

## **VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Court Appointed Special Advocates are trained community volunteers appointed by district court Judges to speak for the best interests of children who are brought before the court for reasons of abuse or neglect.

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) often referred to as a volunteer Guardian Ad Litem, is an official part of judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys and social workers. By handling only one or two cases at a time the CASA has time to thoroughly explore the history of each assigned case. The volunteer talks with the child, parents, family members, neighbors, school officials, doctors and others involved in the child's background who might have facts about the case. The volunteer reviews all court facts about the case and the volunteer also reviews all court documents pertaining to the case. He or she then is expected to submit formal reports to the Judge at every scheduled hearing/review. The CASA continues to monitor the case to assure that the judicial and child welfare systems are moving ahead to secure a safe, permanent home for the child, and that court-ordered services are provided to the child and family. The CASA can be an invaluable resource for the attorney for the child and social worker in reaching their goals for permanency.

### **HISTORY**

Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington first implemented the CASA concept in 1977. As a Judge he felt a compelling need to have more information available to him to base his decisions, most of which had lifetime ramifications for children. Since the conception of the CASA program in 1977, CASA has grown to include over 800 member programs now in 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands. An estimated 50,000 volunteers are "Speaking Up" for approximately 200,000 abused and neglected children nationwide. The National CASA Association provides leadership and lends technical support to new and existing programs. Wyoming CASA programs (Sheridan, Buffalo, Gillette, Cody, the Reservation, and Casper) adhere to program guidelines and standards established by the National CASA Association.

### **PROGRAM GOALS/PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

- To provide independent, factual information to the court regarding abused and neglected children.
- To provide advocacy for abused and neglected children who are the subject of judicial proceedings.
- To monitor cases involving abused and neglected children until the terms of the court order are fulfilled
- To conduct independent and objective analysis concerning abused and neglected children.
- To factually and objectively report findings and observations to the court.
- To insure representation of the child's best interest in all judicial proceedings.
- To monitor cases following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court.

### **THE CASA VOLUNTEER**

Complete an intensive independent review of each case:

- Speak with the child and relevant adults
- Review appropriate records and reports
- Observe the child and significant others

Report findings to the court:

- Provide a written report containing factual information
- Attend court hearings concerning the child
- Participate in case conferences concerning the child

Insure representation of the child's best interest:

- Attend all court hearings to see that all relevant facts are presented
- Attend appropriate interagency meetings regarding the child
- Prod public systems into action

Monitor case following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court.

Consult regularly with the volunteer coordinator concerning assigned case and develop a CASA case plan and review progress and reports.

### **REQUIRED SKILLS / ABILITIES**

- Ability to keep all client and court information confidential
- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing
- Ability to respect and relate to people from various backgrounds (economic, cultural, educational) in a variety of settings.
- Ability to transport self to a variety of locations
- Ability to deal with hostility, anger and other emotional attitudes
- Ability to maintain objectivity
- Ability to gather and record factual information accurately.
- A basic understanding of child development
- A basic understanding of family relationships

### **TRAINING**

- CASA volunteers are required to attend approximately 33 hours of pre-service training
- CASA volunteers follow guidelines established by the National CASA Association
- CASA volunteers will attend in-service training and receive direct supervision and guidance from program staff

### **TIME COMMITMENT**

- Volunteers are required to commit themselves to the program for one year at a time. At the beginning of a case, volunteers might expect to spend 10-15 hours a week for the first month or so. Each child will be different but volunteers will want to spend the minimum of an hour a week with the child for the first year.
- Volunteers are expected to be available for case assignment and to accept cases unless other arrangements have been made.

### **CONCLUSION**

CASA of Laramie County is providing trained volunteer to abuse and neglect cases starting in 2003. CASA plays an integral part in assuring that children do not become lost in the court system. A CASA volunteer is a caring adult who tries to understand the child's concerns and report them to the judge. The long range goal is to have a trained CASA volunteers available to abused and neglected children in all jurisdictions in Wyoming by 2007.

Early contact with children, who become involved in the Wyoming court as a result of abuse and/or neglect, can help to prevent future involvement either as a delinquent or an offending adult. The CASA program is dedicated to the premise that all children are entitled to grow up in a safe and loving home. The CASA program is committed to reunification of child/children with their biological family, when that home can be made safe for the child/children. Most important is the CASA volunteer's role in ensuring that all decisions regarding the child are in their best interest.

CASA of Laramie County