

Advocate Job Description

CASA of West Central Illinois

The Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are trained volunteers whose role is to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in the West Central Illinois Juvenile Court system. Herein the CASA Advocate is referred to as the "Advocate."

Qualifications and Skills:

The advocate must have the following qualifications:

- Age 21 years or older
- Have a valid driver's license or photo ID
- Possess maturity, stability, objectivity, flexibility, and common sense
- Exhibit self-assurance and assertiveness
- Have the ability to deal with occasional hostility and rejection
- Be able to keep information confidential
- Be able to work within established guidelines
- Have the ability to interview, observe and listen as well as analyze written material
- Be able to write clearly and concisely
- Have the ability to make decisions and set goals
- Be willing to commit to the program for minimum of 1 year

Advocate Roles and Responsibilities:

A. The Advocate should:

- a. Complete an intensive, independent investigation if the case to identify the child's best interest
 - i. Interview the child and all relevant parties to the case
 - ii. Review appropriate records and reports- DCFS, schools, health care, etc.
 - iii. Observe the child and significant others
 - iv. Maintain regular contact with the child's caseworker and your own attorney
- b. Advocate for the child's best interest
 - i. Participate in case conferences concerning the child such as ACRs (Administrative Case Review, IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings, CAYIT (Child and Youth Investment Team) meetings
 - ii. Monitor implementation of services plans and court orders assuring that court ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and that review hearings are held in accordance to the law
 - iii. Continue contact with the child (at least monthly), family, or others (as ordered by the court) to monitor progress
 - iv. Express the wishes of the child even if contrary to their best interests

- v. Work together with mental health, educational, and other community service providers to assure that the child's needs in these areas are met as well as make recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child and when appropriate, the child's family
 - vi. Determine if a permanency plan has been created for the child
 - vii. Act as facilitator among the parties to see cooperative solutions
- c. Report findings to the court
 - i. Attend all court proceedings to see that all relevant facts are presented
 - ii. Provide a written report (at the minimum at each permanency review) containing factual information and a clear statement as to what is in the child's best interest
 - iii. If appropriate, submit supplemental written reports to the court concerning changes in circumstances, recommendations for modifications in disposition, compliance with court orders, and placement alternatives for the child such as relatives, foster care, and group homes.
- d. Attend training arranged by the CASA office
 - i. Attend pre-service training sessions
 - ii. Attend 2 or more hours of court observation
 - iii. Attend 12 hours of in-service training per year (up to 6 hours of training may come from outside sources with permission of the director)
- e. Consult with the CASA office regularly
 - i. Review progress in the case
 - ii. Review court report
- f. Submit volunteer information monthly
 - i. Volunteer activity reports which include monthly hours, contacts, and miles
 - ii. In-service hours (if obtained elsewhere)
- g. Report abuse or neglect (Mandated Reporting)
 - i. A Court Appointed Special Advocate who has reasonable cause to believe that a child known to them in their official capacity may be abused, neglected, or in imminent danger, is mandated by law to immediately report suspected abuse or neglect to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services hotline (1-800-252-2873)
 - ii. Contact the CASA Executive Director as soon as possible when making a report

B. The Advocate should not:

- a. Provide direct services to the children to whom they are assigned, nor to their families. Example: give rides to parents or assigned children for any reason
- b. Engage in behavior which could lead to a conflict or create a liability to the volunteer or the CASA program
- c. Be related to any parties involved in the case or be employed in a position with any agency or organization that might result in a conflict of interest. This may include church or any other social service organization
- d. Cause a child or family to become dependent on the CASA volunteer for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations
- e. Take a child to the volunteer's home or any home other than the child's

- f. Have children in their custody or care (A CASA advocate may ask to spend a few minutes with a child to ask the child questions if the advocate believes a parent or foster parent may influence the responses of the child)
- g. Make placement arrangements for the child (Advocate can make suggestions to caseworker.)
- h. Give legal advice or therapeutic counseling
- i. Give money or expensive gifts to the child, child's family, or caregiver
- j. Supervise visits between children and parents.

Other Volunteer Policies and Procedures

Program Services to the Advocate

- A. Supervision
 - a. The Advocate Coordinator will serve as the supervisor to the advocate to assist and oversee casework
 - i. The advocate coordinator will contact the advocate periodically to update the volunteer on case events, hearings, record keeping, or other related matters
 - ii. The advocate is encouraged to keep agency staff informed of case issues, especially critical developments
 - iii. In-person or phone consults with the director are available and strongly encouraged prior to court appearances and at any time to review case progress and concerns
 - b. The Advocate Coordinator will assist with and review all reports to the court prior to distribution
 - i. The Advocate Coordinator will not alter report content without the consent of the volunteer.
 - ii. If the Advocate Coordinator opposes recommendations made by the volunteer or believes further recommendations are warranted, the Advocate Coordinator may submit and independent report in addition to the volunteer's report. A copy of that independent report will be sent to the advocate prior to the hearing for which the report was prepared for.
 - c. Advocate Coordinator will maintain a flexible schedule for case consultation purposes and make every effort to be available, as necessary. Please make appointments as much as possible as the office is not always staffed.
- B. Advocates will have access to legal counsel in regards to their assigned cases from the attorney assigned to CASA for those cases through the duration of them
- C. Evaluation
 - a. Active advocates are updated regarding their in-service hours and are encouraged to make up hours if they are lacking in earning in-service time

- b. At this time a formal evaluation is not done with each advocate but if issues arise they will be dealt with on a case by case basis

D. Grievances

- a. An advocate who has a specific complaint or grievance regarding the CASA program, must first try to resolve their issue with the Advocate Coordinator
- b. If this does not resolve the issue, the advocate may try to resolve their issue with the Executive Director
- c. If this does not resolve the issue, the advocate may submit their concerns in writing to the president of the CASA of West Central Illinois Board of Directors
- d. The Executive Committee of the Board must respond within 30 days of receiving the complaint. If the volunteer remains dissatisfied with the response of the Executive Committee, he or she may request a meeting with the entire Board to further discuss or mediate the complaint

Record Keeping

A. The CASA office will maintain complete records regarding volunteer advocates

- a. Written records shall include:
 - i. Application and references
 - ii. Emergency contact information (included in application)
 - iii. Proof of receipt of volunteer policies and procedures and advocate handbook contents
 - iv. Documentation of reference checks
 - v. Training records
 - vi. Documentation related to performance (when applicable)
 - vii. Documentation of volunteer status
- b. Volunteer access to their volunteer file
 - i. Volunteer access will be determined by the Advocate Coordinator following an assessment of the reasons for the request. If the volunteer is permitted to review their file they must do so in the presence of a CASA of West Central Illinois Staff Member.
 - ii. If the volunteer wishes to make an addition or correction to their volunteer file, they must submit a written proposal of the addition or correction to the Advocate Coordinator who will determine whether to admit the written proposal into the file

B. Case Management

- a. The CASA office will maintain complete case assignment records including as up to date calendar of court hearings, or copies of all volunteer reports and correspondence concerning the case
- b. Advocates should maintain complete records about the case, including appointments, interviews, and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances
- c. Advocates should return their case files to the CASA office when their case closes and when they resign or are discharged from a case.

Volunteer Discipline and Dismissal

A. Discipline

- a. Discipline may be taken if the volunteer's work is unsatisfactory



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- b. Corrective action is within the discretion of the Advocate Coordinator and may include supervision, reassignment, retraining, or dismissal from the CASA program.
- B. Dismissal
 - a. Volunteers who do not adhere to the policies and procedures of the program or who fail to satisfactorily perform their volunteer assignment are subject to dismissal. Dismissal is within the discretion of the Advocate Coordinator.
 - b. Grounds for dismissal include:
 - i. Violating a program policy, court rule, or law
 - ii. Taking Action without program or court approval that endangers the child or is outside the role or powers of the CASA Program
 - iii. Engaging in ex-parte communication with the court
 - iv. Failing to demonstrate and ability to effectively carry out assigned duties
 - v. Existence of a conflict of interest which cannot be resolved
 - vi. Failing to complete required pre-service and in-service training
 - vii. Existence of child abuse/neglect allegations against the volunteer
 - viii. Falsifying his or her application or misrepresenting facts during the screening process

Advocate Signature: _____ Date: _____