



Why Be A CASA Volunteer?

WHAT IS A CASA VOLUNTEER? A CASA volunteer is an officer of the court. A judge appoints a special advocate to represent the best interest of abused or neglected child/children in court proceedings.

WHAT DOES A CASA VOLUNTEER DO? A trained CASA volunteer gathers information for the court, recommends to the judge what the child needs to be safe and what is in the child's best interest for a permanent home. A CASA volunteer advocates for a speedy decision that considers a child's sense of time.

WHY DOES A CHILD NEED A CASA VOLUNTEER? When the court is making decisions that will affect a child's future, the child needs and deserves a spokesperson – an objective adult to provide independent information about the best interest of the child. While other parties in the case are concerned about the child, they also have other interests. The CASA volunteer is the only person in the case whose sole concern is the best interest of the child. A CASA volunteer gives individual attention to each case.

An abused or neglected child has come from a world of chaos and instability. For the child, there is fear; fear of being hurt; fear of being alone and fear about the future. For children who are in and out of home placements, there can be many changes in schools and homes before a decision is made on where the child should live. A CASA volunteer can be the sole source of stability and comfort to fill an enormous void in the child's life. A CASA volunteer is a trusted, dependable adult who doesn't go away and who gives the child hope for a better future.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CASA AND A SOCIAL WORKER? The roles are not the same. The CASA volunteer is independent from the social services system and focuses solely on the child. The social worker serves the family – parents and child – by providing direct services. Social workers are not able to be a wholly independent voice because they are part of the agency that has already taken a position in the case by filing a petition and bringing the matter to court. A CASA volunteer is an independent voice, not part of an agency that may be constrained by rules and regulations, agency policies and fiscal limitation. The CASA volunteer is an officer of the court.

DOES THE COURT LISTEN TO WHAT A CASA HAS TO SAY? YES! Judges know their decisions are only as good as the information they receive. They count on CASA volunteers to be an independent voice and they know that CASA volunteers have more time to focus on specific cases. A CASA volunteer who can tell the court "I was there – this is what I observed" can be invaluable.

HOW DO WE KNOW CASA VOLUNTEERS ARE EFFECTIVE? Studies have shown CASA volunteers to be effective in reducing court costs, reducing stays in foster care and even in reducing rates of delinquency and children in need of supervision. A study conducted by the National CASA Association showed that children with a CASA volunteer spent approximately one year less in care than a child without a CASA volunteer. This represents a savings to taxpayers and more importantly it means that a child finds a permanent, safe home more quickly.

