

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
County of Luna

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Media Release

Abused and neglected children in the counties of Luna, Grant and Hidalgo are in need of volunteer representation through the Court Appointed Special Advocates program.

Luna County CASA provides services to 29 children in Luna County, 30 in Grant County and one in Hidalgo County. Services are provided by the program coordinator, Mayra Solis, and about 10 volunteers each in Grant and Luna counties. Hidalgo County has no volunteers.

"CASA volunteer advocates provide invaluable support to advocate for a child's best interests in courtrooms and the community," Solis said. "Oftentimes, these children are abused and neglected without any adult in their lives capable of advocating for them in court cases, which can be extremely stressful."

The program is looking for adults who can volunteer about two hours per month for a child in the counties it serves. Volunteers will be a child's advocate until they are placed in loving, permanent homes. For many abused children, a CASA volunteer is the only consistent and positive adult presence in their lives.

"Unfortunately there are some members of our community who do not respect the blessings of having a child," Luna County Board of Commissioners Chairman Joe "Oleo" Milo, Jr., said. "The CASA program is our humble attempt to help provide support to the neediest children in our community. We are extremely grateful for the wonderful volunteers we currently have, but there is a great need for more caring adults in these children's lives."

Everyday throughout the nation, 1,900 children will become victims of abuse or neglect, and four of them will die, according to National CASA. During fiscal year 2014, the last full year for which Luna County CASA has data, there were 150 substantiated cases of physical or sexual abuse or physical neglect in Luna County alone.

Jessica Moreno, director of Luna County's Community Health and Well Being Department, oversees the CASA program. Additionally, she has volunteered herself to serve as an advocate. She believes volunteering as an advocate is one of the most powerful ways an individual can help positively impact other individuals and the community.

"The relationship that the CASA advocate builds with a child can last a lifetime," she said. "I can't think of a better way for a caring person to help a child going through difficulties many of us cannot begin to imagine."

Luna County CASA is one of about 950 programs in the nationwide CASA network. For more information and to get involved, contact Solis at 575-567-1186.

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