

## LOCAL

## VOLUNTEERING

COMMUNITY STAR | MEET SOMEONE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## A shoulder to lean on

## STAR STATS

**The star:** Vic Meyers  
**The community:** Collin County  
**The organization:** CASA of Collin County. CASA volunteers are thoroughly trained in courtroom procedure, social services, the juvenile justice system and the special needs of children. The next training session is in October. For more information, visit [www.casaofcollincounty.org](http://www.casaofcollincounty.org) or call 972-529-2272.

What does it mean to be a child advocate? For CASA volunteer Vic Meyers, it's as simple as just being there.

CASA is appointed guardian ad litem for any child who is removed from an unsafe home and enters the foster care system. Each child has a CASA supervisor who works with about 25 volunteers. It's the volunteers who provide one-on-one relationships with the children, assessing their needs, getting to know everyone in their lives and helping them through the complicated court system.

Meyers, who has volunteered at CASA of Collin County since 2009, attends court hearings and keeps in touch with CPS workers, therapists, schools, probation officers, parents and, of course, the children themselves.

"You're someone who's there for them," he says. "You keep reinforcing that, 'If there's a problem, call. If you're upset and you don't know how to deal with it or process it, call.'"

Volunteers are asked to make a one-year commitment because that's typically how long it takes a child to get through the system and find permanent placement.

"We ask for that commitment so the child won't have to undergo another change," says Kathy Blank, development director. "Sometimes CASA is the only stable adult in that child's life. They can have changes in CPS workers, family members. We want CASA to remain with them for the whole process."

Meyers, who retired after 21 years at Texas Instruments,



**SUPERVISOR** Holly Beckerley says Vic Meyers is a good sounding board for kids.

## Fast fact

Last year in Collin County, more than 750 children were removed from their homes because of abuse, neglect or abandonment, trapped in the court and child welfare maze.  
 SOURCE: CASA of Collin County

has two cases, a 16-year-old male and an 11-year-old male. Because his father left him, his mother and three sisters when he was a child, he finds it important to be a positive male role model to young men. CASA's caseload is typically about half male and half female, but only about 20 percent of its volunteers are male, says Blank.

Meyers says volunteers must drop all judgment in order to work with CASA's children; some youths may already have a police record or have been to drug rehab. "You have to be prepared to hear it all and not be judgmental," he says. "You judge the parents a lot of times. Or you start to. But then you realize, who were their parents? What did they learn? Maybe they're doing good compared to what they had to experience."

In addition to having an

open mind, an important part of guiding the children is building trust, which starts with listening.

Meyers was surprised by how quickly the kids learned to open up to him. "At first you think it'd be so hard to crack that nut, but it's actually very easy," he says. "They really want someone to talk to and listen. And they have a lot of questions most of the time. It's amazing."

Meyers recently went to a court hearing with a child who received some disappointing news. He walked laps with the child around the third floor of the courthouse, listening to him and helping him process the situation.

"A lot of the children we serve don't have someone who will do that for them," says Holly Beckerley, Meyers' casework supervisor. "They need that sounding board and that adult they can trust who will listen to them."

Beckerley says Meyers is helping the boy with manners toward authority, teaching him to speak his mind in a polite, respectful way. "A lot of adults may not take the time to do that with a child. And that's going to help him out in the real world."

While Meyers works on behalf of the children at least three times a week, he says there are many different levels where volunteers can make a difference.

"There are so many children out there that need help, and really so few people that are willing and able to help them," he says. "Just start, take that first step and it could lead to other steps. No matter what you do, you're going to be a help."

Although there are rough times throughout the process, Meyers finds the job unbelievably rewarding. "When you see mother and children be reunited from what seemed like a surefire permanent removal, and then they're back together and the children are blossoming and everyone is happy, it's good to know you had a part in that," he says.

Meyers' first case was a brother and sister removed from the mother, and now everyone is back together. Meyers says he still gets texts from the mother and the kids telling him how things are going. "You really do advocate for them for the rest of their lives," he says. "They always have my number."

Erin Booke

## LEND A HAND

**1 Cat/Kitten Adoption Counselors:** Feral Friends Community Cat Alliance, which actively assists the community in reducing feline overpopulation, seeks volunteers to interview potential adopters and screen to match them with an appropriate pet. Training provided; min. age: 21.  
**Time:** Ongoing, 3 to 4 p.m. Saturdays  
**Volunteers needed:** Unlimited  
**Location:** Rowlett (75088)  
**Contact:** Kelly Richert, 972-671-0429, [info@feralfriends.org](mailto:info@feralfriends.org); [www.feralfriends.org](http://www.feralfriends.org).

**2 Editor for Newspaper on the Air:** Reading & Radio Resource, which translates print materials into audio form for children and adults with vision impairments or reading disabilities, seeks a volunteer editor. Volunteers will select and prepare news articles from local newspapers to be recorded at a later time. Training provided; min. age: 18.  
**Time:** Ongoing, 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
**Volunteers needed:** 2  
**Location:** Dallas (75201)  
**Contact:** Steve Cumming, 214-871-7668, [steve@readingresource.org](mailto:steve@readingresource.org); [www.readingresource.org](http://www.readingresource.org).

**3 Web Designer:** Media Projects Inc., which specializes in films that explore social issues and community concerns, seeks a volunteer to streamline and modernize the website. Training provided; min. age: 22.  
**Time:** Ongoing, any time between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.  
**Volunteers needed:** 1  
**Location:** Dallas (75201)

## FUNDRAISING CALENDAR

**Start! Heart Walk:** Walk together in the fight against heart disease at the 2010 Start! Heart Walk, benefiting the American Heart Association. The fun, family-oriented event centers on a three-mile noncompetitive walk. 9 a.m. Saturday at Victory Park, 2500 Victory Ave. [www.dallasheartwalk.org](http://www.dallasheartwalk.org).

**Collin County Humane Society "Give a Dog a Home" Gala:** A festive event with a cocktail hour, live music, silent auction and vegetarian three-course dinner will benefit the planned construction of a shelter in 2012. 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday, Cityplace Conference Center, 2711 N. Haskell Ave. \$100. [www.collincountyhumanesociety.org](http://www.collincountyhumanesociety.org).

**Special Olympics Texas Scott & Scott Casino Night:** Try your luck at blackjack, craps and roulette while raising money to support Dallas-area athletes. 7 p.m. Sept. 16 at the Starlight Room, 603 Munger Ave. \$100 per person or \$175 per couple. 214-943-9981; [www.specialolympicstexas.org](http://www.specialolympicstexas.org).

**Dancing With the Stars in Oak Cliff:** The Fort Worth Avenue Development Group, a nonprofit that focuses on neighborhood improvement, will hold its annual fundraiser, which will include food, a silent auction and a dance exhibition by swing dancers. 7 to 11:30 p.m. Sept. 18 at the Kessler Theater, 1230 W. Davis St. \$35 for general admission and \$75 for VIP tickets. 214-728-2027; [www.fortworthavenue.org](http://www.fortworthavenue.org).



The Volunteer Center of North Texas receives thousands of opportunities from more than 1,500 area nonprofit groups. For more information, visit [www.vcnt.org](http://www.vcnt.org).

**Contact:** Cynthia Salzman Mondell, 214-826-3863, [mail@mediaprojects.org](mailto:mail@mediaprojects.org); [www.mediaprojects.org](http://www.mediaprojects.org).

**4 Receptionist:** The Volunteer Center of North Texas is looking for a volunteer receptionist to answer phones, greet visitors and assist with data entry. Training provided; min. age: 21.  
**Time:** Ongoing; afternoon shifts only  
**Volunteers needed:** 1  
**Location:** Fort Worth (76109)  
**Contact:** Rochelle Luna, 817-927-7172, [rluna@vcnt.org](mailto:rluna@vcnt.org); [www.vcnt.org](http://www.vcnt.org).

**5 Animal Attendants:** Linens for Animals, which provides comfort for animals in need, is looking for volunteers to work with dogs and cats in a new rescue/sanctuary in McKinney. Volunteers will assist in walking, playing with and bathing animals at the facility. Min. age: 14.  
**Time:** Ongoing  
**Volunteers needed:** 50  
**Location:** McKinney (75071)  
**Contact:** Dedra Shaver, 817-210-7856, [dedra@linensforanimals.org](mailto:dedra@linensforanimals.org); [www.linensforanimals.org](http://www.linensforanimals.org).



## This week with the Briefing Moms Panel: Have you been lying to your children?

Parents may tell their children hundreds of untruths over the course of their childhoods: white lies, childhood fables, "little" lies of convenience. At what point does a lie become significant, and when do the untruths begin to do harm? What do kids learn from the lies parents tell, and how can compromises of truth be explained?

Join the Moms this Friday in *Briefing* and online at [dallasnews.com/voices](http://dallasnews.com/voices) as they talk about untruths.

When does the lying stop? Tell us what you think and hear what other Moms have to say. Online at [dallasnews.com/voices](http://dallasnews.com/voices).

**briefing**  
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Tori Mathe

Dr. Misty Hook

Julie Hildebrand

Rebecca Quigley

Lorrie Irby Jackson

Marina Trahan Martinez

Melissa Hill

Sarah Squires

Susan Sternblitz



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