

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is a CASA volunteer?**

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a trained community volunteer who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interests of an abused or neglected child in court. CASA volunteers are able to focus on the child and their needs while they are in the system. (I.C. 31-34-10-3)

2. **What is the CASA volunteer's role?**

A CASA volunteer provides the judge with a carefully researched background of the child to help the court make a sound decision about the child's future. Each case is as unique as the child involved. The CASA volunteer gets to know the child and their case, and then makes fact-based determinations regarding what is in the child's best interest. The CASA volunteer makes recommendations regarding necessary services and placement options to the judge and follows through on the case until it is permanently resolved.

3. **How does a CASA volunteer investigate a case?**

To prepare a recommendation, the CASA volunteer talks with the Department of Child Services Family Case Manager, the child, parents, family members, school officials, health providers, and others who are knowledgeable about the child's history. The CASA volunteer reviews all records pertaining to the child – school, medical, case manager reports, and other pertinent documents.

4. **How does a CASA volunteer differ from a Department of Child Services Family Case Manager?**

Case Managers are employed by the state government. They often work on a large number of cases at a time and are sometimes unable to conduct a comprehensive ongoing investigation of each case. The CASA volunteer has only 1-2 cases at a time and is able to devote their attention and focus to the child for whom they are advocating. The CASA volunteer does not replace the Department of Child Services Case Manager, but rather works alongside them to ensure that the case moves forward in a timely manner. The CASA is an independent appointee of the court that is knowledgeable about community resources and is charged with thoroughly examining their appointed child's case and making recommendations to the court.

5. **How does the role of a CASA volunteer differ from an attorney?**

The CASA volunteer does not provide legal representation; that is the role of the attorney. However, the CASA volunteer does provide crucial background information that assists the attorney in presenting their cases. It is important to remember that CASA volunteers do not represent a child's wishes in court. Rather, they tell the court what the child's wishes are, and then they exercise their own independent judgement to determine whether those wishes are actually in the best interest of the child. A CASA Volunteer represents the best interest of the children they are appointed to advocate for, which is not always the same as what the child wants.

6. **Is there a "typical" CASA volunteer?**

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life with a variety of backgrounds; there are more than 93,000 CASA volunteers nationally. Crossroads CASA promotes and celebrates diversity, and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, national origin or citizenship status, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, economic status, age, disability, military or veteran status, or any other basis protected by Federal, State, or Local law.

7. **Do lawyers and judges support CASA?**

Yes. Juvenile and Family Court Judges implement the CASA program in their courtrooms and appoint volunteers. The American Bar Association, the National Bar Association, the National Counsel of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Judges and Delinquency Prevention have endorsed CASA.

8. **Does the federal government support CASA?**

CASA is a priority project of the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The office encourages the establishment of new CASA programs, assists established CASA programs, and provides partial funding for the National CASA Association.

9. **How effective have CASA programs been?**

All children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect deserve to have their best interests represented in court. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) have a profound positive impact on the lives of these children, giving them a voice and hope for the future. A child with a CASA is more likely to find a safe, permanent home, and spends far less time in foster care (up to 8 months less on average) than a child who does not have CASA representation. Children with CASAs get more help while in the child welfare system, as more services are ordered for them. They do better in school, are more likely to pass courses and are less likely to be expelled. (Gershun & Terrebonne, 2018)

10. **How much time does it require?**

All CASA volunteers go through an initial 30-hour comprehensive training series. Upon the completion of the training and being sworn in as an officer of the court, the CASA is appointed to a case that they are comfortable advocating for.

Although each case is different, a CASA volunteer usually spends about 5-10 hours a month doing research, conducting interviews and meeting with the child. Complex cases may require more time.

11. **How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved with a case?**

The CASA volunteer continues until the case is permanently resolved. One of the primary benefits of the CASA program is that, unlike other parties who often rotate cases, the CASA volunteer is a consistent figure in the proceedings and provides continuity for a child.

12. **Are there other agencies or groups that provide the same service?**

There are other pro bono child advocacy organizations nationwide, but CASA is the only national program using carefully screened and trained community volunteers who are appointed by the court to represent a child's best interests.

13. **What children are assigned CASA volunteers?**

Children who are victims of abuse and neglect who have become wards of the court are assigned CASA volunteers. The Juvenile Judge may also choose to appoint a CASA to an Informal Adjustment, Juvenile Delinquency case or a Collaborative Care case.

14. **How is CASA funded?**

Crossroads CASA's program is funded through County funds, State funds, private funds, and grants.

15. **Is there a State and National Website?**

Yes, for more information visit <https://www.in.gov/courts/iocs/galcasa/> and [www.nationalcasagal.org](http://www.nationalcasagal.org).