

Volunteers Help Foster Children Navigate the Court System

POSTED: APR 15, 2011 4:36 PM PDT UPDATED: APR 15, 2011 4:36 PM PDT
By Sharie Harvin, Reporter

LAS VEGAS -- April is Child Abuse Awareness Month and there are more than 3,000 abuse and neglect cases in Nevada. One of the ways the state is addressing this issue is by increasing the number of volunteers who fight for abused and neglected children in courtrooms.

The volunteers are called Court Appointed Special Advocates, or CASA's. Their mission is to talk to the child, parents, teachers and counselors and then tell the courts what is in the best interest of the child.

"CASA's are there to make sure children's needs are met, making sure they're in the best placement -- to make sure we can get permanency for these children as quickly as possible and make sure children don't lose hope," said CASA Program Administrator Shelia Parks.



Eighteen CASA volunteers had their swearing in ceremony Friday inside the Eighth Judicial District Court. The volunteers went through 50 hours of training on child abuse, family dynamics, cultural awareness, Nevada law, case management and much more.

Because of the graduates, there are now more than 300 CASA volunteers, but still 3,200 children in the foster care system in Nevada.

"What we're missing from our system is urgency. There's no urgency to get them out or get them adopted. We kind of let them proceed in the process," said District Court Judge Frank Sullivan.

Judge Sullivan says the average child stays in the foster system about 40 months before they get a permanent home. The court has implemented an initiative called the Model Court, who's goal is reduce that number to 18 months.

The Model Court gauges how efficient a courtroom is with timely hearings so abused and neglected children can quickly find a safe home.

If you want more information on becoming a CASA volunteer, call (702) 455-4306.