



LaSalle County CASA

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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 interests of abused and neglected children in court. CASA volunteers are ordinary citizens. No special legal background is required. Volunteers are screened closely for objectivity, competence, and commitment.

What training does a CASA volunteer receive?

CASA volunteers undergo a thorough training course conducted by the local CASA program. Volunteers learn about cultural sensitivity, child development, advocacy techniques, the court system, DCFS, and confidentiality.

What is the CASA volunteer's role?

As a child advocate, the CASA volunteer has three main responsibilities:

1. to serve as a fact finder for the judge by thoroughly researching the background of each assigned case;
2. to speak for the child in the courtroom, representing the child's best interests;
3. to continue to act as a "watchdog" for the child during the case, ensuring that it is brought to a swift and appropriate conclusion.

How does a CASA volunteer investigate 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. The CASA volunteer also reviews all records pertaining to the child -- school, medical and case worker reports; and other documents.

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

Social workers generally are employed by state governments. They sometimes work in as many as 60 to 90 cases at a time and are frequently unable to conduct a comprehensive investigation of each. The CASA

worker is a volunteer with more time and a smaller caseload (an average of 1-2 cases at a time.) The CASA volunteer does not replace the 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 a recommendation 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. That is the role of the attorney. However, the CASA volunteer does provide crucial background information that assists attorneys in presenting their cases.

Is there a "typical" CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life, with a variety of educational and ethnic backgrounds. There are more than 72,000 CASA volunteers nationally. Aside from their CASA volunteer responsibility, 50 percent are employed in regular full-time jobs.

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 are all 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, while remaining objective observers.

Do lawyers, judges and social caseworkers support CASA?

Yes. Juvenile and family court judges implement the CASA program in their courtrooms and appoint volunteers. CASA has been endorsed by the American Bar Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice.

History of CASA

In 1976, Superior Court Judge David Soukup of Seattle, WA sought to ensure he was getting all the facts and that the long-term welfare of each child was being represented. He obtained funding to recruit and train community volunteers to step into courtrooms on behalf of children. This unique concept was replicated around the country.

How effective have CASA programs been?

Research suggests 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.

How much time does it require?

Each case is different. A CASA volunteer usually spends about 10 hours doing research and conducting interviews prior to the first court appearance. More complicated cases take longer. Once initiated into the system, volunteers work about 10-15 hours a month.

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.

The How is CASA funded?

LaSalle County CASA is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization funded by United Way of Eastern LaSalle County, United Way of Illinois Valley, United Way of Streator, LaSalle County 708 Mental Health Board, Attorney General's VCVA grant, County Court Services along with business and individual donations and donations-in-kind.