

The VOICES of

CHILD ADVOCATES OF FORT BEND™



Inside /
CEO Update • Christmas Home Tour
• Understanding Teen Dating Violence
• Monthly Spotlights • And More!

February 2025

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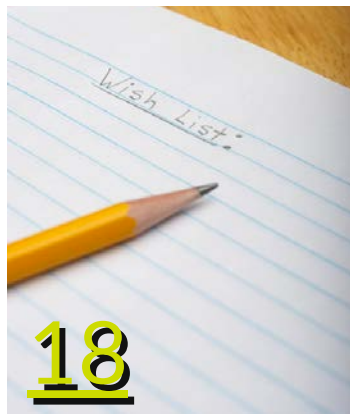


Keeping you informed on our mission:

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.



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5403 AVENUE N
ROSENBERG, TX 77471
281-344-5100



WWW.CAFB.ORG

JOIN US

Sip & Strolls

Thursday, Feb 27

9:00am - 10:30am

&

Tuesday, March 25

5:30 - 7:00pm

Child Advocates of Fort Bend
5403 Avenue N, Rosenberg, TX 77471

Join us for a tour through our Davis George Campus. Meet our staff, hear the stories of the children we serve and learn more about the work that we do.

RSVP to Lisa at LMoore@cafb.org or 281-344-5108.



from the ceo

This is a special time of year here. . .

Hello Friends,

Welcome to our February issue of VOICES where we highlight key issues around child abuse, share highlights of the past month and what's coming up and thank you for joining us on our journey to end the cycle of abuse and neglect. February recognizes Black History Month. At Child Advocates of Fort Bend, 33% of the children we serve identify as Black or Multi-Racial. It's important that we recognize the disproportionality of children of color in the child welfare system and that we serve them with culturally-informed and sensitive practices. Our staff and volunteers are trained in cultural competency and our **Advocacy For All** policy reflects our commitment to creating an inclusive agency. Let's start with some facts about child abuse of Black children. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, Black children were three times more likely to die from abuse or neglect than White children. Child Abuse occurs within the Black

community at about the same rate as the population, **13%**, but **25%** of all child abuse cases reported in America are of Black children. This compares to **10%** of White children. This disruption and instability can lead to additional trauma in the child's life. These higher incidence numbers are reflected in the number of incarcerated youth (many of whom experienced abuse), runaways and victims of sex trafficking. For years, child-welfare agencies, family courts and advocates have looked to fix racial disparities in the system. A study from the Journal of Pediatric Surgery shows that Black families are more likely to be investigated than their White peers, investigations involving Black children are more likely to be substantiated and Black children are more likely to be removed. There also is evidence of potential bias in doctor's and nurse's decisions about which injuries should be reported to CPS, according to the researchers. Some experts argue that disproportionate reporting of injured Black children may also be correlated to higher

continued next page



incidences of poverty in the Black community, so it is important that mandated reporters control for this potential bias. At Child Advocates of Fort Bend, **Advocacy For All** is the cornerstone of our work for **34** years and will continue to guide us to ensure that all children, regardless of color, receive the highest level of care, service and support.

February also brings the spotlight to Teen Dating Violence which is an adverse childhood experience (ACE) that affects millions of young people in the United States. The statistics are that **1 in 12** U.S. high school students have experienced either physical or sexual dating violence, according to the CDC. It is preventable and resources are available. Teen dating violence can take place in person, online or through technology. It can include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological aggression or stalking. Teens often think some behaviors like teasing and name-calling are normal, but these can escalate and become abusive. Teens may be reluctant to report unhealthy behaviors because they don't recognize them as unhealthy until too late, they are scared, don't know who to tell, may feel guilty or think they

may be punished. At Child Advocates of Fort Bend, we take this very seriously and are equipped to recognize teen dating violence and provide children and adolescents with a safe place to tell what happened and access therapy and other services to heal and stay safe in the future. We are also out in the schools talking to students about internet and physical safety and reached over **19,000** children and adults last year.

Thank you for your support of children who have experienced abuse and ensure that their voices don't get lost and are unheard. Recognizing abuse, understanding how it impacts children of different backgrounds and cultures and having evidence-based approaches in our advocacy and treatment work is critical to bringing healing, recovery and ultimately prevention.

For the Children's Sake,

Ruthanne

Ruthanne Mefford, CEO





Interracial Adoption:

By Aly Ferrante and Jheri Walters

When considering interracial adoption, it is important to acknowledge and address potential challenges that may arise. By being proactive and working to build a strong foundation of understanding, adoptive families are able to lead with love and build a healthy future together. Some key factors to consider include:

Learn About the Child's Culture:

Embrace and celebrate their cultural background, and find ways to incorporate it into daily life. Learning a child's culture in interracial adoption is essential for promoting cultural identity, connection to heritage, cultural competence, communication, and empowerment. It lays the foundation for a supportive and inclusive family environment where the child can thrive and develop a strong sense of self.

Build a Diverse Community:

Surround your family with people from different races and cultures to create a supportive environment. Building a diverse community is essential for creating a nurturing and inclusive environment for interracial

adoptive families. It provides opportunities for cultural enrichment, support, and understanding, ultimately contributing to the well-being and development of adopted children.

Address Racism Openly:

Be ready to talk about race, bias, and discrimination, and teach your child how to handle these issues confidently. Addressing racism openly in interracial adoption is essential for promoting awareness, coping strategies, identity formation, empathy, advocacy, and allyship. It creates a supportive and empowering environment where children can navigate the complexities of race with resilience, understanding, and a commitment to social justice.

Encourage Connection:

Help your child connect with role models and peers who share their racial or cultural identity. Encouraging connection with peers who share their racial identity in interracial adoption is essential for promoting cultural understanding, shared experiences, identity development, community and support, and empowerment

and advocacy. It creates a supportive and inclusive environment where adopted children can connect with others who share their background, values, and aspirations, and fosters a sense of belonging, empowerment, and resilience.

Commit to Lifelong Learning:

Keep educating yourself about the challenges and joys of raising a child from a different background. Committing to lifelong learning in interracial adoption is essential for promoting cultural competence, understanding racial identity, advocacy and empowerment, building connections, and personal growth. It creates a foundation for adoptive parents to continuously educate themselves, engage in meaningful conversations, and take proactive steps to support their child's cultural development, well-being, and sense of belonging.

By authentically investing in learning and encouraging an adopted child's heritage is the kind of love and commitment that can help adoptive families overcome many challenges and obstacles they may face.

Mixed Race Identity Development

The development of a mixed-race identity is a fundamental process for individuals with parents from different racial backgrounds. It involves exploring and integrating multiple racial and cultural identities, which can significantly impact their sense of self, belonging, and overall well-being.

Here are some key aspects of why mixed-race identity development is important:

Building a strong sense of self:

Developing a positive mixed-race identity can foster self-esteem, confidence, and a strong sense of who they are. Embracing all aspects of their heritage can lead to a more complete and authentic self-concept.

Navigating social complexities:

Mixed-race individuals often face unique challenges in navigating social interactions and expectations. They may encounter questions about their identity, experience pressure to choose one race over another, or face discrimination from within and outside their communities. Understanding their mixed-race identity can provide them with the tools to cope with these challenges and develop resilience.

Promoting inclusivity and understanding:

The experiences of mixed-race individuals contribute to a broader understanding of race, ethnicity, and identity. By recognizing and valuing mixed-race identities, we can foster more inclusive and accepting communities that celebrate diversity in all its forms.

Mental health and well-being:

Research suggests that having a strong sense of racial identity is linked to positive mental health outcomes, including higher self-esteem and lower rates of depression. Embracing their mixed-race identity can contribute to the overall well-being of individuals.

Cultural enrichment:

Mixed-race individuals have the unique opportunity to experience and learn from multiple cultures. This can lead to a richer understanding of the world, greater empathy, and a broader perspective.

However, it is important to note that mixed-race identity development is a complex and individual process. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and individuals may identify differently at various points in their lives. The support of family, friends, and communities is crucial in helping mixed-race individuals navigate this journey and develop a positive sense of self.





FEATURE STORY

Understanding Teen Dating Violence: A Teenage Boy's Perspective

Many times, when we think of teen dating violence we think about violence against girls. But just as important, violence against boys needs to be discussed. As a teenage boy, navigating the world of dating can be exciting but also challenging. It's important to recognize that dating should be a positive experience, but sometimes, it can turn harmful. Teen Dating Violence (TDV) is a serious issue that affects many young people, and it's crucial to be aware of its signs and impacts.

What is Teen Dating Violence?

Teen Dating Violence is any form of abuse—physical, emotional, or sexual—that occurs in a dating relationship among teenagers. It can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, but it's often overlooked when it happens to boys.

TDV includes behaviors like hitting, shoving, name-calling, threats, and controlling actions

Recognizing the Signs

As a teenage boy, you might feel pressured to appear strong and unaffected by emotional or physical pain. However, it's essential to recognize the signs of an unhealthy relationship:

- **Physical Abuse:** Any form of physical harm like hitting, slapping, or pushing.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Insults, constant criticism, or attempts to control your behavior.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Being forced into sexual activities without consent.
- **Digital Abuse:** Excessive texting or monitoring your social media activities.

The Impact of Teen Dating Violence

Experiencing TDV can have long-lasting effects on your mental and physical health. It can lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and even physical injuries. It's important to understand that no one deserves to be treated this way.

Seeking Help

If you or someone you know is experiencing TDV, it's crucial to seek help. Talk to a trusted adult—like a parent, teacher, or school counselor. There are also hotlines and organizations dedicated to helping teens in abusive relationships. Child Advocates of Fort Bend provides educational programs related to healthy relationships as well as internet and social media safety for youth, parents and community.

Promoting Healthy Relationships

Healthy relationships are built on respect, trust, and communication. Here are some tips for fostering a positive dating experience:

- **Communicate Openly:** Share your feelings and listen to your partner's concerns.
- **Set Boundaries:** Respect each other's personal space and limits.

- **Support Each Other:** Encourage each other's goals and interests.
- **Respect Differences:** Appreciate each other's individuality without trying to change one another.

Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month is an opportunity for us all to learn about the importance of healthy relationships and the dangers of TDV. As teenage boys, we must recognize that it's okay to seek help and speak out against abuse. By promoting respect and understanding in our relationships, we can create a safer environment for everyone. Remember, you deserve to be in a relationship where you feel safe, respected, and valued. Don't hesitate to reach out for support if you need it. Together, we can make a difference.

If you are interested in having us present to your school, faith-based community or social group, please reach out to:

Sandra Glenn

Outreach Coordinator

sglenn@cafb.org

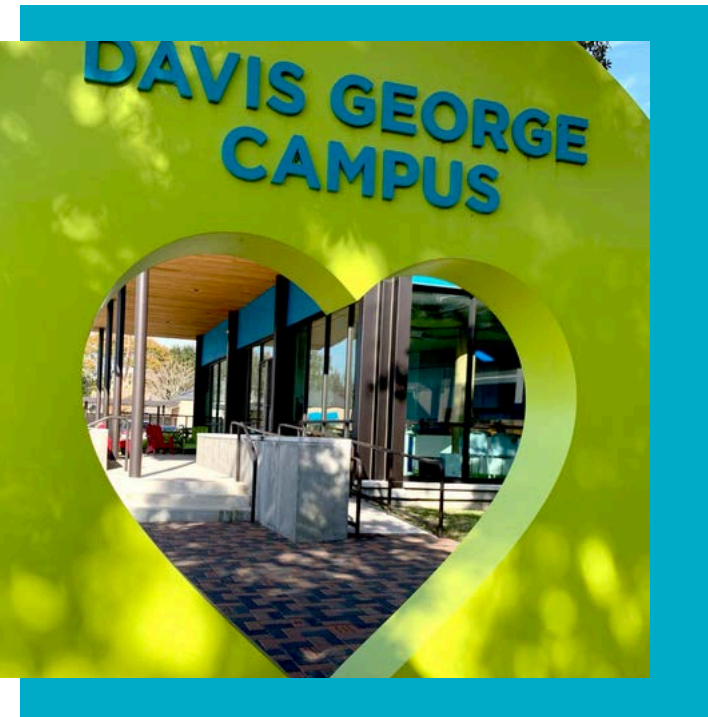
or

Dana Mersiovsky,

Training and Outreach Manager

dmersiovsky@cafb.org





monthly spotlights

updates on Giving Tuesday, new staff and MORE!

STAFF UPDATE



Marisol Medina

Executive Assistant

Hello, my name is Marisol Medina and I am the new Executive Assistant to CEO, Ruthanne Mefford. I have over 16 years of experience as an Executive Assistant with the City of Houston, nVent Thermal and Rosenberg Auto Investors. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Sam Houston State University.

In my free time, you will almost certainly find me either at home or wandering the city for new food places. What can I say... I LOVE FOOD!!! But overall, I love Sushi and Italian food. Besides being a foodie, I love random road trips. Call me crazy, but sometimes I will drive to either Austin or San Antonio for dinner... during the week that is.

STAFF UPDATE



Jasmine Morales Bilingual Family Advocate

My name is Jasmine Morales and it's a pleasure to be part of this amazing family! As a Bilingual Family Advocate at CAFB, I get to support families through the criminal court process and help advocate for forensic interview clients and their families. I am a MSW student at the Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston. One of the many reasons I accepted this position is the culture and people. I'm passionate about education and always seek opportunities to learn and grow both personally and professionally. Outside of work, you will find me shopping for indoor plants at plant nurseries and thrifting all over Houston and Katy! If anyone has any great recommendations in this area, I would love to hear them! Looking forward to working with you all and contributing to the mission of Child Advocates of Fort Bend!

Did you know that you can donate cars, airplanes, boats, motorcycles or trucks and select Child Advocates of Fort Bend to receive the proceeds?

Visit [HERE](#) for questions or contact Lisa at lmoore@cafb.org



Teen Groups!

By Megan DeYoung, Ophelia Mok, Kimberly Bautista and Amanda Penney

This fall, the Family Advocacy team started two new support groups - one for teen girls and another for caregivers. The purpose of these groups was to create a welcoming and safe space for teens and caregivers to process their experiences related to trauma. Our aim was to provide psychoeducation about abuse and to foster a sense of community for many who may otherwise feel isolated in what they have been going through.

Our teen support group ended on a high note with a series of meaningful activities designed to provide closure and celebrate the participant's healing journeys. We began with a powerful "Letting Go" activity, where the girls smashed plates to symbolize the things they wanted to leave behind. This included barriers to their healing, past pain, and limiting beliefs. This exercise highlighted the importance of trauma-informed care, offering a safe and empowering space for a physical release and emotional healing. Next, the girls wrote down their hopes and goals, releasing them into the sky with balloons as a symbol of hope for the future of their healing journeys. To further mark the occasion, each participant painted memorial rocks that will be displayed in the CAFB courtyard. This allowed participants to leave a lasting legacy that is a testament to their resilience and offers a lasting visual representation of their growth and strength. Finally, the girls painted handprints on a canvas to be showcased for the next teen group to see, serving as a reminder of their journey and the supportive community they





built. These activities provided a deeply impactful and transformative way to close the group and celebrate their healing journey. Our eleven-week caregiver support group also ended last month. Much of the last session involved group members sharing encouraging words with one another. Members identified strengths in one another, including ways they had seen other caregivers show unwavering support for their children despite challenging circumstances. This was a powerful experience for each participant, as many of them have few, if any, people in their lives whom they feel that they can open up to about what it is like to walk with a child through the aftermath of abuse. At the end of the group, the caregivers expressed that when they think about their child's abuse, they no longer feel alone with their experiences.

In both groups, we were reminded of the profound importance of finding support and connection through shared experiences. The courage to open up and the willingness to listen fostered a sense of community that became a cornerstone of the healing process. Through thoughtful closure activities, participants were able to acknowledge their journeys, honor their progress, and leave with a sense of resolution. The closing rituals not only marked the end of this chapter but also highlighted the resilience and strength that will continue to guide participants forward. These moments emphasize the transformative power of connection, closure, and hope on the path to healing. Our team is looking forward to starting more groups in the future.



save the date



CHILD
ADVOCATES
OF FORT BEND™

all the feelings GALA

SATURDAY
APRIL 26, 2025

SPONSORSHIPS ARE NOW AVAILABLE.

LEARN MORE



THANK YOU



Thank you to Janet Sue Reid from the Fort Bend Star for coming by to learn more about us and the work that we do and for writing this lovely article about our agency!

Curious about what she said? Read it [here](#).

TRUST-BASED RELATIONAL INTERVENTION (TBRI®)

By Alli Waterwall

Trust-Based Relational Intervention or TBRI® is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children.

TBRI® uses **Empowering Principles** to address physical needs, **Connecting Principles** for attachment needs, and **Correcting Principles** to disarm fear-based behaviors.

The Fort Bend County TBRI Collaborative is a multidisciplinary team of community professionals who are passionate about making our county one that is trauma informed. We provide a 24-hour Caregiver Training that includes 4 sessions, an **Introduction and Overview, Connecting Principles, Empowering Principles, and Correcting Principles.**

We are excited to share our new training format and 2025 training dates. This year we are offering the Caregiver Training in a

comprehensive two and three-day format. The hope is that this will shorten the time frame it takes to complete the training while alleviating time away from other responsibilities.

We will be offering the two-day training on **February 11th and 12th** from 10am-4pm.

Additionally, we will be offering the three-day training on **June 10th- 12th** and **October 14th- 16th** from 10am- 4pm.

The trainings will be held at the Child Advocates of Fort Bend Campus. Lunch and snacks will be provided.

If you or your organization is in need of the training and are not able to attend the offered dates/ times, please reach out to **Alli Waterwall** at AWaterwall@cafb.org to arrange additional trainings as we continually strive to deliver this material to all who are interested.

This training is not solely for caregivers. We encourage any and every individual who works with children or desires to become more trauma informed within their personal and/or professional life to attend.

CHILD **ADVOCATES** OF FORT BEND™

NEW VOLUNTEER TRAINING

CLASSROOM HOURS

MARCH 17 - 9AM-4PM

MARCH 19 - 9AM-4PM

MARCH 21 - 9AM-4PM

MARCH 24 - 9AM-4PM

MARCH 26 - 9AM-4PM

MARCH 28 - 9AM-1PM

For more information, please contact Jen Brown

jbrown@cafb.org

our needs

This month, we have immediate need for:

- **Snack bags:** individual serving bags of goldfish, teddy grahams, and fruit snacks in sandwich baggies
- **Subway gift cards**
(for children in court hearings)
- **Gas gift cards and UBER gift cards.**
Walmart, Target and VISA are best.



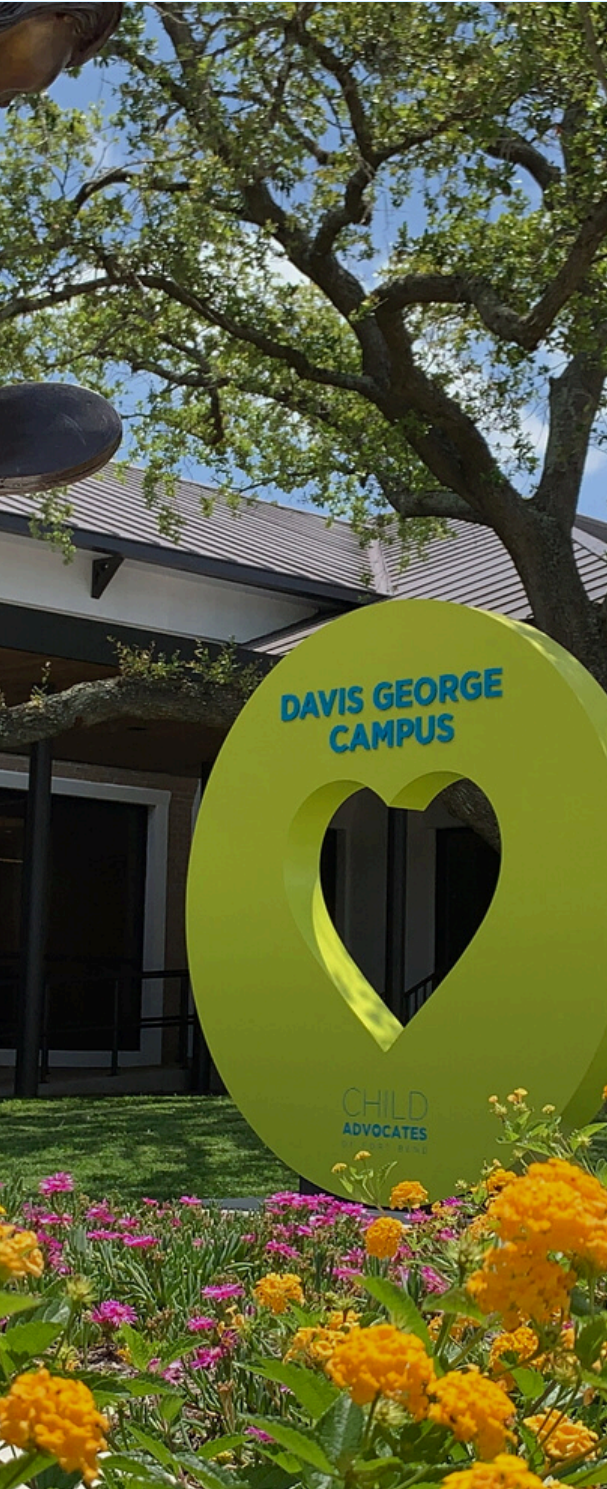
License to Help!

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.

save these dates



February 4, 2025

Darkness to Light

10:00am - 1:00pm

Contact **Dana** at DMersiovsky@cafb.org for details or to reserve your spot

February 11-12, 2025

Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) Training

10:00am - 4:00pm

CAFB Training Room

Contact **Alli** at AWaterwall@cafb.org to reserve your spot

February 20, 2025

Advocating for Youth with Disabilities Training

11:00am - 2:00pm

CAFB Training Room

Contact **Dana** at DMersiovsky@cafb.org to reserve your spot

February 27, 2025

Sip & Stroll

5:30pm - 7:00pm

Contact **Lisa** at LMoore@cafb.org to reserve your spot

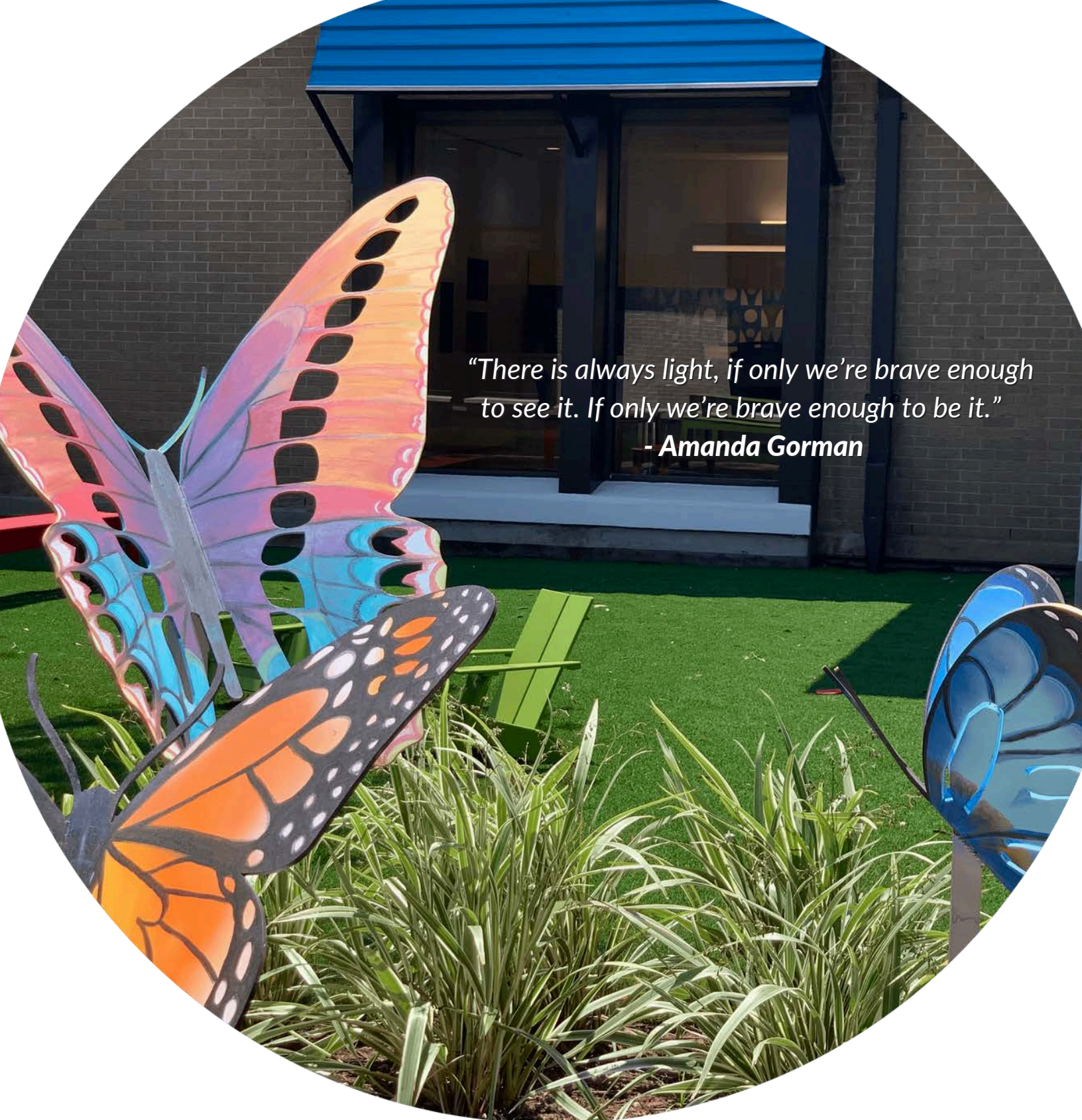
April 26, 2025

Inside Out Gala

Sponsor or Reserve your seat TODAY!

Contact **Tarina** at TSheridan@cafb.org.





"There is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."
- Amanda Gorman

CHILD **ADVOCATES** OF FORT BEND™