

Seguin started accepting applications in September 2009. The final home loan closed in January 2014.

"We are happy this program was able to provide such a great opportunity for a number of families in our city," Seguin Public Information Officer Scott Packard said. "This program helped a variety of people including senior citizens, single moms and young couples."

The program, now complete, struggled at first as many of the 70 initial applicants did not qualify based on their credit scores. Rules stated that applicants with scores under 560 would not be considered.

"Tracy Stalnaker (City of Seguin Assistant Director of Finance) helped us the whole way," Jordan continued. "This is good for my family."

For the Guerreros, the approval came just in time. They are expecting their second child on their two-year wedding anniversary in June.

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Community challenged to help stop child abuse; April officially declared Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month

April 9th, 2014



CASA volunteer Mary Hodges shares her experiences working as a Court Appointed Special Advocate. Hodges was speaking during Tuesday's commissioners court meeting. The court approved a proclamation declaring April as Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month in Guadalupe County. Also pictured is Tricia Schneider, CASA development director and casework supervisor.

By Darren Dunn

(Seguin) -- We all have a responsibility to try end child abuse in our community. That was essence of a message delivered Tuesday by Guadalupe County [District Attorney Heather McMinn](#). McMinn was speaking to the Guadalupe County Commissioners Court, which had just approved a proclamation recognizing April as Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month.

McMinn says more monetary and human resources are needed to combat the problems of abuse and neglect in Guadalupe County. She says the problem is very real, and we all need to be prepared to do something about it.

"It really is going to take an army to address the child abuse in our communities and in our state. We're very blessed to have legislators, commissioners and professionals that are willing to look at this problem and address it. In Guadalupe County last year, we had 311 confirmed victims of child abuse. These children are being abused and neglected not only in their homes, but also in the system, and by the system. Child abuse and neglect is a topic that we often don't want to talk about. Abusers rely on that conspiracy of silence so that they can continue to perpetrate on our children, but we as a community, whether we are professionals, whether we're volunteers, we are members of this community, we can do better," said McMinn.

McMinn says collectively the community needs to step-up to make sure these children and kept safe. She says this is something that can't be ignored.

"We need to take care of our own children first, and then we need to reach out beyond that whenever we're able to help take care of the other children in our communities, in our schools and our churches. But what we need to do, is we need to make sure that we're opening our eyes. That we're looking. We're looking to see what's going on and that we're brave enough, when we see something going on, to report it. If you think a child is being abused or neglected we must report that. We've got to get involved in these children's lives. I've sat across from too many witnesses who've cried saying they wished they would've called sooner. I've gone to too many funerals as your district attorney. It's time that we stand up and that we're brave enough to speak up for our children, but we do have to open our eyes. We can't ignore this problem in our communities," said McMinn.



Law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and local non-profit groups -- dedicated to fighting against the abuse and neglect of children in Guadalupe County -- gathered on Tuesday for the official reading of a proclamation declaring April as Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month.

Two non-profit groups that also work in support of children who have been abused or neglected were also on hand for the proclamation reading.

Tricia Schneider, development director and casework supervisor for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Central Texas, says they work to recruit local volunteers who can serve as an advocate for the children that find themselves in courtrooms because they've been removed from homes where abuse and neglect have been alleged. Schneider says they have way more kids who need this support than they have volunteers willing to help. She says CASA hopes that this awareness period will help them find more volunteers.

"There were 311 confirmed victims last year, of those 215 were in state foster care. Those are the children that CASA is advocating for. We were able to serve 68 children and we wish that we could've served all of the other children. There was a difference of 147. So when the district attorney mentioned that we do need more advocates, we do appreciate your support in helping to build awareness about that need," said Schneider.

Christy Williams, executive director of the Guadalupe County Children's Advocacy Center, says the proclamation will help to raise awareness about the many cases of child abuse that occurs locally. The advocacy center has placed pinwheels on the lawn of the Guadalupe County Courthouse. Each pinwheel represents the more than 300 kids who were abused locally last year. Williams says they need to do everything that they can to remind people that this is community must do more to protect its children.

"I appreciate the commissioners, once again recognizing April is child abuse awareness and prevention (month). Without the commissioners and the community and professionals as a whole to drive that force of awareness, it won't happen. We're the ones that have our eyes open to the problem, if we can just help the rest of the community see that the problems there, maybe we can see an end to it in the near future," said Williams.

McMinn says she's had to prosecute too many of these cases, and she knows that the only way to really stop the abuse, is for good people to get involved now. She says if you can't volunteer your time, figure out another way that you can help.

"If you have the funds to donate, please do so. If you don't have the money, if you have gently used toys, children's clothing, furniture, anything that you can donate to these organizations, there's some wonderful homes out there who need some assistance. If you have foster families in your church, or that you know about (in) your neighborhood, reach out to them, donate in time. If you can become a court appointed special advocate, please take your time to do that. These people are on the frontlines advocating for our children, we need more volunteers for CASA. If you can be a foster parent, please think about getting the training and opening your home to become a foster parent. If you can't, at least [become an advocate](#). An advocate for your own children, and an advocate for all the children in our community," said McMinn.



District Attorney Heather McMinn says more volunteers and money needed to help stop child abuse.

Mary Hodges is a new CASA volunteer. She says she's trying to give a voice to these children, who have been dragged into the system due to abuse and neglect. Hodge says it's important that we all speak out, and help out these children any way that we can.

"Race, richness, poorness, it doesn't matter, those children get hurt and they get abused," said Hodges. "If we can prevent one child from going to bed with one black eye tonight or one bruise, we've really accomplished something. I volunteer because I love children and people put money into computers and things like that, but the last time I looked that computer can not reach up and hug your neck and say I love you, good night and thank you. So money going into our children as our future and as a piece of mind to know that our babies are going to bed well feed and taken care of."

CASA and the children's advocacy center are always looking for volunteers and monetary support. More details about CASA can be found at www.casacentex.org, or learn more about the Guadalupe County Children's Advocacy Center at <http://www.gccac.net>.

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