

Welcome to Clark County CASA

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



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CLARK COUNTY CASA/GAL PROGRAM

VOLUNTEER POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers are a valuable resource for Clark County CASA/GAL Program, its staff, and its clients. The purpose of these policies is to provide guidance and direction to CASA volunteers. Clark County CASA/GAL Program reserves the exclusive right to change any of these policies and guidelines at any time and to expect adherence to the changed policy. Changes to or exceptions from these policies may only be granted by the Director, and must be obtained in advance. Issues not specially covered by these policies and guidelines will be determined by the Director.

These are non-negotiable policies and guidelines that cover all Clark County CASA/GAL Program volunteers. They exist for the protection of the children, the volunteers, and the CASA program. It is imperative that volunteers familiarize themselves with these policies and guidelines and follow them. Any questions regarding the interpretation of these policies and guidelines should be brought to the attention of CASA staff.

Deliberate violation of any of these policies or guidelines will result in disciplinary action. This may include probation, requirement of specific remedial action and/or immediate removal from the duties as a CASA and/or volunteering for Clark County CASA/GAL Program.

If you violate or think you may have violated a Clark County CASA/GAL policy, call your CASA office immediately! CASA staff will work with you to try and sort out and correct any problems that result and your actions will demonstrate good faith. It is infinitely better for CASA staff to hear about a problem from a volunteer than it is to hear about it from someone else.

Volunteers interact with a wide range of individuals and agencies. Not everyone is happy to see a CASA at his or her home or office. Problems can and do occur. Knowing the program's policies and guidelines can help tremendously.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of a CASA/GAL Volunteer is to assure that the best interests of a child, who has entered the system primarily as a result of abuse, neglect or dependency, is represented at every stage of the case proceedings. A CASA/GAL Volunteer advocates so that every abused or neglected child can be safe, establish permanency, and have the opportunity to thrive. A CASA/GAL provides information to the Court so that it may make better informed decisions on behalf of the child.

Clark County CASA/GAL Program Values Statement

Service: Staff and volunteers play an integral role in providing excellent care and advocacy to children in our community who have experienced abuse or neglect. We listen and respond to each other, our local collaborators, and the needs of our families. We strive to provide quality service and act with integrity at all times.

Collaboration: We strive to build connections and partnerships with other social service agencies to effectively and creatively carry out our mission. We see our partnerships as allies on whom we can rely on for support. We strive to work as a team in the face of difficulty.

Integrity: We carry out all obligations of our program and volunteers with the utmost responsibility and accountability. We are committed to being responsive, respectful, honest and fair to all. We address problems directly and immediately. We express appreciation and recognize jobs well done.

Diversity: We seek everyone's unique background to provide advocacy to the diverse foster care system. We respect and celebrate diversity in all forms, understand that it affects all aspects of our work and we strive to be inclusive and welcoming of all backgrounds. We try to be conscious of all cultures and we foster a trusting, open and inclusive environment at all levels of program.

Ethics: We strive to meet the highest ethical standard with trauma informed care initiatives. We operate with integrity at all times, providing quality service, being reliable and responsible. Being efficient and effective in our approach to generate the best solution each time. We honor our commitments, adhere to professional standard and operate legally and ethically at all times.

A BRIEF HISTORY

In 1977, Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington, realized that there was no one in the courtroom whose only job was to provide a voice for the child in court cases brought to protect the child. He was frustrated that the court received very little information about the child and he was worried that he (and other judges) might not be making the best decisions possible for the individual children affected by the court's decisions. He believed that volunteers, properly

trained, could speak for the children and give judges better insight into the facts pertaining to each individual child. Through his efforts, the first volunteer guardian “ad litem” program was established, which later became known as CASA.

The core components of Judge Soukup’s pilot program are essentially the same today: judges appoint selected, well trained volunteers to represent the best interests of the children in court. CASA volunteers typically handle just one or two cases at a time so they can provide in-depth, first-hand documented information to judges, attorneys, and social workers to assist in sound decision making.

As a result of the passage of House Bill 89, which created many changes in abuse, neglect and dependency matters and allowed for volunteer guardian ad litem in the courtroom, the Clark County Juvenile Court implemented the CASA Program to supplement its’ existing GAL policy. The first group of community volunteer was trained during the spring of 1989 with nine CASA’s being sworn in.

PROGRAM AUTHORITY

Ohio Revised Code 2151.281 governs the appointment, duties, and authorities for the Court Appointed Special Advocate.

Approval and Sanction

Clark County CASA/GAL Program operates under the approval and sanction of Clark County Juvenile Court.

National CASA Association

All standards of compliance set forth by the National CASA Association are observed by Clark County CASA/GAL Program.

Ohio CASA Network

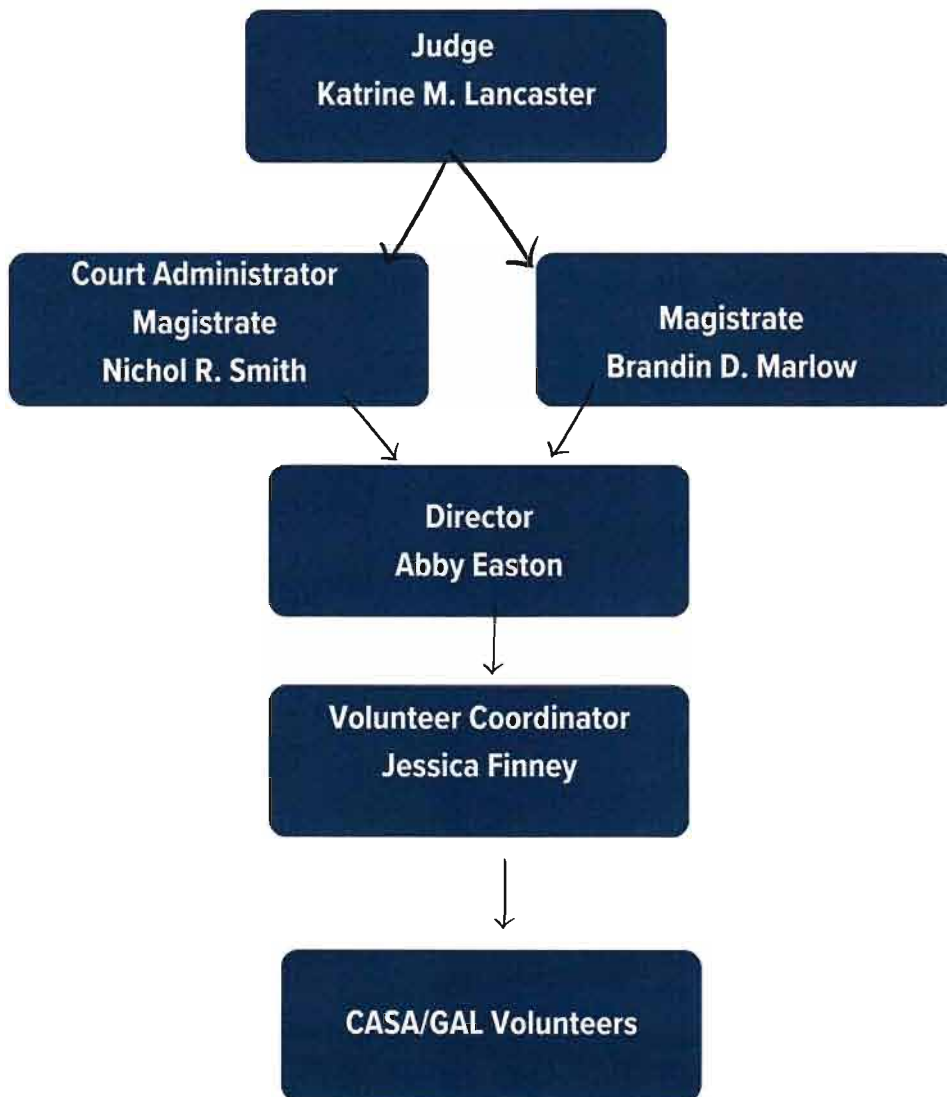
Clark County CASA/GAL Program, has made a commitment through a Memorandum Agreement to maintain standards of compliance with the Ohio CASA Network

CASA OFFICE

The CASA office is open Monday-Friday 8:00AM to 4:30PM. It is located at 101 E. Columbia St., Springfield, OH 45502. CASA observes the following holidays and closes the office in compliance with the Clark County Juvenile Court holiday schedule:

New Year’s Day	Labor Day
Martin Luther King Day	Veteran’s Day
President’s Day	Thanksgiving Day and the following day
Memorial Day	Christmas Day
Independence Day	

Organizational Chart



Inclement Weather

Volunteers should assume CASA will be open during inclement weather. If Clark County Juvenile Court is closed, volunteers may assume CASA is officially closed. CASA will only be closed in the event that the Clark County Juvenile Court is closed.

Roles of CASA Staff

Roles and Responsibilities of CASA Staff

CASA staff has the responsibility to assess the needs of the program and to continually assure that the program functions with a high level of competency, integrity, and ethics. Crucial to this are establishing and maintaining relationships with the court and with all individuals and agencies involved in the child welfare system. This is also accomplished with the professional recruitment, training, and on-going support of the program's volunteers.

CASA staff is responsible for assuring the court is presented with the appropriate and well-researched and professionally present reports. CASA staff is also responsible for recruiting volunteers, providing professional and pertinent training to volunteers, and offering professional support to the CASA's actively working on cases.

Director

The Director is responsible for developing policies and procedures for Clark County CASA/GAL Program, and staffing cases with the Volunteer Coordinator on a regular basis. He or she oversees operations of the program, performs public speaking, responsible for training new and seasoned CASA volunteers, recruits new volunteers, responsible for community engagement and outreach, coordinating special events, responsible for telling our organizations story, and represents CASA on a variety of task forces, workgroups, committees, and commissions at the local, state and national level.

Volunteer Coordinator

The Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for supervision of CASA Volunteers. The Volunteer Coordinator is assigned to support and supervise individual CASAs who have ongoing cases. The Volunteer Coordinator is also responsible for facilitating pre-service and in-service trainings, as well as, recruitment of new volunteers.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Clark County CASA/GAL Program complies with the Clark County Juvenile Court/County policy prohibiting discrimination in employment in accordance with all state and federal laws. No human resources decisions concerning any term or condition of employment shall be unlawfully based upon race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, child birth, and related medical conditions, national origin, age (21 and older), veteran status, disability (physical or mental),

marital status, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, parent with court-imposed support order, and military status.

Volunteer Personnel Records

Records will be maintained by Clark County CASA/GAL Program for all applicants. Records associated with active and inactive volunteers, including volunteer personal data, application material, training records, record of appointment, and case related information will be maintained and kept current by the program staff. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to keep their CASA Supervisor apprised of any changes of name, mailing addresses, and telephone numbers in order to keep their files up-to-date. Access to reference submitted to the program is limited to Clark County CASA/GAL Program staff and directors. Volunteers may review all other information in their record. CASA Volunteers may submit documentation in addition or correction of information contained in the record.

Training and Evaluation

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (NCASAA), the Ohio CASA Network, and Clark County CASA/GAL Program share standards and guidelines that call for appropriate and adequate initial and on-going training, education, and professional development of CASA volunteers.

General Training

Clark County CASA/GAL Program requires a minimum of 30 hours initial training and 12 hours of annual, in-service training for CASA volunteers. In order to provide CASA/GAL Volunteers with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the duties of the CASA/GAL, a CASA/GAL Volunteer is required to attend all sessions of the pre-service training that is offered by the Clark County CASA/GAL Program. In-service training is required for all active and inactive volunteers. CASA Volunteers will be notified of appropriate training, conferences, and educational opportunities. Volunteers may submit workshops, seminars, and other training sessions attended to be considered as credit towards their 12 hour annual training requirement. Reading of relevant books and viewing of relevant videos may also be considered as training, along with a three paragraph summary and how it applies to your work as a CASA.

Annual Performance Evaluations

Active CASA Volunteers are required to participate in annual performance evaluations. A standard form will be used that provides for both an examination of the CASA's performance of responsibilities and discussion of any suggestions or concerns that the CASA or program staff

may have. CASA volunteers will also have the opportunity to share suggestions for program improvement.

Annual Volunteer Survey

Active CASA volunteers will receive an electronic survey from the Clark County CASA/GAL office. We ask that each CASA complete the survey, as it allows us to evaluate our program and may any changes necessary.

Volunteer Status Definitions

Active

Active volunteers are those volunteers currently appointed to at least one case by the Clark County Juvenile Court Judge.

Inactive

Volunteers will be considered inactive they have completed a case, and two or more months have passed since they have been active, or are currently eligible for a case appointment but have not taken a case. Volunteers that have not met the 12 hours of continuing education for the year will be placed on inactive status until they become current.

On Leave

Volunteers can request to be placed on leave due to health, family, or other circumstances that have been discussed with CASA staff for a period of time. If a CASA is on leave for more than six months, CASA staff will schedule to meet with the volunteer to discuss the volunteer's future with the Clark County CASA/GAL Program.

Retired

Volunteers who will be considered to have retired their CASA status if the volunteer submits a letter to the program requesting "retired" status, or if they have completed a case and one year has passed since they were appointed to a case. At the time a CASA Volunteer retires the CASA identification badge and all case materials, notes, and information relevant to any case shall be submitted to the CASA/GAL staff.

Returning to Active Status

Any volunteer who has retired or is on leave may be eligible to return to “active” status. CASAs who have not actively worked on a case for 12 months or more may be required to complete another pre-service training to be eligible for case assignment. Individuals who have been terminated from the Clark County CASA/GAL Program will not be considered for a return to “active” status.

Transferring to or from another CASA Program

Individuals wishing to transfer to another CASA program must follow the guidelines established by that program. Individuals wishing to transfer into the Clark County CASA/GAL Program must meet all requirements established for Clark County CASA/GAL Program.

Termination

CASA/GAL Volunteers who do not adhere to the policies and procedures of the program or who fail to satisfactorily perform their CASA/GAL Volunteer assignment are subject to dismissal. Dismissal is within the discretion of the Program Staff after consultation with and approval of the Juvenile court Judge and/or the Court Administrator. Dismissal will occur when all other means for dealing with the CASA/GAL Volunteer’s behavior have been exhausted. Appropriate grounds for dismissal include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The CASA/GAL Volunteer takes action without program or Court approval which endangers the child or is outside the role or powers of the CASA/GAL Program;
2. The CASA/GAL Volunteer engages in ex-parte communication with the Court;
3. The CASA/GAL Volunteer violates a program policy, court rule or law;
4. The CASA/GAL Volunteer fails to complete required training;
5. The CASA/GAL Volunteer fails to demonstrate an ability to effectively carry out assigned duties;
6. The CASA/GAL Volunteer falsifies his/her application or misrepresents facts during the screening process;
7. There are allegations of child abuse/neglect against the CASA/GAL Volunteer;
8. A conflict of interest arises which cannot be resolved;
9. At the discretion of the Judge.

At the time of a CASA/GAL volunteer dismissal, the CASA/GAL Volunteer identification badge and all case materials and notes, and information relevant to the case(s), shall be submitted to the CASA/GAL Program Director.

Weapons Policy

To help ensure the safety and security of employees, volunteers, guest, and those CASA volunteers interact with, as well as ensuring a workplace free from violence, CASA prohibits the possession or use of weapons, including but not limited to firearms, at any time while on CASA business.

Volunteers are specifically prohibited from carrying weapons or firearms of any kind while acting within the scope of their duties as a volunteer.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL-FREE PROGRAM

Clark County CASA/GAL Program prohibits the unlawful manufacture, distribution, possession, and/or use of an illegal and/or controlled substance while serving as a Clark County CASA Volunteer. Any volunteer who violates this policy is subject to discipline, up to and including termination. Any conviction for illegal possession, manufacture, or distribution of drugs will result in termination as a volunteer.

It is a violation at Clark County CASA/GAL Program for any volunteer to perform their duties under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Any violation of this policy is subject to disciplinary action, up and including termination.

Volunteers and CASA Staff

Role of Volunteers

Clark County CASA/GAL Program is committed to providing volunteer, advocacy for children. Although not child welfare professionals, CASA Volunteers have an imperative function with the highest standards of professionalism.

The CASA's Autonomy and Limits on Autonomy

The appointed CASA is the child's advocate and is given a wide latitude by the CASA program to determine and advocate for a child's best interest. CASA's are encouraged to be vigorous in their advocacy efforts. Program staff will normally support CASAs in this role. No CASA report to the court will be altered by CASA staff without the knowledge and agreement of the appointed CASA. However, if the CASA program is in conflict with the opinions and recommendations of the CASA volunteer, the program may, after discussion with and notice to the CASA:

- Submit a separate report to the court detailing the program's concerns, opinions, and recommendations, or
- If the program believes that either the welfare of the child or of another individual is jeopardized by the actions and/or recommendations of a CASA volunteer, the program may ask the court to remove the CASA from his or her appointed case. A CASA will at all times act as an advocate for an appointed child and exercise independent judgment on the child's behalf. The CASA will be guided solely by the child's best interests, which may at times run counter to those of the state or the parent or the foster parent.

ORC 2151.281(l) states that

"the guardian ad litem for an alleged or adjudicated abused, neglected, or dependent child shall perform whatever functions are necessary to protect the best interest of the child, including, but not limited to, investigation, mediation, monitoring court proceedings, and monitoring the services provided the child by the public children services agency or private child placing agency that has temporary or permanent custody of the child, shall file any motions and other court

papers that are in the best interest of the child in accordance with the rules adopted by the supreme court.

The guardian ad litem shall be given notice of all hearing, administrative reviews, and other proceeding in the same manner as notice is given to the parties to the action.

(J)(1) when the court appoints a guardian ad litem pursuant to this section it shall appoint a qualified volunteer or court appointed special advocate whenever one is available and the appointment is appropriate.”

Under this statute, the CASA is deemed a legal party in the proceedings. The CASA, in partnership with program staff, shall be prepared to exercise any rights that might be required for effective advocacy on behalf of the child.

Volunteer Responsibilities

Volunteers, when sworn and appointed to a case, are required by Clark County CASA/GAL Program to:

1. Obtain first hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by reviewing all relevant documents and records and interviewing the child, parents, social workers, teacher and other persons to determine the facts and circumstances of the child's situation.
2. Identify and advocate for the best interest of the child.
3. Seek cooperative solutions by acting as a facilitator among parties.
4. Provide, at every hearing, reports which include objective findings and recommendations.
5. Make regular monthly contact with family members, case workers, foster parents, the child's attorney, parents' attorneys, therapists, teachers, and any other person with knowledge of the current status of the child's situation.
6. Regular review of all pertinent records.
7. Determine if a permanent plan has been created for the child.
8. Determine whether appropriate services are being provided to the child and family.
9. Participate in developing and negotiating dispositional recommendations, treatment plans, and service agreements.
10. Inform the court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by the court.
11. Have regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child to ensure in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court. The CASA/GAL volunteer shall meet in-person with the child once every 30 days at a minimum. An exception may be granted at the discretion of program staff; however, the justification and reasons for a decision to permit less frequent in-person contact must be documented.

12. Make recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child, and when appropriate, the child's family.
13. Submit a signed report with recommendations to the court on what/which placement or services that are best for the child – following the program's established format and submitted to the Volunteer Coordinator for review and discussion of all recommendations 10 days prior to the date of the scheduled hearing. Reports must be distributed at least 7 days prior to the scheduled hearing.
14. Discuss all recommendations concerning the case with Volunteer Coordinator prior to submitting recommendations to the court. Program staff do not alter reports or recommendations without the knowledge and agreement of the CASA/GAL volunteer.
15. Update case activity by entering contact logs into Optima for each case a volunteer is assigned monthly, at minimum.
16. Turn in mileage forms monthly.
17. Advocate for the child's best interest in the community by interfacing with mental health, education and other community systems to assure that the child's needs in these areas are met.
18. Participate in all scheduled case conferences with supervisory staff.
19. Participate in in-service training.
20. Maintain complete records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances.
21. Return case files to the program after the case is closed and delete any photos, texts, email's for electronic devices of those closed cases.
22. Notify CASA Staff when out of town.

Meeting these requirements ensures the CASA remains up-to-date on the well-being of the child, the progress of the case, and compliance with the court orders by parties.

Restrictions on the CASA Role

CASA volunteers are charged with advocacy on behalf of abused and neglected children. It is important to remember that the role does NOT include providing services.

A CASA WILL NOT:

- Provide transportation for children or families involved in dependency cases;
- Take the child home with the CASA;
- Provide supervision for visits;
- Make placement arrangements for the child;
- Be the only responsible adult in attendance of the appointed child;
- Provide legal advice or therapeutic counseling;

- Becoming inappropriately involved in the case by providing direct service delivery to any parties that could lead to a conflict or interest of liability problem, or cause a child or family to become dependent on the CASA/GAL Volunteer for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations. Examples of inappropriate CASA/GAL practices are: taking a child home for sheltering a child in the home; giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling making placement arrangements, and giving money or gifts.
- Give money or expensive gifts to the child or family;
- Provide any case information to non-parties (schools, teachers, foster parents, counselors, etc.)
- A CASA Volunteer should not be related to any party involved in the case, or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest.

Volunteer Job Description

Qualifications:

- 21 years old or older
- Written application
- Personal interview
- Criminal background check
- National Sex Offender Registry check
- Completed 30 hours of pre-service training that includes instruction on the court and child welfare systems; child abuse, neglect and dependency; relevant state and federal laws; permanency, and responsibility of a CASA volunteer. A CASA/GAL is provided access to legal advice and representation as needed.

Volunteer Description

A CASA Volunteers is appointed by the court to advocate for children who come into the court system primarily because of abuse or neglect. A CASA Volunteer reviews records, facilitates prompt and thorough review of the case, and interviews appropriate parties.

A CASA Volunteer attends court proceedings, provides written reports to the court and makes recommendations so that the court can make better-informed decisions in the best interest of the child.

A CASA Volunteer is assigned no more than two cases at a time. Depending on the experience level of a CASA volunteer, exceptions can be made to have more than two cases; but no more than three cases at a time. An experienced CASA Volunteer may be assigned to train new CASA Volunteers.

A CASA Volunteer does not provide direct services to the child or to the child's family, does not engage in activities which jeopardize the safety of the child, the integrity of the program, or the objectivity of the Volunteer, or activities which are likely to result in conflict of interest or expose the program or the volunteer to criminal or civil liability

A CASA Volunteer respects the right to privacy by keeping information that would be identify parties involved in CASA /GAL cases confidential.

Time Commitment

A two year commitment is requested of a volunteer. A CASA Volunteer usually spends about 10 hours doing research and conducting interviews prior to the first court appearance. More complicated cases take longer. Once initiated into the system, a CASA Volunteer works approximately 10-15 hours each month.

Entering of Homes

At no time shall a CASA Volunteer enter the home of a child when a parent or legal guardian is not present. This applies even when the child would allow access. Liability is a major issue. If the parent is not home, ask to see the child in a public view. The porch or front steps offer a comfortable setting for the child and the CASA Volunteer.

The CASA Volunteer should not look into windows. There may be a problem with a person's right to privacy. If a CASA Volunteer suspects that a child is in the home alone or in danger, the local law enforcement agency should be contacted.

*The Judge cannot order the parents to allow access to the home. However, it can be encouraged from the bench. If a parent refuses to allow access to the home, the parent can be told that this will be reflected in the report to the Judge. This may persuade the parents to allow the CASA Volunteer access to the home.

*The Judge can order a parent to make the child available to the CASA Volunteer, but this does not have to be done in the home.

Records

The CASA program maintains accurate and current records for each child served which includes but is not limited to:

- Biographical or other identification information
- Case history and complaint
- Court reports and other court documents
- Children Services case plan

Records for children served are updated with current contacts and monthly progress notes. The CASA Program maintains electronic copies of all volunteer reports, correspondences, and notes from meetings. Clark County CASA shall keep all records a minimum of seven years from case closure unless there is a court requirement that dictates otherwise. Electronic files are backed up on a separate system at least once a week and the backup is kept offsite. Records and information are the property of the Clark County Juvenile Court and records will not be altered, covered up, falsified, or destroyed to prevent its use in an official proceeding.

Volunteers as Community Advocates

CASA volunteers are advocates for the children on their cases. They are also advocates for abused and neglected children in a larger, collective sense. CASA volunteers educate the public regarding the scope of their community's child abuse problem, resources needed to diminish the problem, and how community involvement can become part of the solution. They can voice their opinions to elected officials regarding the wise usage of government resources and in the establishment of legislation that would protect children and benefit families.

CASA volunteers can advocate within the private sector by advocating for responsible change within the child welfare system. They can keep the child welfare system from becoming isolated from the larger community by continually re-infusing the system with the broader community's values. Volunteers are integral to achieving Clark County CASA/GAL Program's mission.

Prior to any action that might significantly affect or obligate Clark County CASA/GAL Program, CASAs should seek prior approval from program staff. These actions include, but are not limited to: public statements to the press, coalition or lobbying efforts with other organizations, or entering any agreements involving contractual or other financial obligations. CASAs are authorized to act as representatives of Clark County CASA/GAL Program as specifically indicated in their job descriptions and these policies and procedures and only to the extent of such written specifications. When personally posting about Clark County CASA/GAL Program on Social Media, please "tag" our program's page.

Mandatory Reporters

All citizens have a responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Members of the general public may report suspected abuse and neglect if they choose. Ohio state law, however, mandates that workers in certain professions must make reports if they have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect. These people are called mandatory reporters and they are a crucial link in the system to protect Ohio's most vulnerable citizens.

All employees and volunteers of CASA are mandatory reporters. CASAs are required to report because they have frequent contact with at-risk populations – infants and children, people who are elderly or dependent, individuals with mental illness or developmental disabilities, and residents in health care facilities.

Communication

Positive and respectful communication is essential to the success of the CASA program. It is a normal dynamic of human interaction to experience communication breakdowns so it is imperative that all individuals associated with Clark County CASA/GAL Program make every effort to assure avenues of communication remain open and productive. This includes communication between staff and volunteers as well as with all other individuals and agencies engaged in the child welfare system.

Any conflicts between CASA and program staff regarding the handling of a case, reporting of information, or court report recommendations should be brought to the immediate attention of the Program Director.

Complaint Procedure

It is recognized that within any organization there will be occasional complaints against an employee/volunteer by the public and/or another employee/volunteer. Whenever differences or problems arise employees/volunteer should attempt to resolve the matter informally through proper channels. In the event a difference or problem cannot be resolved informally, the Judge provides the following complaint procedure by which the public or employee/volunteer may seek a resolution of the complaint.

- Step 1: A member of the public or employee/volunteer having a complaint may file it in writing with the immediate supervisor/department head. In order for the complaint to be recognized, it must be filed within five (5) working days from the date that the issue first presented itself. The Supervisor/department head will respond in writing within five (5) working days in an attempt to resolve the matter.
- Step 2: If the matter is not resolved in Step 1, the complainant may pursue the matter by submitting the complaint in writing to the Judge or designee within five (5) working days from the reply received in Step 1.
- Step 3: The Judge or designee shall respond in writing within ten (10) working days following the conclusion of his/her investigation. The decision rendered in this step, Step 3, is final and bonding.

Any uncorroborated and/or unsubstantiated complaints will not become party of any record of the Court. Complaint forms are available in supervisor/department head offices.

Conduct

CASA Volunteers will encounter a variety of groups (social workers, parents, foster families, etc.) during the course of their investigations. These groups will be from differing educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

It is understood that situations do arise which can be frustrating for the CASA Volunteer (uncooperativeness on the part of the parents, strongly differing opinions between yourself and the social worker, frustration over the Court's decision, etc.) When such a situation does occur, the CASA Volunteer should contact the program staff in order to discuss problems.

CASA Volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. Angry words and outbursts are never appropriate responses to a difficult situation. If you find yourself losing your temper, take a break and regain your composure.

Severe or frequent problems regarding a CASA Volunteer's conduct may be grounds for dismissal from the program.

Conflict of Interest

The primary obligation of both CASA staff and volunteers is to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children as objectively as possible. In the course of conducting any CASA activities, integrity must underlie all relationships, including those with children, parents, donors, agency/court relationships, consultants and governance. The highest standards of ethical business conduct and compliance are required of all CASA parties in performance of their responsibilities. No party may engage in conduct or activities that may raise questions as to CASA's honesty, impartiality, reputation or otherwise cause embarrassment to CASA. Nor may parties allow others to engage in such conduct or activities on their behalf.

CASA will stress ethical standards and promote its commitment to integrity and values and to ensure compliance with laws, rules and regulations. All parties will be informed of policies and procedures regarding ethical conduct and help will be provided to answer questions, seek guidance and to report suspected violations. All parties are encouraged to express any concerns regarding compliance with this policy and the related procedures. Complete and accurate reporting and record keeping, including but not limited to, financial records, program reports, attendance sheets, and case files is also required by all parties.

The program staff is responsible for monitoring implementation of ethics awareness and compliance to all values and ethical employment conduct guidelines. She/he is expected to

create open and honest environment in which parties feel comfortable in bringing issues forward. Retaliation against parties who raise genuine concern will not be tolerated.

Steadfast commitment to ethical behavior will be demonstrated in all relationships. The highest ethical standards will be practiced, and commitments will be honored. Personal responsibility for actions will be taken, and everyone will be treated fairly and with trust and respect.

CASA values the skills, strengths and perspectives of diverse teams. A participatory workplace that enables people to be involved in making decisions about their work will be fostered. CASA will continually learn and encourage cooperate efforts at every level and across all activities. Suggestions for improvement will be offered in an open forum. A safe, welcoming and inclusive workplace supporting diversity in all aspects of life will be provided.

All parties ensure that:

- They do not engage in any activity that might create a conflict of interest for CASA or for themselves individually;
- They do not take advantage of their position to seek personal gain through the inappropriate use of goods/materials, confidential information or by abuse of their position;
- They will follow all restrictions on use and disclosure of information honoring the privacy of child, their families, donors, and others;
- They will observe that honesty and integrity is the foundation for all of CASA's interactions;
- They will protect all CASA assets and use them only for appropriate preapproved activities;
- Without exception, they will comply with all applicable laws, rules and regulations; and
- They will promptly report any charges filed, illegal or unethical conduct to the Director.

Conflict of Interest Procedures

In all cases, conflicts of interest or circumstances giving rise to the appearance of a conflict must be disclosed in advance of initiating the activity giving rise to the conflict and in accordance with the procedures stated above. In developing responses to such conflicts, every effort will be made to avoid the conflict. In cases where it is not possible to completely avoid a conflict or the appearance of a conflict, reasonable efforts will be made to mitigate the effects of the conflict.

At a minimum, the recommended course of action will ask the individual involved in the conflict to disclose the situation to the relevant parties and recuse and abstain him/herself from any involvement in decisions pertaining to the conflict or the appearance of the conflict. Before the conflict is disclosed and while the request for approval of a proposed course of action is pending or being considered, the individual involved in the conflict will refrain from participating in the questionable activity and/or withdraw from any discussion of or decision on the matter.

If a person involved with the conflict fails to disclose the conflict prior to becoming involved in the transaction or decision affected by the conflict, appropriate discipline will follow.

Volunteer Supervision

The program staff is easily accessible to provide guidance to an active CASA Volunteer and maintains regular contact in order to review progress of the case. Program staff works as a team with each CASA Volunteer throughout the life of the case. Together supervisors and volunteers will assess how to proceed with an investigation, identify critical issues, and develop case recommendations.

The CASA Volunteer and program staff will work diligently to address any conflicts that arise with regard to recommendations in order to preserve the integrity of their team, their working relationship and promote the children's best interest. The conflict may be rectified with a compromise concerning the recommendations. Any compromise established will not jeopardize child safety, the best interests of the child nor the program's mission. In the event a conflict cannot be resolved regarding a volunteer's recommendations, an additional report will be submitted to the court under the program director's signature.

Case Procedures

Swearing- In

All volunteers successfully completing the pre-service training and wishing to become a CASA must be sworn in by a Clark County Courts Judge.

Criteria for Case Appointments

Clark County CASA Volunteer advocate will only be appointed to a case in which a child has a pending juvenile court matter involving abuse or neglect. Volunteers may be asked to take a private case that originated with an abuse and neglect adjudication.

Volunteer Selection and Appointment

CASA staff will consider the strengths and weaknesses of each available volunteer to determine which individual would best serve the needs of the child(ren) on the case. Each case is unique and volunteers have varying levels of knowledge, skills, and experience. It is with this in mind that the program seeks to "match" volunteers and cases. The appointment of a CASA volunteer occurs only upon a Court' Judge's order. Under no circumstances will a volunteer assume a case without a court order. Any request by an outside party to do so should be referred to program staff.

Volunteer Caseload

CASA Volunteer case assignments are decided on a case-by-case basis taking into account the individual's experience and ability to fulfill the requirements of each case. Volunteers will never be assigned to a case without the volunteer's approval.

Case Closure

Cases are closed when the Court dismisses a petition or changes a child's legal status. This may be achieved by the child's adoption or legal guardianship, a return to the biological family, the child reaching adulthood, or by any court order terminating CASA's obligation.

CASA Volunteer Removal

A CASA may be removed from a case at the request of the CASA, the program, the court, or as a result of case closure. Unless the Juvenile Court case closes, the court must issue an order vacating the CASA appointment for a volunteer to be removed from a case.

Assigning an Additional Volunteer to a Case

Some cases may benefit from having an additional volunteer appointed. This may occur, for instance, if the case would benefit from certain expertise (e.g. bilingual skills, the case has multiple children with multiple placements, or if the CASA is unable to fulfill his/her responsibilities). The Volunteer Coordinator assigned to the case determines, in consultation with the Program Director, whether to appoint a co-CASA to the case.

Attorney Representation

If a CASA Volunteer and Children Services are not in agreement with recommendations, the volunteer needs to discuss with the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as the conflict arises to determine if a motion needs to be filed for an attorney to be appointed to CASA. Attorneys will also be appointed if the volunteer and the child have a conflict on where the child wants to ultimately reside. In such case, an attorney will be requested by the volunteer for the child.

CORE VALUES

Ethical Behavior

Clark County CASA/GAL Program is committed to the highest standards of ethics and integrity. Unethical behavior is never justified or acceptable, no matter the intention or outcome.

Respect

Staff and volunteers of Clark County CASA/GAL Program will treat all people with respect and fairness, no matter who they are, or what their relationship may be to the CASA program and the

work the program does. Rude, disrespectful, or demeaning behavior is considered unacceptable at every level of the organization.

Confidentiality

Advocates take an oath of confidentiality when they are sworn in as a CASA Volunteer. It is this oath that allows the volunteers to have access to the confidential information pertaining to the child's case in court. Volunteers are responsible for maintaining strict confidentiality of all the information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a party to their case, another volunteer, or staff member. Volunteers cannot involve others outside the Clark County CASA/GAL Program to aid them with their CASA case activities. For example, having family members or friends type court reports. We cannot emphasize strongly enough the volunteer's responsibility to maintain strict confidentiality in his/her role as a volunteer.

Violation of confidentiality can result in harm to the reputation of Clark County CASA/GAL Program and increase the vulnerability of the children we serve. It is your responsibility to maintain strict confidentiality in your role as a volunteer. Information that you read in the case file and/or that is provided to you in interviews must be treated with respect and privacy.

The laws of confidentiality also bind the parties that you will interact with in your role as a volunteer. They share information with you because they have been given assurances that you will respect the confidentiality and privacy of the families involved.

Any information pertaining to the individual families or the children that the volunteer receives – either verbally or from records – is strictly confidential and cannot be discussed with anyone except court personnel, Clark County CASA/GAL Staff, or to others involved in an official capacity that are authorized to exchange such information. Discussion of the case with others, even if the family name and other identifying information are omitted, is strictly forbidden. Exceptions to this policy may be made by CASA program staff. Violation of confidentiality may be cause for immediate termination from the program.

The CASA Volunteer is responsible for the safekeeping and privacy of the case file. At the conclusion of a volunteer's involvement with the case, the records must be immediately returned to program staff.

If, for any reason, a CASA Volunteer believes a breach of confidentiality has occurred, contact program staff immediately.

Electronic and Social Media

Clark County CASA believes that social media tools, when used appropriately, can be a powerful tool for investigation and to increase awareness, support and sense of community for those of us engaged in advocacy for abused and neglected children. We also believe it is important that those who choose to do so understand what is recommended, expected and required when they

discuss CASA-related topics. Our ability to serve children depends on the trust and support of our community, and it is critical that we handle the confidential information entrusted to us responsibly.

When you engage in social media and online communication, you become a public figure. As a public figure that is associated with CASA, you have a responsibility to help protect this organization and our clients. The following expectations, along with both positive and negative social media examples, are intended to give you guidance in both promoting and protecting CASA, and to protect the children we serve.

1. ***Never reveal confidential information.*** Sharing stories that illustrate the value of CASA advocacy for children is often the most powerful way to engage the public in our cause. However, the sharing of confidential information about the children and families we serve is prohibited. This includes names, ages, case-specific details, time-specific statements, and photographs. It is acceptable to discuss general details and to use non-time-specific statements so long as it does not contain information recognizable to the family or anyone associated with the family case. For example, use general terms such as “youth” instead of “13-year-old-girl.” You must be careful to protect the dignity of families, children and social agencies, even if they are not named.
2. ***Uphold a respectable reputation.*** Be fair and courteous to fellow employees, volunteers, board members, the families we serve, the stakeholders with whom we work, and the vendors we retain. If you have a complaint or criticism, you are encouraged to address it through the appropriate internal channels of communication. Additionally, do not respond to any negative comment posted online about CASA or any other CASA program including local and national organizations. We would appreciate you informing the Program Director if you see any negative representation of the organization online so we may determine the best way to respond or not.
3. ***Be considerate.*** Never post discriminatory or harassing comments. Be respectful of all individuals and families served by CASA; CASA employees, volunteers, board members; and community stakeholder including individuals or organizations within our outside the judicial and child welfare systems or any other person associated with CASA.
4. ***Maintain a high standard of professionalism.*** You should maintain professional relationships at all times. Avoid connecting via social media with a child or family you know through your work with CASA or as a volunteer. If for some reason you feel you must communicate through a social network about a CASA-related matter, check first with program staff. You should not add children or families as friends on social media or request that they add you. Remember that your communication while on CASA business may be discoverable in court. Do not communicate with the judge or court regarding a CASA case or any other CASA matters not specific to a case via social media.
5. ***Use good judgement.*** Refrain from including any inappropriate content, providing links to inappropriate websites, or including any inappropriate photos in postings or comments directly or indirectly referring to CASA, any individuals associated with CASA, or your role

with the organization. Inappropriate material includes depictions or descriptions of illicit substances, and/or their paraphernalia; underage drinking; harassing, hostile false, or confidential information; and any other acts that violate local, state, or federal law and/or CASA statutes, rules, and regulations. Prejudice or discriminatory content is also prohibited. When using social media in connection with your capacity as a CASA volunteer, take a moment to consider all online comments with respect to the above framework before posting. Using good judgement extends to the selection of sources of news and research. The sources you base your arguments on should be reputable and well-established, and ideally bipartisan or nonpartisan. Remember that the internet archives almost everything, so even deleted posts can be searched!

6. **Share public content but not private content.** You are free to share content from National CASA/GAL's public website and Ohio CASA's public website and social media accounts with the general public. However, you may not share content from any member portal that is password protected unless it was specifically intended for sharing.
7. **Respect copyright.** Make sure facts are accurate before posting and you have permission to post any copyrighted information. When discussing others' research or opinions, make it clear that the research or opinions are not coming directly from you by citing the source.
8. **Be transparent.** Your online comments represent only your personal opinions. Never present yourself as a spokesperson for CASA. Always be clear and open about the nature of your association with CASA and when necessary make it clear that your views do not represent those of the organization or anyone else associated with the organization.

Photographic Permission

Any photos taken of a volunteer during the course of their work for CASA may be used in future promotional materials without compensation.

Violation of Social Media Policy

Online content produced by Clark County CASA Volunteers in conflict with the above guidelines or including discriminatory remarks, harassment, and threats of violence or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination from your role as a Clark County CASA Volunteer.

Furthermore, retaliation or any negative action against any staff, volunteer, or board member for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating with an investigation will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination from your role with the Clark County CASA/GAL Program.

Correspondence

At times, a CASA/GAL Volunteer may find the need to correspond with other professionals or agencies involved in a case. Any correspondence written by the CASA Volunteer to a professional agency is to be reviewed and approved by the program staff prior to being mailed. All correspondence is to be typed on CASA letterhead, unless otherwise indicated by the Program Director.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Responsibility to Children

The organization's first responsibility is to advocate for the best interests of the children served by the program. All resources are allocated and policies and procedures enacted in accordance with this responsibility. Examples include volunteer screening and case management procedures, training programs, staff qualifications, ratios of volunteers to staff, ratios of children to volunteers, and a commitment to the highest standards of confidentiality.

Child Advocacy

Advocacy for the best interests of children requires commitment to three tenets: protecting children from abuse, safety and permanency for children, and actively valuing the child's attachment to his or her family.

Culturally Appropriate Advocacy

Advocacy for the best interests of children requires tremendous sensitivity to the child's family's culture, ethnic identity, religion, and many factors that contribute to a child's identity. The CASA organization and all those within it must be diligent and deliberate in ensuring that advocacy is culturally sensitive and appropriate. CASA staff and volunteers must always strive to do better than the norm, to grow beyond our current understanding and competence level.

Attitudes towards Families

Children love and value their families, even families who may have abused or neglected them. Clark County CASA/GAL Program recognizes that advocacy for a child is often closely tied to advocacy for the family. We promote respectful treatment of all parents and family members.

Safety and Permanency

Safety and Permanency for children is a major focus of all CASA programs. Children require and deserve to live without the threat of physical or psychological harm to themselves or others in

their home. Children also require and deserve stability and permanence in order to develop bonds and attachments that lead to health, nurturing, and meaningful relationships.

Liability

Both federal and state statutes provide protection for volunteers acting within the scope of their volunteer responsibilities. CASA volunteers are required to have a valid driver's license and adequate personal automobile insurance. Liability insurance is provided for all CASA/GAL Volunteers engaged in court business. (CASA Volunteers are encouraged to consult with their own insurance agents regarding the extension of their personal insurance to include community volunteer work).

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship to the Child Welfare System

Clark County CASA/GAL Program values strong, professional, and productive relationships and open communication with all the individuals associated with CASA cases and with the agencies working within the child welfare system. Although CASA volunteers often take positions on specific cases that are at odds with others on the case, the CASA program does not cast itself in an adversarial role with any party. Clark County CASA recognizes that reasonable people disagree and that the best outcomes for children result from a full and complete discussion of all issues and points of view.

Relationship and Responsibility to the Court

Clark County CASA has a responsibility to operate with the highest standards of ethics and accountability. As appointed officers of the court, a CASA's conduct must consistently demonstrate these standards, both inside and outside the courtroom. CASAs must abide by the laws of Ohio and follow the rules of the court, doing nothing to bring dishonor to the court, the CASA role, or the CASA program. These expectations equally apply to the volunteer, staff, and Board of Clark County CASA.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Commitment to Diversity

Clark County CASA recognizes that the best service will be provided to children when members of all the communities to which these children belong are well represented at every level of the organization (i.e., policy setting, support and supervision, and direct services).



*Thank you for your commitment and
dedication to our children.*



CLARK COUNTY CASA/GAL PROGRAM

VOLUNTEER POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AGREEMENT

I have received, read, and agree to the Clark County CASA/GAL Program Policies and Guidelines. I understand that by signing this agreement and becoming a Clark County CASA Volunteer, I agree to abide by these policies and guidelines in good faith and to the best of my ability. I acknowledge that violating any of these policies may result in my dismissal from the program.

 Signature

 Date

VOLUNTEER PROTECTION (WHISTLEBLOWER) POLICY

If any volunteer reasonably believes that some policy, practice, or activity violates the court’s policies and procedures or local, state, and/or federal law should immediately advise his or her supervisor of the employees or volunteers concern. That supervisor shall investigate any such report and advise the court administrator and the judge of the complaint and the supervisor’s findings. The court administrator and the judge shall take appropriate action to ensure that the court’s policies and procedures as well as local, state, and federal law are enforced.

Volunteers are urged to err on the side of reporting to supervisors any concerns to ensure that our policies and procedures as well as local, state, and federal law are not violated. All volunteers are advised that the court is a mandatory reporter and the volunteer is reminded that he or she and the court have a legal duty to advise local law concerns about abuse, neglect, and dependency issues for minors. In making reports to outside agencies court volunteers and supervisory staff must strive at all times to ensure that confidential information from the court records are not inadvertently reported along with legitimate concerns in order to comply with Ohio law regarding the confidentiality of the Juvenile Court’s records.

Court volunteers are advised that the court will not retaliate against any volunteer who discloses or attempts to disclose reasonable concerns as stated above, and the court shall strive to protect the reporting volunteer from efforts by any other court employee or volunteer to seek retribution against the reporting volunteer.

My signature below indicates my receipt and understanding of this policy I also verify that I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions about the policy.

Signature

Date