



CASA FACT SHEET

What is a CASA volunteer?

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

What is the CASA volunteer's role?

A CASA provides the judge with the carefully researched background of 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 must determine if it is the child's best interests to stay with his / her parents or guardians, be placed in foster care, or be freed for permanent adoption. The CASA makes a recommendation on placement to the judge, and follows through on the case until it is permanently resolved.

How does a CASA volunteer investigate a case?

To prepare an investigation, the CASA talks to the child, parents, family members, social worker, school officials, health providers and others knowledgeable about the child's history. The CASA volunteer also reviews all records pertaining to the child – school, medical and caseworker reports; and other documents.

How does the role of a CASA volunteer differ from an attorney?

The CASA does not provide legal representation in the courtroom. That is the role of the attorney. However, the CASA does provide crucial background information that assists attorneys in presenting their cases.

NOTE: A CASA does not represent a child's wishes in court. Rather, they speak to the child's best interests.

How does a CASA volunteer differ from a social service caseworker?

Generally, state governments employ the social workers. They sometimes work on as many as 60 to 90 cases at a time and are frequently unable to conduct a comprehensive investigation of each. The CASA worker is a volunteer with more time and a smaller caseload (an average of 1-2 cases at a time). The CASA does not replace a social worker on a case; he or she is an appointee of the court. The CASA volunteer can thoroughly examine a child's case, has knowledge of community resources, and can make a recommendation to the court, independent of state agency restrictions.

Is there a typical CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life, with varied ethnic, professional and educational backgrounds. There are more than 50,000 CASA volunteers nationally. Local programs vary in the number of volunteers utilized. Aside from their CASA volunteer work, 52 percent are employed in regular, full-time jobs; the majority tend to be professionals. 82% of the volunteers nationwide are women; 18% are men.

How does the CASA volunteer relate to the child he or she represents?

CASA volunteers offer children trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings. They explain to the child the events that are happening, the reasons they all are in court, and the roles the judge, lawyers, and social workers play. CASA volunteers also encourage the child to express his or her own opinion and hopes, while remaining objective observers.

Do lawyers, judges and social service caseworkers support CASA?

Yes. Juvenile and family court judges implement the CASA program in their courtrooms and appoint volunteers. The CASA program is endorsed by the American Bar Association; the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and 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 the new CASA programs, assists established CASA programs, and provides partial funding for the National CASA Association.

How many CASA programs are there?

There are now over 900 CASA programs across the country, including Washington, D.C. and the Virgin Islands.

How effective have CASA programs been?

Findings show that children who have been assigned CASA volunteers tend to spend less time in court and less time within the foster care system than those who do not have CASA representation. Judges have observed that CASA children have better chances of finding permanent homes than non-CASA children.

How much time does it require?

Each case is different. A CASA usually spend about 10 hours doing research and conducting interviews prior to the first court appearance. More complicated cases take longer. Once initiated into the system, CASA volunteers work about 10–15 hours per month.

How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved with a case?

The CASA volunteer continues until the case is permanently resolved. One of the primary benefits of the CASA program is that, unlike other court principals who often rotate cases, the CASA volunteer is a consistent figure in the proceedings, and provides continuity for a child.

Are there any other agencies or groups that provide the same service?

No. There are other child advocacy organizations, but CASA is the only program where volunteers are appointed by the court to represent a child's best interest.

What children are assigned CASA volunteers?

Children who are victims of abuse and neglect who have become wards of the court are assigned CASA volunteers. The program is most common in juvenile and family court cases.

What is the role of the National Casa Association?

The National CASA is a non-profit organization that represents and serves the local CASA programs. It provides training, technical assistance, research, media and public awareness.

How is CASA funded?

At the local level, CASA programs are generally funded through a State's department of justice. Many programs are privately funded through service organizations, such as the junior league and the National Council of Jewish Women. The National CASA Association is funded through a combination of private grants, federal funds (U.S. Justice Department), memberships and contributions.

How can I get more information about becoming a CASA volunteer or assisting the cause in another capacity?

CONTACT:

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Lower Shore CASA serves Worcester County

As dawn broke over the beach,
the old man asked the youth why
he was flinging starfish into the sea.
The answer – they'd die if left in the sun.
“But the beach goes on for miles and there are
millions of them,” he muttered.
“What difference is it going to make?”
The young man, looking at the starfish said,
as he threw it to safety,
“It makes a difference to this one.”

CASA—making a difference, one child at a time.