

Effectiveness of CASA / GAL Volunteers for Children

Like our volunteer advocates, the National CASA Association, with local and state programs, strives for fact-based decision-making. Below is a summary of conclusive results from CASA studies selected based on their high methodological quality.

- CASA volunteers spend most of their volunteer time in contact with a child. (1)
- CASA volunteers spend significantly more time in contact with a child than a paid guardian ad litem. (2)
- CASA volunteers are far more likely than paid attorneys to file written reports. (3, 4, 5)
- CASA volunteers are highly effective in getting their recommendations accepted in court. In four out of five cases, all or almost all CASA volunteer recommendations are accepted. (1)
- When a CASA volunteer is assigned, a higher number of services are ordered for children and families. (1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9)
- A child with a CASA volunteer is more likely to be adopted. (8, 9, 10, 11)
- A child with a CASA volunteer is as likely to be reunified with their birth parent as a child without a CASA volunteer. (3, 9, 11)
- A child with a CASA volunteer is less likely to reenter the child welfare system. The proportion of reentries is consistently reduced by half. (8, 11, 12)

The Office of the Inspector General Report

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 a 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: First: Cases assigned to a CASA volunteer tend to involve the most serious cases of maltreatment, in which the children were more at risk. And: 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 3 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 volunteer is not involved. The statistics vary from only 1.4% of children with a CASA volunteer reentering the CWS (CASA Data Request) to 9% of CASA children reentering the CWS (Youngclarke Review). This is in contrast to 16% for children not served by a 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 volunteer. 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.

Evaluation of Court Appointed Special Advocates/ Guardians ad Litem Volunteer Impact – Judicial Survey

In 2005 Organizational Research Services conducted a survey of juvenile and family court judges in order to evaluate the impact of Court Appointed Special Advocates/Guardians ad Litem (CASA/GAL) volunteers and program activities on judicial decision making, court processes and case outcomes. Findings include:

- Judges report that CASA/GAL volunteers’ activities are very useful, that their input in informing court decisions is valued, and that volunteers are very effective in supporting court processes.
- Judges agree that the work of the CASA/GAL volunteers has been of high quality, is beneficial to their decision making, and is beneficial to the children and families they serve.

- Judges are most likely to assign CASA volunteers their most difficult and complex cases. When assigning a case to a volunteer, they particularly consider the instability of the child's current placement, conflicting case information, concerns about implementation of services and extreme neglect, physical abuse or sexual abuse.
- Nearly 30% of the judges report that CASA/GAL volunteer recommendations are “almost always” incorporated into the hearing court order.

References

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2. Donald D. Duquette and Sarah H. Ramsey, “Using Lay Volunteers to Represent Children in Child Protection Court Proceedings” (Appendix C). *Child Abuse and Neglect* 10(3): p. 293-308, 1986.
3. Sherrie S. Aitken, Larry Condelli, and Tom Kelly, *Final Report of the Validation and Effectiveness Study of Legal Representation Through Guardian Ad Litem*. Report submitted to the Administration on Children Youth and Families, Department of Health and Human Services by CSR, Inc.: Washington, DC, 1993.
4. Karen C. Snyder, John D. Downing, and Jill A. Jacobson, *A Report to the Ohio Children's Foundation on the Effectiveness of the CASA Program of Franklin County*. The Strategy Team: Columbus, OH, 1996.
5. Victoria Weisz and Nghi Thai, “The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program: Bringing information to Child Abuse and Neglect Cases,” *Child Maltreatment* 8(X), 2003.
6. Larry Condelli, *National Evaluation of the Impact of Guardian Ad Litem in Child Abuse and Neglect Judicial Proceedings*. Report submitted to the National Center of Child Abuse and Neglect for the Administration of Children, Youth and Families by CSR, Inc.: Washington, DC, 1988.
7. Litzelfelner, “The Effectiveness of CASAs in Achieving Positive Outcomes for Children,” *Child Welfare* 79(2): p. 179-193, 2000.
8. John Poertner and Allan Press, “Who Best Represents the Interests of the Child in Court?” *Child Welfare* 69(6): p. 537-549, 1990.
9. Gene C. Siegel, et al., *Arizona CASA effectiveness study*. Report to the Arizona Supreme Courts, Administrative Office of the Courts, Dependent Children's Services Division by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2001.
10. Susan M. Profilet, et al., *Guardian ad Litem Project*. Child Advocates Inc., 1999.
11. Shareen Abramson, “Use of Court-Appointed Advocates to Assist in Permanency Planning for Minority Children,” *Child Welfare* 70(4): p. 477-487, 1991.
12. Michael Powell and Vernon Speshock, *Arizona Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program, Internal Assessment*, 1996.

Links:

Office of the Inspector General Report:

<http://www.usdoj.gov/oig/reports/OJP/a0704/final.pdf>

Organizational Research Services Judicial Survey Report:

http://www.casnet.org/download/casa-surveys/0510_casa_eval_report_0024.pdf