



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A child's voice.  
A child's life.  
Lifted up.

### **WHAT IS CASA?**

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children. CASA of Ulster County is a private, non-profit organization that is part of the national CASA movement and which provides trained volunteers to serve as advocates for abused and neglected children involved in Family Court. CASA is at its best when it creates enduring relationships and personal connections. Our volunteers provide a strong voice in Family Court to ensure that these children are no longer victimized and their time in foster care is temporary. CASA believes that every child is entitled to a safe and permanent home.

### **WHAT IS A CASA VOLUNTEER?**

A Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer is a trained citizen, appointed by a Family Court Judge to represent the best interests of a child in court. Children helped by CASA of Ulster County volunteers are victims of abuse and neglect. Some have been abandoned. Many are in foster care.

### **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AN ADVOCATE VOLUNTEER?**

An advocate volunteer is a constant, stabilizing presence of a young person in foster care. An advocate provides a judge with carefully researched background of the child to help the court make sound, informed decisions about the child's future. Each home placement case is as unique as the child involved. The volunteer diligently researches the case, to determine if it is in a child's best interests to stay with his/her parents or guardians, be placed in foster care, or be freed for permanent adoption. The advocate reports back to the Family Court Judge any concerns regarding placement of the child and services provided to the child, and follows through on the case until it is permanently resolved.

### **HOW DOES AN ADVOCATE VOLUNTEER DIFFER FROM A SOCIAL SERVICE CASEWORKER?**

Caseworkers generally are employed by or contracted by our local government. They sometimes work on as many as 25 cases at a time. Advocate volunteers generally have more time and a smaller caseload (on average 1-2 cases at a time). CASA does not replace a caseworker on a case; our volunteers are independent appointees of the court. The volunteer can thoroughly examine a child's case, has knowledge of community resources and can state their concerns to the court.

### **HOW DOES THE ADVOCATE VOLUNTEER RELATE TO THE CHILD HE OR SHE IS ASSIGNED TO?**

Advocates must meet with the children assigned to them at least once every 30 days, and ideally in their home environment. CASA's volunteers offer children trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings. They explain to the child the events that are happening, the reasons they all are in court, and the roles the judge, lawyers, and caseworkers play. Volunteers also encourage the child to express his or her own opinion and hopes, while remaining objective observers.

### **HOW MANY CASES ON AVERAGE DOES A CASA VOLUNTEER CARRY AT A TIME?**

An average caseload is one to two cases at a time. However some cases may have multiple children involved.

### **DO LAWYERS, JUDGES AND SOCIAL SERVICE CASEWORKERS SUPPORT CASA?**

Yes. Juvenile and family court judges implement the CASA program in their courtrooms and appoint volunteers. CASA has been endorsed by the American Bar Associations, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. In many regions, CASA also has the support of and collaborates with their local social service department. Much of this is based on the development or positive relationships.

### **HOW MUCH TIME IS REQUIRED TO BE A CASA VOLUNTEER?**

Each case is different, but on average a volunteer will spend 10-15 hours a month on a case after she/he has spent approximately 10 hours when first assigned the case. A volunteer will continue with a case until it is permanently resolved. Unlike other court principals who often rotate cases, CASA volunteers are consistent figures in the proceedings and provide continuity for the child.

### **CAN I WORK FULL-TIME AND BE AN ADVOCATE VOLUNTEER?**

Yes. It is possible to work full-time and be an advocate volunteer. It does, however, require some flexibility for court dates and case review meetings. Some employers offer "flex time" for these infrequent daytime events. In other cases, advocate volunteers have control of their schedule or use accrued time.

### **DO I NEED ANY SPECIAL TRAINING TO APPLY?**

No! We have volunteers from all walks of life. We will provide you with the initial training you need and will offer continuing education and support. Any relevant experience you bring to your experience at CASA is a plus.

### **HOW LONG IS THE TRAINING? IS THERE A COST?**

The initial training offered to prospective volunteers is approximately 30-35 hours long. Half of this is offered in a classroom setting. The balance is facilitated online. The curriculum is developed by the National CASA Association. There is no cost for the training.

### **WHAT TYPE OF CHILDREN ARE ASSIGNED TO CASA VOLUNTEERS?**

Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children and our volunteers work with abused, neglected and abandoned children who have become wards of the court or are in danger of becoming wards.

### **WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A CASA VOLUNTEER?**

An advocate volunteer must be at least 21 years of age and successfully complete screening (written application, three written references, personal interview, criminal record check and child abuse and adult protection registry checks) in order to be accepted into training. In addition to the initial training, all volunteers must complete 10 hours of in-service training annually. Each volunteer must also take an oath of confidentiality.

### **HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CASA?**

If you have questions or require additional information about Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children, please call (845) 339-7543, email at Richard Heyl de Ortiz at richard@casaulster.org, or write to 209 Clinton Avenue, Kingston, NY 12401.

**A Powerful Voice for Children in Ulster County since 1987**