

The VOICES of

CHILD **ADVOCATES** OF FORT BEND™

Inside /
CEO Update • Programming for Children
and Youth at CAFB • Celebrating Our
Volunteers • Inside Out Gala • And More!



APRIL IS CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS MONTH

April 2025

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Keeping you informed on our mission:

Strengthen the Child's Voice, Heal the Hurt, and Break the Cycle of Abuse and Neglect for Children and Families in Fort Bend and surrounding counties.



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Save these dates and plan to join us for these upcoming events



5403 AVENUE N
ROSENBERG, TX 77471
281-344-5100



WWW.CAFB.ORG



from the ceo

Happy Spring...

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and we are busy with activities planned throughout the month. Our CAP-C (Child Abuse Prevention Collaborative) kicked off the month with a panel presentation on child abuse reminding all the child welfare and school professionals in the room about the short- and long-term effects of abuse and neglect and how important it is for them to continue their life-saving work to ensure the safety of our children. Our annual Light of Hope Celebration was Friday, April 4 at Sugar Land Town Square Plaza. This is our largest awareness event of the year where we showcase 20 different agencies in Fort Bend County providing services to children and families. We invited elected officials to join me on stage proclaiming our unified message that "We Are For The Child" with the background of Sugar Land City Hall lit up in blue, the national color of child abuse awareness. The significance of the blue ribbon is drawn from a story of a grandmother who was devastated to learn that her grandchild had died due to physical abuse. To bring attention to child abuse, she tied a blue ribbon to the antenna

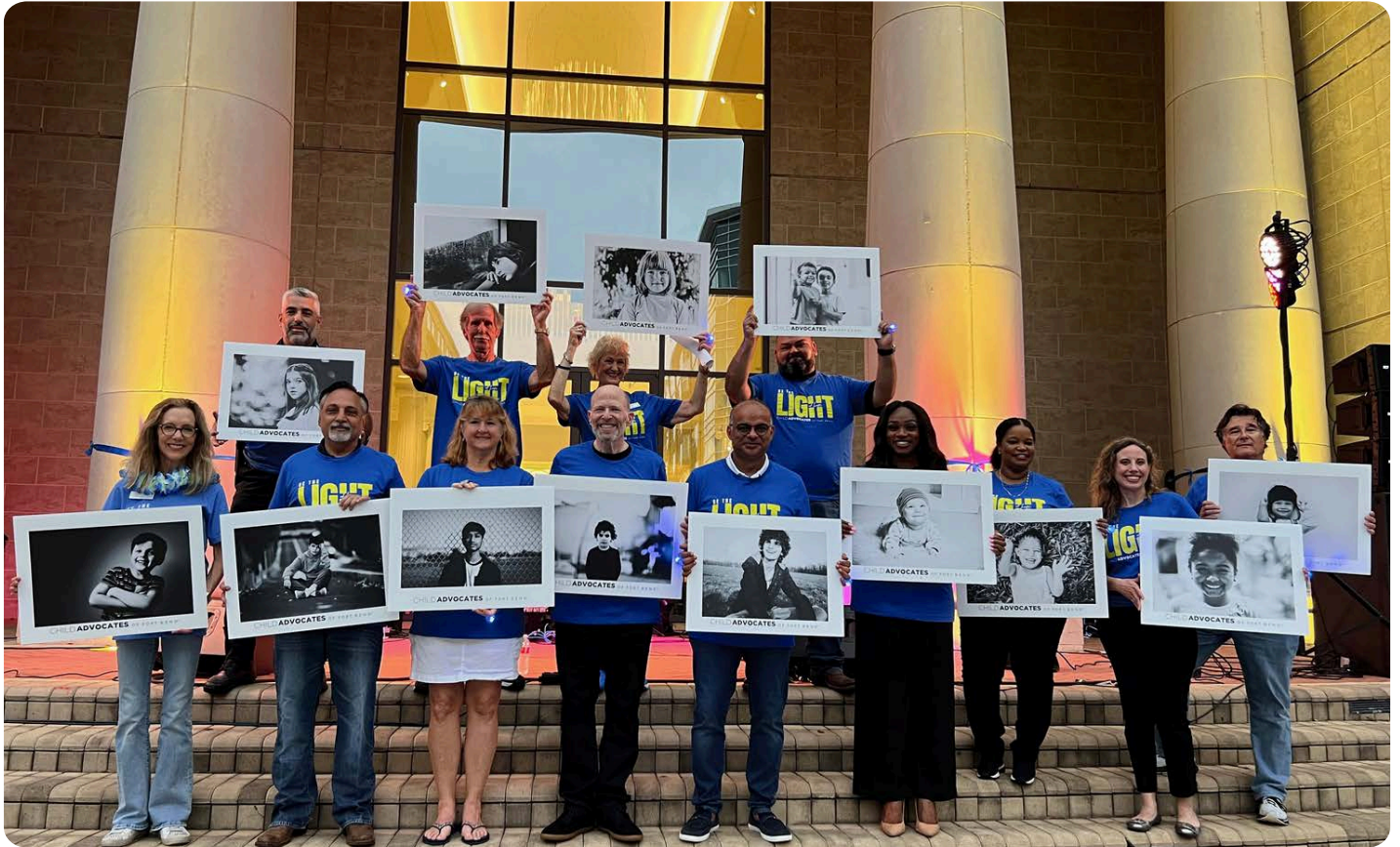
of her car to signify his bruised body. What began as a story of one little boy has now grown to be a national movement in honor of the hundreds of thousands of children who have suffered and died from their abuse. Later in the month on April 12, the Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office is hosting the Pinwheel Project which is a kid-friendly carnival at Traylor Stadium. We round out the month with our annual Gala For The Children on April 26 with the theme of "Inside Out" where we explore the many feelings that children experience in childhood and how important it is for adults to be aware and sensitive to these emotions. Come join us at these events and share your commitment to ensuring the safety of our children and the importance of strong families. Thank you for your support and all you do for children - as volunteers, donors, partners, ambassadors or staff. We are deeply grateful.

For the Children's Sake,

Ruthanne

Ruthanne Mefford, CEO





Light of Hope: Illuminating the Fight Against Child Abuse

By Casey Davis, Community Engagement Director

Our Annual Light of Hope Ceremony is our annual Child Abuse Prevention event to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect, while celebrating the resilience of families and strengthening community bonds. The evening featured more than 20 non-profit and community partners providing a host of information and fun activities for children and families to enjoy. By celebrating the resilience of families and strengthening their bonds, we remember the children who do not have a safe home.

The ceremony was a moment of reflection and a call to action, bringing our community together to shine a light on the importance of protecting children.

Children throughout our community experience abuse every day. We want to recognize the courage of each child that has come forward to tell. Child Advocates of Fort Bend is committed to bringing to light the issues of child abuse

-cont'd



and neglect. Our CEO, Ruthanne Mefford and community members provided messages of action, urged attendees to learn the signs, speak up when a situation doesn't look right, and report abuse.

We provided blue light-up rings to send a message that each one of us can do something and "be the light".

There are many opportunities to raise awareness about child abuse, and you can reach out to us if you have any questions or need additional resources. Here are a few ways you can get involved:

- **Wrap blue ribbons around trees:** Show your support by wrapping blue ribbons around trees in your home or community.
- **Display blue pinwheels:** Place blue pinwheels in your yard, a symbol of childhood and the hope for a brighter future.
- **Invite us to speak:** Let community members and schools know about the child safety prevention programming that Child Advocates of Fort Bend provides.
- **Share resources:** Provide resources from our agency about how to talk to children about abuse and neglect.



What can you do? Check out the rest of our newsletter for great resources and events that will inspire you to help prevent abuse and neglect. It takes all of us!

[See more photos](#)





FEATURE STORY

Building Stronger Families: A Story of Hope and Healing

When families come to us at Child Advocates of Fort Bend (CAFB), our mission is clear: to provide vital resources and support that strengthens their bonds and fosters healing. We believe in empowering families to build a foundation of wholeness.

At CAFB, we offer a comprehensive range of over 18 in-house services, and we're also deeply connected to a network of community partners, ensuring families have access to a wide spectrum of support.

Recently, we received a heartwarming thank you letter from a caregiver who first walked through our doors a couple of years ago. Her journey included support through our Children's Advocacy Center (CAC), the guidance of a dedicated CASA volunteer and staff member during her Child Protective Services (CPS) journey, and access to a variety of our services and resources.

This caregiver's story beautifully illustrates the power of collaboration and the willingness to embrace change. While CAFB and our community partners can offer a wealth of assistance, the true transformation happens when individuals actively choose to accept help and commit to growth.

This caregiver wholeheartedly embraced every opportunity. She participated in all four of our TBRI (Trust-Based Relational Intervention) trainings, fully accepted and utilized every resource and support offered, and worked diligently towards a healthier and happier life.

We are deeply honored to be a part of the lives of the children and families we serve. Hearing stories like this, witnessing the positive ripples our work creates, fills us with immense joy and reinforces our commitment to our mission.

cont'd

(Names have been removed to ensure confidentiality)



Hello,

I just wanted to take the time to express my gratitude. It's been a long and tough few years for the kids especially. I am proud to be the mother of such brave and intelligent, beautiful children. **I know we have all had our ups and downs and disagreements and things did not end in the way I had hoped, but they did end well** and everything happens for a reason and in God's time.

I want to thank you all for the time and effort you put into my children and my case. I don't think this was easy for any of us. And things were definitely unfair to the children, however, **everything that has happened has led to an outcome that is far better than I originally planned or imagined.** That being that my family has reunited, I was afforded the opportunity to really work on myself and my recovery and other issues and grow into a better person and a better mother, a better sister, daughter and aunt. I have learned skills for parenting that, perhaps, I otherwise would not have.

My life is far more manageable now and **my support system is larger and stable.** Things are no longer happening to me back to back as they used to before and the way I am able to handle the stress and disappointments that do come, is completely different. My relationships are healthier, and I no longer struggle with the health problems I had struggled with previously. I have been given the opportunity to start over in a new place, not surrounded by harsh memories and unhealthy people and situations.

I am no longer alone. The kids are in such a great place and learning their roots and have the blessing of being back with both their mother and father, as well as their siblings and other family members. My family and I have grown and are no longer so dysfunctional and constantly bickering. I am sober, I am healthy and continue to heal. I now have a husband and we have our children again, and we are flourishing together.

I thank God every day for everything that happened. Though it was difficult and painful, and I wouldn't wish it upon anyone, it allowed us to grow and learn.

Thank you for keeping me accountable, thank you for teaching me the skills that helped me to parent better. Thank you for bringing the kids to this country. Thank you for the time and work you put into this. We are happy and I feel so much joy and hope for the future.

Sincerely,
S.



April 26, 2025

**Houston Marriott Sugar Land
5pm - 10pm**

Won't you join us?

Gather your friends, family and co-workers and join us for an evening full of emotions, fun and impactful messaging that makes a HUGE difference for children in Fort Bend!

To sponsor or for tickets visit our website or click [here](#)

We need your help!

- **Be the organizer and invite your friends to attend!**
- **Share our event on Social Media**
- **Browse our Online Bidding site (live April 14)**
- **Interested in volunteering? Contact Tarina**

Can't make the Gala but interested in a Live Auction item?

Contact **Tarina** and we will make sure you have a chance to win!

Tsheridan@cafb.org



Another Way CAFB Meets the Needs of Our Clients

By Jheri Walters, LCSW-S

Our mission has always been to meet patients and their families where they are, and one way we are doing that is by making medical forensic exams more accessible. We are proud to collaborate with TXFNE, providing both sexual and physical assault exams on-site. This partnership helps us achieve our goal of offering essential support when and where it is needed most.

On-Site Non-Acute Medical Forensic Exams

Every Wednesday and Thursday, a nurse dedicated to the CAC is available to conduct on-site non-acute medical forensic exams. These exams are offered for cases where the assault or last known contact (for patients 13 and under) occurred more than 5 days prior. By providing these services on-site, we eliminate the need for families to travel to another facility, allowing them to receive care in a familiar, comfortable environment. If preferred by the patient and family, the exam can be scheduled on the same day as the Forensic Interview, helping to minimize the number of visits and making the process more convenient.

Coordinating Additional Support

During the exam, if any additional needs arise for the patient or their family, our nurse will work closely with the family advocate to

connect them with any necessary services. Should the patient require additional medical care, TXFNE will ensure coordination with the appropriate medical resources.

Collaborating on Case Review

Every other Thursday, a nurse from TXFNE attends the Case Review Team (CRT) to discuss the medical exams and address any questions or concerns. The nurse is also available to discuss any other medical questions that come up or if an exam would be appropriate in a case where the patient has not already received a medical forensic exam.

Acute Cases and After-Hours Care

For acute cases or exams required outside of our regular Wednesday and Thursday hours, patients and families can visit St. Luke's Sugar Land or one of the Oak Bend facilities to receive an exam by one of TXFNE nurses. Their hotline and response are 24/7 and the number can be provided to the families so they can contact the nurse as well. TXFNE hotline is 281-306-6893 and they would press 1 for the nurse.

We remain committed to providing compassionate, timely, and accessible care for all families we serve.





monthly spotlights

updates on training and MORE!



Welcome to the Child Advocates of Fort Bend Family

On Friday, March 28, we wrapped up two weeks of Pre-Service Volunteer Training. Twelve new volunteers, along with four staff members, were sworn-in to service by Judge Jamie Rawlinson. This incredible and diverse group of individuals will bring so much expertise, lived experience and talent to the children and families served by Child Advocates of Fort Bend. **Congratulations to all - we are lucky to have you!**

L-R: Dana Mersiovsky, Dani Gross, Maya Calonia, Kimberly Banks, Ruby Cabell, Jackie DeGroot, Lara Darr, Jasmine Morales, Maritza Ortiz Aya, Terri Morgan, Judge Jamie Rawlinson, Asha Kohli, Sheetal Ahuja, Cassidy Reue-Collins, Stephanie Helton, Graciela Saldivia and Cheryl Henderson.

JOIN US

FFRIENDS is an auxiliary volunteer group supporting Child Advocates of Fort Bend (CAFB). On April 10th they will host their annual membership social at the beautiful home of Pat & Brad Somers in Venetian Estates. In addition to socializing and hors d'oeuvres, guests will enjoy an interactive role play activity that helps explain the many adults and moving parts involved in the path towards healing for the children we serve.

FRIENDS Special Needs Fund underwrites the needs of children in the foster care system that CAFB and other providers are unable to offer – items that most people take for granted. The fund has underwritten backpacks filled with school supplies, summer camp tuition, tutoring, caps and gowns for graduating seniors and computers for college students. FRIENDS has more than 100 members and is managed by a Council which provides volunteer opportunities and social events throughout the year. Annual membership dues are \$50 per year. Membership is open to anyone. Visit www.CAFB.org to join or learn more.



LEARN MORE



FRIENDS OF CHILD ADVOCATES OF FORT BEND SPRING FLING

THURSDAY, APRIL 10
6PM - 8PM

Please bring a guest and join us to socialize with new and old FRIENDS. Bites and sips will be served.

*Please bring a bottle of wine or spirits with a value of \$35 or greater for our auction at Child Advocates of Fort Bend's *Inside Out Gala*.

To RSVP or for more information
contact Judy Maddison at
713-516-2043 or jbm951@icloud.com

DONOR SPOTLIGHT



Sugar Land Rotary Club's Community Awareness Night

On Saturday, March 22nd, the Sugar Land Rotary Club held their annual fundraising event. Child Advocates of Fort Bend was fortunate to be one of the recipients of funds raised that evening. With a focus on tackling Human Trafficking and Homelessness, the Rotary Club raised money through a silent and live auction. Over 160 guests and sponsors filled the ballroom at Safari Texas Ranch to hear our CEO, Ruthanne Mefford, speak about Human Trafficking specifically, the myths vs. facts, how it happens, and how we are responding. It was a lovely evening and we are grateful for the support of the community and the Sugar Land Rotary Club.

Did you know that you can donate cars, airplanes, boats, motorcycles or trucks and select Child Advocates of Fort Bend to receive the proceeds?

Visit [HERE](#) for questions or contact Lisa at lmoore@cafb.org



Justice-Involved Youth Pilot Program

By Aly Ferrante

For many years, CASA Advocates have served as valuable resources for children and families wrapped in the throes of the child welfare system, making a powerful impact. 2025 is bringing some exciting growth to the services provided by our CASA Program enabling us to expand our reach within our community. We have been given the wonderful opportunity to grow our impact as CASA by advocating for an additional extremely vulnerable population: Justice-Involved Youth (JIY).

Adolescents involved with the juvenile justice system need strong advocates to provide support, encouragement, guidance and advocacy. This is where CASA steps in. In partnership with Judge Teana Watson and Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation, Child Advocates of Fort Bend will begin implementation of the JIY Pilot Program in which CASA Advocates can be appointed to juvenile justice cases in need of extra support and advocacy.

The JIY Pilot Program aims to help these youth successfully complete probation, strengthen healthy family and community connections to prevent future involvement in the system, and increase educational engagement to promote academic success.

With the launch of the JIY Pilot Program, Child Advocates of Fort Bend is poised to make a significant difference in the lives of justice-involved youth. By providing these vulnerable adolescents with dedicated CASA Advocates, the JIY Pilot Program aims to empower them to navigate the complexities of the juvenile justice system, build brighter futures, and become thriving members of our community.



Nest and WINGS Spring Break Event Recap

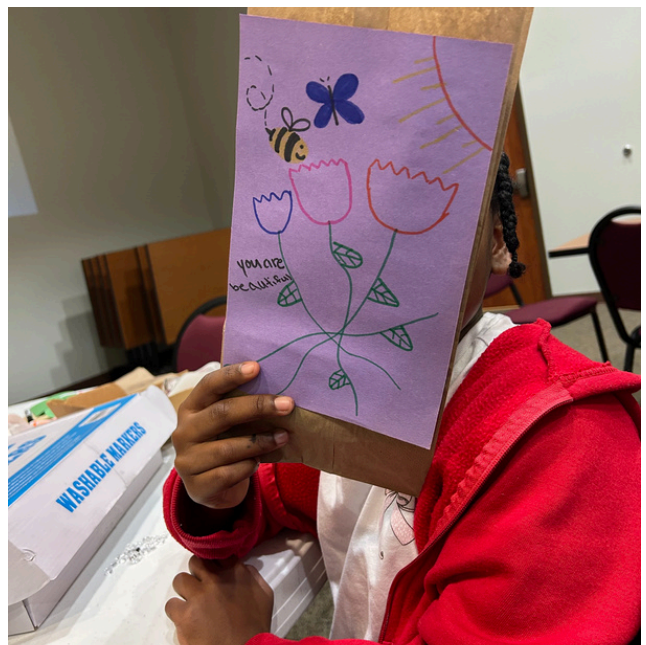
By Aly Ferrante

The CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Program recently hosted its annual Spring Break Event, providing a meaningful experience for youth ages 6-18 who have received services through Child Advocates of Fort Bend. This year's event focused on community service, personal growth, and peer connection.

A highlight of the program was a community service project at Catholic Charities, where the youth engaged in hands-on activities to give back to their community. This experience served to instill the importance of philanthropy and social responsibility, demonstrating the positive impact individuals can have on others.

Beyond contributing to the community, the youth also gained valuable personal benefits. The event fostered a sense of self-efficacy, empowering them to recognize their own capabilities and potential. Furthermore, it provided a unique opportunity for peer connection, allowing participants to build relationships and strengthen their support network through Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) tools.

After a productive morning, youth also had the opportunity to engage in a fun and creative painting session with Paint the Town, as a "thank you" for their volunteer efforts. Each youth got to create a masterpiece to commemorate their fun day with CASA.

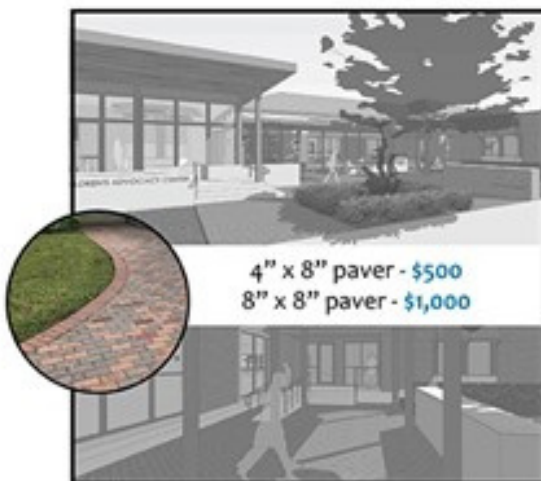


The CASA Program's Spring Break Event successfully combined community service with personal development, creating a positive and enriching experience for the youth served by CAFB's programs. By emphasizing giving back, self-efficacy, and peer connection, the program left a lasting impact on its participants.



Looking for a way to honor or memorialize someone you love?

Would you like to pay tribute to someone by honoring or memorializing them for a life well lived or a special occasion? Send a donation in any amount with their name, address, and a note about why you are honoring them. We'll send an acknowledgement letter letting them know that you donated on their behalf. Honor someone today by [donating online](#) or by mailing a check to Child Advocates of Fort Bend, 5403 Avenue N, Rosenberg, TX 77471.



What are some permanent honorarium choices?

Pavers. Your \$500 or \$1,000 gift can purchase a medium or large paver in our front walkway engraved with your name or message. Purchase your paver today and someone will contact you to discuss your inscription. If you have already purchased a paver, we thank you!

If you wish to honor or memorialize someone special in a more significant way, why not name a room in our building after them? We have a variety of room naming opportunities available including private offices, therapy rooms, family meeting rooms, conference rooms and more.

For more information, please contact Lisa Moore at Lmoore@cafb.org



CAFB Partners with Lamar CISD for Parent Education Series

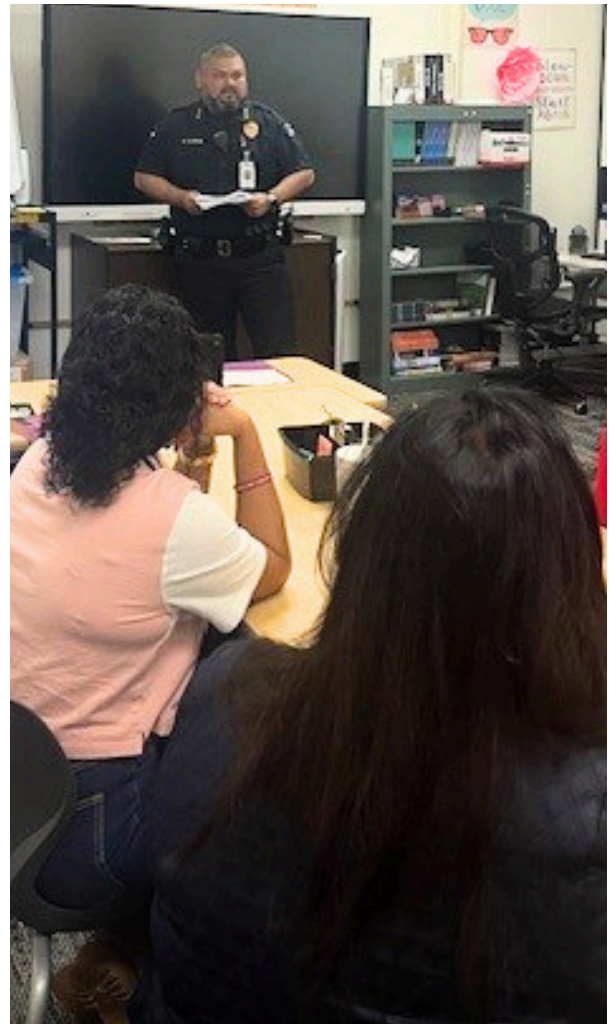
By Aly Ferrante

On March 6, 2025, Child Advocates of Fort Bend (CAFB) partnered with Lamar CISD's Project Learn to present an informative session for parents on "Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse." This vital presentation, led by CAFB's Jheri Walters and Sandra Glenn, along with Chief Garcia of Lamar CISD, provided parents with essential knowledge on identifying signs of abuse and taking appropriate action to protect children.

As part of CAFB's ongoing mission to increase awareness and prevention efforts in the community, this session emphasized the importance of parental involvement in child safety. Attendees learned how to recognize various forms of abuse, understand reporting procedures, and create safe environments for their children. Chief Garcia offered a law enforcement perspective, addressing legal responsibilities, the role of school officials and parents in child protection, and the link between exploitation and social media. He discussed the dangers of online interactions, how predators target children through digital platforms, and preventive measures parents can take to safeguard their children.

This presentation was the first in a two-part series aimed at empowering parents with the tools and knowledge needed to safeguard children. The second session, held on March 27, focused on Internet Safety, providing insights on cyber threats, online exploitation, and digital well-being.

Child Advocates of Fort Bend remains committed to working with schools, families, and community organizations to prevent child abuse and ensure the safety of all children. **For more information about upcoming parent education events and child safety resources, contact [Sandra Glenn](mailto:sglenn@cafb.org), Outreach Coordinator at sglenn@cafb.org.**



BUILDING RESILIENT **AND** TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNITIES



Featuring



Gregory Williams, PhD

Williams shares life-changing lessons learned from his years of abuse along with insight to survivors who are dealing with their own inner pain and doubts. He teaches survivors the keys to overcoming past abuses, traumatic events, and major setbacks.

His story will inspire you and help you discover the secret to conquering your own personal darkness and begin turning your negative into a positive!



The Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development is a program of the Department of Psychology in the TCU College of Science & Engineering in Fort Worth, Texas. Their mission is: to improve the lives of children through research, education, and outreach that addresses the impact of early abuse, neglect, and trauma. Their research and interventions are empowering parents, professionals, and students with trauma-informed strategies that improve outcomes for children and youth.



Erin Merry

Erin is an internationally recognized author, speaker, and child abuse advocate and activist. For six years of her childhood she was sexually abused, keeping her secret locked away in her childhood diary. Before graduating high school Erin published her diary into a book called Stolen Innocence.

In 2013 she had Erin's Law passed in her home state of Illinois. The law requires personal body safety taught in public schools every year. She has made it her mission to have it passed in all 50 states. Currently Erin's Law is in 38 states, Kerala, India and Ontario, Canada.

MAY 8 + 9

MAY 8 9AM - 4PM

MAY 9 9AM - 1PM

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
at SUGAR LAND**

BRAZOS HALL-103

14000 UNIVERSITY BLVD.
SUGAR LAND, TX 77479



Interfaith Gathering Recap

By Jennifer Brown

The Fort Bend County community is deeply interconnected, as evidenced by events like the recent Interfaith Gathering. This event highlighted the shared commitment across diverse faiths and values to protect our children and ensure community safety.

In March, we convened representatives from Christian, Islamic, Jewish, and Hindu congregations, along with community partners dedicated to supporting at-risk children and youth. The focus was to educate attendees about the critical issue of child abuse and explore collaborative actions to support children and youth in foster care and throughout our community. This valuable exchange fostered greater understanding of both needs and available resources in our area.

Our partner agencies included:

- **ACHIEVE Fort Bend** - Supporting schools through an early intervention, drop prevention program.
- **Arrow Child and Family Ministries** - Providing services including foster care support, adoption, behavioral health services, transitional living services, medical needs support and more
- **CarePortal** - Care-sharing technology that drives action for local kids and families in crisis.
- **Child Abuse Prevention Collaborative (CAP-C)** - Launched by CAFB to unite 40 agencies in Fort Bend County to prevent and address child abuse.

- **Crime Stoppers of Houston** - Dedicated to solving and preventing serious crime in the Greater Houston Area in partnership with citizens, media and the criminal justice system. Calling to report a crime is always anonymous.
- **Fort Bend County Health and Human Services** - Promotes and protects the health and well-being of the residents of Fort Bend County through disease prevention and intervention, public health emergency preparedness and response, community engagement, and helping to assure the equitable provision of basic human needs.
- **The Sanctuary Foster Care Services** - Stops the cycle of multiple placements for children in CPS care by providing support, resources and assistance to foster care families in a variety of ways.
- **DFPS Faith-Based and Community Engagement** - The faith community has a long history of helping those in need. DFPS wants to partner with all faith communities in Texas to help vulnerable children, adults, and families.

Child Advocates of Fort Bend believes that collaboration is key to prevention and is proud to partner with numerous faith leaders and community organizations dedicated to improving children's lives.

If you would like Child Advocates of Fort Bend to come and talk to your organization, please email Outreach@cafb.org.



our needs

This month, we have immediate need for:

- **Travel size toiletries** - Shampoo, conditioner, body wash, face wash, deodorant, tooth brush, tooth paste, etc.
- **Fast food gift cards, any amount**
(for children in court hearings)
- **Gas gift cards and UBER gift cards.**
Walmart, Target and VISA are best.



License to Help!

Did you know that Child Advocates of Fort Bend participates in the TX CASA Specialty License Plate Program? You can order a custom license plate with the phrase "Big Voices for Little Texans". Not only can you spread awareness and show your support for us but a portion of the cost of the plate goes to Texas CASA and the local programs to increase our statewide efforts to advocate for



every child in the foster care system. To order your plate go to <https://www.txdmv.gov/motorists/license-plates> and search for CASA under specialty plates OR visit your local tax assessor's office and ask for the Court Appointed Special Advocate license plate.



Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) Training

June 10 - 12, 2025

10am until 4pm

**Child Advocates of Fort Bend Training Room
5403 Avenue N, Rosenberg, TX 77471**

This two day training is specifically designed for those working with children who come from 'hard places,' such as maltreatment, abuse, neglect, multiple home placements, and violence, but can be used with all children. TBRI® offers practical tools for parents, caregivers, teachers, or anyone who works with children, to see the "whole child" in their care and help that child reach his highest potential.

TBRI® is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. The Fort Bend County TBRI Collaborative offers free training for professionals and caregivers who work with children who have experienced trauma.

For more information, contact [Alli Waterwall](mailto:AWaterwall@cafb.org) at AWaterwall@cafb.org



SIENNA™

RUN FOR THE ROSÉ 5k



SATURDAY
APRIL 12
8AM-11AM

Sawmill Lake Club

***** **BENEFITING** *****
**CHILD ADVOCATES
OF FORT BEND**

Get in your strides, steps & sips at Fort Bend County's newest chip timed race suitable for both beginners and experienced runners.

REGISTER TO RUN!



*Early-Bird Registration—
\$30 through March 9*

NO WAY 5K *Party Patrol*

*Don't want to run?
Come for the FUN!*

Festivities

- **BUBBLY BAR** (Must be 21)
- **FOOD TRUCKS**
- **FITNESS VENDOR BOOTHS**
- **HULA HOOPING & CORN HOLE**
- **LIVE DJ JAMS**
- **FINISH LINE CELEBRATION**



SIENNATX.COM

Johnson
DEVELOPMENT

save these dates



April 10, 2025

FRIENDS Spring Fling

6:00pm - 8:00pm

Contact **Judy** at Jbm951@icloud.com to RSVP

April 26, 2025

Inside Out Gala

Sponsor or Reserve your seat TODAY!

Contact **Tarina** at TSheridan@cafb.org.

April 29, 2025

Sip & Stroll

5:30pm - 7:00pm

Contact **Lisa** at LMoore@cafb.org to reserve your spot

May 8-9, 2025

Building Resilient and Trauma-Informed Communities

RSVP [here](#) to reserve your spot

May 22, 2025

Sip & Stroll

9:00am - 10:30am

Contact **Lisa** at LMoore@cafb.org to reserve your spot

June 10-12, 2025

Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) Training

10:00am - 4:00pm

CAFB Training Room

Contact **Alli** at AWaterwall@cafb.org to reserve your spot





"We must move beyond the ideal of a comfortable, self-focused life and answer the call to be an advocate for those who need one."

- Anonymous