

Being a CASA Volunteer – What you need to know

What is a CASA Volunteer?

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer is a trained community member who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interest of a child in court. Children helped by CASA are those who have been abused and/or neglected and whose home placement is being determined by the court.

What is the CASA's role?

A CASA volunteer provides a judge with a carefully researched background of the child to help the court make a sound decision about that child's future. Each child's case is unique. The CASA volunteer must determine if it is in a child's best interest to stay with his or her parents, be placed in foster or relative care or be freed for permanent out of home placement or adoption. The CASA volunteer provides "guardian ad litem" representation for the child in the court system, as well as advocacy in educational, social welfare and medical areas.

How does CASA make a difference?

- A recent study by Texas Appleseed, "Improving the Lives of Children in Long-term Foster Care," reports that "if a child has a CASA, the CASA usually is the only person who truly knows the child and knows how the child is really doing."
- National CASA reports that children with CASA volunteers are *more likely* to receive therapy, health care and education, *more likely* to do better in school, *less likely* to be bounced from one place to another, *less likely* to get stuck in long-term foster care and *significantly more likely* to reach safe, permanent homes.
- A CASA volunteer is often the child's only link to maintaining family connections and can be instrumental in identifying family members as temporary or permanent placement options.
- Most importantly, children themselves report that they know and can rely on their CASA volunteers.

How does CASA of Travis County support volunteers?

CASA recruits, screens, trains and supervises community volunteers to take on the role of advocating on behalf of children who've been abused or neglected. Each volunteer undergoes a background check, personal interview, thorough screening and in-depth training prior to being assigned to a case. Each volunteer is supervised by a professional staff member who oversees their work throughout each case.

How does a CASA volunteer investigate a case?

To prepare a recommendation, the CASA volunteer spends time with the child, talks to parents, family members, social workers, school officials, attorneys, therapists, teachers and others who are knowledgeable about the child's history and progress. The CASA volunteer has a court order that allows them to review all records pertaining to the child – school, medical, caseworker reports and other documents.

How does a CASA volunteer differ from social service caseworkers?

Social workers often have 30 to 50 children at a time and are frequently unable to conduct a comprehensive investigation of each child. The CASA volunteer is assigned to one child or family of children. The CASA volunteer is an independent appointee of the court. The CASA volunteer thoroughly examines a child's case, has knowledge of community resources, and makes a recommendation to the court independent of state agency restrictions.

Is there a "typical" CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life with a variety of educational and ethnic backgrounds. There are 550 active CASA volunteers annually in Travis County. Aside from their CASA volunteer responsibility, 50 percent are employed in regular full-time jobs.



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What are the requirements for becoming a CASA Volunteer?

Prospective volunteers must be at least 21 years of age, and undergo criminal and Child Protective Services background checks. Applicants are required to complete an application, attend a pre-training interview, and participate in CASA training. Volunteers should have effective oral and written communication skills.

What is CASA's training program like?

Our volunteer advocate training program consists of 10 3-hour classroom sessions and 3 hours of courtroom observation. Each trainee must begin their coursework with CASA 101. The remaining 9 sessions may be taken in any order at any time offered on the training calendar. This provides flexibility to accommodate a variety of schedules.

How many cases on average does a CASA volunteer carry at a time?

Typically each CASA volunteer carries one case at a time which allows them to focus on the needs of one child or sibling group.

How much time does it require?

The scheduling of most volunteer activities is flexible. While each case is different, a CASA volunteer usually spends 15-20 hours each month doing research and spending time with the children on their case.

How does a CASA volunteer differ from an attorney?

The CASA volunteer represents the best interest of the child and funnels information to the attorney and judge. An attorney is charged with representing their client's legal interests and with following the wishes of their client. CASA is appointed as the child's Guardian ad Litem (GAL) and is responsible for making recommendations about what things would be best for the child. The CASA volunteer does not file legal paperwork with the court. However, the CASA volunteer does provide crucial background information that assists the court in making decisions.

How is CASA funded?

CASA of Travis County is funded through a combination of private and public funds including city, county, state and federal grants in addition to private foundations, corporations and individual contributions.

How do I get more information?

If you are interested in becoming an advocate, please visit our website at www.casatexas.org/volunteer for additional information. You can also contact CASA by phone at 512.459.2272 or by email at volunteer@casatexas.org.