



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

RHODE ISLAND

Volunteer Packet

Rhode Island Family Court

Chief Judge Michael B. Forte

One Dorrance Plaza
Providence, RI 02903



COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

What is the CASA Program of the Rhode Island Family Court?

CASA is a statewide program of the Rhode Island Family Court dedicated to helping abused and neglected children find their way through the Rhode Island child welfare and family court systems to safe, loving, permanent homes. Because of the dedication of well-trained CASA volunteers, these children have an advocate to speak for their “best interests” in court.

What is a CASA volunteer?

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer is a trained citizen appointed by the Chief Judge of the Rhode Island Family Court to represent the best interests of a child victim in cases of abuse and/or neglect.

What is the CASA volunteer’s role?

A CASA’s role in abuse and/or neglect proceedings is to present the court with a unique “child-centered” perspective regarding what is in the best interests of the child. To prepare their recommendations, CASA volunteers talk with the child, parents, family members, foster families, social workers and all other persons involved in the child’s life. Most importantly, CASA volunteers visit with the child on a regular basis in order to gain an understanding of the child’s situation.

How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved with a case?

CASA volunteers are asked to make a commitment to each case they assume: usually 12-18 months. This is a necessary commitment due to the dynamics of abuse and neglect cases and the need for stability in the lives of child victims. Often the CASA volunteer remains the only consistent figure for the child throughout the courts proceedings.

How many children does CASA RI serve?

At this time there are 3,000 children who could use the services of a CASA volunteer.

What training does a CASA volunteer receive?

Each CASA volunteer must complete 30 hours of comprehensive pre-service training. The curriculum is designed to inform volunteers about courtroom procedures, the dynamics of abuse and neglect, cultural differences, Rhode Island state laws and effective communication techniques. Professionals from social service agencies, lawyers and judges, and seasoned volunteers participate with the CASA staff in sharing their expertise during this training.



Is there a “typical” CASA volunteer?

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life with a variety of professional, educational and ethnic backgrounds. *Two requirements are that the person must be 21 years of age and a United States citizen.* There are over 150 CASA volunteers in professions that include retirees, homemakers, business owners, college students, doctors, teachers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, advertising agency executives.

How much time does volunteering require?

CASA volunteers spend approximately 8-10 hours per month on each case. However, cases that are more complex may require more time spent researching and conducting interviews with involved parties.

How many cases on the average does a CASA volunteer carry at a time?

The average caseload is one to two.

How does a CASA research a case?

To prepare for their recommendations to the court, CASA volunteers talk regularly with the child, parents, family members, social workers, school officials, health providers and others who are knowledgeable about the child’s history. The CASA volunteer also reviews all records pertaining to the child’s schooling, medical records and case worker reports.

How effective is the CASA program?

Judges throughout Rhode Island have noted the value of the information that CASA brings to the proceedings and are appreciative of the unique perspective presented by CASA volunteers. In addition, national studies show that a child who has been assigned a CASA volunteer spends less time in court and less time in foster care than those who do not have a CASA volunteer.

For More Information Contact:

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CASA VOLUNTEER POSITION DESCRIPTION

Position Title

- * Volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (VCASA)

Qualifications

- * Desire to help abused and neglected children maintain stability and permanency
- * Must be 21 years of age and a United States citizen
- * Have a valid driver's license
- * Be willing to travel throughout the state on CASA related business
- * Ability to maintain objectivity when gathering information
- * Effective communication and writing skills essential for the preparation of Court reports
- * Ability to work independently

Supervision

- * Responsible to Staff Attorney and Staff Social Caseworker

Duties

- * Gather facts, including review of all records related to an assigned case
- * Interview the parties, establish and maintain contact with the child, family, social workers, attorneys and other individuals involved in planning for the child when appropriate
- * Submit written reports to the Court summarizing relevant information and making specific recommendations in the child's best interest
- * Appear at scheduled Court hearings whenever possible
- * Monitor Court Orders to ensure compliance by all parties

Time Commitment

- * Willing to commit to the case for 12-18 months, at a minimum
- * Time necessary to complete duties on an individual case may vary, usually 10-12 hours in the first month following appointment to a case and then 8-10 hours per month thereafter
- * Although most scheduling is flexible and arranged by the VCASA at his or her convenience, the VCASA must be available to confer with the RI Department for Children, Youth and Families (RIDCYF) and other professionals involved in the case during workday hours. The VCASA should attend daytime RI Family Court hearings approximately every six months, unless to do so would place an undue burden on the CASA volunteer.

Training

- * Each prospective CASA volunteer is required to attend 30 hours of training that includes three (3) hours of court observation.
- * In addition, several in-service training workshops are held throughout the year.



CASA Volunteer Training Program

Overview of the CASA Volunteer Role/RI Child Protection System

Offers a broad view of the course agenda. Covers the roles and responsibilities of the CASA volunteer. Provides an historical view of the child protection system, the importance of confidentiality, information about how cases of abuse and neglect come to the attention of RI DCYF (RI Department for Children, Youth and Families) and track through the RI DCYF system. It also includes a general overview of how CASA and RIDCYF interact.

Introducing the Law

Provides a general overview of the Family Court System and the child protective court process. The activities are designed to help the participants become more comfortable with the courtroom process and experience.

Family Systems and Development

Focuses on family dynamics and discusses risk factors (including substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness), the impact of poverty, parental substance abuse and domestic violence on children. How these factors influence the ways a family copes with change, crisis and stress, as well as the bond children have with their families. Activities in this chapter help the CASA volunteer recognize personal values and maintain objectivity regarding the risks for a child. This chapter also helps the participants focus on the feelings and fears of the children for whom they will advocate.

Interviewing Skills for CASA Volunteers

Names the basic elements of communication, recognizes the importance of observation in gathering information about children and identifies the elements of a successful child interview, reviews important skills for building rapport and trust with a child, applies a collaborative approach to dealing with conflict, identifies different styles of dealing with conflict and revisits the concept of confidentiality.

Exploring Cultural Awareness

Examines the dynamics of cultural differences. Participants examine values and how values determine how a culture meets and defines basic needs. Participants will identify their own values and relate them to those of other cultures. Activities will give participants the opportunity to identify how language, class, and culturally-bound values influence the recommendations concerning the child. Participants are encouraged to gain competence in working cross culturally, identifying ways to become more sensitive to cultural diversity.



Learning About the Role of DCYF

Presentation of the role of DCYF (Department of Children, Youth & Families). Outlines the process of DCYF involvement in cases and how the DCYF case comes to the court. Reviews DCYF responsibilities, as well as its relationship with CASA attorneys and CASA volunteers.

Working a Case

Reviews the process used to appoint a CASA volunteer to a case, creates and implements a strategy to gather information about a case, identifies the components of a successful interview and names community resources that might be effective in addressing the needs of a child.

Report Writing

Systematically organizes information pertinent to a case and synthesizes information to write an effective court report. Utilizes all of the above recommendations about the needs of the child and identifies strategies for testifying and effectively presenting information in court, as well as practicing the steps to monitor a case from the dispositional order until the child is in a safe, permanent home. Activities are designed to help the CASA create an effective court report and gain confidence in presenting information to the court.

Pulling it all Together / VCASA Presentation

Identifies the strategies for self-care, identifies safety tips for volunteers, reviews the role of the CASA program staff for volunteer supervision and support; reviews office procedures for case assignment, obtaining records, submitting court reports, revisits the need for an advocate for abused and neglected children.

Court Observation

CASA advocates will complete court observations, maximizing the experience and helping to increase the advocates understanding of the system. The ability of CASA advocates to improve their court experience depends on their understanding of not only the court system, but also the more subtle details of how each courtroom is managed. Courtroom observation can include (but is not limited to) a brief overview of court procedures and the key players involved. Upon the completion of observation advocates can then ask specific questions about: the role of each participant, legal terms that are used, specific documents and programs that are referenced and the way a judge handles a case and next steps in the travel of a case.



VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

**Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
Rhode Island Family Court
One Dorrance Plaza
Providence, RI 02903**

How did you hear about CASA : _____

1. PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Name: _____ Maiden Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Social Security #: _____

Do you speak another language other than English? (Circle) Yes No
Please specify language: _____ Level of proficiency: _____

Do you have a valid driver's license? (Circle) Yes No

Auto insurance is mandated by RI law. Do you have auto insurance? (Circle) Yes No

Have you ever been arrested? (Circle) Yes No
If yes, please detail: _____

Have you ever been convicted of any crime? (Circle) Yes No
If yes, please detail: _____

Do you have any criminal charges pending at present? (Circle) Yes No
If yes, please detail: _____

Note: If you become a CASA volunteer, you will be required to inform CASA staff within 24 hours if you are arrested, become the subject of a DCYF investigation, or become a party to any case before a Rhode Island court. Please initial to indicate you have read and understand this requirement: _____

Have you or any of your family members ever been or are you presently involved with RI Family Court? (Circle) Yes No

If yes, please detail: _____

Have you or any of your family members ever been or are you presently involved with RI Department for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)? (Circle) Yes No

If yes, please detail: _____

2. EDUCATION:

What is your highest level of education: (circle) High School/GED Technical School
College/Graduate School Technical School/College

Dates Attended: _____ Degree earned: _____

Graduate School: _____ Area of Study: _____

3. NARRATIVE:

Please write a one page narrative highlighting significant life events or a life philosophy that has been an influence in your decision to consider becoming a CASA Volunteer. (Use the back of this application or attach a sheet.)

4. EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION (current)

Company Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Position: _____

Address: _____

Date(s) employed: _____

Supervisor Name, Email, and Telephone: _____

Please list all other employment that involves children on separate page.

5. VOLUNTEER INFORMATION (current and/or previous)

1. Agency/Organization Name: _____

Telephone: _____ Position: _____

Address: _____

Duties: _____

Date(s) Volunteered: _____

Supervisor Name and Email: _____

2. Agency/Organization Name: _____

Telephone: _____ Position: _____

Address: _____

Duties: _____

Date(s) Volunteered: _____

Supervisor Name and Email: _____

3. Agency/Organization Name: _____

Telephone: _____ Position: _____

Address: _____

Duties: _____

Date(s) Volunteered: _____

Supervisor Name and Email: _____

We are always collecting information to better serve the needs of our volunteers or prospective volunteers. Please indicate what time of day training would work best for you.

Days 9:00am to 4:00pm

Evenings 5:30pm to 8:30pm

6. REFERENCES

Professional, educational and/or volunteer references...no family or friends, please

1. Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Email: _____ Telephone: _____

Company/Organization: _____ Address: _____

2. Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Email: _____ Telephone: _____

Company/Organization: _____ Address: _____

3. Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Email: _____ Telephone: _____

Company/Organization: _____ Address: _____

AFFIRMATION

I understand that the CASA Volunteer Program of the Rhode Island Family Court requires a personal interview, references, a criminal background check, fingerprints, and a RIDCYF check before my application to become a CASA Volunteer will be considered. If accepted into training, I agree to attend all training sessions. I understand that the completion of training does not guarantee being sworn-in as a CASA Volunteer. Upon completion of training, I understand that the CASA staff will assess my performance and determine whether I possess the necessary qualities to function effectively as a CASA Volunteer. If selected to be sworn-in as a CASA Volunteer, I agree to complete all of my CASA duties to the best of my ability.

Participation in the CASA Volunteer Program requires a significant commitment of time. I agree to make a commitment of at least 18 months to the CASA Program, including on-going in-service training. CASA Volunteers are asked to keep information confidential, remain professional in demeanor, agree to program supervision and agree to meet deadlines.

In addition I agree to devote 10-12 hours per month (depending on the case) on each assigned case. I agree to visit the child wherever he or she is living. I realize that failure on my part to meet my volunteer commitment may result in my termination from the CASA Volunteer Program.

I agree to notify the CASA Volunteer Program if my status, as it relates to RIDCYF or the Criminal Justice System, changes in any way. I understand that all information collected on my behalf will be kept confidential.

RELEASE

I hereby certify that all statements made on this application are true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that by submitting this application, I authorize inquiries concerning my employment, character and criminal history for the purposes of determining my suitability as a volunteer.

APPLICANT SIGNATURE: _____ **Date:** _____