

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a CASA?

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. They are volunteers who are appointed to advocate on behalf of children who have come to the attention of the dependency court system due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

How do I become a CASA volunteer?

There are several steps involved in becoming a CASA volunteer. You must attend an information session, submit an application, pass a criminal background check, be interviewed, and go through the pre-service training. Upon successful completion, a dependency court judge will swear you in as a CASA volunteer and officer of the court.

How much time is required to be a CASA volunteer?

We estimate volunteers devote an average of 15 hours a month to case activities. These activities include phone calls, in-person meetings, and online documentation. Court appearances and some case activities will require you to be available, at times, during regular workweek hours (i.e. contact with CASA coordinators, social workers, teachers, therapists, etc.). Court hearings are scheduled in advance and ample notice is given, barring any unforeseen circumstances.

How long does a CASA volunteer remain involved?

We ask volunteers to make a minimum two-year commitment. One of the primary benefits of our program is that the CASA volunteer remains a consistent figure in the child's life often through the duration of the case, providing stability and continuity in that child's life.

Does a CASA volunteer need to be a legal expert?

No. CASA volunteers are valuable because they come from all walks of life and can draw on a variety of professional and personal experiences. You do not need to be a lawyer or legally savvy to be a great CASA volunteer, but through both the pre-service training and your CASA experience you will learn a lot about the legal process of the dependency court.

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

A CASA volunteer is never asked to take more than one case in the first six months. A case can involve more than one child. After six months, depending on the volunteer's comfort level and time availability, the volunteer may choose to take another case.

How is a CASA volunteer different from a social worker?

Generally, a social worker is employed by state or local governments and can have as many as 50 cases at one time, making a comprehensive investigation of each case a challenge. The CASA volunteer, however, is assigned specifically to a child or sibling group and can devote more time to his or her assigned case. The CASA volunteer does not replace a social worker; he or she is an independent appointee of the court. The CASA volunteer thoroughly examines a child's case, investigates various community resources, and makes recommendations to the court.

What does the training consist of?

CASA of Los Angeles' pre-service training program combines in-person and online delivery of information. The online sessions will introduce you to the key elements of CASA work, as well as allow you to interact with your peers, explore new ideas, and obtain tools for effective advocacy. The in-person sessions use case studies to introduce you to a variety of dynamics, including poverty, mental health issues, substance abuse, domestic violence, and other topics relevant to child welfare.

Pre-service training is delivered over seven weeks, totaling approximately 40 hours. Completion of the training is required for acceptance in the CASA program and attendance at all trainings is mandatory. The in-person component is offered in a variety of locations and at different times, including evening and weekend options.

After successfully completing training, volunteers are sworn-in by a dependency court judge and are ready to be assigned to a child. Once sworn in, volunteers must complete 12 hours of continuing education annually. CASA offers educational opportunities monthly.

What does the background check consist of?

We thoroughly screen all applicants for the CASA volunteer position. The process of initial and subsequent background screening includes:

1. Fingerprinting (Live Scan)
2. Personal interviews
3. Reference checks
4. Social Security number verification
5. A local security clearance, which requires a valid California driver's license or California ID card or US passport
6. Criminal records (including, but not limited to the local court, CA Department of Justice (DOJ), and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI))
7. National Sex Offender Registry
8. Child abuse registries (e.g. Child Abuse Central Index)
9. DMV records
10. Any other investigation that CASA deems appropriate

Criminal history does not necessarily disqualify you from service. However, any applicant found to have been convicted of, or having charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or the CASA program's credibility will not be accepted as a CASA volunteer.

Are CASA volunteers expected to travel?

CASA of Los Angeles serves children through Los Angeles County. Travelling is necessary as the duties of a CASA volunteer include monthly, face-to-face contact with a child wherever he or she is residing. Travelling may also be necessary for information gathering with parties related to the case as scheduled.

Is a CASA volunteer exposed to cases involving abuse?

Children come into the dependency court due to issues of neglect and/or abuse—which may be emotional, sexual, and/or physical. Frequently, individuals who have personal experience with these issues, and are attuned to the needs of children in foster care, want to become CASA volunteers. This experience does not preclude an individual from becoming a CASA volunteer. These issues will be addressed during the screening process, so that both CASA and the applicant can determine whether this volunteer opportunity is the best match for both parties.

What kind of support is provided to CASA volunteers?

CASA volunteers are provided a number of avenues to receive support during their advocacy. These include being matched with an advocate supervisor and opportunities for continuing education on specific issues, such as the needs of transition age youth and early childhood development. CASA of Los Angeles offers volunteers access to individual counseling opportunities through a confidential third party. Other activities, such as share and support networks and book clubs, are designed to connect volunteers with each other in order to discuss common issues.

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

No. Like a mentoring program, the CASA volunteer develops 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.

Can we introduce our CASA child to our family?

No, CASA volunteers should not take their CASA child on family outings or invite them to visit the CASA's home. This can often lead to confusion about the relationship between the child and the

volunteer. In most cases, family members have not gone through the CASA pre-service training and are not held to the same confidentiality parameters. It would be a breach of confidentiality.

How old are the children that CASA of LA serves?

The young people served by CASA range in age from 0 to 21.

How much notice do CASA volunteers get on court dates?

A CASA volunteer will know his/her next court date at the conclusion of the current hearing, usually six months in advance. The CASA office will also typically remind CASA volunteers of their court dates a few weeks prior. For the CASA volunteer's very first hearing, it will depend on when the CASA volunteer is appointed and when the child's next hearing is scheduled.

CASA has promotional materials in Spanish. Is it necessary for CASA volunteer to speak Spanish?

No. CASA volunteers do not need to speak Spanish. However, CASA is actively seeking bilingual Spanish-English individuals to take on the growing number of cases where involved parties are monolingual Spanish.

What happens if CASA volunteers are unavailable to attend a court date?

While attendance at court hearings is a required duty of a CASA volunteer, we understand that emergencies may arise that prevent attendance. Should this occur, the CASA volunteer should contact their staff coordinator, who may attend for the CASA volunteer.

Does CASA of Los Angeles need more volunteers?

YES! CASA of Los Angeles seeks to provide advocacy services to 3,000 children on an annual basis. To do this, we need to engage 1,000 more volunteers. If you have ideas for where we could be sharing information about our unique and rewarding volunteer opportunity, please contact Camrin Christensen, Volunteer Recruitment and Outreach Director, at cchristensen@casala.org or 323.859.2888 ext. 6320.