

CITY OF SAN MARCOS
2019 CDBG PUBLIC SERVICES APPLICATION



Due Date: June 18, 2021

I. **APPLICANT CONTACT INFORMATION**

CASA of Central Texas, Inc. (Court Appointed Special Advocates)

Applicant Organization: _____
Norma Castilla-Blackwell

Contact Name: _____ Telephone: 512-392-3578
830-626-2272

2725 Hunter Road, San Marcos, TX 78666

Mailing Address: _____

Physical Address, if different from mailing address: _____
nblackwell@casacentex.org www.casacentex.org

Contact E-Mail Address: _____ Web Address: _____

Norma Castilla-Blackwell

Who is authorized to execute program documents? _____

II. **APPLICATION SUMMARY INFORMATION**

Advocacy for San Marcos Children Who Have Experienced Abuse and Neglect

Project Name: _____
\$60,000

Amount of CDBG Funds Requested: _____
San Marcos, TX

Project Location: _____

Will all CDBG funds for this project be expended by July 15, 2021? _____ Yes _____ No
X
75%

If "No", what percent is expected to be completed by that date? _____

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Briefly summarize the program for which CDBG funding has been requested.

CASA of Central Texas (Court Appointed Special Advocates/CASACenTex) envisions a world where every child thrives in a safe, stable, and loving home. Our mission is to help children and youth in the foster care system who have experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, and various forms of neglect. CASA trains and supports qualified, compassionate adults who will fight for and protect a child's right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to learn and grow in the security of a loving family. Dedicated CASA volunteers are empowered as voices in the courts, in schools, and in the child welfare system to ensure representation of the child/youth's best interests in terms of their medical, educational, mental health, housing, and long-term needs for permanency - with no service fees to the families or the courts. Under the Texas Family Code, CASACenTex is the only organization that may be appointed by judges as Guardian ad Litem (GAL) on child welfare cases in Caldwell, Comal, Guadalupe, and Hays Counties.

CASACenTex has a non-discrimination policy and is a unique community prevention program that provides a valuable service benefiting children/youth, ranging in age from newborn up to 17 years – male/female/transgender, of all races, ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses – who are currently placed in care with Child Protective Services/Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (CPS/TDFPS). We also provide services to youth/young adults 18+ who are transitioning into independent living, providing support and encouragement for them to become successful adults.

Experiencing abuse or neglect, removal from home, and entering the foster care system causes trauma. CASA recognizes that every child in care has experienced trauma in some capacity and, in order to ensure their well-being, the entire system needs to approach care with a trauma-informed lens. The CASA network continues to learn about and implement new tools and resources to advocate for the emotional needs as well as the physical needs of the children we serve.

Family preservation is always the goal, but if reunification is not safe or possible, CASA volunteers will advocate for the child to be adopted by, or live with, other relatives or family friends. If that is also not possible, CASA volunteers will work towards adoption by a non-relative. No matter the circumstances, CASA volunteers will keep in contact with the support network until the case closes so that everyone continues to put the child's/youth's best interests first.

USE OF FUNDS

How will the funds be used?

The primary goal for this grant is to expand services to more San Marcos children/youth in state foster and substitute care with compassionate and effective advocacy to achieve safe, permanent homes. It is vital that we recruit, train, and empower more volunteers to be strong voices to ensure that these young people's needs are met and their voices lifted.

For the period 7/1/21 through 6/30/22, CASA of Central Texas volunteers and staff will provide essential advocacy services for the education, medical, mental health, permanency, and placement needs (stable, safe homes within a timely period) of an estimated 140 San Marcos children/youth in foster and substitute care. (This projection includes 15 San Marcos children/youth whose cases have been postponed during this past year due to COVID-related delays.) They will be served by 78 volunteer advocates assigned to experienced Case Supervisors who will monitor compliance with Texas and National CASA standards, guide them through case management, and oversee case progress to ensure appropriate permanency outcomes for the children. CASA volunteers and Case Supervisors will testify in court hearings and trials, attend case-related meetings, and report monthly statistics.

This funding will support partial salary and fringe for:

Program Director: \$15,000 Recruitment & Training Director: \$8,000 Development Coordinator \$5,000
Case Supervisor #2: \$5,000 Case Supervisor #4: \$5,000
Case Supervisor #6: \$4,000 Case Supervisor #12: \$5,000

Payroll Taxes: \$3,700 Office Supplies: \$1,000 Internet/Telephone: \$3,000 Utilities: \$5,300

Total Expense: \$60,000

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Once the project is completed, how can its success be measured?

Our goal is to serve 100% of the children /youth who need an advocate! The opening of our new Training & Support Center in San Marcos will expand our classroom capacity and technological support for volunteers. We hope to swear in new advocates and retain current advocates (78 total) who could serve 140 San Marcos children and youth, ensuring they receive care for their medical, mental health, educational, and housing needs. CASACenTex evaluates many quantitative indicators relative to advocacy, training and outreach: 1) The Training & Recruitment Director will collect online applications, background and reference checks on all applicants; conduct 9 new Pre-Service Volunteer Training (PSVT) sessions in Hays County, including court observations, homework and tests; and arrange swearing-in ceremonies with court judges. 2) Volunteers will be matched with incoming cases and assigned to a Case Supervisor. Each volunteer will provide 60+ hours of donated casework per child/per year, including monthly (or more)

visits with the children, written case recommendations and court testimony; phone calls and meetings with CPS caseworkers, schools, medical and mental health professionals. 3) Case Supervisors prepare monthly case data (reports), including new case assignments, number of children served, number of of volunteers assigned to cases, and case status. 4) The Program Director maintains a database and compiles monthly statistical reports listing open and closed cases, current status of cases, and counties where cases were heard. Extensive files are kept on each case, and case reports are filed with the court. 5) The Training & Recruitment Director and Training Coordinator manually capture and collect data in an Excel spreadsheet: number of new advocate training sessions offered/completed, number of new volunteers trained and sworn-in, and number of continuing education opportunities offered/CE sessions completed. 6) Activities and progress on goals and objectives will be documented, reported and discussed by the senior staff and Board of Directors on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.

TYPE OF PUBLIC SERVICE (choose all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05A Senior Services | <input type="checkbox"/> 05B Handicapped Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05C Legal Services | <input type="checkbox"/> 05D Youth Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05E Transportation Services | <input type="checkbox"/> 05F Substance Abuse Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05G Battered and Abused Spouses Services | <input type="checkbox"/> 05H Employment Training |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05I Crime Awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> 05J Fair Housing Activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05K Tenant/Landlord Counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> 05L Child Care Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05M Health Services | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 05N Abused and Neglected Children Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05O Mental Health Services | <input type="checkbox"/> 05P Screening for Lead Paint/Lead Hazards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05Q Subsistence Payments | <input type="checkbox"/> 05R Homeownership Assistance (Not Direct) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

PROGRAM INFORMATION

1. Program eligibility (please select one):
 - a. This is a new program.
 - b. This is an existing program that: (select one of the following)
 - Has previously received CDBG funding and the amount requested for this year is the same or less than previous funding; or
 - will expand to serve more beneficiaries or to provide more services if the CDBG funding as requested is approved. *Please attach an analysis that details how the program or service will be expanded, how many new beneficiaries will be served by the expansion, and how this number was determined.*
2. Programs receiving funding from the City at this time (during the current program year):
 - a. How much CDBG funding was awarded? CDBG: \$60,000 CDBG-CV: \$55,600 _____
 - b. Is this program receiving any other City of San Marcos sources? ^{no} _____
 - c. If yes, how much was received and from what source? _____
3. Is there a fee to clients to participate in the program? Yes No
If yes, please provide fee structure.
4. Describe the days and hours of operation of the program: _____
Our offices are currently open by appointment, M-F, 8AM-5PM; however, CASA volunteers work 24/7 in order to meet the needs of the children/youth/families they serve.

NEED AND JUSTIFICATION

Describe the need for this program.

According to a first-ever report, CHILDHOOD IN THE TIME OF COVID published in 2021 by Save The Children, Texas ranked 48 in a child-focused analysis of how they fared during the 2020 pandemic based on hunger, lack of tools for remote learning, and making ends meet. These challenges only strengthened our resolve to serve more children and expand our casework services with an emphasis on innovation, fluidity, and technology.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer eyes were on vulnerable children who who lacked the normal support systems provided by friends, teachers, counselors, coaches, and daycare professionals, the very people most apt to notice a change in behavior, injury, or withdrawal from daily routine. For children most at risk, social isolation and economic uncertainty had far-reaching consequences. During the harrowing time wrought by COVID-19, we leaned heavily on task forces and collaborations. We also saw challenges in parents' abilities to complete service plans and a lag in children being reunified with families or adopted.

Along with the trending increase in demand for CASA services due to population growth, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a traumatic impact on our children. (The San Marcos population increased 49.13% from 2019 to 2020, with an overall poverty rate of rate of 32.15%, well above the national rate of 13.7% predicted in 2021 by the Urban Institute.) In CY 2020, there were 980 completed investigations of child abuse/neglect in Hays County, and 169 new child removals from their homes. CASACenTex served 226 children/youth of 500 in state care, including 127 children/youth from San Marcos.

When it became apparent that COVID-19 was an immediate threat, our senior leadership and board viewed this as an opportunity to reshape our procedures, our service model, and to innovate our important work for children and youth in need. We swiftly pivoted in order to serve more children and families in a different way. We launched virtual casework meetings, court hearings, mediations, and trials – and accepted new cases every week as the number of children entering state care continued to rise. We also forged ahead offering virtual community information sessions with increased frequency and virtual pre-service volunteer training classes. Our outstanding CASA volunteers did not waver in their devotion to the children they served by FaceTiming, texting, Zooming, and "visiting" from the safety of the porch and sidewalk. Many of our volunteers who previously were not proficient with technology quickly adapted in order to maintain important communication. Because of their committed support, children were not susceptible to further social and emotional isolation and re-traumatization.

As highlighted in our recent application for Corona Virus relief funds, another major problem continues to be backlog of pending cases: delayed court hearings have resulted in fewer children being returned to their families, even after the families completed their service plans; other families experiencing difficulty completing their service plans because of financial, technology, transportation, or personal challenges; delayed adoptions either by relatives or new "forever" families;

CASACenTex is well-positioned to advocate for children's mental health, medical, education, housing and permanency needs. We promote frequent check-ins with children, sibling groups and families to ensure physical safety and protection, as well as address mental well-being. As educational delays are also a great concern, a CASA volunteer may be assigned as a "surrogate parent" in the school system to facilitate decisions. We are also concerned for older youth who are about to exit foster care and youth adults in extended foster care. Many lack relationships, resources and connections needed to ensure safety and stability as young adults.

IMPACT

Describe in detail the impact this program will have on the identified need and on San Marcos residents.

CASACenTex understands the vital need for the child to have a voice in the courtroom – and that each child is an individual with unique needs. By speaking for the child, CASA ensures that the wishes and needs of the child are not overlooked by the many competing interests at play. CASACenTex volunteers help maintain a sense of urgency to all children's cases and recognize that permanency (both legal and relational) is essential to well-being. Successful case outcomes are based on achieving safe and permanent homes for children by reunification with safe parents, permanent placement with relatives, legal adoption by new "forever" families, and emancipation/preparation for independent living. Closed case narratives anecdotally report CASA's impact on medical, mental health, education, and other advocacy areas that tell us that our volunteers make a positive difference in the lives of children they served.

CASA's combined team of licensed social workers and attorneys recruit, train, and supervise volunteer advocates, as they construct bridges between children and the services that they need to ensure they will not languish for years in care, bouncing from home to home. family court judges consistently seek out and rely on CASA to help them make important life-changing decisions for the city's children. Advocates provide judges with detailed, fact-based court reports that include a holistic picture of the needs and life-circumstances of these children – to ensure that each family's situation is truly evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

In a recent CASACenTex newsletter, longtime Executive Director Norma Castilla-Blackwell shared: "As this past year unfolded, the critical role CASA of Central Texas plays in the community was continuously reinforced. Now we are moving full steam ahead, like never before, in our goal to provide a trained Court Appointed Special Advocate to every child in foster care."

EXPERIENCE OR REFERENCES

Describe your experience in implementing a similar program, or if this is a first time venture, provide an explanation of
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why you believe you will be successful in implementation. You may attach up to three letters of reference.

Formed in 1985, CASA of Central Texas has the distinction of being the third-most longstanding CASA program in Texas. Operating as an independently incorporated nonprofit services provider, CASACenTex is part of a nationwide CASA movement that is now one of the largest volunteer networks in the country - 72 Texas chapters and 948 state/local programs - following best practices at the national, state, and local levels. Our child-focused work is vital for child safety and to help children to thrive: well-being is improved, placements are found and stabilized, children transition out of the foster care system and have a stronger sense of belonging.

We have an experienced executive leadership team with 11 years of average tenure and a strong staff team with seven years of average tenure. The Executive Director Norma Castilla-Blackwell has been with the organization since 2003. She provides staff leadership for positions including the Development Director, Finance Director, Training & Recruitment Director, Program Director, and a recently added Controller. We have nine outstanding community members on the volunteer Board of Directors with 100% contribution participation for the past three fiscal years. Also, during the past three years, we have maintained our Guidestar by Candid (www.guidestar.org) Platinum status – the highest level of recognition for financial transparency.

We have enjoyed a strong relationship with the City of San Marcos for the past fifteen years as, together, we have witnessed the phenomenal growth of this city with all of the benefits and challenges to care for its citizens. We express our gratitude for your confidence and investment in CASA of Central Texas: your gifts have enabled us to better serve the children/youth in San Marcos who were removed from their homes and might otherwise have fallen through the cracks of an overburdened child welfare system. The momentum of the past 36 years is only growing stronger. We are committed to developing new and improved ways to enhance the advocacy for children and youth in care and to seek the right resources needed to effectively advocate for the safety, permanency and well-being of children we serve. We value our partnership with the City of San Marcos and hope to again merit your confidence!

IV.

PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

Applicant must be able to document that at least 51% of the beneficiaries have an annual income that is at or below 80% of the Area Median Income and are San Marcos residents.

A. PRESUMED BENEFIT: See definition above of “Presumed Benefit”.

1. Will all of the program’s beneficiaries in a Presumed Benefit Category? Yes or No

If “yes”, list the categories: Abused Children

2. How many persons in each presumed category are proposed to be assisted if funding is received?

Abused Children	Elderly Persons	Battered Spouses	Homeless Persons	Severely Disabled Adults	Illiterate Adults	Persons living with AIDS
140						

3. If this program was carried out the previous full program year (10/1 – 9/30), how many persons were served in each presumed category:

Abused Children	Elderly Persons	Battered Spouses	Homeless Persons	Severely Disabled Adults	Illiterate Adults	Persons living with AIDS
127						

B. BENEFICIARIES WHO ARE NOT CONSIDERED “PRESUMED”

1. How many persons are proposed to be assisted if funding is received? _____

If this program was carried out the previous program year (10/1 – 9/30), how many persons were served?

2. What percentage of persons proposed to be assisted are expected to be low/mod? _____

3. What percentage of persons proposed to be assisted are expected to be San Marcos residents? _____

4. How do you propose to document the income of the beneficiaries? (check all that apply)

Evidence that the child is approved for free or reduced lunch

Evidence that the family lives in housing sponsored by the Housing Authority

Evidence that the family is WIC approved

Income documentation using one of the 3 HUD approved methods

Self-certification, with income verification required of 20% of certifications

Other, describe: _____

VI.

LINE ITEM BUDGET

Please use the following format to present your proposed line item budget. Secured funds are funds on-hand, pledged, or awarded. Following the Line Item Budget, please complete the Supplemental Budget Form – Use of Other Resources. Funds and costs, as outlined on the Sources and Uses of Funds form, may **not** be spent or incurred prior to a contract award date (usually October 1st) from the CDBG Program. Supporting documentation may be attached as an Appendix.

Expense Category	Total Program Budget	CDBG Portion	Other Funding Source	Other Funds Amount
Personnel Services				
Salaries	340,538.00	47,000.00	See attached list	293,538.00
Fringe Benefits	26,051.16	3,700.00	See attached list	22,351.16
Supplies				
Office Supplies	13,500.00	1,000.00	See attached list	12,500.00
Program Supplies				
Client Materials				
Operating				
Training				
Insurance				
Utilities/Rent/Mortgage				
Other (please specify)				
Internet/Telephone	15,000.00	3,000.00	See attached list	12,000.00
Utilities	9,500.00	5,300.00	See attached list	4,200.00
Total	404,589.16	60,000.00		344,589.16

Please provide an explanation for any unusual budget expenditures listed in the line item budget above.

VII.

PROJECTED IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE WITH PERFORMANCE GOALS

Projected Start Date:
10/1/2021

Projected Completion Date:
9/30/2022

Activity Description	Start Month/Year	End Month/Year	Performance Measurement Goal
<i>Example: Hiring New Staff Member</i>	<i>October 2021</i>	<i>December 2021</i>	<i>Employment process complete</i>
Advocacy (casework)	October 2021	September 2022	140 San Marcos children served
Pre-Service Volunteer Training	October 2021	September 2022	78 advocates (new and retained)
Recruitment of Community Volunteers	October 2021	September 2022	78 advocates (new and retained)