



**CASA OF COOS AND CURRY COUNTIES
OREGON COAST COMMUNITY ACTION**

What does CASA stand for?

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate.

What makes the CASA program different?

CASA programs are the only volunteer organization directly connected to the court; volunteers are appointed and sworn in by a judge to speak for a child who would otherwise not be heard. As adults come and go in the lives of abused and neglected children, these children desperately need one adult to stay with them for the length of their court case—someone who develops knowledge of the child’s particular needs and may prevent a child from falling through the cracks of the system. This is what a CASA volunteer does.

Who are CASA volunteers?

CASA volunteers are compassionate, objective, self-motivated individuals from the community who are trained to speak on behalf of abused and neglected children. They come from all walks of life. About half of all CASA volunteers in the United States work full-time.

CASA volunteers submit an application with references, complete an interview with the program staff, and attend training. A complete criminal history and child abuse registry check are performed on each applicant. Upon completion of their training, CASA volunteers are sworn in by the juvenile court judge and promise to maintain strict confidentiality and professionalism throughout their appointment.

What is the role of a CASA volunteer?

A CASA volunteer provides a judge with objective information about the child to help the court make a sound decision about that child’s future. Each case is as unique as the child involved. The CASA volunteer forms an opinion as to what is in the best interest of the child for their future, such as being reunified with their parents, living with relatives, getting a permanent guardian or adoption. The CASA volunteer makes a recommendation on placement to the judge and follows through on the case until it is permanently resolved.

How does a CASA volunteer gather information about a case?

To prepare a recommendation, the CASA volunteer talks with the child, and may also speak to parents, family members, social workers, school officials, health providers and others who are knowledgeable about the child’s history. The CASA volunteer also reviews records pertaining to the child, including school records, medical records, case worker reports and other documents.

Is there a “typical” CASA volunteer?

No. CASA volunteers come from all walks of life and have a variety of professional, educational

and ethnic backgrounds. Many volunteers work full-time, but others work part-time, stay at home or are retired. All are passionate and committed to helping abused and neglected children.

What do CASA volunteers do?

CASA volunteers visit the child, get to know the him or her and find out important information such as how the he or she is doing in placement, what kind of services are needed and how school is going. The CASA volunteer may also talk to professionals who are working on the case, to the child's family and/or to the foster parents, teachers and possibly others. The volunteer will review important documents relating to the case, such as summaries of the parent's progress in services. The volunteer then prepares a summary for the court about what they have learned about the child. In the report, the volunteer makes independent recommendations to the court about what should happen in the case in order to have the best outcome for the child—to keep the child safe, promote the child's well-being and help the child to be able to return home or to have another safe and permanent home as quickly as possible. The volunteer also monitors the case plan and help make sure the plan is followed and serves the best interests of the child.

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

The number can vary some depending on the volunteer's time commitment, but most volunteers have one or two cases involving one or more children at a time.

How effective are CASA Programs?

Research shows that children who have been assigned CASA volunteers tend to spend less time in the foster care system than those who do not have CASA volunteer. Judges have observed that children who have a CASA volunteer also have better chances of finding permanent homes.

How much time does it required to volunteer?

Each case is different. However, a typical volunteer spends 10 to 15 hours a month on a case.

How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved?

The volunteer continues until the case is permanently resolved. One of the primary benefits of the CASA program is that, unlike case workers and others involved in the case, the CASA volunteer is often the only consistent adult who stays involved in the case from beginning to end; providing stability and continuity that is desperately needed.

Why do you need CASA volunteers if you have caseworkers and attorneys?

CASA volunteers play an entirely different role in the case. The volunteer is the only person whose sole job is to get to know the child and determine what is in his or her best interests. The caseworker's main role is to work with the family and help them to complete services so that their children can be returned to a safe home. Caseworkers, attorneys and other professionals in the cases have many cases involving many families and children. CASA volunteers work with only a few children at a time, so they can have time to dedicate to getting to know the child and really finding out what they need and what would be best for the child's future. Judges rely heavily on the information they receive from CASA volunteers who are charged with serving as the "eyes and ears" of the court.

What training is involved?

Each CASA volunteer receives a minimum of 30 hours of initial training, which takes place over several weeks and may include an e-learning (computer based) component. The training covers information on the role of the advocate, about child development and social issues affecting families, and a broad overview of Indiana law and the court process relating to child abuse and neglect cases. Professionals who are involved with the local court and child protective services are often part of the training. In addition, volunteers must complete 12 hours of in-service training annually, which is offered by the local programs, the State Office of CASA and the National CASA Association.

Is being a CASA volunteer the same as being a mentor?

CASA volunteers are appointed to children who have come to the attention of the juvenile court system due to abuse or neglect. Like a mentoring program, the CASA volunteer does develop a relationship with the child through frequent contact; however, the primary role of the CASA volunteer is to gather information about the child, write reports to the court and attend court hearings. The CASA program is not a mentoring program. The CASA volunteer does not go on social outings with the child or play an active role in the child's day-to-day life. Instead, the CASA volunteer is involved with the child and the case while the child is in foster care, to help him or her during this difficult time to help have the best possible outcome. Once the case has ended, the CASA volunteer does not typically remain involved in the child's life.

How do I become a volunteer with a local CASA program?

There are several steps involved in becoming a CASA volunteer. You must complete an application, pass a criminal background check, be interviewed, and go through 30 hours of training. Upon successful completion, the juvenile court judge will swear you in as a CASA volunteer and an officer of the court.

If you want to learn more about becoming a CASA or would like to support our program financially, please reach out to our CASA staff:

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