

Section One
INTRODUCTION TO CASA

	Page
○ History of the CASA Volunteer Role.....	1
○ National CASA.....	2
○ Principles and Concepts that Guide CASA Work.....	3
○ The Role of the CASA Volunteer.....	6
○ Attitudes and Skills That Enhance CASA Work.....	7
○ Demonstrated Effectiveness of CASA Volunteers.....	8
○ Section Review.....	10
○ Review Questions.....	11
○ Resources.....	12



Section One

History of the CASA Volunteer Role

In 1974, Public Law 93-274, the Child Abuse and Prevention Act, was passed. One of the funding requirements was the mandatory appointment of a guardian ad litem (GAL) to represent and protect the abused or neglected child's best interests in every case that results in judicial proceedings. The law did not specify who could serve in this capacity.

Meanwhile in 1976, Superior Court Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington saw a recurring problem in his courtroom:

In criminal and civil cases, even though there were always many different points of view, I walked out of the courthouse at the end of the day and I said, 'I've done my best; I can live with this decision.'

But when I'm involved with a child and I'm trying to decide what to do to facilitate that child's growth into a mature and happy adult, I don't feel like I have sufficient information to allow me to make the right decision. I wonder if I really know everything I needed to know or if I've been told all of the different things pertaining to the case.

Traditionally, the court found that few attorneys and case managers were able to spend the necessary time to undertake the kind of thorough investigation required by these difficult cases. Judge Soukup decided to recruit and train community volunteers who were asked to make a long-term commitment to each child they served. The first Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program was implemented in Washington as a pilot program in January 1977.

In the first year of operation, the program provided 110 trained volunteers for 498 children in 376 dependency cases. In 1978, the term Court Appointed Special Advocate was used to denote any court appointed volunteer following a clearly defined role as a friend of the court in dependency matters.

Following this early model, CASA-like programs were developed across the United States. It was clear that a national association was needed to direct CASA's emerging national presence. The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (NCASAA) was created in 1982 to support volunteer child advocate programs and increase the number of volunteer child advocates nationwide. By 1984, the National headquarters office opened its doors in Seattle, Washington.



Section One

National CASA

NATIONAL CASA MISSION

The National CASA Association, together with its state and local members, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so that they can thrive in safe, permanent homes.

NATIONAL CASA STANDARDS

National CASA standards describe the major criteria the CASA/GAL volunteer must meet. The following statements describe the CASA/GAL volunteer:

- An individual who has been screened and trained by the CASA/GAL program and appointed by the court to advocate for children who come into the court system primarily as a result of alleged abuse or neglect
- An individual who respects a child's inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe environment that meets that child's best interests
- An individual who assures that the child's best interests are represented in the court at every stage of the case

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (NCASAA) includes over 1,000 CASA programs in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands. NCASAA provides support with training, legal expertise, research, fund raising, news and public awareness services, and political lobbying efforts for dependent children's issues in Washington, D.C.

Today, programs go by many names—CASA, GAL, ProKids, Voices for Children, Child Advocates—but all have this in common: volunteers who advocate for abused and neglected children in the court system.

The United States Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention recognizes CASA volunteers as an exemplary program in delinquency prevention because CASA volunteers provide a consistent, adult presence in a child's life.



Principles and Concepts That Guide CASA Work

THE “BEST INTEREST” PRINCIPLE

- A safe home
- A permanent home
- As quickly as possible

Parents typically decide what is best for their children and then provide it for them to the extent that they can. They are their children’s best advocates. The child protection system intervenes in families’ lives when parents cannot or will not protect, promote, and provide for their children’s basic needs. A CASA volunteer becomes the advocate when the parents cannot—or will not—fulfill this role.

Judges use the “best interest of the child” standard when making their decisions in child abuse and neglect cases. Child welfare and juvenile court practitioners and scholars have debated the meaning of “best interest of the child” for years. Books have been written on the subject; however, there is still no concise legal definition for this standard. In cases where the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) applies, the law presumes that it is always in the best interest of an Indian child* to have the tribe determine what is best for the child’s future. You will learn more about ICWA in your training.

**This curriculum uses the terms “Indian child” and “Indian custodian” in accordance with the legal definitions set out in the Indian Child Welfare Act.*

What National CASA Says

The CASA volunteer is guided by the “best interest” principle when advocating for a child. This means that the volunteer knows the child well enough to identify the child’s needs. The CASA makes fact-based recommendations to the court about appropriate resources to meet those needs.

THE “MINIMALLY ADEQUATE PARENTING” (MAP) STANDARD

Removing a child from his/her home because of abuse and/or neglect is a drastic remedy. Because removal is so traumatic for the child, both the law and good practice require that agencies keep the child in the home when it is possible to do so and still keep the child safe. Children should be removed only when parents cannot meet the “minimally adequate parenting” standard. This standard describes what must be in place for the child to remain in his/her home.

The same standard is also used to determine whether or not parents have made sufficient progress so that a child can be safely returned to the family home. Minimally adequate



Section One

parenting is determined by a number of factors, each of which must be looked at specifically in relation to the case at hand. Factors to consider include:

The Child's Needs

Is the parent providing for the following needs at a basic level?

- Physical (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, safety, protection)
- Emotional (attachment between parent and child)
- Developmental (education, special help for children with disabilities)

Social Standards

Is the parent's behavior within or outside commonly accepted child-rearing practices in our society?

- In terms of discipline, whipping a child with a belt was generally thought to be appropriate during the first half of the twentieth century but is now widely considered abusive. Contemporary families frequently use a short “time out” as a punishment for young children.
- In terms of school attendance, it is a widely held expectation that parents send all children to school (or home-school them) until they reach the age limit at which attendance is no longer compulsory.
- Social standards also apply in medical care, where immunizations and regular medical/dental care are the standard.

Community Standards

Does the parent's behavior fall within reasonable limits, given the specific community in which the family resides?

- The age at which a child can be safely left alone varies significantly from urban to suburban to rural communities.
- The age at which a child is deemed old enough to care for other children is largely determined by cultural and community norms.
- Even something as simple as sending a nine-year-old child to the store might fall within or outside those standards, depending on neighborhood safety, the distance and traffic patterns, the weather, the child's clothing, the time of day or night, the ability of the child, and the necessity of the purchase.

Communities can be geographical or cultural. An example of a non-geographical, cultural community is a Native American tribe in which members live in a variety of locales but



Section One

still share a common child-rearing standard. According to the Indian Child Welfare Act, the minimally adequate parenting standard must reflect the community standards of the tribe of the Indian child.

WHY THE MAP STANDARD IS USED

- It maintains the child’s right to safety and permanence while not ignoring the parents’ right to their children.
- It is required by law (as a practical way to interpret the “reasonable efforts” provision of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act).
- It is possible for parents to reach.
- It provides a reference point for decision makers.
- It protects (to some degree) from individual biases and value judgments.
- It discourages unnecessary removal from the family home.
- It discourages unnecessarily long placements in foster care.
- It keeps decision makers focused on what is the least detrimental alternative for the child.
- It is sensitive across cultures.

KEY PARAMETERS OF THE MAP STANDARD

- The standard relates to a particular child.
- It is a set of minimum conditions, not an ideal situation.
- It is a relative standard, depending on the child’s needs, social standards, and community standards. It will not be the same for every family or every child in a particular family.
- It remains the same when considering removal and when considering reunification.



The Role of the CASA Volunteer

INVESTIGATION

Carry out an objective examination of the situation, including relevant history, environment, relationships, and needs of the child.

FACILITATION

Identify resources and services for the child and facilitate a collaborative relationship between all parties involved in the case, helping to create a situation in which the child's needs can be met.

ADVOCACY

Speak up for the child by making recommendations regarding the child's best interests in a written court report.

MONITORING

Keep track of whether the orders of the court and the plans of the child protective services agency are carried out, and report to the court or collaborate with the child protective services agency when any of the parties do not follow those orders and plans.

THE CASA VOLUNTEER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD

Establishing a relationship with the child is one of the most important things you do as a CASA volunteer. The ideal relationship is one that maximizes your ability to advocate successfully for the child. The following guidelines describe the parameters for your relationship and contacts with the child.

As a CASA volunteer you have direct and sufficient contact with a child to carry out an independent and valid investigation of the child's circumstances, including the child's needs and wishes, so as to be able to make sound, thorough, and objective recommendations in the child's best interest.

This contact should occur in person to provide you with firsthand knowledge of the child and his/her unique personality, abilities, and needs. While social contact is permitted with the child to develop trust and a meaningful relationship, you function as an objective advocate for the child and not as the child's attorney, caseworker, counselor, mentor, or parental figure. You do not provide direct services to the child, such as supervising visitation; however, it is appropriate for you to observe visitation. Under no circumstances shall you take the child into your home, provide shelter for the child, or take the child on an overnight outing.



Attitudes and Skills That Enhance CASA Work

PROFESSIONALISM

Ethics, accountability, confidentiality, resourcefulness, critical thinking, and good judgment can enhance your credibility and earn the respect of parties in a case. Professionalism and assertiveness can help you gain necessary information.

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE

Open-mindedness, respect, collaboration, self-awareness, and assertiveness will help you be more successful in working with other people, particularly in gathering accurate information and making accurate interpretations of situations. As a CASA volunteer, you are expected to demonstrate respect and open-mindedness in your interactions with all parties to the case. Gathering information from children requires skills and attitudes different from those required when working with adults. Children may be frightened or healing from trauma. They are different emotionally and developmentally from adults and also from other children. Listening and observation skills will help you gather a full picture of the child's situation.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

What you do not understand may lead to inaccurate interpretations. Understanding your own culture and the differences between cultures will allow you to best serve children and their families. Your life experience (culture, era, geography, race, education, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, family dynamics, etc.) has led you to develop a particular perspective. Your unique perspective always influences how you interpret what you observe. The more aware you become of your personal perspective, the better able you will be to understand that others have different perspectives. In observing children and families, it is important to understand that your perspective on families and parenting is likely to be different from those with whom you are working.

Demonstrated Effectiveness of CASA Volunteers

THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT

In 2006, the US Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of the National CASA Association, as required by Congress. The results of this audit were released in January 2007. The objectives of this audit report were to determine the types of activities funded by National CASA and to assess local CASA programs' performance against four outcome measures for cases involving CASA volunteers as compared with non-CASA cases. These outcomes include the length of time a child spends in foster care, the extent to which there is an increased provision of services, the percentage of cases permanently closed and achievement of the permanent plan for reunification or adoption.

Audit Report Results for CASA Advocacy

1. Length of Time in Foster Care

Children in cases involving a CASA volunteer were on average in foster care longer (between 1.2 months and 2 months) The audit ascribes the longer time to two factors:

1. Cases assigned to CASA volunteers tend to involve the most serious cases of maltreatment, in which the children were more at risk.
2. The children have already been in foster care between 4.5 and 5.5 months before assignment of a CASA volunteer.

Children with a CASA volunteer are substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care, defined as more than three years in care: 13.3% for CASA cases versus 27.0% of all children in foster care.

2. Number of Services Provided

When a CASA volunteer was involved; both children and their parents were ordered by the courts to receive more services. The audit concluded that this was an indication that "CASA is effective in identifying the needs of children and parents."

3. Percentage of Cases Permanently Closed

Permanent closure is defined as the case being closed for any reason and the child not reentering the child welfare system (CWS). Cases involving a CASA volunteer are more likely to be "permanently closed" (i.e., the children are less likely to reenter the CWS) than cases where a CASA is not involved. The statistics vary from only 1.4% of children with a CASA reentering the CWS (CASA Data Request) to 9% of CASA

Section One

children reentering the CWS (Youngclarke Review). This is in contrast to 16% for children not served by a CASA volunteer.

4. Achievement of a Permanent Plan for Reunification or Adoption

Children with a CASA volunteer are more likely to be adopted and less likely to be reunified with their parents than children not assigned a CASA. The audit explains this finding as the result of CASA volunteers serving on typically the most serious cases of maltreatment and therefore cases where children are less likely to be reunified with their parents.

Audit Report Results for Activities Funded by National CASA

- Over 93% of National CASA expenditures went to fund activities directly supporting CASA/GAL programs.
- National CASA expended 6.85% of grant money on general and administrative activities. According to the audit report, National CASA spends significantly less on administrative costs than the 16.3% average administrative costs for human services nonprofit organizations.

ADDITIONAL STUDIES DOCUMENT RESULTS OF CASA ADVOCACY

Like our volunteer advocates, the National CASA Association and our local programs strive for fact-based decision-making. Below is a summary of conclusive results from the Caliber study and other CASA studies selected by researchers with the University of California, San Francisco Fresno Medical Education program for their high methodological quality.

Notable conclusive results from these studies include the following:

- CASA volunteers spend most of their volunteer time in contact with a child.
- CASAs spend significantly more time in contact with a child than a paid guardian ad litem.
- CASA volunteers are far more likely than paid attorneys to file written reports.
- CASAs are highly effective in getting their recommendations accepted in court. In four out of five cases, all or almost all CASA recommendations are accepted.
- When a CASA volunteer is assigned, a higher number of services are ordered for children and families.
- A child with a CASA is more likely to be adopted.
- A child with a CASA volunteer is as likely to be reunified with their birth parent as a child without a CASA.
- A child with a CASA is less likely to reenter the child welfare system. The proportion of reentries is consistently reduced by half.



Section One

Section One Review

As you have learned in section one, you will need specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills to advocate effectively for a child. Children who have been abused or neglected are often without a voice in the court system unless they have a CASA volunteer to advocate for their best interests.

An effective advocate is able to:

1. Approach each case with a single goal: advocating for interventions and services designed to ensure that the child is in a safe, stable, and permanent home as soon as possible.
2. Work within the parameters of federal and state laws governing child abuse, neglect, and dependency cases.
3. And, under the guidance of the CASA program staff:
 - Conduct an independent investigation to gather facts and continue researching the case to understand the needs and wishes of the child.
 - Collaborate with the child (when possible), the child's family, the child protective services agency, and other service providers to identify the appropriate resources for meeting the needs of the child and to determine where those resources are available.
 - Consistently design and present to the court fact-based recommendations so that appropriate resources can be ordered to meet the needs of the child.
 - Monitor the case until the child is in a safe, permanent home.

As you complete this training workbook, you will learn more about what you will need to learn to be an effective Court Appointed Special Advocate in the state of Arizona.



Section One

Section One Review Questions

- What three interesting things did you learn about the history of the CASA program?

- How would you explain the Minimally Adequate Parenting Standard?

- In reading about the role of a CASA volunteer, which elements do you feel are your strengths? Which characteristics do you want to develop?

Questions for My Coordinator



Section One

Resources

National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

www.casaforchildren.org

The website for the national child advocacy organization, this site includes information about the work of CASA programs as well as a library with links about several important topics impacting children, including HIV, cultural awareness, and advocacy.

www.casenet.org

This website was created to provide support to CASA staff and volunteers across the country.



