



"The News"

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Words from the Director

As we move into October, I want to take a moment to reflect on the importance of advocacy in the work we do. Advocacy is the heart of our mission—it's how we raise our voices, empower others, and drive change in the lives of the children we serve.

In this ever-evolving landscape, our role as advocates is more crucial than ever. Whether we're attending court as the voice for our assigned child, standing up in support of the children in their education, or simply educating others about the challenges our children face, each action we take makes a difference.

Let's continue to work together to amplify the voices of the children we serve and push for better outcomes and permanent homes for the children. This month, I encourage all of us to reflect on how we can strengthen our advocacy efforts, both individually and collectively.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication and passion. Together, we can achieve more.

Deliberate-Attentive-Dedicated

Tommy



Supervisor Tips

CASA volunteers frequently ask questions regarding what information they can collect about a child and with whom they can share that information. This is a much more complicated issue than it may appear; many overlapping (and sometimes conflicting) state and federal laws are involved. These tips are intended to guide you but are not a substitute for talking with your CASA advocate supervisor about your case.

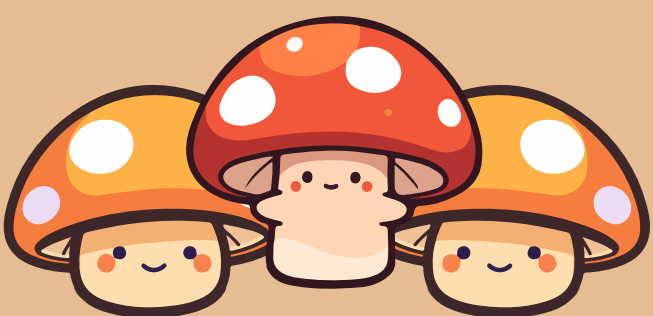
1. Learn as much as you can about the child from every possible source.

The information a CASA volunteer is entitled to gather about a child varies from state to state. Generally, CASA volunteers have broad rights to information about the child. This usually starts with all of the information available to the child welfare authorities on the case. State law may authorize you to gather records that are otherwise usually kept private: educational, medical, mental health and law enforcement or judicial records regarding the child. Medical and mental health records are often the hardest to obtain. Many courts use an order to assign a CASA volunteer that includes statutory language defining what information the volunteer has access to.

Practice tip: Become informed about what information you are allowed to gather in your state and be firm about asking for it. If the order appointing you to a case is specific as to what information you can access, bring it along when you want to review records.

2. Learn as much as you can about the parents too.

When you start your investigation, think about what documents and records might be useful. In most states, the child welfare agency should let you read their file on the parents. A parent's medical information is so private that it should not be collected unless there is reason to do so. The court will normally require evidence showing that something about the parent's medical condition affects parenting ability before ordering the release of such information. The court may well limit what records you are allowed to see. Access is regulated by



Supervisor Tips cont.

both state law and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). Parents' mental health records are also heavily protected—both by HIPAA and physician/patient privilege. Similarly, substance abuse treatment records can be obtained only if the substance-abuse problem relates to the parenting concerns. Many adult criminal records are public records and generally available.

Practice tip: Think about what kind of records might exist about the parents of the child you are advocating for, and then decide whether those records will shed light on the parenting problems in your case. If certain records seem relevant, consult your advocate supervisor about how to get them.

3. To strictly maintain confidentiality, memorize an “apology rap.” You must strictly protect the privacy of the child and the parents in your case.

Familiarize yourself carefully with the requirements of your program as well as state statutes about confidentiality. You will learn that many people want to know things about the child you are advocating for. Many times it will seem reasonable and appropriate to give out information, but you as the CASA volunteer still cannot disclose it. Foster parents need information about the child, but it is not your job to supply that information. This is a source of frustration to CASA volunteers, who often meet foster parents who feel they have not been adequately kept in the loop. If the foster parent needs information, you can offer to go to the social worker and ask them to call the foster parent, but you should not disclose anything yourself. Be particularly alert to inadvertently passing information to the foster parent about how the biological parents are doing.

Practice tip: Memorize a phrase you can comfortably repeat to teachers, foster parents and neighbors who genuinely want to know how a child is doing: **“I’m so sorry that I can’t give you that information. I can see that you need it. Please speak to the social worker about this.**



Supervisor Tips cont.

4. Be aware of safety issues that are also confidentiality issues. Many laws about confidentiality and privacy exist to protect children from harm.

Because our cases can involve dangerous or criminal behavior, names and addresses of foster parents and the children's schools should never be disclosed in order to keep the child and caregivers safe. If domestic violence is an issue, be scrupulous in maintaining the privacy of the victim's location.

5. Be aware that you can be compelled to share the information you gather.

Through the discovery process, you are very likely to have a continuing obligation to share the documents and information you gather with the other parties to the case. If you are testifying, you can be compelled to turn over anything that you rely on to refresh your recollection. The best practice is to testify from memory as much as possible—or base your recollection on your formal court report. Another area of compulsory disclosure has to do with new referrals of suspected abuse. In many states, CASA volunteers are mandatory reporters of child abuse. Discuss with your program supervisor major developments in your case so that they can help you decide whether you need to make a referral to child protection authorities.

Practice tip: Before you take a document from anyone, make sure they understand that you may be required to share it with the other parties and the court. You cannot keep anything a foster parent writes to you, for example, secret from the other parties. Do not turn over discovery or documents to other parties yourself! Discuss with your program supervisor when and how the document should be distributed. Many documents you collect, especially confidential records, have laws affecting the manner in which they are turned over.



Supervisor Tips cont.

6. Be careful about throwing things away.

You cannot throw anything away that could be discoverable or subpoenaed. Begin with a goal: that children are placed out-of-home only when necessary, that they are placed appropriately and that they are provided quality care. We were also resolute that cases be reviewed by the court at least every six months and that permanent families be provided in a timely fashion. Even when it seems appropriate to dispose of documents, you need to be careful about how you dispose of them. To avoid inadvertently disclosing information, take materials back to your program for disposal. When a case is dismissed, make certain that your files get back to the program. Your trash or recycling bin does not meet confidentiality requirements. National CASA Association standards require that a local program have written operational procedures consistent with legal requirements and with the policy on confidential information governing the retention, maintenance, protection, destruction and return of case files when the case is closed.

Practice tip: When emailing anyone about your case, only use initials! Deleting email on your case can be just as problematic as throwing away documents. Consult with your advocate supervisor about email policies.



CASA of West CenLA

420 McMahon Street
DeRidder, LA 70634
337.462.4667 Phone
337.462.1554 Fax

113 S. 3rd Street
Leesville, LA 71446
337.239.1970 Phone
337.239.1960 Fax

casawestcenla.org
[facebook.com/CASAWestcenla](https://www.facebook.com/CASAWestcenla)

Community Resources

Abuse/Neglect

Child protection/DCFS hotline: 855-4LA-KIDS

Elderly protection hotline: (age 60+) 225-342-0144

Adult protection hotline: (age 18-59) 800-898-4910

Addiction

Alcohol and Abuse Helpline: 337-502-9833

Overcomers self-help addiction group: 337-463-5382

New Beginning: 1-877-855-9773

Behavioral Health

Beauregard Behavioral Health Clinic: 337-462-1641

Bright Hope Counseling and Neurotherapy: 337-463-4900

Caring Choices of Leesville: 337-238-6431

Imperial Behavioral Health: 337-639-3001

Oceans Behavioral Health Hospital: 337-460-9472

Rehabilitation Services of SWLA: 337-463-4020

The Father's Chair - Certified Licensed Pastoral Counselor: 727-247-9984

Transcend Counseling of Louisiana: 337-221-1274

Food

Beauregard Community Action Association: 337-463-7895

God's Food Box: 337-463-4449

Meals on Wheels DeRidder: 337-463-6578 and 337-463-9694

Meals on Wheels Leesville: 337-239-4361

New Step Outreach: 337-226-5602

Soul Soup Kitchen: 337-221-1308

SNAP/food stamps: 1-888-LAHELP-U, 337-463-6091, 337-238-7030

The Church in Rosepine: 337-463-7746

Financial Assistance

Beauregard Community Action Association: 337-463-7895

Vernon Community Action Council: 337-404-7710

Kinship Care Subsidy Program: 1-888-LAHELP-U

More resources to come in the next issue!



What's Going on this Month

Vernon Parish

American Legion Riders Post #387
Poker Run-Ride-Auction
October 12, 2024 - 9am
Retired American Legion Post #387
New Llano, LA





Anderson Hills
400 Slagle Road
Leesville, Louisiana
337.357.1286

**October 2024
Pumpkin Fest**
Every Weekend
in October

Saturdays
10 am to 6 pm
Sundays
2 pm to 6 pm

**Welcome
to the
Hills**

Wristband Prices:
\$15 or \$25
Entry Only: \$5
3 & Under Free



117th Annual
**WEST LOUISIANA
Forestry Festival**

Off TO THE *Races*



OCTOBER 2 - 6, 2024
at the Vernon Parish Fairgrounds



**CARNIVAL
RODEO**

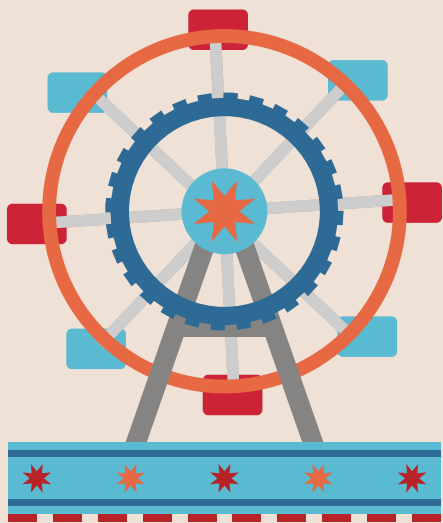
**LIVESTOCK, VENDORS,
LIVE DJ & FOOD**

FUN FOR ALL AGES!





**FREE
ADMISSION**
every day for
law enforcement,
first responders,
military, & family
members



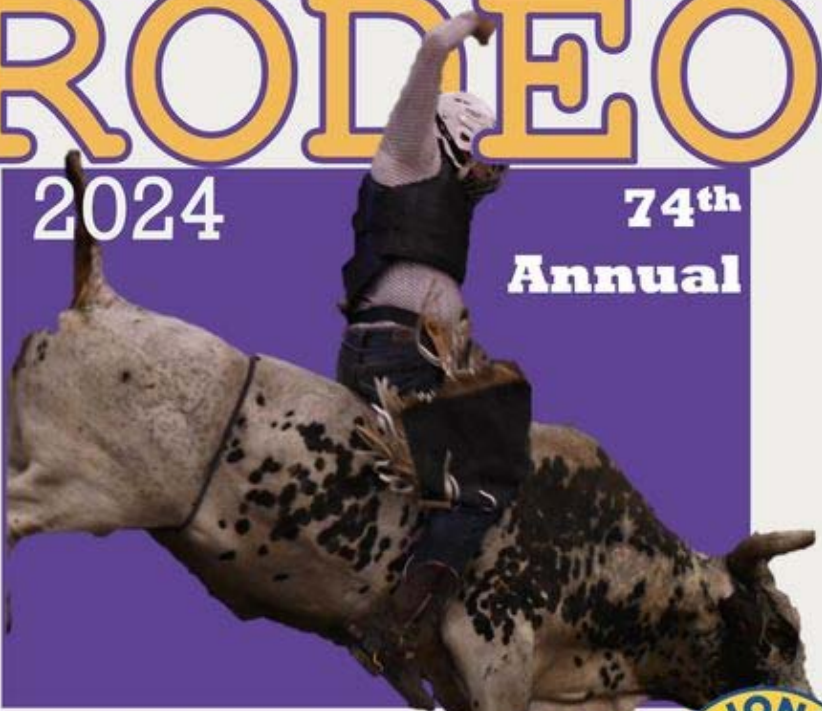
October 31 - 5:30pm-8pm
Witch Way to Main



Leesville Lions Club

RODEO

2024 **74th Annual**



Leesville Rodeo Arena
Oct 3-5 7:30

J2 Rodeos, Announcer Seth Roy, and Rudy Burns

Tickets are \$12 in advance and \$15 at the gate. All proceeds benefit the Louisiana Lions Camp



Click pictures to go to sites

Fun Facts about October!

- October 1 - Balloons Around the World Day
- October 4 - World Smile Day
- October 7 - Frappe Day
- October 11 - It's My Party Day
- October 15 - I Love Lucy Day
- October 17 - Wear Something Gaudy Day
- October 18 - Chocolate Cupcake Day
- October 20 - International Sloth Day
- October 24 - Bologna Day
- October 28 - International Animation Day
- October 30 - Candy Corn Day

A Little More Serious

- October 3-9 Mental Illness Awareness Week
- October 8-14 Fire Prevention Week
- October 9 - Indigenous People's Day
- Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- Health Literacy Month
- ADHD Awareness Month
- Down Syndrome Awareness Month
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrom (SIDS) Awareness Month
- Polish American Heritage Month
- Italian American Heritage Month
- Filipino American History Month
- Global Diversity Awareness Month

Advocate Spotlight



Vernon Parish

Joseph



Beauregard Parish

Donna