

# CASA HISTORY

## SANGAMON COUNTY CASA

In July 1993 the YWCA/CASA obtained a grant from the Attorney General's office to develop a CASA program in Sangamon County. Volunteers were trained and assigned in early 1994. In September 1995 the CASA Program became a part of the Sangamon County Child Advocacy Center.

The CASA volunteer in Sangamon County serves as a Friend of the Court. Through an order of appointment the CASA has access to all pertinent records about the child they represent. The CASA is charged with interviewing all parties related to the case (e.g. caseworkers, foster parents, parents, children, teachers, counselors). The CASA reports their findings in written form for court hearings and has the opportunity to speak in court concerning the best interest of the child they serve.

Potential volunteers go through a screening process that includes an application, personal interview and a background check. The process continues as they participate in 40 hours of basic training. Training topics include issues such as: child development, abuse and neglect, communication skills, advocacy skills, report writing, the juvenile court system, cultural awareness and more. Once successfully completing this process, volunteers are sworn in by the presiding juvenile court judge as Officers of the Court. Volunteers are then assigned as advocates as cases become available.

Volunteers are generally assigned to one case at a time; a case may involve more than one child. CASAs are also expected to make an 18-month commitment to a case (some cases take more time, some cases take less time). CASAs can be assigned at any point in the juvenile court process – they may be assigned to a case where the child is new to the system or they may be assigned to a case that has been in the system for a long time.

Once assigned to a case, CASAs determine a work plan with the Program supervisor, this plan provides the CASA with direction and is modified as needed. CASAs meet with the Supervisor on a regular basis in order to discuss progress and pitfalls as well as ensure that the work plan is appropriate. The CASA Program staff provides direction, feedback and support to the volunteer throughout their assignment to the case.



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## NATIONAL CASA

The first volunteer Guardian ad Litem program was organized in 1977 in King County, Seattle, Washington. In the following years, word of the success of the King County Program spread like wildfire, and similar programs were begun all over the United States. Because some state statutes require the Guardian ad Litem to be an attorney, the term **CASA** (Court Appointed Special Advocate) was coined to denote volunteers from the local community who had been trained to serve as advocates for children involved in court proceedings.

In 1982, the National CASA Association, Inc. was established to serve as an umbrella organization for the growing number of programs in the country. National CASA provides information, technical assistance, research, funding, training, and hosts an annual national conference. Membership in National CASA is open to programs and individuals throughout the United States. For more information the National CASA Association can be reached toll free at (800) 628 – 3233 or can be accessed at <http://www.nationalcasa.org/>.



## ILLINOIS CASA

The judges in each of Illinois' 102 counties (organized into 21 judicial circuits, plus Cook County) decide who will provide Guardian ad Litem services in their courts. Some have CASAs who serve as Guardians ad Litem; others maintain attorney Guardians ad Litem while the CASA serves as a "Friend of the Court" adding another perspective for the judge.

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for  
a child.®