

CASA of Terrebonne Tutoring Initiative

Approximately 443,000 children are in foster care in the United States. Most of these children have been victims of repeated abuse and prolonged neglect and have not experienced a nurturing, stable environment during the early years of life. Such experiences are critical in the short- and long-term development of a child's brain and the ability to subsequently participate fully in society. Children in foster care have disproportionately high rates of physical, developmental, and mental health problems and often have many unmet medical and mental health care needs. (Developmental Issues for Children in Foster Care, Pediatrics, Vol. 106 No. 5 November 1, 2000, pp. 1145-1150).

With this early exposure to abuse, neglect, chaotic environments, and instability often come academic deficits. Nearly 70% of children in foster care have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), only 50% will graduate from high school, and less than 3% will graduate from college. Of the 94 children currently being served by CASA of Terrebonne, approximately 50 are in need of meaningful tutoring services to help bring them to grade level.

In trying to get academic services for these children, we have come across roadblocks like transportation, confidentiality and tutor stability/cost. In response to this, we developed a program which addresses these various obstacles by recruiting volunteers with backgrounds in education who have gone through the training and background checks, or who are already CASA volunteer advocates. The tutors will provide high quality, short-term academic support services to children served by our program and who reside within a 40-mile radius of Houma.

In their capacity as tutors they will receive an hourly stipend of \$25, inclusive of travel expenses, for providing these services. They will provide tutoring services to children, meeting with them for 1-hour of intensive tutoring each week (plus travel time). They work with the children with a focus on 1) determining how that child learns; 2) helping the child develop learning strategies based on their method of learning; 3) training the caregiver on how to support the learning strategies; and 4) bringing the child up to grade level. The goal is for the child to become a confident learner who has built upon successes and utilizes the identified learning strategies, moving forward at grade level.

Tutors work in concert with the child's CASA volunteer, teachers, and guidance counselors to learn more about the child's academic history, find out what has been tried previously, and review any existing IEPs and build tutoring services around that model. They also receive assessments from the child's academic level. After a three-month tutoring period, they will be re-assessed to measure any gains made.

A good education can provide a way out for children in poverty and despair; if this project can demonstrate meaningful gains, it is worth every penny of the funding expended in support of it.