



## Suitcases for kids

BY ROY WAGGONER

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A suitcase is a far cry from a plastic bag.

Girl Scout Ambassador Katy Garrison said she believes in that idea and wants children working with Court Appointed Special Advocates to feel like they have something stable in their lives, something to call their own.

"I noticed a lot of kids are taken out of their homes, and they can't carry much with the plastic bags they normally are given for their things," she said.

That's why she has started a "Suitcase for CASA" project designed to collect suitcases from around the community for children in the CASA system. It's her Gold Award project for Troop 257 of Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest, and she currently has about 50 suitcases. Her goal is to collect 200 suitcases.

The suitcases will go to Child Protective Services for children to fill up with belongings when they are taken from their parents and managed by CASA advocates and foster families. A stuffed animal or toy and poem about a brighter future will be in each suitcase.

"Just having this suitcase gives hope for the future, something they can hold onto," Garrison said.

She started small with word-of-mouth and fliers but now has partnered with area organizations to serve as drop-off locations, even holding collection days today and Aug. 7 to grab more attention to the cause.

"I just thought this would be a good way to make this more visible. We still need more," Garrison said.

Father Dale Garrison said he thinks the Saturday drop-off events will offer people a place to give because some aren't sure where to drop off the suitcases.

Katy Garrison said the goal is for the suitcase project to become a self-sustaining, communitywide project.

Corri Garrison, who pulls double duty as Katy's mother and troop leader, said getting the word out has been the hardest part of the project, but it's grown to include suitcases from Dallas, and even Tennessee. She's excited about her daughter's progress.

"I'm so proud of her. She's progressed from a little Brownie to leading a project like this," she said.

CASA Director Lyn White-Giesler said this project is meaningful because it gives children something comfortable and "homey."

"This will really impact kids. They literally just have to carry bags," she said.

She said she plans to tell the Texas CASA organization about the project in the hopes of inspiring others in the state to do the same work.

“Sometimes a spark can turn into a flame,” White-Giesler said.

## **WHERE TO GO**

### **Suitcases may be dropped off at the following locations:**

>> **Saturday:** St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, 1601 E. 42nd St., 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

>> Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest, 5217 N. Dixie Blvd. in Odessa or 901 W. Dengar in Midland, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

>> Ector County Appraisal District, 1301 E. Eighth St., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

>> **Mondays:** St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, 1601 E. 42nd St., 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

>> **Aug. 7:** East Walmart on 42nd Street, both entrances. Times pending.

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