

fact sheet

What is a CASA volunteer?

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a specially trained volunteer (21 or older) who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interests in court of an abused and/or neglected child. Children helped by CASA volunteers include those in foster care for whom permanency is being addressed.

What training does a CASA volunteer receive?

CASA volunteers undergo a thorough training course conducted by the local CASA program. CASA Volunteers' pre-service training is 32 hours and utilizes the National CASA Association's training curriculum. Volunteers learn about courtroom procedure from the principals in the system – from judges, lawyers, social workers, court personnel, and others. CASA volunteers also learn effective advocacy techniques for children, and are educated about specific topics ranging from seminars on child sexual abuse to discussions on early

childhood development and adolescent behavior.

A volunteer has three roles.

As a child advocate, the CASA volunteer has three main responsibilities:

- 1). To serve as a fact-finder for the judge by thoroughly researching the current and background facts of each assigned case;
- 2). To provide these facts in report form to the judge and to speak for the child in the courtroom, representing the child's best interests; and
- 3). To continue to act as an overseer during the life of the case, ensuring that it is brought to a swift and appropriate conclusion in the child's best interests.

How does a CASA volunteer investigate a case?

In order 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 and case worker reports, etc.

How does a CASA volunteer differ from a caseworker?

Caseworkers are employed by state governments. They work on as many as 30 cases at a time and are frequently unable to conduct a comprehensive investigation on 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 volunteer does not replace a caseworker on a case; he or she is an independent appointee of the Court. The CASA volunteer can thoroughly examine a child's case, has knowledge of community resources, and can make recommendations to the Court, independent of state agency restrictions.

Is there a "typical" CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life, with a variety of professional, educational and ethnic backgrounds. Aside from their CASA volunteer work, 52% are employed in regular full-time jobs; 82% of the volunteers nationwide are women and 18% are men.

How does the CASA volunteer relate to the child?

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 judges, 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 workers 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. Dept. of Justice.

How effective have CASA programs been?

Preliminary findings show that children who have been assigned CASA volunteers tend to spend less time in Court and in the foster care system than those without CASAs. Judges have observed that CASA children also have better chances of finding permanent homes than non-CASA children.

How much time does it require?

Each case is different. A CASA volunteer usually spends more time conducting research and interviews prior to the first court appearance. Once the initial investigation is complete, volunteers spend approximately 10-15 hours a month maintaining contacts and gathering information.

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

CASA of Lancaster County requires an 18 to 24 month commitment upon assignment of case. However, CASA strives to remain involved should the case continue beyond that point, until it 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.

What children are assigned to CASA volunteers?

Children from birth to 18 years of age who are victims of abuse and/or neglect and who have become wards of the court are assigned CASA volunteers. CASA of Lancaster County prioritizes assignment of volunteers to dependent children from birth to 4 years of age.

How can I get more info about CASA of Lancaster County and volunteering?

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