

Working Together for Children

CASA & DCFS

Advocating for Abused and Neglected Children in the Child Welfare System

CASA'S PURPOSE

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program recruits, trains, and supervises volunteers who advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children. Appointed by the court, CASA volunteers work to ensure that children in the child welfare system find safe, permanent homes. They assist children involved in Family Services and Foster Care once the court becomes involved, serving youth from birth to 18 years old, and up to 21 for those in Extended Foster Care. CASA volunteers are men and women from the community who serve as consistent, objective voices for these children, acting as independent, empowered advocates and the eyes and ears of the court throughout the process.

CASA'S WORK

Established in 1991 by state statute (Louisiana Children's Code Art. 424), CASA programs assist courts by advocating for the timely placement of children into safe, stable, and permanent homes. CASA volunteers work alongside caseworkers, foster families, and service providers to ensure that the child's needs are prioritized in all proceedings. The court appoints a CASA program to assist the court in fulfilling its duties and responsibilities to children brought into court. The appointment of a CASA program includes proceedings through permanent placement of a child, including families in need of services or delinquency proceedings.

HOW CASA CAN HELP

Family Finding

Through relationships built with the child and family, CASAs may be able to obtain identifying information for potential family members that can be placements or long-term connections for the children.

Identify Resources

CASAs are individuals in the community who are involved in various groups and organizations that may provide resources to children and families. CASAs can help link families to those resources to benefit the children served.

Family Support

CASAs recognize the importance of family preservation and works to support the family in efforts toward reunification whenever it is safe to do so. Through relationships the CASA program has established with partners, volunteers can access needs for the family from various community partners.



This document was developed in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Children & Family Services.

LOUISIANA CASA ASSOCIATION LOUISIANACASA.ORG

Louisiana CASA Association is the statewide association for the 18 local CASA programs in Louisiana. CASA programs recruit, train, and support court-appointed volunteers who speak up for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

CASA IN COURT

Confidentiality and Communication

All communication or documentation received by a CASA is confidential. CASA volunteers are not permitted to disclose any details of the information they gather, except when submitting formal reports to the court. However, they can discuss their findings with DCFS as the child's custodian or reporting agency. Whenever possible, CASA volunteers communicate with DCFS their recommendations prior to court proceedings to ensure alignment and transparency.

Notices and Participation

Under Louisiana Children's Code, Article 424, CASA volunteers are notified of all court proceedings, hearings, and administrative reviews related to their assigned child. This includes participation in family team meetings. CASA volunteers attend all court proceedings, including delinquency or family preservation hearings, and may be called or request to appear as witnesses if needed. This process ensures CASA volunteers remain fully informed to advocate effectively at every stage of the child's case.

Court Reports

CASA volunteers are responsible for submitting detailed court reports to the court and all relevant parties involved in a case. These reports are prepared in accordance with local court requirements and provide vital information based on the CASA's direct observations.

CASA's Core Model

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for children's best interests. Our volunteers work with one child or sibling group, allowing more time for intensive attention and support. They stay with each case until it is closed and the child is in a safe, permanent home.

CASA's best-interest advocacy is driven by the guiding principle that children grow and develop best with their family of origin, if that can be safely achieved. Most of the children CASA works with are in foster care, but some are with their family of origin. CASA's core model is that volunteers advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Here's what that means:



Learn

CASAs learn all that they can about the child, their family, and their life.



Engage

CASAs engage with the child and build a relationship during regular visits.



Recommend

CASAs speak up for the child's best interests in court. They make recommendations regarding the child's placement and needed services, and monitor the child's situation until the case is released by the court.



Collaborate

CASAs collaborate with others to ensure that necessary services are provided and are in the child's best interest.



Report

CASAs report what they have learned and observed to the court.

A Network of Volunteers for Children

The **National CASA/GAL Association** sets standards and provides resources to ensure all CASA programs operate effectively and uniformly.

State CASA Associations support local programs and provide technical assistance, ensuring they meet the national standards and state-specific requirements.

Local CASA Programs recruit, train, and supervise volunteers who advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in their communities.



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