



Frequently Asked Questions Court Appointed Special Advocates



◆ **What children are assigned CASA volunteers?**

Children under 13 who are victims of abuse and neglect who have become wards of the court and have been removed from their parents' care are assigned CASA volunteers.

◆ **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 interest of a child in court. Children helped by CASA volunteers include those who are victims of abuse and neglect and have been removed from their homes.

◆ **What is a CASA volunteer's role?**

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

◆ **How does a CASA volunteer research 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 and current status. The CASA volunteer also reviews all records pertaining to the child (school, medical, caseworker reports; and other documents).

◆ **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, 54% are employed in regular full-time jobs, the majority tends to be professionals; 83% of the volunteers nationwide are women, 17% are men.

◆ **Can anyone volunteer to be a CASA?**

CASA volunteers are ordinary citizens over the age of 21. No special background is required. Volunteers are screened closely for objectivity, competence and commitment.

◆ **What training does a CASA volunteer receive?**

Sangamon County CASA volunteers undergo a thorough 40-hour training course which is published by the National CASA Association. Volunteers learn about courtroom procedure from the principals in the system (judges, lawyers, social workers, court personnel, etc.). CASA volunteers also learn effective advocacy techniques for children, and are educated about specific topics ranging from child sexual abuse to early childhood development and adolescent behavior. Volunteers are also required to receive 10 hours of continuing education each year.

◆ **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, all the while remaining objective observers.

◆ **How many cases on the average does a CASA volunteer carry at a time?**

The number varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but an average caseload is 1 to 2.

◆ **How much time does it require?**

Each case is different. A CASA volunteer spends an average of about 10 hours a month doing research and conducting interviews prior to the first court appearance. Some cases take less time; more complicated cases take longer.

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◆ ***How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved with a 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 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 interests.

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

Caseworkers sometimes work on as many as 60 to 90 cases at a time and are frequently unable to conduct a comprehensive review of each one. The CASA worker is a volunteer with a smaller caseload (1 to 2 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 CASA volunteer differ from an attorney?***

The CASA volunteer does not provide legal representation in the courtroom. That is the role of an 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 to the child's best interests.

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

Yes. The Juvenile Court Judges implement the CASA program in his/her courtroom and appoint volunteers regularly. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has endorsed CASA as well as the American Bar Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the US Department of Justice.

◆ ***How many CASA programs are there?***

There are over 800 CASA programs in all 50 states.

◆ ***How effective have CASA programs been?***

Research shows 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 also have better chances of finding permanent homes than non-CASA children.

◆ ***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.

◆ ***What is the role of the National CASA Association?***

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

◆ ***How is CASA funded?***

The CASA Program in Sangamon County is funded through a combination of grants, fundraisers & donations.

For more information about volunteering locally contact the Sangamon County Child Advocacy Center CASA Program at 1001 E. Monroe St, Springfield, IL 62703, (217) 522 – 2241.