good use."

Since 2019, she has worked repeatedly to advocate for foster children, ensuring their best interests remain the focus in an often-overwhelming system. Through her dedication, she has helped provide stability and support to children facing uncertainty, making sure they have a trusted adult to rely on. Her efforts serve as a reminder that one person's dedication can change the course of a child's life for the better.



Photo provided by CASA.

Becoming a CASA Volunteer

Lillian explains that becoming a CASA isn't something one just jumps into. "It takes about 30 hours of training," she says. "It familiarizes you with the program, how to handle cases, and how everything works. It takes about two or three weeks, but once you start, you realize how important it all is."

Once assigned to a case, CASA volunteers have specific responsibilities each month—meeting face to face with the child, reaching out to caseworkers, talking with foster parents, attending court hearings, and keeping in touch with their CASA supervisor. "I check in about once or twice a week," Lillian says. "It's a commitment, but it's not overwhelming."

She understands that the idea of volunteering can seem daunting to some, but she says it's more manageable than people think. "A lot of people are afraid of the commitment," she tells me. "But it's not a daily thing. Maybe 10 to 20 hours a month, if that. You just need to listen, understand the case, and always keep the child's best interest in mind."

In 2023 alone, 957 children in Tarrant County had a CASA volunteer advocating on their behalf, ensuring their voices were heard in the foster care system, according to CASA of Tarrant County. While this number reflects the impact CASA volunteers have, there are still so many more children in need of dedicated advocates to support them during these challenging times.

Facing the Challenges

Lillian says her first case is still ongoing, and it's been one of the most challenging circumstances she's faced. "The siblings had to be separated for their best interest," she explains. "One of them has medical conditions that made finding an adoptive home for both of them together nearly impossible. It's heartbreaking, but I think I've found a solution."

Her second case was much shorter, wrapping up in just under two years. "It depends on the case," she says. "Some move quickly, but others can go on for years. My longest one lasted six years."

Through it all, she's learned how to connect with the children she advocates for. "You have to figure out what they like, find things in common," she tells me. "One of my kids wanted to play games, so I'd bring something we could do together. We'd talk while playing, and that hour of time let him know I was there for him."

Standing Up for What's Best

One thing was clear throughout the conversation—Lillian doesn't shy away from the tough decisions. "I always tell foster parents that my job is to be there for the child," she says. "I have to be brave enough to say, 'This is not going to work.'" She understands that these conversations may be difficult, but she never loses her hope. "It is not about making anyone happy except the child," she explains. "Sometimes that may mean making hard choices, but that's what advocacy is."

She has no doubt that CASA makes a difference. "There are so many foster kids who need help," she says. "CASA gives them someone who truly listens, someone who will fight for them." She has seen how even the smallest actions, like checking in regularly, showing up to court hearings, and making sure a child's voice is heard, can change the trajectory of a foster child's life.

"These kids need consistency," she says. Lillian believes that for every child who has a CASA volunteer, there's one more chance for a better future, and she's committed to making that impact one case at a time.

Finding Support and Looking Ahead

I asked Lillian how she copes with the emotional weight of her work, and she says, "It's important to have a person to talk to. For me, that's my husband. Having him by my side helps me step back and look at things from another perspective."

She's taken on multiple cases at once before but recognizes the importance of setting boundaries. "You can take time off if you need to," she says. "And if a case is too much, you can say, 'I'm sorry, I can't handle this case at this moment.'"

Lillian knows that advocating for children in foster care is a commitment, but it's also flexible. "CASA understands that life happens," she says. Volunteers can step back when needed and return when they're ready. For Lillian, it's about finding balance—giving her time and energy to these children while also taking care of herself. "You have to be in a good place to truly help them," she explains. "And when you are, you can make a real difference."

As we wrapped up our conversation, I asked her what she would say to someone thinking about becoming a CASA volunteer. She didn't hesitate. "Just do it," she says. "You don't have to be an expert. You just have to care."

For Lillian Oexmann, CASA is more than just volunteer work—it's a calling. And because of her, and people like her, children in foster care have someone standing up for them, fighting for them, and making sure they are never forgotten.



Photo provided by Lillian Oexmann.