



STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF CASA STATEWIDE

CASA FAQs

What is CASA?

When a child enters the foster care system because his or her home is no longer safe due to abuse or neglect, a judge may appoint a committed volunteer to advocate for the best interests of the child or youth in court and other settings. That volunteer is called a Court Appointed Special Advocate, or CASA volunteer. CASA volunteers guide foster children through an overburdened and complex foster care system with the end goal of reaching a safe and permanent home.

What is the role of a CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers get to know the child and gather information from everyone involved in his or her daily life, including family members, foster parents, teachers, doctors and social workers. CASA volunteers use the information they gather to report to the judge, advocating for the child's physical and emotional needs.

Who can be a CASA volunteer?

Current CASA volunteers come from all walks of life and do not need any special background or education. Volunteers must be:

- At least 21 years old
- Able to pass criminal and CPS background checks
- Willing to commit to at least one year of advocacy
- Effective communicators, orally and in writing
- Willing to participate in an in-depth training program

Are CASA volunteers foster parents?

It is a common misconception that CASA volunteers are foster parents. CASA volunteers do not house foster children; instead, they are a powerful voice for a child or sibling group, representing their best interests in court and other settings.

What kind of work do you do as a CASA volunteer?

A CASA volunteer:



- Conducts an independent investigation by reviewing all pertinent documentation and records. Volunteers also interview the child and anyone involved in the child's life to determine the facts and circumstances of the child's situation. A volunteer spends significant time getting to know the child and gaining his or her trust.
- Determines the thoughts and feelings of the child about the situation, taking into account the child's age, maturity, culture and ethnicity, as well as the degree of attachment to family members including siblings.
- Seeks solutions to achieve resolution of problems and aims to foster positive steps toward achieving permanency.
- Makes recommendations for specific, appropriate services for the child and the child's family.
- Advocates for the child's health, education and mental health by communicating needs to the appropriate parties to assure that the child's needs in these areas are met.
- Is a constant, significant adult that builds trust, support and friendship.
- Works to understand the needs of the child and the situation in order to recommend who could potentially provide the child a happy and stable home.
- Writes a report to the court, recommending what is best for the child or children based on the volunteer's research.
- Appears at all hearings to advocate for the child's best interests and provides testimony when necessary. Volunteers may go to court two to three times during the case.

How much time does a typical volunteer spend on a case?

Although the time a volunteer devotes to a case can vary by the complexity of the case, the number of siblings involved and many other factors, the average time a volunteer spends during a month is approximately 10-12 hours.

What training is provided to potential volunteers?

Potential volunteers receive at least 30 hours of training to prepare for their work as a CASA volunteer. During training, volunteers are provided instruction on building rapport with the child and developing relationships with pertinent parties. Training also offers guidance on the child protective system, the legal system and court procedures. The training program is in-depth and extensive, but anyone can be equipped with the tools they need to be a CASA volunteer if they are interested in making a significant impact on the life of a child.

Does the program provide staff or training to support volunteers on their cases?

Once a volunteer is assigned a case, he or she is also assigned a staff supervisor to guide and support him or her during the life of a case. This supervisor is an ongoing resource for



the volunteer should he or she need any guidance in attaining information about the child or working in the child protective and legal systems. Additionally, volunteers are required to complete 12 hours of in-service training throughout the course of a year in order to learn new skills and refine their training.

How do these children come into care?

When the state determines that a child is not safe in his or her home and a relative or family friend is unable or unwilling to care for the child, a court can grant temporary custody to Child Protective

Services (CPS). CPS places these children in foster care. Foster care settings include:

- Foster family homes.
- Foster family group homes.
- Residential Treatment Centers for children who have significant emotional and behavioral problems.
- Return to family, or may be placed with a relative (kinship) or adopted.
- Placements with relatives who are overseen and monitored by CPS.

Foster care is meant to be temporary until a permanent living arrangement is found.

However, many times a permanent resolution is never found and children "age out" of the system at 18 years old without ever having been adopted or finding a permanent home.

What kind of children will I work with?

CASA volunteers are each assigned to help one child or set of siblings at a time, so they can focus on giving that child or sibling group the individualized advocacy and attention they need. CASA volunteers can specify the age, gender and ethnicity preferences of children they would like to work with.

What impact does a CASA volunteer have on a case and the child involved?

Oftentimes, CASA volunteers become one of the only consistent adults in the lives of these children. Moreover, CASA volunteers have a measurable impact on the child and his or her family compared to children without a volunteer. Outcomes include:

- A child with a CASA volunteer is more likely to find a safe, permanent home.
 - More likely to be adopted
 - Half as likely to reenter foster care
 - Substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care
 - More likely to have a plan for permanency, especially children of color
- Children with CASA volunteers get more help while in the system; more services are ordered for the children.
- Children with CASA volunteers spend less time in foster care and are less likely to bounce from home to home.



- Children with CASA volunteers perform better academically and behaviorally in school.
- Children with CASA volunteers also score better on nine protective factors: Neighborhood resources, interested adults, sense of acceptance, controls against deviant behavior, models of conventional behavior, positive attitude towards the future, valuing achievement, ability to work with others and ability to work out conflicts.

How can I learn more about volunteering?

Visit BecomeACASA.org to find a local program near you. The local program will reach out to you with more information about becoming a volunteer and on upcoming training dates.

Are there other ways to help CASA for those people who are interested but might not currently have the time to be an advocate?

CASA programs need help spreading the word about the organization in order to recruit volunteers and garner other resources. Local program spokespeople are available to speak to organizations, corporations or faith-based groups about how to become involved in many different capacities.