

VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION

INTRODUCTION

Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained community volunteers appointed by the district court Judges to speak for the best interests of the children who are brought before the court for reasons of abuse or neglect.

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) often referred to as a volunteer Guardian Ad Litem, is an official part of judicial proceedings, working along side attorneys and social workers. By handling only two or three cases at a time the CASA has time to thoroughly explore the history of each assigned case. The volunteer talks with the child, parents, family members, neighbors, school officials, doctors and others involved in the child's background who might have facts about the case. The volunteer reviews all court facts about the case and the volunteer also reviews all court documents pertaining to the case. He or she then submits formal reports to the Judge at every scheduled hearing/review. The CASA continues to monitor the case to assure that the judicial and child welfare systems are moving ahead to secure a safe, permanent home for the child, and the court-ordered services are provided to the child and the family. The CASA can be an invaluable resource for the attorney for the child and social worker in reaching their goals for permanency.

HISTORY

The CASA concept was first implemented by Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington in 1977. As a Judge he felt a compelling need to have more information available to him in which he could base his decisions, most of which had lifetime ramifications for children. Since the conception of the CASA program in 1977, CASA has grown to include over 900 member programs now in 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands. An estimated 30,000 volunteers are "Speaking Up" for approximately 90,000 abused and neglected children nationwide. The National CASA Association has been established to provide leadership and lend technical support to new and existing programs. CASA of Navarro County adheres to all program guidelines and standards established by the National CASA Association.

PROGRAM GOALS/PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- To provide independent, factual information to the court regarding abused and neglected children.
- To provide advocacy for abused and neglected children who are the subject of judicial proceedings.
- To monitor cases involving abused and neglected children until the terms of the court order have been fulfilled.
- To conduct independent and objective analysis concerning abused and neglected children.
- To factually and objectively report findings and observations to the court.
- To ensure representation of the child's best interest in all judicial proceedings.
- To monitor cases following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court.

THE CASA VOLUNTEER

Complete an intensive independent review of each case:

- Speaking with the child and relevant adults,
- Review appropriate records and reports, and
- Observe the child and significant others.

Report findings to the court:

- Provide a written report containing factual information,
- Attend court hearing concerning the child, and
- Participate in conferences concerning the child.

Insure representation of the child's best interest:

- Attend all court hearings to see that all relevant facts are presented,

- Attend appropriate interagency meetings regarding the child, and
- Prod the public system into action.

- Monitor case following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court.
- Consult regularly with the volunteer coordinator concerning assigned case and develop a CASA case plan and review progress and reports.

REQUIRED SKILLS / ABILITIES

- Ability to keep all client and court information confidential,
- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing,
- Ability to respect and relate to people from various backgrounds (economic, cultural, educational) in a variety of settings,
- Ability to transport self to variety of locations,
- Ability to deal with hostility, anger and other emotional attitudes,
- Ability to maintain objectivity,
- Ability to gather and record factual information accurately,
- A basic understanding of child development, and
- A basic understanding of family relationship.

TRAINING

- CASA volunteers are required to attend approximately 30 hours of pre-service training,
- CASA volunteers follow guidelines established by the National CASA Association and
- CASA volunteers will attend in-service training and receive direct supervision and guidance from program staff.

TIME COMMITMENT

- Volunteers are required to commit themselves to the program for eighteen months, and
- Volunteers are expected to be available for case assignment and to accept cases unless other arrangements have been made.
- Volunteers, on average, spend 8-10 hours a month on each case.

CONCLUSION

CASA of Navarro County has been appointing trained volunteer to abuse and neglect cases since May 2003. Currently, CASA of Navarro County has trained over 100 volunteers. CASA plays an integral part in assuring that children do not become lost in the court system. A CASA volunteer is a caring adult who tries to understand the child's concerns and report them to the judge. The long range goal is to have trained CASA volunteers available to all abused and neglected children in Navarro County by 2006.

Early contact with children, who become involved in the Texas Courts as a result of abuse and/or neglect, can help to prevent future involvement either as a delinquent or an offending adult. The CASA program is dedicated to the premise that all children are entitled to grow up in a safe and loving home. The CASA program is committed to reunification of child/children with their biological family, when that home can be made safe for the child/children. Most importantly is the CASA volunteer's role in ensuring that all decisions regarding the child are in their best interest.

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