

Court Appointed Special Advocate Program

Each year, millions of children in the United States are abused, neglected, or abandoned by their families. More than half a million children end up in the foster care system. Unfortunately, many of these children do not have the benefit of a citizen's voice in the courtroom, speaking for their best interests. Without a voice, these children can slip through the cracks of our social service and judicial systems. These children, abused and neglected by those they trust the most, can be victimized a second time by the systems that have been ostensibly set up to protect them. The Court Appointed Special Advocate Program was created to make a positive difference in the lives of these children through a nationwide network of dedicated volunteers.

National

Concerned with the staggering number of children in foster care, the United States Congress in 1974 enacted Public Law 93-274, the "Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act," which provided financial assistance to states for the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. The legislation included a requirement for that assistance: mandatory appointment of a guardian ad litem (GAL) to represent the abused or neglected child's best interests in every case which resulted in a judicial proceeding. The legislation did not specify that the guardian ad litem had to be an attorney, but usually it was an attorney who was appointed to fill this role.

In 1976, Judge David W. Soukup, then Presiding Judge of King County Superior Court in Seattle, Washington, searched for alternative ways to ensure that the child's best interests would be consistently represented to the court. He found that few court-appointed attorneys had the time or the training to carry on the comprehensive investigation that would elicit the information the court needed. Judge Soukup decided to utilize trained community volunteers who would be asked to make a long-term commitment to a child for whom they would serve as guardians ad litem. Judge Soukup's concept became a successful program in its first years of operation and word of the program spread quickly.

Following this early model, similar programs were developed across the United States. By 1982, it was clear that a national association was needed to direct CASA's emerging national presence. The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (NCASAA) was formed that year. Currently, there are 950 CASA programs with more than 52,000 CASA volunteers throughout the country and U.S. Virgin Islands advocating for 206,000 children.

Arizona

Arizona's CASA Program was established in Maricopa County in October 1985. The Honorable C. Kimball Rose, Maricopa County Presiding Juvenile Court Judge, joined community leaders and spearheaded efforts to establish this program. The program was "tested" with operational programs in Maricopa and Coconino counties. Rules and procedures were developed, duties and responsibilities were defined and evaluations were performed by the Arizona Supreme Court. The Pima County CASA Program, which was independently formed in 1979, joined this effort in January 1987.

In March 1987, the Arizona Supreme Court formally established the Arizona CASA Program under the court's jurisdiction. Through this process, the legal and administrative standing of the Arizona CASA Program was

established.

Funding for the Arizona CASA Program through fiscal year 1991 came from a combination of the state's General Fund, federal grants, and private monies. Legislation was passed in 1991 that institutionalized the role of the court appointed special advocate and the Arizona CASA Program into a statutorily-mandated program. House Bill 2419, signed into law in 1991, provided 30% of unclaimed lottery winnings as the primary funding source for the administration of the Arizona CASA Program.

By 1993 every Arizona county juvenile court had established a CASA program. In 1994 the Policies and Procedures were written and formalized by an Order of the Chief Justice of the Arizona Supreme Court. Currently the Arizona CASA Program is operated locally in all 15 counties by Arizona's Juvenile Courts and administered statewide by the Arizona Supreme Court. Since the Arizona CASA Program's inception in October 1985, more than 3,100 CASA volunteers have served over 9,500 of Arizona's abused, neglected, and abandoned children.

What is a CASA volunteer?

Appointed by a juvenile court judge, a **Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)** is a citizen who is specially screened and trained to speak up for abused, neglected, and abandoned children. CASA volunteers develop a relationship with the child, research the history of abuse, assess the facts, and identify key problems. CASA volunteers write and submit court reports that summarize crucial information, provide insight, and make recommendations to the judge for the child's safe, permanent future.

What does it take?

- ✦ Commitment to abused and neglected children
- ✦ Common sense and persistence
- ✦ Objectivity
- ✦ Responsibility
- ✦ Communication skills
- ✦ Ability to work with different kinds of people, some of whom will be wrestling with difficult problems
- ✦ About 15–20 hours a month

Become a CASA and...

- ✦ Connect with a child in need
 - ✦ Speak up to protect the best interests of abused and neglected children in court
 - ✦ Become a member of a respected, professional child advocacy organization
 - ✦ Assist the judge in making important decisions concerning children
 - ✦ Be a positive adult role model for a child that desperately needs one
 - ✦ Contribute to your community and encourage positive change
 - ✦ Spread the word about this important volunteer organization

As more and more cases of abuse and neglect continue to flow into our overburdened child protection system, children need CASA volunteers now more than ever. Perhaps *you* could make a difference in the life of a child.

Where can I find out more?

In Greenlee County, the CASA Program office is located in the basement of the County Court House. Office hours vary. Please call:

928-865-2072 ext #129

**Stacey Armstrong
Program Coordinator**

**Monica L. Stauffer
Presiding Judge**

You may also contact the Arizona CASA Program at:

800-723-8193

Please visit the Arizona CASA Program web site at:

www.supreme.state.az.us/casa

***Make a difference in
a child's life!***

The Arizona CASA Program: Working Toward Solutions

Tragic stories and the statistics of brutalized children are quoted in the local media on a frequent basis. Citizens shake their heads in dismay and specialists in the field discuss a whirl of policies, system reforms, and responsibilities.

Each year, over 900 Arizona citizens actively volunteer as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). These volunteers advocate on behalf of more than 1,880 of Arizona's abused and neglected children annually. Throughout the state, CASA volunteers make phone calls, pore over thick files, and have conversations with people in a child's life. They write reports, push to secure needed services, and always let the child know they are there, with them all the way, until that one goal is reached—a safe, permanent home.

Children need CASA volunteers now more than ever. As the number of abuse and neglect cases increase and continue to flow into our overburdened child protection system, the risk of children becoming “lost” in our system escalates to frightening proportions. While case workers may come and go, and children may be moved from one foster home to the next, the CASA volunteer provides consistency and continuity in the child's life during a time of stressful turmoil. Committed to the challenge of helping decipher the complex and chaotic web of dysfunctional families, and a policy-bound child protection system, CASA volunteers research the case, assess the facts, identify key problems, and submit court reports outlining recommendations for improvement.

CASA volunteers assist the judge in reviewing and monitoring cases of children who have become part of the juvenile justice system. CASA volunteers work closely with the child and all interested parties to the case to bring an independent assessment of the case to court, recommending to the judge what is best for the child's future. A CASA volunteer is a well-informed source of information for the judge and a consistent advocate for the child throughout the court process. The ultimate goal of a CASA volunteer is to find safe, permanent homes for abused children.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program

CASA Volunteer: Frequently Asked Questions

What is a CASA Volunteer?

A CASA volunteer is a specially screened and trained volunteer, appointed by a juvenile court judge, to protect and represent the best interests of an abused, neglected, or abandoned child involved in dependency proceedings in juvenile court.

Volunteers come from all aspects of the community. A social service or legal background is not required. Volunteers are closely screened

for maturity, responsibility, objectivity, cultural sensitivity, commitment, and the ability to relate to families in stressful situations. In addition, background checks are performed to ensure minimum legal standards are met.

What is the Role of the CASA Volunteer?

As a child advocate, the CASA volunteer has three main responsibilities:

- 1) to serve as a fact-finder for the judge by thoroughly researching the background and current

- circumstances of each assigned case;
- 2) to speak for the child in the courtroom, representing the child's best interests; and
 - 3) to continue to advocate for the child during the life of the case, ensuring that it is brought to a swift and appropriate conclusion.

Is Training Provided to be a CASA Volunteer?

All applicants must complete 30 hours of training—15 hours of orientation training held over two days at the Arizona Supreme Court Building in Phoenix and 15 hours of pre- and post-orientation training at the county level.

Volunteers learn about case management and court procedures from the principals in the system. CASA volunteers also learn effective advocacy techniques for children and are educated about specific topics, including child maltreatment, permanency planning, negotiation and interviewing, case assessment, and court report writing. Ongoing in-service training and

How Does a CASA Volunteer Investigate a Case?

The CASA volunteer meets with the child, parents, family members, case managers, school officials, health providers, and others who are knowledgeable about the child's history and the facts of the case. The CASA volunteer also reviews records pertaining to the child—school, medical reports, case manager reports, court orders, and other pertinent documents.

In some cases, a volunteer could be appointed to a child within five to seven days following the child's removal from the home and into foster care. The volunteer will learn about the case at the same time as the case manager, attorneys, and other interested parties.

How Many CASA Programs and Volunteers Are There?

The Arizona CASA Program is made up of 15 county programs operated and supervised locally by Arizona's superior courts. In Arizona, there are currently over 900 Court Appointed Special Advocates representing more than 1,880 of Arizona's abused and neglected children annually.

The Arizona CASA Program is part of a nationwide movement of community volunteers and is affiliated with the National CASA Association. Currently,

support is provided in every county program.

How Does the CASA Volunteer Differ from an Attorney or a Case Manager?

Once appointed, the CASA volunteer becomes part of the judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys and case managers as an appointed officer of the court. Unlike attorneys and social workers, however, the CASA volunteer speaks exclusively for the child's best interests.

How Much Time Does Each Case Require?

Each case is unique. More time must be spent in the beginning, researching files and court documents, and conducting interviews. Except for attendance at team meetings and court hearings, volunteers schedule their own time. Once initiated into the system, volunteers work about 15-20 hours a month.

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How Is the CASA Program Funded?

The Arizona CASA program is funded through 30% of unclaimed winnings of the Arizona Lottery and through grants from the National CASA Association.

How Effective Are CASA Volunteers?

In 2001, the results of an 18 month study to ascertain the effectiveness of CASA volunteers was released. The study was conducted by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ). Information was compiled from case reports, interviews with judges, foster parents, attorneys, case managers and other parties.

The study produced several critical key findings regarding the effectiveness of CASA volunteers:

- CASA volunteers were assigned the most serious and complex cases;
- CASA volunteers had more contact with key parties to the case;
- volunteers ensured more services were ordered for the child and family in their assigned case;
- CASA volunteers appeared to be very instrumental in assisting with sibling and parent visitations;

- recommendations made by CASA volunteers pertaining to case plan goals, placement, visitations, and other types of services were being followed by the court; and,
- CASA volunteers 85% of the time remained with the case through through the time the court made a permanency determination.

National Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics

According to the 2000 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System of the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, over 2 million reports of alleged child abuse and neglect were reported. The most common form of child maltreatment reported is neglect. Of these, 1 million reports of abuse or neglect were substantiated. It is estimated that over half a million children are living in the foster care system each year.

Statistics on Arizona's Children in Foster Care

Statistics from Arizona's DES, Division of Children, Youth and Families Semi-Annual Report, for the period of April 1, 2002 to September 30, 2002 indicates that there were 6,270 children in out-of-home care in Arizona. Of that number, 2,302 children were placed in family foster home settings and 1,632 children were placed with relatives.

**The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
concept is based on the commitment
that every child has the birthright
to a safe, permanent home.**

Call today for information on how you can be a
CASA volunteer

928-865-2072 ext# 129

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