

# Mission Moment: Cecilia Arvizu

January 1, 2022

For Cecilia Arvizu, becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), as part of her internship with CASA of the Coastal Bend, was an opportunity to put into action the past few years of her social work education. Upon completion of the training program in July 2021, Cecilia was appointed as a CASA volunteer to three cases with a total of eight children who were placed in foster care due to child abuse and neglect. Typically new volunteers are appointed to a single case, serving one sibling group; however, Cecilia wanted to help while also learn from a variety of youth and their families.



The most recent case Cecilia was appointed to, in late 2021, involves a sibling group of three children. One of the youth, a teenage girl, quickly connected with Cecilia. At first Cecilia was just another face of an adult involved with the child welfare system, as many professionals come and go during a child's time in foster care. However once the girl learned that Cecilia is a volunteer whose role is to be a listening ear, caring heart and strong voice in advocating for her best interests, she soon began to share about her friends and then about her trauma.

While Cecilia listened to the daily struggles this girl endured because of her abuse, Cecilia first worried that she would say the wrong thing. The girl spoke of how what most would view as simple, routine acts such as brushing her teeth, would trigger a flood of

painful memories. As she continued to listen, Cecilia realized that she did not need to say anything, she just needed to hold space for the girl to feel heard.

As one could imagine, after hearing the details of what the girl endured and the continued shock waves she experiences, Cecilia needed to process what she took in. She reached out to her CASA Advocate Advisor to share the discussion, her thoughts and to gain guidance in how to process and help the girl in moving forward. Being a CASA volunteer involves heart work, which can involve all kinds of emotions. It is natural and expected for volunteers to be emotional- a beautiful part of being human is feeling beyond our own physical boundaries and stepping into someone else's world to help share the celebrations as well as share the sorrow. For a child to not have to carry the weight of their trauma by themselves is relieving for them but also can be challenging for a caring adult. That is why we ensure our volunteers have guidance and support through our staff, their peers and community resources.

Since that initial conversation, Cecilia knew the girl was very resilient and smart yet still did not fully know to what depths, until they went out to lunch one day. When Cecilia arrived at the residence, the caregiver shared with Cecilia how the girl had already picked her clothes out and was excited for their outing. Cecilia could tell this meant more than just a meal for the girl-she was dressed and ready for a special experience.

While at the restaurant, the girl was at first shy to order and then with Cecilia's encouragement she spoke up. Once they began eating, she shared with Cecilia that this was the first time she was eating out and not expected to give something in return to her abuser afterwards. She felt liberated. "I saw she was relaxed and was enjoying just being a kid," said Cecilia. "I felt honored to have that role with her."

Cecilia last visited with the siblings for Christmas, helping create happy childhood memories for them. The girl recently celebrated her birthday and is anxiously awaiting to learn how to drive. She has ambitions for after high school that include becoming a helper in our community, such as law enforcement or the military, where everyone has each other's back.

To learn how you can make a difference as a CASA volunteer for Coastal Bend youth in foster care, attend an upcoming 45 minute Virtual CASA Info Session held every Wednesday at 12pm via Zoom: <https://bit.ly/2JAld0E>