

# **CASA Volunteer Fact Sheet**

## **What is a CASA?**

A CASA, or Court Appointed Special Advocate, is a trained and supervised volunteer, appointed by a judge to advocate for a foster child – a child who is under the court’s protection because of abuse or neglect.

## **What does a CASA volunteer do?**

A CASA volunteer provides an independent investigation of the child’s circumstances for the judge. The CASA gathers information, writes reports, and makes recommendations to the judge in the child’s best interests.

## **Which children are assigned CASA volunteers?**

Children who are victims of abuse and neglect who have become dependents of the court are assigned CASA volunteers when there are unresolved or significant issues surrounding their court case or life situation.

## **How does a CASA volunteer investigate a case?**

The CASA volunteer meets with the child, parents, relatives, caregivers, social workers, teachers, school officials, healthcare providers and others involved in the child’s life. The CASA volunteer also reviews records pertaining to the child – school, medical and caseworker reports, as well as other pertinent documents. The CASA then provides that information to the judge, to help the judge make better decisions about the child’s life.

## **How does a CASA volunteer differ from a social worker?**

State governments generally employ social workers. A social worker is required by law to be assigned to every case. They often work on many cases at a time and therefore cannot always do intensive investigation about a particular child's circumstances. A CASA volunteer, on the other hand, has an opportunity to do a thorough investigation because he or she only has one or two cases at a time. The CASA volunteer provides valuable information that assists the social worker assigned to the case.

## **How much time does it require?**

CASAs work about 20 hours per month... sometimes more and sometimes less. Each case is different. A CASA volunteer typically spends about 20 hours doing research and conducting interviews prior to the first court appearance.

## **How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved with the case?**

A CASA volunteers with his or her child until the goals have been achieved or until the case is permanently resolved. One of the primary benefits of the CASA program is that the CASA volunteer is a consistent figure in the proceedings and provides continuity for the child.

## **Does the CASA volunteer act as a lawyer?**

No. State law requires that each child has an attorney to represent him or her in court. The CASA volunteer provides valuable information that may assist the child's attorney in presenting the case.

## **What is the benefit to the child of having a CASA?**

A CASA volunteer offers a child someone to trust and feel safe with during complex, and sometimes frightening, legal proceedings. The CASA explains complicated court hearings to the child, supports them in court and explains all the various people involved in the child's case. A CASA volunteer also listens to the child's desires and makes them known to the court, although the CASA will always make recommendations in the child's best interests. Studies have shown that children with CASAs receive more assistance and support than children without. The CASA volunteer is often the most stable presence in a foster child's life and for many foster children, the CASA volunteer is the only person who is not paid to care for them. CASA volunteers bring the voice of the community into a child welfare system that is often overly bureaucratic and legalistic.

## **Does CASA of Los Angeles have the support of lawyers, judges and social workers?**

Yes. Dependency Court judges appoint CASA volunteers to specific cases. The American Bar Association, National Bar Association, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice have endorsed CASA. A 2005 survey of more than 500 judges showed that judges believe that CASA volunteers do high quality work, and that CASA reports help judges make decisions and that CASA advocacy helps foster children.

## **What if I don't have time to be a CASA?**

You can get involved in other ways as well. One way is to join the CASA Circle of Friends, a group of volunteers that supports Friends of CASA of Los Angeles' fundraising and outreach efforts. Or, you may wish to serve as a member of the non-profit's Board of Directors.

## **How can I find out more about CASA of Los Angeles?**

For additional information about CASA of Los Angeles visit [www.casala.org](http://www.casala.org) or call (323) 526-6666.