Frequently Asked Questions For CASA® Volunteers

**What function do Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers serve?**CASA volunteers are trained to act as first-hand experts on the individual needs of abused and neglected children in foster care, giving them the best possible chance at a hopeful future.

**As an appointed member of the court, a CASA volunteer assumes the following core responsibilities:**

* Serve as a fact-finder for the judge by thoroughly researching the background of the assigned case
* Speak on behalf of the child in the courtroom, representing his or her best interests
* Act as a "watchdog" for the child for the duration of the case, ensuring it is brought to a swift and appropriate conclusion

**How are CASA volunteers assigned to cases?**Judges typically assign CASA volunteers to the most difficult and complex cases involving physical or sexual abuse and neglect. Several other factors are also considered in making this decision:

* The instability of the child's current placement
* The presence of conflicting case information
* Concerns about the implementation of special services, such as medical care, counseling and education
assistance.

**What are the qualifications to become a CASA volunteer?**

***Commitment:*** The vast majority of cases last one to two years, and the amount of time spent on a case per month typically range between 10-20 hours. Volunteers must make case time a priority in order to provide quality advocacy.

***Objectivity:*** Volunteers research case records and speak to everyone involved in a child's life, including their family members, teacher, doctor, lawyer, social worker and others. Their third-party evaluations are based on facts, evidence and testimonies.

***Communication skills:*** Once a volunteer has fully evaluated a case, they prepare a written report outlining their recommendation for the child's placement. They must be able to speak with authority as they present their rationale to the judge in court.

**What is the process to become a CASA volunteer?**
CASA volunteers undergo a thorough training and development program that consists of at least 30 hours of pre-service training, followed by 12 hours of yearly in-service training. Volunteers learn about courtroom procedure from the principals in the system? Judges, lawyers, social workers, court personnel and others. CASA volunteers also learn effective advocacy techniques for children, and are educated about specific topics ranging from seminars on child sexual abuse to discussions on early childhood development and adolescent behavior.

After completion of the initial training, volunteers are sworn in as officers of the court. This gives them the legal authority to conduct research on the child's situation and submit reports to the court.

**What does it mean to be a certified CASA program?**
The 1,018 local and state member CASA program offices adhere to formal standards set by National CASA and are required to pass a quality assurance review, which is administered every four years. This self-assessment is a course of action taken by local programs in order to evaluate and improve their operations.

Staff teams work together to answer 446 questions and gather 58 supporting documents for submission to National CASA. Professionals outside the CASA network determine overall compliance by conducting an independent review of the standards self-assessment instrument and supporting documentation. Programs must address any compliance concerns within six months in order to maintain CASA membership.

**How is CASA funded?**
Following is a breakdown on National CASA's funding sources.

* The Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) currently provides 82% of National CASA's funding: 53% is used for local CASA program start-up and expansion, which is made available through the passage of grants; and 29% is used for local program training, and for technical assistance to state and local programs.
* Charitable foundations, private contributions and national conference fees account for the other 18% of National CASA's funding.
* Only 12.4% of all revenue supports National CASA general and administrative expenses; 87.6% is dedicated to program services including funding and training.

**What is the cost to provide a CASA volunteer to one child for a year?**
The median cost per child is $1,070, which covers training, staff support and other costs.