



CASA VOLUNTEER FACT SHEET

What is CASA?

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a trained citizen who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interest of a child in court. Children helped by CASA volunteers include those for whom home placement is being determined in juvenile court. Most of these children are victims of abuse or neglect. The Henrico CASA program includes approximately 100 volunteer advocates.

What is a CASA volunteer's role?

A CASA volunteer provides a judge with a carefully researched background of the child to help the court make a sound decision about the child's future. Each home placement is as unique as the child involved. The CASA volunteer will help determine if it is in the child's best interest to stay with his or her parents or guardians, be placed in foster care, or be 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.

Can anyone volunteer to be a CASA?

CASA volunteers are ordinary citizens. No special or legal background is required. Volunteers are screened closely for objectivity, maturity, communication skills, competence, and commitment.

Is there a typical CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life, with a variety of professional, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. There are more than 93,300 CASA volunteers nationally. Local programs vary in the number of volunteers they utilize. Many CASA volunteers are professionals with full-time positions. The diversity of the area's population is usually reflected in the CASA volunteers who serve there.

What training does a CASA volunteer receive?

CASA volunteers undergo a thorough training course conducted by the local CASA program. Training requirements vary by program, but an average course is approximately thirty-eight hours. Volunteers learn about courtroom procedures from the principals in the system -- from judges, lawyers, social workers, court personnel and others. CASA volunteers also learn about effective advocacy techniques for children and are educated about specific topics ranging from child sexual abuse to early childhood development and adolescent behavior.

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.

How does a CASA volunteer investigate a case?

To prepare a recommendation, the CASA volunteer talks with the child, 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 reports, and other documents.

How does the CASA volunteer relate to the child represented?

CASA volunteers offer children trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings. CASA volunteers encourage the child to express his or her own opinions and hopes while remaining objective observers.

How many cases does a volunteer carry?

The number varies in various jurisdictions, but an average caseload is one to two at a time.

How much time does it require?

Each case is different. A CASA volunteer usually spends about 20-40 hours doing research and conducting interviews prior to the first court appearance. More complicated cases may take longer. Once initiated into the system, volunteers work about 10-20 hours a month.

How long does a CASA volunteer remain with the case?

The 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 the child.

How does a CASA volunteer differ from a social worker?

The CASA volunteer is a volunteer with more time and a smaller caseload (no more than two children/two cases at a time). The CASA volunteer does not replace a social worker 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.

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

The CASA volunteer does not provide legal representation in the courtroom. That is the role of the attorney. However, the CASA worker 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 to the child's best interest.

Do lawyers, judges and social workers support the CASA program?

YES. Juvenile and family court judges implement the CASA program in their courtrooms and appoint the volunteers. CASA has been endorsed by the American Bar Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators.

Do other agencies 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 the child's best interests.

How can I find the CASA program in my community?

CASA programs are known by a variety of names including CASA, Guardian ad Litem (GAL) programs, Pro-Kids, Child Advocates, Inc. and FOCAS, to name a few.

To learn more about becoming a CASA Volunteer in Henrico County, please contact:

Markella Maschas

Program Manager

(804) 501-1671

mas042@henrico.us

www.henricocasa.org

To find another program in Virginia or the United States, visit the National Association website (www.nationalcasagal.org) for more information.