

# **CASA FACT SHEET**

## **What is a CASA Volunteer?**

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer is a trained community member who is appointed by the judge to speak up for abused and neglected children in court due to abuse and/or neglect.

## **What is a CASA volunteer's role?**

A CASA volunteer works with attorneys, social workers, caseworkers, parents, and others who are involved with the child. From the information gathered, the CASA will make recommendations to the judge as to what is in the best interest of the child.

CASA volunteers offer children trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings. They explain the events to the child, and encourage the child to express his or her own feelings, hopes, and opinions while still being objective observers.

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

State governments usually employ caseworkers. They work on as many as 30-40 cases at a time and are frequently unable to conduct a comprehensive investigation of each. The CASA volunteer has more time and a smaller caseload (an average of 1-2 cases at a time). The CASA volunteer does not replace the caseworker; 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 recommendations to the court that are independent of state agencies.

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

The CASA volunteer does not provide legal representation. However, they do provide the attorney with crucial background information that assists the attorneys in the case. The CASA volunteer tells the court what the child's wishes are, and they exercise their own independent judgment to determine what is in the best interest of the child.

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

CASA volunteers come from a variety of educational and ethnic backgrounds. There are more than 70,000 volunteers nationally. Aside from being a CASA, more than 50% are employed full time.

### **How much time does being a CASA require?**

Each case is different. A CASA volunteer usually spends 6-12 hours per month, depending on the complexity of the case. They also complete an initial 36-40 hour training before becoming a volunteer. The volunteer will continue with the case until a permanent plan is in place for the child. The CASA is the one consistent figure that the child has in their life in most cases. An 18-month commitment is required of every volunteer.

### **Who endorses CASA?**

The American Bar Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the federal government endorse CASA.

### **Who funds CASA?**

Each CASA program is funded differently. Cass County CASA, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. A small portion of our funding comes from the federal and state governments. The majority of our funding is received through private donors, community foundations and fundraising events.

### **How many CASA programs are there?**

There are more than 900 programs in operation across the United States, including those in Washington D.C. and the U.S. Virgin Islands, serving 280,000 children. In 2004, Michigan had 19 CASA programs in 21 counties, including Cass County.

### **How effective are CASA programs?**

Research suggests that children who have CASA's spend less time in the court and foster care system than those who do not. Judges have also observed that CASA children have better chances of finding a permanent home and are able to access more community services than children without CASA's.

In 2004, Cass County CASA advocated for 53 abused and neglected children with 19 volunteers.

**For more information about CASA go to [nationalcasa.org](http://nationalcasa.org) on the web  
or call our office at 269/445-4431.**