



Court Appointed Special Advocate

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) are community volunteers who are sworn officers of the court, appointed by a judge to advocate for the best interests of children, youth and young adults in Los Angeles's child welfare system.

Who are CASAs?

- CASAs are at least 21 years old and pass a thorough background check, including a live scan, written application, and in-person interview
- No professional background is required, although CASAs are required to complete 30 hours of pre-service training with CASA/LA prior to working with a child
- CASAs commit to two years and 10-15 hours per month of service

What do CASAs do?

- Meet regularly (at least 1x a month) with the child/youth they are appointed to
- Communicate regularly with the child's social worker, attorney and other team members, including caregivers and family members
- Receive and review important documents, like the child's case file, education records and other relevant documents
- Attend team meetings, like child and family team (CFT) meetings, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and treatment team meetings
- Advocate for education rights and may be appointed to hold education/developmental rights for the young person they're appointed to
- Monitor how the child is doing and follow-ups to ensure needed services and/or resources are in place
- Attend court hearings, report to the court and make recommendations to the court
- Make reports of suspected child abuse, if necessary as CASAs are mandated reporters

What don't CASAs do?

- Provide a placement for the child, take the child home or introduce the child to their family or friends
- Share confidential case-related information to anyone other than those designated by the court
- Transport children regularly to services
- Give expensive (valued at more than \$20) gifts or handle money on behalf of a child/youth
- Give legal advice or therapeutic counseling
- Monitor or supervise visits ordered by the court

Collaboration with Community Partners

CASA volunteers are part of the greater team that supports the child/youth and their family and collaborate with the team to ensure the child/youth's needs are being met. CASA advocacy is most successful when they can be in regular contact with the child/youth's attorney, social worker and key team members like therapists, educators, family and caregivers.



"The CASA always goes above and beyond for her assigned youth. The CASA has created an amazing bond with the youth and it's a clear how much she really cares. The CASA treats this position not as just a volunteer opportunity, but a chance to change a youth's life. The CASA continued to show up for the youth and prove to the youth that there are people who love and care about them."

– DCFS Social Worker



Who do we serve?

CASA of Los Angeles serves young people between the ages of 0-21 currently living in Los Angeles County and who have an open dependency case at the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court or the Alfred J. McCourtney Juvenile Justice Center in Los Angeles County. Referrals for the appointment of a CASA volunteer are appropriate when any of the following apply:

- The court or child's team would benefit from independent factual information in order to decide the best interests of the child
- There are concerns about the child's medical, educational or developmental needs being met and/or the child needs an educational rights holder or a developmental services decision maker
- Court ordered or mandated services are not being delivered in a timely manner
- There are concerns about permanency such as multiple placements, appropriateness of current placement, or lack of long-term adult connections
- There are concerns about a child's mental health needs being met or the psychotropic medications a child is prescribed
- There are concerns about current or pending involvement with the juvenile justice system
- There are concerns about current or potential involvement with CSEC
- An expectant or parenting youth needs support
- A child/youth who identifies as LGBTQIA+ needs support with connections to affirming placements and services
- Siblings who have individual advocacy needs, in addition to shared advocacy around permanency and visitation
- A transitional age youth (aged 12-21) needs support in the pursuit of a post-secondary education or career training program or an appropriate transition plan
- A child 0-5 who needs developmental and/or medical services and/or needs support with permanency, including reunification

CASA/LA Essential History Program

The CASA/LA Essential History Program aims to help social workers, attorneys and judges make trauma-informed decisions about the young people they serve by providing them with a summary report of the young person's experiences and history in critical areas of life. The information will be included in the court file, enabling professionals to make truly informed decisions about the young people in their care.

Upon receipt of the referral, CASA/LA will assign a CASA volunteer for a 90-day appointment to complete a comprehensive file review of all available juvenile dependency file records, including social worker reports (and attachments), minute orders and other court documents. During this appointment, the CASA will not have any contact with the child or case parties nor will they provide any advocacy or make recommendations to the court.

Using a tracking document (to indicate source of information) and with support from a CASA advocate supervisor, CASAs will document the following key indicators:

- Adverse Childhood Experiences: These will be mainly tracked through a young person's reasons for entering the system, and any additional forms of abuse or neglect they may have experienced while in the system.
- Well Being History: This section focuses on the areas of permanency, physical health, behavioral/emotional/mental health, academic/educational, and supportive/stable family connections. Specifically, CASAs will look for both risk and protective factors within those categories and provide the court with most pertinent information.

At the end of the appointment, the CASA's summary report of the child's case file will be submitted to the court file as well as the current social worker and attorney.



How to make a referral for all CASA cases

Send an email to referrals@casala.org with the following info:

- Child's name and date of birth
- Court case number
- Reason why a CASA is being requested
- Any special requests for the CASA match, such as language needs

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the referral, call (323) 859-2888 and ask to speak to the advocate supervisor on duty.

Please note: Referrals take about two weeks to process. During this time, a CASA staff person will contact the attorney and social worker to get more detailed information about the case. Once a referral is accepted, the case will be added to the CASA/LA waitlist.

Support

Every CASA volunteer is supervised by a CASA staff member. CASA/LA advocate supervisors are masters-level professionals who have experience working with children and families. Advocate supervisors support CASAs in their advocacy, edit court reports and help resolve issues.

If you need to reach the advocate supervisor on your case, please contact the CASA office at (323) 859-2888.

