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## CASA Fact Sheet

### What is a CASA volunteer?

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a trained community member who is appointed by the Family Court Judge to represent the best interests of a child in court. Children helped by CASA volunteers include those who have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect.

### What is the CASA volunteer's role?

A CASA volunteer provides a judge with a carefully researched background of 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 follows through on the case until it is permanently resolved.

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

To prepare a recommendation, the CASA volunteer talks with the child, parents, family members, social workers, 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 and caseworker reports; and other documents.

### How does a CASA volunteer differ from a social service caseworker?

Social workers generally are employed by state governments. They sometimes work on as many as 40 cases at a time and are responsible for the entire family. The CASA volunteer has one or two cases and concentrates primarily on the children. The CASA volunteer does not replace the social worker on a case; he or she is an independent appointee of the court.

### How does the role of a CASA volunteer differ from an attorney?

The CASA volunteer does not provide legal representation in the courtroom. That is the role of an attorney. A CASA volunteer does not represent the child's wishes in court. Rather, they speak to the child's best interests.

### Is there a "typical" CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life, with a variety of professional, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. There are more than 47,000 CASA volunteers nationally. Aside from their CASA volunteer work, 52% are employed in regular full-time jobs; the majority tend to be professionals. 82% of the volunteers nationwide are women; 18% are men.

### How does the CASA volunteer relate to the child he or she represents?

CASA volunteers offer children advocacy and work to gain their trust. They visit each child on average, twice a month. In these visits they listen to the child's opinion of where they would like to live permanently, and what their hopes are for the future, while remaining objective observers. They may help encourage a child to cooperate with treatment, to expand their interests into positive activities, foster sibling visits, and be there to listen to a lonely child.

### How many cases does a CASA volunteer carry at one time?

Most CASAs have just one case.

### Do lawyers, judges, and caseworkers support CASA?

Yes. Family Court judges implement the CASA program in their courtrooms and appoint the volunteers. CASA has been endorsed by the American Bar Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice.

### Does the federal government support CASA?

CASA is a priority project of the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

### How many CASA programs are there?

There are now over 900 programs in all 50 states, Washington, DC, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. New programs start up on the average of three to four per month.

### How effective have CASA programs been?

Preliminary findings show that children who have been assigned a CASA volunteer tend to spend less time in court and less time within the foster care system than those who do not have CASA representation. Judges have observed that CASA children also have better chances of finding permanent homes than non-CASA children.

### How much time does it require?

Each case is different in the number of hours per month. A CASA volunteer usually spends about 15 hours a month doing research and conducting interviews in the beginning of a case. After the initial period, volunteers spend anywhere from 3 to 20 hours a month, depending on the circumstances of their case.

### How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved in a case?

Volunteers commit one year to the program. The volunteer continues until the case is permanently resolved. 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 and provides continuity for a child.

### Are there any other agencies or groups that provide the same service?

No. There are other child advocacy organizations, but CASA is the only program where volunteers are appointed by the court to represent the child's best interests.

### What children are assigned CASA volunteers?

Children who are victims of abuse and neglect, who have been removed from their homes and are in temporary placement, are assigned CASA volunteers.

### What is the role of the National CASA Association?

The National CASA Association is a non-profit organization that represents and serves the local CASA programs. It provides training, technical assistance, research, media and public awareness services to members.

### How is CASA funded?

National CASA is funded through a combination of private grants, federal funds, memberships and contributions. CASA for Children of Mercer and Burlington Counties, Inc. is a private not-for-profit agency that receives funding from private foundations, fundraising activities of the Board of Trustees, and generous donations from community members.

### How can I find the CASA program in my community?

CASA of Mercer County, Inc.'s phone number and address are listed on the first page. If you are not from the state of New Jersey, CASA programs are known by a variety of names. National CASA can be contacted for help in finding a local program. Visit [www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org).

### How do I get more information about becoming a CASA volunteer?

We would love to meet you and tell you more about who we are and how you can help. Visit [www.casamercer.org](http://www.casamercer.org) or call us at (609) 434-0050.

All volunteers are selected based upon their individual ability to meet the responsibilities of the CASA program. No individual will be rejected because of culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, national origin, race or sexual orientation.