

VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION

Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian Ad Litem (CASA/GAL) of Summit County

INTRODUCTION

Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained community volunteers appointed by the Summit County Juvenile Court Judge to speak for the best interests of children who are brought before the court for reasons of abuse or neglect.

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), often referred to as a volunteer Guardian ad Litem, is an official part of judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys and social workers. By handling only one or two cases at a time the CASA has time to thoroughly explore the history of each assigned case. The volunteer reviews all court facts about the case and the volunteer also reviews all court documents pertaining to the case. He or she then is expected to submit formal reports to the Judge/Magistrate at every scheduled hearing/review. The CASA continues to monitor the case to assure that the judicial and child welfare systems are moving ahead to secure a safe, permanent home for the child, and that court-ordered services are provided to the child and family. The CASA can be an invaluable participant in the child welfare system in facilitating a permanent home for the child as soon as possible.

HISTORY

The CASA concept was first implemented by Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington in 1977. As a Judge he felt a compelling need to have more information available to him on which he could base his decisions, most of which had lifetime ramifications for children. Since the conception of the CASA program in 1977, CASA has grown to include over 933 member programs now in 49 states and Washington DC. In 2012, 77,000 CASA volunteers helped 234,000 children find safe, loving homes. The National CASA Association has been established to provide leadership and lend technical support to new and existing programs. CASA of Summit County adheres to all program guidelines and standards established by the National CASA Association.

PROGRAM MISSION

The CASA/GAL Program of Summit County advocates for the best interests of abused and neglected children within the Juvenile Court

System. Based on the belief that children are entitled to a safe and permanent home, the CASA Program of Summit County works in the court system through trained community volunteers, in collaboration with key agencies, legal counsel and community resources to serve as the child's advocate and represent the child in juvenile court.

PROGRAM GOALS/PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- To provide independent, factual information to the court regarding abused and neglected children
- To provide advocacy for abused and neglected children who are subject of judicial proceedings
- To monitor cases involving abused and neglected children until the terms of the court order have been fulfilled
- To conduct independent and objective analysis concerning abused and neglected children
- To factually and objectively report findings and observations to the court
- To ensure representation of the child's best interest in all judicial proceedings
- To monitor cases following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court

THE CASA VOLUNTEER

Completes an intensive independent review of each case:

- Speaks with the child and relevant adults
- Reviews appropriate records and reports
- Observes the child and significant others

Reports findings to the court:

- Provides a written report containing factual information
- Attends court hearings concerning the child
- Participates in case conferences concerning the child

Ensures representation of the child's best interest:

- Attends all court hearings to see that all relevant facts are presented
- Attends appropriate interagency meetings regarding the child
- Prods public systems into action

Monitors cases following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court

Consults regularly with the volunteer coordinator concerning assigned cases

REQUIRED SKILLS/ABILITIES

- Ability to keep all client and court information confidential
- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing
- Ability to respect and relate to people from various backgrounds (economic, cultural, educational) in a variety of settings
- Ability to transport self to a variety of settings
- Proof of valid Ohio drivers license and vehicle insurance
- Ability to deal with hostility, anger and other emotional attitudes
- Ability to maintain objectivity
- Ability to gather and record factual information accurately
- A basic understanding of child development
- A basic understanding of family relationships
- Must be 21 years of age
- Must be able to successfully pass a criminal and child welfare background check

TRAINING

- CASA volunteers are required to attend approximately 40 hours of pre-service training
- CASA volunteers follow guidelines established by the National CASA Association
- CASA volunteers will attend 12 hours of in-service training annually
- CASA volunteers will receive direct supervision and guidance from program staff

TIME COMMITMENT

- Volunteers are required to commit themselves to the program for 24 months
- Volunteers are expected to be available for case assignment and to accept cases unless other arrangements have been made

CONCLUSION

The CASAGAL Program of Summit County has been appointing trained volunteers to abuse and neglect cases since 1981. Currently, the CASA/GAL Program of Summit County has over 200 child advocates. CASA plays an integral part in assuring that children do not become lost in the court system. A CASA volunteer is a caring adult who tries to understand the child's concerns and report them to the Judge/Magistrate.

Early contact with children who become involved in the Summit County Juvenile Court as a result of abuse and/or neglect can help prevent future involvement either as a delinquent or an offending adult. The CASA program is dedicated to the premise that all children are entitled to grow

up in a safe and loving home. The CASA program is committed to reunification of child/children with their birth family, when that home can be made safe for the child/children. Most important is the CASA volunteer's role in ensuring that all decisions regarding the child are in the child's best interest.

CASA/GAL SIGNATURE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

By signing below, I am indicating that I have received a copy of the CASA/GAL Volunteer Job Description, Roles and Responsibilities, and Policies and Procedures. I agree to abide by the above-noted requirements.

CASA/GAL (Print Name)

Date

CASA/GAL (Signature)