

# Volunteers stand up for abused children

Dozens of local residents took time Tuesday to stand for children in northeast Louisiana who have been abused or neglected.

The event was CASA of Northeast Louisiana's inaugural "Stand Up For A Child So They Can Stand A Chance" where people gathered at American Legion Hall on Forsythe Avenue to show their support for these children.

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates.

Advocates are the eyes and ears of the court, providing important information about a child in need so the best possible home for an abused or neglected child can be found.

Children who receive help from an advocate are much more likely to find a permanent placement than children who are left without an advocate, and therefore, without a voice in court, said Erin Stokes with Monroe's Center for Children and Families.

CASA volunteers began early Tuesday morning placing 200 cardboard cutouts of children outside American Legion Hall.

The cardboard cutouts represented some of the 800 children in Ouachita Parish who were abused and neglected last year, Stokes said.

In northeast Louisiana, there were 1,400 cases of abuse and neglect last year.



**MONROE MAYOR** Jamie Mayo, second from right, joins CASA workers and supporters Tuesday to stand up for the rights of abused and neglected children. The event was CASA of Northeast Louisiana's inaugural "Stand Up For A Child So They Can Stand A Chance" where people gathered at American Legion Hall on Forsythe Avenue to show their support for these children.

Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo, West Monroe City Court Judge Jim Norris and Monroe City Court Judge Fred Anman were among those who stood during different times of the event.

"They were here to stand here with these kids to show that somebody needs to be standing with our children always," Stokes said. "We had some great support from our local officials and the public."

"Foster children are not going to go away ... kids who have been abused is not something we should push under the rug," Stokes explained. "This is something that's real and it's something that should be brought to light."

She said many people in the area are not aware of the severity of the issue. Many people also do not know how many children in the northeast Louisiana region are

of those ugly truths that we don't like to think about. Unless it affects you personally, you often can avoid it.

"But, the fact is we have a very caring community. We are known for giving and for volunteerism. So, I know when people see the truth, they will act. We have that kind of community."

CASA of Northeast Louisiana also is looking for additional advocates to assist local children.

Citizen photos by Heather Rogers

Thursday, Sept. 10, to train new volunteers who want to become an advocate for children.

The class will be held at Center for Children and Families, located at 622 Riverside Dr., Monroe.

"We want to bring attention to our need for people to become volunteers and become advocates," Stokes said. "So, we thought what better way than to say we are going to stand for these

