

Troup County CASA

The Juvenile Court Judge has ordered that a **CASA volunteer** be appointed to advocate on behalf of your child. This document will explain the role of the CASA volunteer in you and your child's life.

What is CASA?

CASA is an acronym that stands for "Court Appointed Special Advocate." This nationwide program was created in 1977 in Seattle, Washington by a Juvenile Court Judge who felt that he was not receiving the vital information he needed to make relevant decisions for abused and neglected children who were either in a foster home, in the care of relative or in the supervised care of a parent.

This **CASA** program is active in most judicial jurisdictions in Georgia, to include Troup County. Although the Troup County office is currently staffed by four employees, including a Volunteer Trainer, two Volunteer Coordinators and an Executive Director who are employed full-time by the program. The program is implemented by an army of volunteers who are appointed to advocate for children based upon the Judge's court-ordered request (**CASAs**).

CASA is a non-profit organization funded by grants, fund raising and private donations. **CASAs** are not employees of DFCS, the Juvenile Court, Troup County or Georgia state government. **CASA** volunteers do not provide legal advice.

Who is a CASA volunteer?

A **CASA** volunteer can be any adult, 21-years of age or older. There are no specific qualifications or educational requirements for an adult to become a **CASA** volunteer. After submitting an application, the prospective volunteer is interviewed by the **CASA** staff before being accepted to the program.

Once accepted, the volunteer must complete 40 hours of training, submit to a local and national criminal background check and is then sworn in as an officer of the court by Troup County Judge Michael Key. The volunteer must take an additional 12 hours of training each year they are active with the **CASA** program.

What is the role of a CASA volunteer?

A **CASA's** ultimate goal is for your child to have a **safe, permanent, stable home, as quickly as possible.**

To achieve that goal, a **CASA** volunteer becomes the "**eyes and ears**" of the Juvenile Court Judge, and an advocate for your child while they are the subject of a dependency case in Juvenile Court. In that role, the **CASA** volunteer will make recommendations to the court regarding what will be in your **child's best interest.**

Each **CASA** volunteer is assigned to work with one of the full-time **CASA** Volunteer Coordinator who will supervise and direct their work throughout the duration of the case. The volunteer will begin by meeting with your child (or children if the volunteer has been assigned

to a sibling group) in the home where they are currently residing. After meeting with the children, they will meet with anyone who has a relevant role in the child's life, to include biological parents, foster parents, extended relatives, school teachers, school personnel, neighbors, doctors, DFCS case managers, or therapists. The volunteer will continue to meet with these people regularly as the cases progresses. The volunteer may also meet with your child in a variety of appropriate settings, including the daycare, their school, during visits with parents, foster home, parent's home, relative's home or doctor visit.

Volunteers have access to and will review any records relevant to the case, to include, but not limited to DFCS case files, court documents, therapeutic evaluations, parent criminal histories, substance abuse evaluations, domestic violence evaluations, drug screens, employment records, visitation reports from parent aides throughout the duration of the case. The volunteer will also attend DFCS meetings, periodically observe parent/child visitations, IEP/504 meetings at school when scheduled and all court hearings. A volunteer may also interact with attorneys appointed to work with the parents and the child.

The **CASA** volunteer may also be asked by the Court to visit on any home being considered as a placement for the child.

Prior to a scheduled court hearing, a **CASA** volunteer is required to submit a written report to the court. The report will make recommendations regarding who should have legal and physical custody of the child, whether reunification is possible and the current needs of the child. The report will also include a review of a parent's court order or case plan compliance, progress in therapy, employment history, housing history, financial stability and whether the child's needs are being met in their current placement. All parties to the case, to include attorneys and DFCS Case Managers, will receive a written copy of the report. Parents may receive a copy of the **CASA** report or review the report with their attorney.

What is my role with the CASA volunteer?

It is important that parents be open, honest, forthcoming and available to meet with a CASA volunteer. The **CASA** is required to meet with you on a monthly basis and will also maintain regular phone contact. The volunteer will verify all information that you provide, so it is important to provide accurate information so that a trusting relationship can be developed between the two of you. Please be sure to provide the volunteer with a current phone number and address and **update them immediately** when changes occur.

Remember . . . the **CASA's** role is to advocate for your child and to find a permanent placement for your child as quickly as possible. **CASA** believes that a child's best placement is in their own home, with their own parents when it becomes a safe and stable environment that will allow them to thrive. Your partnership with **CASA** will help achieve that goal.

Questions?

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