



CASA Frequently Asked Questions

What is CASA?

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates. It is a national nonprofit program that recruits, trains, supervises, and supports community volunteers who advocate for abused, neglected, and/or abandoned children who are dependents of the court and in the child welfare system.

What is a CASA volunteer?

A CASA volunteer is a trained community member who is appointed by a judge to represent the best interest of a child. The CASA volunteer spends time with the child on a weekly basis getting to know the child while also gathering information from the child's family, teachers, doctors, care-givers and others involved in the child's life.

Who are the children CASA serves?

In 2013 approximately 570 children in Santa Barbara County were involved with CPS due to alleged abuse or neglect. These children have often been removed from everything familiar – home, family, friends and school – and find themselves in a world filled with social workers, lawyers, judges and courtrooms where life-altering decisions are made on their behalf.

CASA serves children from birth to nineteen. The majority of the children are placed outside of their home with relatives, in foster homes, group homes, or shelters. **Children do not live with their CASA volunteers.**

How many children does CASA serve?

Last year, dedicated volunteers advocated for 374 children, approximately 65% of the total number of children in CWS care in Santa Barbara County.

Why do children need CASA volunteers?

Most children who enter the child welfare system do so because of abuse or neglect by their primary caregiver. This situation frequently leaves children without a strong adult in their lives to ensure they are safe and that their medical, educational, developmental and personal needs are met.

Social Service caseworkers and attorneys often have case loads of over 30 children, which can hamper caseworker's ability to give individualized attention and support to the children they represent.

CASA volunteers are generally assigned to one child for the duration of their case. This is why the committed service of a trained CASA volunteer makes a real difference to a judge who can depend on a CASA for a well-researched recommendation on the child's needs and to the child who has a consistent adult to count on during such a difficult time in their lives.

What is the difference CASA makes for children?

Children with a CASA volunteer are more likely to find a safe, permanent, nurturing home. When a CASA has been assigned, a child is far less likely to re-enter the foster care system after successful reunification with their parent. And children who receive advocacy while in the system are twice as likely to graduate from high school.

National CASA reports that children with a CASA volunteer are more likely to receive therapy, health care and education, more likely to do better in school, less likely to be bounced from one place to another, and half as likely to re-enter the foster care system.

Most importantly, children themselves report that they know and can rely on their CASA volunteer.



How are CASA volunteers different from social service caseworkers?

Social workers are employed by government agencies and work on as many as 30 cases at a time involving the whole family. Most families include more than one child.

The CASA volunteer focuses on the child. CASA volunteers do not replace a social worker; they are an independent appointee of the court. The CASA volunteer thoroughly examines a child's case, and identifies various community resources that are available and makes recommendations to the court.

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Is being a CASA volunteer the same as being a mentor?

CASA volunteers are appointed to children who have come to the attention of the juvenile court system due to abuse or neglect. Like a mentoring program, the CASA volunteer does develop a relationship with the child through frequent contact; however, the primary role of the CASA volunteer is to gather information about the child, write reports to the court and attend court hearings. CASA is not a mentoring program. The CASA volunteer does not involve the child in their personal life and does not play an active role in the child's day-to-day life. Instead, the CASA volunteer is involved with the child and the case while the child is in foster care, to help him or her during this difficult time to help have the best possible outcome. Once the case has ended, the CASA volunteer role also ends.

How much time is required to volunteer?

Each case and child is different. A CASA volunteer is required to visit their case child on a weekly basis for a minimum of one hour. Volunteers donate an average of 8-10 hours a month spending time with the child and gathering information. Volunteers are asked to commit until the case has been closed—a minimum of one year. The CASA volunteer is often the only consistent adult in the child's life who stays involved in the case from beginning to end, providing stability and continuity that is desperately needed.



What qualifications are needed to volunteer?

No special background or education is required to become a CASA volunteer. We encourage people from all cultures and professions, and of all ethnic and educational backgrounds.

Once accepted into the program, you will receive all necessary training in courtroom procedures, social services, the juvenile

justice system and the special needs of abused and neglected children.

Requirements include:

- You must be 21 years old
- Complete necessary background checks, provide references and participate in an interview
- Complete a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training

When you become a CASA volunteer you agree to:

- See the child weekly
- Have regular communication with CASA staff, and follow through on the case
- Maintain a very high level of confidentiality regarding the case to which you are assigned
- Provide information to the court by submitting a court report
- Submit a monthly report/hours volunteered

How does someone become a volunteer?

Volunteers complete an application process which includes a screening interview, background and reference checks, and 30 hours of pre-service training. After completion of the pre-service 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 the volunteer training entail?

The 30-hour training prepares prospective CASA volunteers by focusing on developing knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas that are critical to successful advocacy, including: the child welfare system, child development, cultural awareness, and court reporting.

Volunteers also attend courtroom observation to reinforce classroom learning. Volunteers gain exposure to the many issues confronting the judge in court proceedings while seeing firsthand the roles of the different parties to a case, including the role they will play once they are assigned their own case.

Are you ready to help change the outcome of a child's life?

Become a CASA volunteer today! Email

volunteer@sbcasa.org or call (805) 739-9102 ext. 2595

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