

WHAT IS CASA?

Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained community volunteers appointed by the 5th Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court Judge in cases where a child has been abused and/or neglected. These advocates serve as a voice for the child so the juvenile court judge knows what the child wants.

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is an official part of judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys, juvenile officers and social workers. By handling only one or two cases at a time the CASA has time to thoroughly explore the history of each assigned case. The volunteer talks with the child, parents, family members, neighbors, school officials, doctors and others involved in the child's background who might have facts about the case. The volunteer reviews all court facts about the case and also reviews all court documents pertaining to the case. He or she is then expected to submit formal reports to the Judge at every scheduled hearing. The CASA continues to monitor the case to assure that the judicial and child welfare systems are moving ahead to secure a safe, permanent home for the child, and that court-ordered services are provided to the child and family. The CASA can be an invaluable resource for the court and for the child in reaching their goals for permanency.

HISTORY

The CASA concept was first implemented by Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington in 1977. As a Judge he felt a compelling need to have more information available to him on which he could base his decisions, most of which had lifetime ramifications for children. Since the conception of the CASA program in 1977, CASA has grown to include 941-member programs now in 49 states. Currently, 88,000 volunteers are "Speaking Up" for 227,500 abused and neglected children nationwide. The National CASA Association has been established to provide leadership and lend technical support to new and existing programs. The 5th Circuit CASA adheres to all program guidelines and standards established by the National CASA Association and the Missouri CASA Association.

PROGRAM GOALS / PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- To provide independent, factual information to the court regarding abused and neglected children
- To provide advocacy for abused and neglected children who are the subject of judicial proceedings
- To monitor cases involving abused and neglected children until the terms of the court order have been fulfilled
- To conduct independent and objective analysis concerning abused and neglected children
- To factually and objectively report findings and observations to the court
- To ensure representation of the child's best interest in all judicial proceedings
- To monitor cases following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court

THE CASA VOLUNTEER DESCRIPTION:

Complete an intensive independent review of each case:

- Speak with the child and relevant adults
- Review appropriate records and reports
- Observe the child and significant others

Report findings to the court:

- Provide a written report containing factual information
- Attend court hearings concerning the child
- Participate in case conferences concerning the child

Ensure representation of the child's best interest:

- Attend all court hearings to see that all relevant facts are presented
- Attend appropriate interagency meetings regarding the child
- Monitor the case for compliance with all court orders
- Consult with CASA staff on a regular basis

PURPOSE / ROLE OF THE CASA VOLUNTEER

Advocate for the child:

- Provide recommendations to the court as to the well-being of the child
- Present the child's wishes and needs to the court
- Communicate with the child about the court process as necessary

Remain independent while working as a team with the Department of Social Services, Juvenile Office, attorneys, counselors, and other agencies involved:

- Attend court hearings involving the case
- Attend Family Support Team meetings involving the child
- Attend other meetings related to the child
- Remain objective

Keep consistent contact with the child, relatives, foster parents, Children's Service Worker, Juvenile Officer, and CASA staff until the case has been formally closed by the court:

- Visit or talk with the child at least once a month to observe whether the child's needs are being met
- Observe parties involved in the case to make certain all court orders are being followed
- Monitor the progress of the goals outlined in court

REQUIRED SKILLS / ABILITIES

- Ability to keep all client and court information confidential
- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing
- Ability to respect and relate to people from various backgrounds (economic, cultural, educational) in a variety of settings
- Ability to transport self to a variety of locations
- Ability to deal with hostility, anger and other emotional attitudes
- Ability to maintain objectivity
- Ability to gather and record factual information accurately
- A basic understanding of child development
- A basic understanding of family relationships

QUALIFICATIONS

- Must be at least 21 years of age
- Must pass criminal and Child Abuse/Neglect background checks
- Submit application and be interviewed by CASA Staff
- Attend necessary pre-service training requirements
- Approval/Swearing in by juvenile court Judge

TRAINING

- CASA volunteers are required to attend approximately 30 hours of pre-service training
- CASA volunteers are to follow guidelines established by the National CASA Association and 5th Circuit CASA
- CASA volunteers will attend in-service training and receive direct supervision and guidance from program staff

TIME COMMITMENT

- Volunteers are required to commit themselves to the program for one year
- Volunteers are expected to remain active on a case until it is closed by the court

CONCLUSION

5th Circuit CASA has been appointing trained volunteers to abuse and neglect cases since 1985. Currently, 5th Circuit CASA has trained hundreds of volunteers and is serving both Andrew and Buchanan counties. CASA plays an integral part in assuring that children do not become lost in the court system. A CASA volunteer is a caring adult who tries to understand the child's concerns and report them to the judge. One of the main goals of the CASA program is to ensure that every child brought before the Juvenile Court in regards to abuse and neglect is placed in a safe, permanent home.

Early contact with children who become involved in juvenile court as a result of abuse and/or neglect can help to prevent future involvement either as a delinquent or an offending adult. The CASA program is dedicated to the premise that all children are entitled to grow up in a safe and loving home. The CASA program is committed to reunification of child/children with their biological family, when that home can be made safe for the child/children. Most important is the CASA volunteer's role in ensuring that all decisions regarding the child are in their best interest.

HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BECOMING A CASA VOLUNTEER, JOINING THE NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION, OR MAKING A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION?

Contact:

5th Judicial Circuit CASA
411 Jules, B-3
St. Joseph, MO 64501
(816) 901-1708
casa@5thcircuitcasa.com