

# Frequently Asked Questions about CASA



## **What is a CASA volunteer?**

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer is a trained citizen who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interests of a child in court. Children helped by CASA volunteers include those for whom home placement is being determined in juvenile court. Most of the children are victims of abuse and neglect.

## **What is the role of a CASA volunteer?**

A CASA volunteer provides a judge with carefully researched background details about the child to help the court make a sound decision about that child's future. Each home placement case is as unique as the child involved. The CASA volunteer must determine if the best interest of the child is staying with their parents or guardians, being placed in foster care, or being freed for permanent adoption. The CASA volunteer makes a recommendation on placement to the judge and follows through on the case until it is permanently resolved.

## **How do CASA volunteers investigate a case?**

To prepare a recommendation, the CASA volunteer talks with the child, parents, family members, social workers, school officials, health providers and others who are knowledgeable about the child's history. The CASA volunteer also reviews all records pertaining to the child – school, medical, case worker reports and other documents.

## **How are CASA volunteers different from social service caseworkers?**

Social workers generally are employed by state governments sometimes working on multiple cases at a time. The CASA volunteer has more time and a smaller caseload (average of 1-2 cases) to investigate a case. The CASA volunteer does not replace a social worker on a case; they are an independent appointee of the court. The CASA volunteer thoroughly examines a child's case, knows about various community resources and makes recommendations to the court independent of state agency restrictions.

## **How are CASA volunteers different from attorneys?**

The CASA volunteer does not provide legal representation in the courtroom. That is the role of the attorney. However, the CASA volunteer does provide crucial background information that assists attorneys in presenting their cases. It is important to remember that CASA volunteers do not represent a child's wishes in court. Rather, they speak for the child's best interests.

## **Is there a "typical" CASA volunteer?**

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life and possess a variety of professional, educational and ethnic backgrounds. There are more than 70,000 CASA volunteers nationally. Local programs vary in number of volunteers they utilize. Aside from their CASA volunteer work, 64 percent are employed in full- or part-time jobs; the majority tends to be professionals with 58% college or university graduates. The majority (82%) of the volunteers nationwide are women.

## **How do CASA volunteers advocate for children?**

CASA volunteers offer children trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings. They help explain to the child the events happening involving the case, reasons they are in court and the roles of the judge, lawyers and case workers. While remaining objective observers, CASA volunteers also encourage the child to express his or her own opinion and hopes about the case.

## **How many cases does a CASA volunteer carry at a time?**

The number varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but an average caseload is one to two.

## **Do lawyers, judges and social caseworkers support CASA?**

Yes. Juvenile and family court judges implement the CASA program in their courtrooms and appoint volunteers. CASA has been endorsed by the American Bar Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice.

## **Does the federal government support CASA?**

CASA is a priority project of the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The office encourages the establishment of new CASA programs, assists established CASA programs, and provides partial funding for the National CASA Association.

## **How many CASA programs exist?**

There are now 930 CASA programs in every state across the country, including Washington DC and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## **How effective are CASA programs?**

Preliminary findings show that children who have been assigned CASAs tend to spend less time in the foster care system and received more services than those who do not have CASA representation. Judges have observed that children with a CASA also have better chances of finding permanent homes.