



## **C.A.S.A. of Mendocino & Lake Counties**

- A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION -

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### **Court Appointed Special Advocate Job Description**

#### **A. Advocate Qualifications**

*A CASA volunteer is a person who has been recruited, screened, selected, and trained; who is being supervised and supported by a local CASA program; and who has been appointed by the juvenile court as a sworn officer of the court to help define the best interest of a child or children in juvenile court dependency and delinquency proceedings. (CRC Rule 5.655. Program requirements for Court Appointed Special Advocate programs)*

Individuals applying to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate for CASA of Mendocino & Lake Counties must be:

1. At least twenty-one (21) years of age;
2. Able to adhere to the pledge of confidentiality
3. Able to communicate effectively orally and in writing;
4. Sensitive to and respectful of people from various backgrounds and lifestyles;
5. Able to arrange transportation to and from a variety of locations to attend various meetings pertaining to assigned cases;
6. Able to maintain objectivity at all times, even when faced with hostility, anger or other strong emotional attitudes;
7. Well organized and able to work independently as well as be able to work in cooperation with and under direction of CASA supervising staff;
8. Computer literate, and able at a minimum to use a word processing program and email in a setting that provides for secure storage and transmission of private, confidential communications; and,
9. Aware at a basic level of child development and family relationship dynamics.

#### **B. Job Responsibilities**

1. Gather information regarding the child's situation and perspective:
  - a. Obtain first hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by:
    - 1) reviewing all relevant documents and records;
    - 2) interviewing the child, parents and/or other family members, social workers, teachers and other persons;
    - 3) Meeting face-to-face with the child
  - b. Maintain a professional and cooperative working relationship with the people involved with the child's case, including social workers, attorneys, therapists, teachers, etc.
  - c. Review various areas of the child's life that effect personal growth, happiness, and well-being (i.e., school, home, placement, medical and mental health services), including relevant records and reports.

- d. Identify, explore and advocate for potential resources that will enhance the child's living situation or facilitate family preservation, early family reunification, or alternative permanency planning.
- 2. Work as an arm of the court
  - a. Through the CASA Program submit to the Juvenile Court regular written reports containing fact-based information and recommendations.
  - b. Attend and when necessary testify at court hearings concerning the child.
  - c. Participate in court-related conferences (CFT, CCT, IEP) concerning the child.
- 3. Insure representation of the child's best interests
  - a. Become informed of proceedings (in addition to actual court proceedings) that affect the child's situation.
  - b. Attend appropriate inter-agency meetings regarding the child.
  - c. Establish and maintain a coordinated and cooperative sharing of information with the child's attorney, or the child's probation officer.
  - d. Encourage public systems to make appropriate and timely interventions and to provide full and appropriate services to the child.
- 4. Monitor the progress of the child's case for the purpose of ensuring the child's case plan and court orders are implemented consistent with the child's welfare and best interest.
- 5. Meet the supervision requirements of the program.
  - a. Communicate fully and regularly with appropriate program staff.
  - b. Participate in the development of an advocacy plan.
  - c. Discuss preliminary findings and regularly review progress in the case.
  - d. Inform your Case Supervisor or the CASA Executive Director immediately of potential conflicts of interest, liability issues, and safety concerns.

**C. Training & Evaluations**

- 1. Initial Training & Oath
  - a. Each applicant must actively participate in the required initial minimum volunteer training program (minimum 40 hours).
  - b. Upon completion of all pre-screening and training requirements, the applicant must take oath in each Court for which the applicant is to become an advocate.
- 2. Continuing Education Requirements - All Advocates are required by the National CASA Association and therefore by CASA of Mendocino & Lake Counties to complete a minimum of 12 hours of on-going education per calendar year. This can be done in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:
  - a. Attending training workshops held by CASA staff;
  - b. Reading and responding to monthly continuing education packets;
  - c. Attending related trainings or classes through other organizations and submitting proof of completion; or
  - d. Independently through pertinent books, videos, webinars, etc. and submitting a written evaluation of the material.
- 3. Annual Evaluations - Each CASA Advocate is evaluated annually as to their performance and effectiveness in their role as advocate or educational surrogate. Included in this evaluation will be an opportunity for each volunteer to self-evaluate as well as report on their job satisfaction, and the quality of staff supervision, support and training they have received through the year.

#### **D. Time Commitment**

1. Each advocate must commit to a minimum of 12 months of service, or until his or her assigned child is placed in a permanent home should that occur before 12 months.
2. The average time required is approximately 5 to 10 hours per month.
3. Advocates are expected to be available for case assignment and to accept cases upon request of the Program unless:
  - a. The CASA advocate is already active with a case;
  - b. A serious conflict of interest or in values exists for the volunteer relative to the case;
  - c. The CASA advocate has informed the Program of a pre-planned vacation or personal commitment;
  - d. The CASA advocate cannot participate due to illness;
  - e. The CASA advocate has requested a temporary respite from service.

#### **E. Termination**

A sworn CASA Advocate may be terminated from service at any time upon written request to the Juvenile Court by the CASA Program. Specific reasons for such a termination may include, but are not limited to:

1. Breach of Pledge of Confidentiality;
2. Incomplete, incorrect or misleading information intentionally provided at any time during the volunteer's tenure with the CASA Program;
3. Allegations of child abuse or neglect or of other criminal offenses relevant to fitness as a CASA Advocate;
4. Failure to complete the minimum training requirements;
5. Failure to meet qualifications or perform duties of a Court Appointed Special Advocate;
6. Unethical or inappropriate behavior including, but not limited to:
  - a. Verbal or physical abuse of any individual while acting as a CASA Advocate;
  - b. Non-disclosure of a discovered conflict of interest;
  - c. Sexual contact with parties involved in an assigned case;
  - d. Being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs while acting as a CASA Advocate; or,
  - e. Failure to abide by agency policies or procedures.
7. Failure to regularly and concisely report observations to the Juvenile Court in order to enhance its decision-making in a manner that reflects and supports the child's perspectives, best interests and well-being.
8. Failure to provide appropriate information, or providing inappropriate information, to parties to their assigned cases, including the children, in the Juvenile Court system.