



CASA of Polk County, Inc.

Frequently Asked Questions

How did CASA begin?

In the 1960s Judges realized that they were making far-reaching decisions about the lives of children without hearing the unique perspective of the child. The first Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) program began in 1977 in Seattle, Washington by King County Judge David Soukup. As word of the program's success spread, similar programs began all over the United States. Because some states require GALs to be attorneys, the term Court Appointed Special Advocate – CASA – was coined to describe volunteers from local communities trained to serve as advocates for abused and neglected children involved in juvenile court proceeding. In 1982 the National CASA Association was established to assist the growing number of programs in the country.

The Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program is a mandated, underfunded program through the juvenile court system. Polk County CASA provides highly trained volunteer advocates for children who have become wards of the state because of abuse or neglect.

Polk County CASA was established in 1989 under the umbrella of the District Attorney's Office. Through the county's in-kind gift of office space and funds provided through Oregon Legislation, CASA has continued to exist since that time. Polk County Friends of CASA 501c3 was established in 2004 to raise funds for the program as county and state funds decreased over the years.

As of July 1, 2015, Polk County CASA and Friends of Polk County CASA, Inc. became one entity as CASA of Polk County, Inc.

Who are CASA volunteers?

A CASA volunteer is a unique individual who is committed to providing factual information about the situation of an abused or neglected child. The information and recommendations the CASA volunteer provides to the Court assists the Court in making crucial decisions about a child's future. CASA of Polk County volunteers represent the diverse communities within Polk County. CASA volunteers come from all professions, races, ethnicities, and social and economic backgrounds. CASA volunteers must be at least 21 years of age.

What do CASA volunteers commit to do?

- Volunteers successfully complete training and are sworn in as CASA volunteers.
- Volunteers commit to serving 24 months as a CASA volunteer
- Volunteers accept assignment to a child or sibling group's case and actively advocate on Behalf of the child(ren).

- Volunteers work closely with their Peer Coordinators, who provide direction and supervision on the cases.
- Volunteers spend 10-12 hours a month on a case gathering information from visiting with the child(ren) and those adults who impact the child(ren).
- Volunteers need some flexibility during the day in order to be present and effective at court hearings, as well as at other meetings that are held between court dates. The time will vary depending on the status of the case. Court hearings typically occur in 6-week cycles, but may vary depending on the complexity of the case
- Volunteers attend 12 hours of additional training per year.

How are CASA volunteers effective?

- By actively monitoring the child's case as it progresses through the court system to ensure that the child's best interests are being met and that the necessary services are provided.
- By gathering information and conducting an independent investigation about the family's situation.
- By observing family and sibling visits.
- By making recommendations to the court regarding the child's best interests.
- By submitting computer generated reports to the Court and involved parties at each hearing.
- By being present at all court hearings and providing oral testimony.
- By being present at other meetings that affect the child(ren)'s best interests between court dates.
- By communicating with the child(ren), parents, other family members, and professionals using concern, tact and basic communication skills.
- By respecting and relating to people from various social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds in a variety of settings.
- By maintaining accurate records and objectivity.
- By remaining in close communication with their Peer Coordinator.
- By having a flexible personal and professional schedule in order to accommodate court dates and meetings.
- By having a telephone equipped with voicemail or an answering machine.