

# CASA Quick Q & A

**What is a CASA Volunteer?** A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer is a specially-trained citizen appointed by the judge to represent a child victim in cases of abuse and neglect.

**What does a CASA Volunteer do?** Advocating for the best interest of a child, a trained CASA provides a judge with carefully researched details about the child to help the court make a sound decision about that child's future. He or she recommends to the Judge what the child needs to be safe and what is in the best interest for a permanent home. The CASA makes recommendations to the judge in the form of a report, attends the child's hearings and follows through on the case until it is permanently resolved.

**What training does a CASA volunteer receive?** CASA volunteer advocates receive 30 hours of online and classroom instruction from program staff, and other professionals in our community. After the instruction is complete the volunteer is sworn in by the family court Judge and then concludes the training with a 3-hour courtroom observation that is required before CASA volunteers can take a case. Thereafter, volunteers are required to fulfill 12 hours of in-service training per year.

**What is the CASA philosophy?** The CASA concept is based on the commitment that every child has the right to a safe, permanent home. The juvenile court judge appoints a volunteer to the child's case. The volunteer then becomes an official part of the judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys and social workers as an appointed officer of the court. Unlike attorneys and social workers, however, the CASA volunteer speaks exclusively for the child's best interests. By handling only one or two cases at a time the CASA volunteer has time to thoroughly explore the history of each assigned case. CASA is the only program where volunteers are appointed by the court to represent a child's best interests.

**How does a CASA volunteer investigate a case?** To prepare a recommendation, the CASA volunteer talks with the child, parents, family members, case managers, school officials, health providers, and others who are knowledgeable about the child's history. The CASA volunteer also reviews all records pertaining to the child - school, medical, case manager reports, and other pertinent documents.

**How does a CASA volunteer differ from a Social Service Case Worker?** Case workers generally are employed by state governments. They sometimes work on over 20 cases at a time while CASA volunteers are able to provide their full attention to just one family at a time. No state agency could ever afford to provide the kind of one-on-one assistance that CASA makes available to children and families. The CASA volunteer does not replace the case worker; he or she is an independent appointee of the court. The CASA volunteer can thoroughly examine a child's case, has knowledge of community resources, and can make a recommendation to the court independent of state agency restrictions.

**How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved with a case?** Our CASA program requires a minimum one-year commitment with the ultimate goal of the volunteer continuing until the case is permanently resolved and permanency has been achieved. That is because one of the primary benefits of the CASA program is that, unlike other court principals who often rotate cases, the CASA volunteer is a consistent figure in the proceedings and provides continuity for a child.

**Is there a “typical” CASA advocate?** CASA volunteers come from all walks of life with a variety of professional, educational and ethnic backgrounds.

**How much time does it require?** Each case is different. A CASA volunteer usually spends about 15 hours a month doing research and conducting interviews prior to the first court appearance. More complicated cases take longer. Once initiated into the system, volunteer advocates work anywhere from 4-20 hours per month depending on the complexity of the case to which they are assigned.

**How are CASA programs funded?** CASA programs depend on their communities to support the service. Foundations, corporations, fundraising events, annual giving and grants are just some examples of the ongoing support received by local CASA programs.

**How effective have CASA programs been?** Research suggests that children who have been assigned CASA volunteers tend to spend less time within the foster care system than those who do not have a CASA volunteer. Judges have also observed that children assigned to a CASA also have better chances of finding permanent homes than children not assigned to a CASA.

**How many CASA programs are there in the State of NJ?** There are 14 independent CASA programs serving each of the NJ court vicinages.

***Things a CASA May Do:***

<i>Locate relatives who might be interested in pursuing custody</i>	<i>Locate and facilitate camp placements</i>	<i>Attend Court &amp; CPR hearings</i>
<i>Assist caseworker with preparation of searches</i>	<i>Attend Case Planning, ISP, IEP and Annual Review Meetings</i>	<i>Act as a sounding board for birth and foster parents</i>
<i>Visit foster homes, birth parents, etc. on a regular basis and share impressions with caseworker</i>	<i>Support foster parents with information and resources for special needs children</i>	<i>Pick up reports from schools, therapists, etc. and deliver to DYFS</i>
<i>Assist in finding and arranging means of transportation to therapy and visitation (CASA’s can’t provide transportation)</i>	<i>Make referrals to community resources such as Salvation Army, Jewish Family Services, Big Brother/Sister, etc...</i>	<i>Assist with obtaining equipment and/or facilities for children’s extracurricular activities.</i>