the VOICES of CHILD ADVOCATES OF FORT BEND™



Inside /

CEO Update • National Adoption Month • 35th Annual Christmas Home Tour • Monthly Spotlights and MORE!

NOVEMBER 2026

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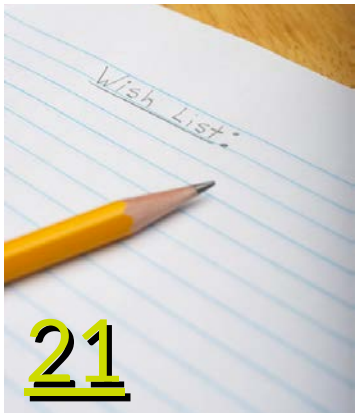


Keeping you informed on our mission:

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.



MONTHLY SPOTLIGHTS



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

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from the ceo

Welcome to our latest issue of VOICES. . . .

Welcome Friends,

November is National Adoption Month which raises awareness for children in foster care who are waiting for permanent, loving families. We celebrate National Adoption Day on November 20 where we show our support and celebrate children in Fort Bend County who have found their "forever homes" through adoption by loving families. We decorate the courtrooms at the Fort Bend County Justice Center, present each child with a rose and gift bag of toys and books, and invite community members to join the fun with arts and crafts, food and drinks, a photo booth and balloon display at the justice center. From babies to teens, adoption can be the culmination of a long road to permanency. With the help of their CASA Advocate, these children can be safe, secure and flourish. We wish them all the best with a very bright future. November is also a time for giving thanks. We gather at Thanksgiving and throughout the month to give thanks for blessings, family and the past year. It is a family-oriented holiday often highlighted by parades, a traditional feast, volunteering and, of course, football! At Child Advocates of Fort Bend, we want to thank our volunteers for all you do to advocate for our children and help them feel safe and supported – whether as a CASA Advocate, a volunteer in our CAC, a volunteer helping youth in juvenile probation or children receiving court-ordered services, or volunteering with our events and fundraisers. We are grateful and deeply appreciative of your commitment and dedication. We wish you all the best this season!

For The Children's Sake,

Ruthanne

Ruthanne Mefford, CEO







Christmas Home Tour

A fundraiser supporting services for children who have suffered abuse and neglect



December 4 + 5, 2026

Presented by Fred and Mabel R. Parks Foundation

About the Christmas Home Tour:

Since 1991 Child Advocates of Fort Bend has been showcasing homes lavishly decorated for the holidays in Fort Bend County's most beautiful neighborhoods as a way of raising money to support our programs. With the help of professional decorators, homeowners decorate their homes for Christmas and open their doors to the public. Guests purchase tickets to tour the homes and admire the talents of the homeowners and decorators as well as the homeowners' personal styles. This is one of Child Advocates of Fort Bend's largest fundraising events. Ninety-four percent (94%), of the proceeds go directly toward services for children.

Homes this year are in
Sienna, Sweetwater & Venetian Estates

Scan the QR code for info, tickets, and more!

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **Sponsor** – There are several opportunities left with perks CLICK HERE
- **Purchase Home Tour Tickets** Individual tickets – $35 CLICK HERE
- **Purchase a Holiday T-Shirt** –Super cute **holiday tees, available in short and long sleeve in green.** Show your support and get in the holiday spirit. Order yours today! Short-sleeved $30; Long-Sleeved (available online only) $35 CLICK HERE
- **Purchase a Holiday Ornament** - These beautiful hand blown glass ornaments are the perfect gift for everyone on your list. They measure 2.4 inches in diameter and come, ready for gifting! - $25 CLICK HERE
- **Volunteer** – Share your time as a 2-3 hour host in one of the homes. Bring a friend or family member and volunteer together! CLICK HERE
- **Entertainers** – Are you a singer? Do you play an instrument? Contact nandale59@gmail.com
- **Cookie Bakers -** Can you bake? Put those your skills to work! CLICK HERE

For more information contact Tarina at TSheridan@cafb.org.





FEATURE STORY

The Life-Changing Impact of Adoption

By Carollynn Thesing

Family reunification is always the goal, but when a child's safety and well-being cannot be assured, adoption offers the opportunity for a stable, permanent future.

For one brother and sister, that opportunity became a lifeline.

When a baby girl was born at just 26 weeks gestation, weighing only 2.2 pounds and testing positive for drugs CPS got involved. The family first came to the attention of our CASA team when the investigation started. During the investigation, CPS learned she had a 3-year-old brother living in the home under deeply concerning conditions. CASA Advocates were assigned to both children and they worked together to advocate for these children.

Although he was three years old, the boy drank milk from a bottle and did not eat solid food. He wore diapers, had years of plaque buildup on his teeth, and could communicate only through gibberish, repeating phrases he heard from caregivers or television shows. He was also terrified of both his mother and bathrooms, making routine activities such as bathing and brushing his teeth nearly impossible. He was immediately removed from the home and placed in foster care.

Meanwhile, his newborn sister spent months fighting for her life in the NICU. During that time, her only visitors were her CPS caseworker and CASA volunteer. When she was finally discharged from the hospital, she joined her brother in foster care.

Fortunately, both children were placed together in a loving foster home that provided stability, nurturing, and consistency they had never known. Baby girls' challenges continued as she faced multiple medical complications, including a diagnosis of Kawasaki disease, treatment with a DOC band, and several hospitalizations.

As the children settled into their new home, they finally began receiving the care and support they desperately needed. The young boy was diagnosed with receptive-expressive language disorder as well as pediatric feeding disorder, and began speech and feeding therapy. He was enrolled in a preschool program for children with special needs, where he received speech therapy, occupational therapy, and feeding therapy. This school year, he will take another major step forward as he enters a mainstream pre-K classroom.

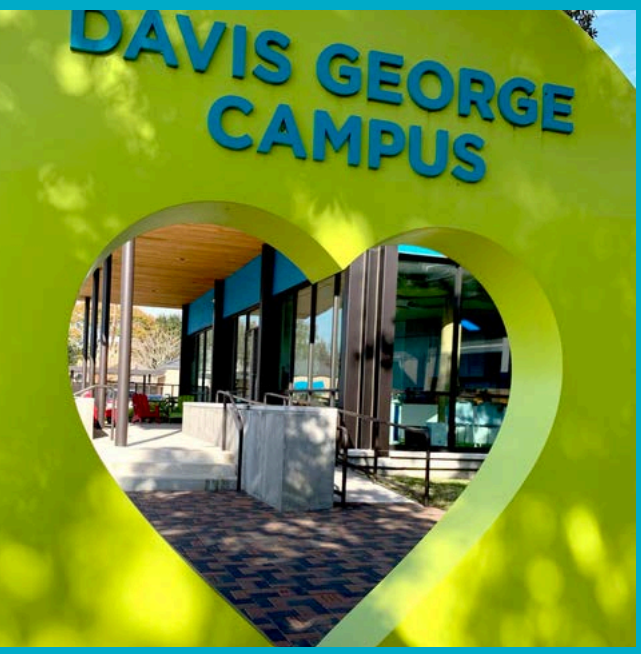
The progress both children have made is nothing short of remarkable. The little boy who once feared bathrooms now loves bath time. After several dental procedures under sedation to address years of neglect, he proudly wears a healthy smile. He is potty trained, beginning to enjoy eating food, and developing the communication skills that will help him thrive. Milestones many families take for granted have become hard-earned victories worth celebrating.

Behind every one of those victories is a foster mother whose love and determination changed the trajectory of their lives. From the day they entered her home, she became their fiercest advocate, ensuring they received the medical care, therapies, support, and encouragement they needed to heal and grow. She worked tirelessly to make sure they knew they were loved, they were safe, and they had every opportunity to succeed.

Recently, she made that commitment permanent by adopting both children.

Today, these siblings' story is no longer defined by neglect, fear, or uncertainty. Instead, it is a story of resilience, healing, and the transformative power of a loving family. Because one woman opened her heart and home, two vulnerable children now have what every child deserves: safety, belonging, unconditional love, and the promise of a brighter future.

As we celebrate National Adoption Month, we recognize the life-changing impact adoption can have when reunification is no longer possible. For these two children, adoption was more than a legal outcome. It was the beginning of a new chapter filled with hope, healing, and the opportunity to thrive.



monthly spotlights

updates from the programs and MORE!

STAFF UPDATE



Martha Medrano

Bilingual Clinical Family Advocate

My name is Martha Medrano and I am a Bilingual Clinical Family Advocate at CAFB. I'm a new mom and have a daughter that will be 1 year old in November. I was born and raised in Houston, met my husband in elementary school, and love dogs. I interned at CAFB in 2015 and came back in 2020, and now I'm back again!

STAFF UPDATE



Joe Driver

MDT Coordinator

Joe Driver returns to CAFB as an MDT Coordinator, after seven years away, bringing 14 years of experience in child welfare, including 11 years supporting the CAC movement and working with multidisciplinary teams. Outside of CAFB, Joe enjoys sports officiating and serves as a fire captain with the Westlake Fire Department. He and his wife, who is nearing completion of her doctorate, have two sons.



Toni Collins

Court Advocacy Specialist

Hello, I'm Toni Collins, and I'm excited to begin my role as a Court Advocacy Specialist with CAFB. I'm passionate about serving children and families and grateful for the opportunity to advocate on their behalf. Outside of work, I love traveling and spending time with my family. I'm the proud mom of adult boy/girl twins and a young adult son. I'm thankful to be starting this new chapter. I look forward to learning, growing, and making a positive impact.



October Prevention in Action:
Making Every Connection Count

By Sandra Glenn

October is recognized as National Bullying Prevention Month, and our Prevention Team has been busy engaging children, families, educators, and community partners through a variety of outreach, education, and awareness activities. Throughout the month, we have focused on empowering children with personal safety skills, equipping adults to recognize and respond to abuse, and strengthening our presence in the communities we serve.

We kicked off the month by participating in the Acorn Art Festival, where we connected with families, shared prevention resources, and increased awareness of child abuse prevention and child safety education. Community events like these provide valuable opportunities to engage families in meaningful conversations about keeping children safe.

Our team was also proud to participate in the District Attorney's Bike Ride for Survivors, standing alongside community partners and supporters who are committed to advocating for victims and survivors. The event highlighted the power of community collaboration in creating safer environments for children and families.

At George Junior High's Emergent Bilingual Celebration, we had the opportunity to connect with students and families from diverse backgrounds, sharing resources and reinforcing our commitment to prevention education that is accessible and inclusive.

In addition to community outreach, we have continued to expand our educational efforts through training and direct prevention programming. Staff members at Velasquez

-more

Elementary participated in our Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse Training, gaining valuable knowledge about identifying signs of abuse and understanding their responsibilities as mandated reporters.

Our Prevention Educators have also been busy delivering Child Safety Matters® lessons to students at Colony Meadows Elementary, Cora Thomas Elementary, Velasquez Elementary, and Pink Elementary. These evidence-informed lessons help students develop skills related to personal safety, recognizing trusted adults, identifying unsafe situations, and reporting concerns.

As we move through the remainder of October, we look forward to continuing our prevention efforts with Child Safety Matters® presentations at Slawinski Elementary, Jane Long Elementary, and Smith Elementary. We will also be participating in community outreach events at Harvest Green and Smith Elementary's Museum Night, where families can visit our awareness booths and learn more about available prevention resources and services.

To close out the month, we will provide Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse Training for the staff and volunteers of the Pregnancy Resource Center, helping strengthen community awareness and response efforts across another important network of professionals and volunteers who serve children and families.



October has been a month filled with meaningful connections, impactful education, and collaborative prevention efforts. Thank you to our schools, community partners, volunteers, and supporters who continue to join us in our mission to create safer communities where every child can thrive. Together, prevention is possible.

Friends Fall Coffee



Do you know how the FRIENDS of Child Advocates of Fort Bend Auxiliary Group helps children served by CAFB? For more than 30 years, FRIENDS has been helping the children we serve through a Special Needs Fund for items and services that these children need but are unable to afford. With a current roster of approximately 100 members, annual membership dues of $50 have provided tutoring, grocery gift cards, camps and dance lessons, basketball shoes, class rings, first time birthday parties, graduations gowns, backpacks and so many more items that youth require, yet many of us take for granted.



On Thursday, October 22nd, the FRIENDS Council hosted their annual Fall Membership Coffee at the gorgeous home and garden of Chinnu Meher-Homji. Volunteers, staff and supporters had a great time catching up and hearing what FRIENDS membership







dues have done for children served by CAFB! A special thank you to Lisa Hunter and the style experts from Fabulous You Boutique for showcasing fabulous fall fashions and styling tips modeled by our very own staff members: Jennifer Brown, Cheryl Henderson, Renee Lukefahr, Ruthanne Mefford, Katie Minor, Beth Murany, and Dana Petty. There were so many fun and fresh ideas for the season that you'll just have to pop into the store to try for yourself!



It's not too late to become a member of FRIENDS and help support for just $50. Visit the CAFB website to learn more about FRIENDS, download a membership form and join today to make sure you get invented to their Martini Night in Spring 2027!





Year of the Fire Horse Party

In the Chinese zodiac calendar a Fire Horse year is a rare, high-energy event that occurs once every 60 years, combining the independent, fast-moving Horse sign with the intense, transformative Fire element. Once every 60 years, the fire horse is created by pairing the horse with the fire element.

The Chinese zodiac system combines 12 animal signs with the 10 heavenly stems, or 10 symbols that represent the five elements, each in yin and yang forms. As the animal signs and elements rotate together year by year, every zodiac year is assigned an animal and element. A fire horse year is often described as being fast-moving and high-energy. The last fire horse was in 1966, The Horse deeply symbolizes strength, speed, freedom, unwavering perseverance, lofty ambition, and ultimate success.





On October 24th friends and supporters gathered to raise money for CAFB and celebrate this new year. They immersed themselves in Asian culture at a private lakefront home in Alkire Lake. Everyone enjoyed delicious appetizers from Alings Chinese Bistro, beverages including a Year of the Fire Horse signature cocktail, and lively conversation. The pinnacle of the evening was a traditional Lion Dance and Chinese Kung Fu by Teo Chew Association: Unicorn Dragon and Lion Dance Team. Special thanks to incredible CAFB Board Members who coordinated and provided for the evening festivities – Patti and Gary Tuma, Pat Somers, Irfan Motiwala, Betty Baitland, Eileen Akerson, and Brigit Engleman.

volunteer social











Thank you to everyone who joined us at Enchanted Forest on October 15 for our Volunteer Social!
We love spending time with the incredible volunteers who help make CAFB's mission possible. Your dedication, compassion, and service make a lasting impact on our community every day. We are so happy that you are part of our CAFB family!

season of GRATITUDE



Thankful for the Community That Makes Our Mission Possible

By Jen Brown

As November arrives and we enter a season of gratitude, we are reminded of how fortunate we are to be part of a community that believes every child deserves to be safe, supported, and given the opportunity to thrive.

At Child Advocates of Fort Bend, we have the privilege of walking alongside children and families during some of the most challenging moments of their lives. The work we do is meaningful, but it is not work we do alone. Every day, we see the difference that compassion, generosity, and a shared commitment to children can make.

We are deeply grateful for our volunteers, who give their time, hearts, and energy to ensure children have a voice and families have support. We are thankful for our donors and community partners, whose generosity provides the resources, opportunities, and encouragement that help make our mission possible. And we are grateful for the countless individuals, businesses, and organizations who continue to show up for the children and families in our community in ways both big and small.

Most of all, we are thankful for the children and families who allow us to be part of their journeys. Their strength, courage, and resilience remind us why this work matters and inspire us to continue showing up with compassion, dedication, and hope.

This month, we asked our CAFB staff to reflect on what they are thankful for. Their answers remind us that gratitude is woven into the heart of our mission. It lives in the relationships we build, the people who stand beside us, the small moments that make a lasting difference, and the shared belief that every child deserves someone in their corner.

-more

We are thankful for. . .

I'm thankful for all of the helpers. Being surrounded by people who want to make a positive difference in the lives of others is inspiring!

~ Jen Brown

A happy and healthy baby boy.

~ Ashton Lejano

I am thankful for family and friends. So many have lost loved ones this year and I know it is hard. I am grateful to have them around.

~ Cheryl Henderson

Health, family, and stability.

~ Jheri Walters

Hope.

~ Stevie Irby

I'm thankful for my family, good friends, great coworkers, and a job where I get to make a difference....even on the crazy days! I'm thankful for laughter, the people who keep me sane, and all the little blessings I probably don't stop and appreciate nearly enough. And, of course, I'm thankful for caffeine, weekends, and a good sense of humor... because some days you need all three.

~ Maggie McDougle

I am thankful that I can fully and consistently enjoy life by serving others and traveling.

~ Deidra Lyons-Lewis

I am very thankful for my all of my team!

~ Stephanie Helton

I'm thankful for a lot of things- my family, my friends, and my job!

~ Katie Minor

I am thankful to work for CAFB where I feel valued. I am also thankful for my family.

~ Renee Lukefahr

I am thankful to be back in Houston with my family and close friends.

~ Toni Collins

Forever grateful for the pure, unconditional love my two chocolate labs gave me. And my amazing colleagues!

~ Cloudy Ramos

The courage to travel to Europe solo for 2 weeks.

~ Carollynn Thesing

This year, I am most thankful for clarity. After years of uncertainty, there is a deep peace in finally seeing things as they are and trusting the path ahead.

~ Dana Petty

I am grateful for my family, my friends, and the wonderful life I have. God has truly been good to me. I have seen many families endure challenging times, and I am thankful for the ability to support them and help them through these challenging periods.

~ Renee Johnson

I'm thankful for so many things this year!! My family, my fur babies, my friends, my health, and the wonderful opportunities that CAFB has provided me. I'm grateful for the community of amazing clinicians and colleagues I get to learn from, who provide guidance and support, as I grow in my role!

~ Amanda Diaz

I'm thankful for my faith, family, friends, coworkers, good health, CAFB, and CAFB volunteers!

~ Melissa Johnson

I am thankful for the full life the Lord has gifted me. I have a large peaceful loving family with 2 thriving children including a new son in law, a passionate work environment, a new home after 30 years, longtime friends and a husband of 35 years who loves to travel and walk our Golden Retriever together. I couldn't ask for a better life!

~ Lisa Moore

As we reflect on the many things we are thankful for, one truth stands out: it takes a community to make a lasting difference in the lives of children and families. Every volunteer hour, every generous gift, every act of kindness, and every partnership helps strengthen the circle of care surrounding those we serve.

From all of us at Child Advocates of Fort Bend, thank you for being part of our community and for believing in our mission. Your support makes our work possible, and your compassion helps create a brighter future for the children and families who need us most.

This November, and throughout the year, we are grateful for you.



cap•c Child Abuse Prevention COMMUNITY

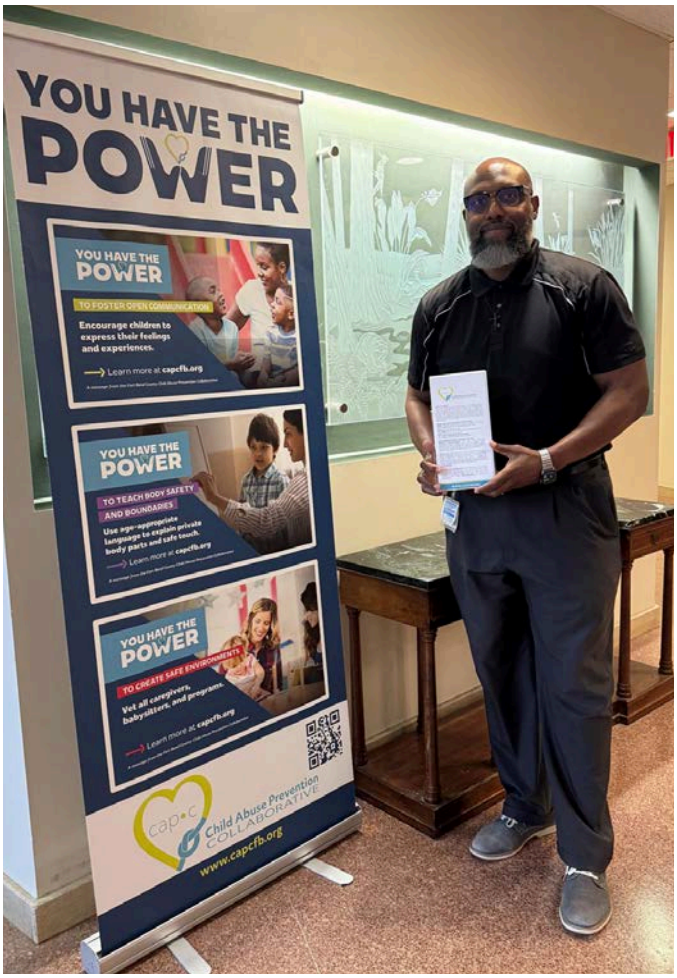
You Have the Power. . . and so does OakBend Medical Center!

By Dana Petty

We are grateful to OakBend Medical Center for being an important part of our Child Abuse Prevention Collaborative (CAP-C). Their Jackson Street campus is a community partner for our prevention campaign making education and awareness possible for their staff, patients and community members.

Do you have an interest in being part of the CAP-C Community and/or being a ***YOU HAVE THE POWER*** *site?*

Contact Dana Petty at dpetty@cafb.org



our needs



Gift Cards
(Visa, Walmart, Uber and fast food)

View our general amazon program needs link **Amazon Wish List**

Holiday Amazon Wish List
(these are for ideas only,
all new gifts welcome!)

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.

How You Can Help:

1 SHOP

Bring your new toy/gift card donation to CAFB.
Teen gifts are always in high demand. Amazon wish list: **https://amzn.to/4fGTZFx**

2 GIFT CARD

3 DONATE

Donate online h**ttps://www.cafb.org/donate/** or send a check address to CAFB with “holiday gifts” in the memo and we’ll shop for you!

CHILD ADVOCATES OF FORT BEND™

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Help Make a Child’s Holiday Extra Special



November 13

Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children
9:00am - 12:00pm
CAFB Training Room
More info or reserve your spot **here**

November 17

Culturally Responsive Support for
South Asian Families Training
11:00am - 1:00pm
More info or reserve **here**

November 20

National Adoption Day Celebration

November 20

Sip & Stroll
12:00pm - 1:30pm
Contact **Lisa** at **LMoore@cafb.org** to reserve your spot

December 4 +5

Christmas Home Tour

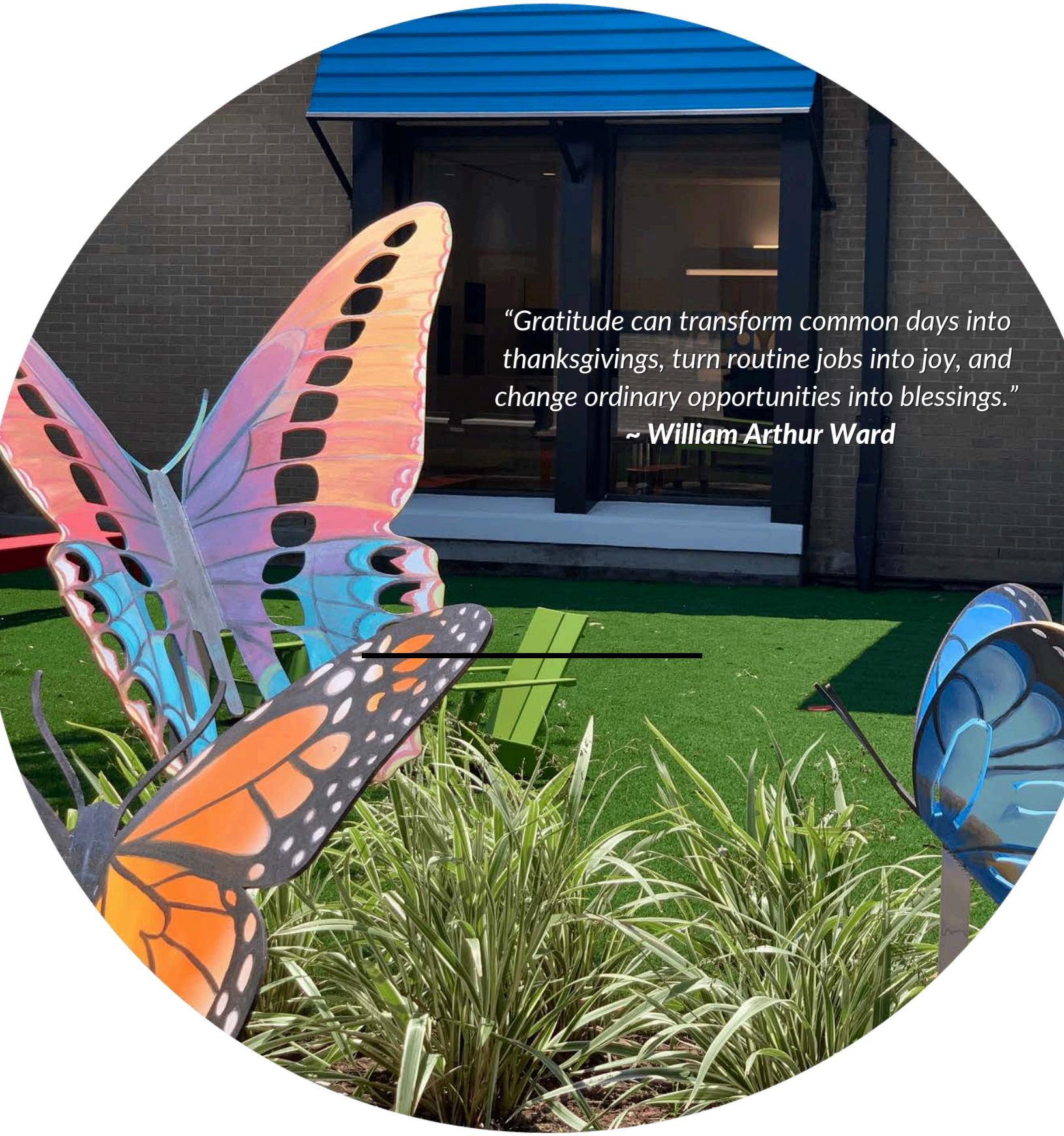
December 1-11

Holiday Donation drop off dates

January 25-29

Pre-Service Volunteer Training





CHILD ADVOCATES OF FORT BEND™