



Dear Prospective CASA Volunteer:

Thank you for considering volunteering your time with the Cobb County Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program. I am delighted that you are interested in improving the lives of abused and neglected children. Please read the enclosed information, which explains this volunteer opportunity in greater detail.

The first step in becoming a CASA volunteer is to complete and return the enclosed volunteer application. Be sure to answer the four essay questions included in the application. When your completed application is received at the Cobb CASA program office, it will be reviewed and you will be invited in for a screening interview. Upon conclusion of a successful interview, you will be given information on the criminal background check procedure. After your criminal background check is completed, you will be ready to participate in the next available training class providing there is no history of criminal activity, which may disqualify your admittance. Any substantiated allegation of a child abuse offense will disqualify your acceptance.

In addition to maintaining confidentiality, CASA volunteers must be able to effectively interview a variety of individuals, remain objective, communicate verbally and in writing, work cooperatively, express sensitivity to cultural and ethnic differences, and demonstrate maturity when dealing with emotional situations. This volunteer opportunity is best suited for those established in their career or retirement and looking to give back to the community by advocating for children in crisis. Most people find that they gain as much as they give from their volunteer experiences.

Again, I thank you for your interest and hope you choose to make a difference in your own life, while making a difference in children's lives as a CASA volunteer!

Please return your completed application to the address below. If you need additional assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Best regards,
CASA Judicial Program Coordinator
Juvenile Court of Cobb County
32 Waddell Street, 5th Floor
Marietta, Georgia 30090
CASA@cobbcounty.org
Phone: 770.528.2285
Fax: 770.528.3349



WHAT IS CASA?

- Cobb County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) is a court-based program of the Juvenile Court of Cobb County. It was created to provide a voice to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children involved in dependency proceedings.
- **MISSION:** The Juvenile Court of Cobb County Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program provides thoroughly screened, expertly trained and fully supervised community-based, citizen volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children involved in juvenile court dependency proceedings. Cobb County Court Appointed Special Advocates speak up for the needs and basic human rights of child victims of abuse and neglect, one child at a time.

SOLUTIONS CASA OFFERS:

- **PREVENTION**
A large percentage of the children who come before the court as dependent children later return to court in delinquency and criminal matters. Children who are abused and neglected are the same children who are committing crimes in our community. Early intervention by a CASA volunteer can reduce the likelihood of a child becoming delinquent.
- **PERMANENT PLACEMENT FOR CHILDREN**
Every child should have a safe, loving and permanent home, but many do not. Each year in Georgia, thousands of children become entangled in the juvenile justice and foster care programs because they are victims of abuse or neglect. A large majority of the children are taken from their homes and placed in an already overburdened system where they can get “lost” for months and even years. Because CASA volunteers recommend for the best interest of the child and search for permanent placement, there is a significant reduction in the amount of time a child spends in temporary foster care if he has a CASA volunteer. A CASA volunteer helps not only to end the abuse or neglect experienced by each child, but also to break the cycle of violence and abuse that will otherwise continue through that child.
- **CONSISTENT ADVOCATE IN THE CHILD’S LIFE**
CASA volunteers are often one of the few consistent figures in a child’s life. While a child may have many caseworkers, foster parents, schools, and residences, the CASA volunteer stays with the child for the duration of the case. Because CASA volunteers carry an average caseload of only 2 cases, they are able to give each child what others in the system do not have – TIME. The CASA volunteer spends numerous hours working on these cases, and the CASA volunteer’s only job is to speak for the child to assure that his or her best interests are not overlooked. Each CASA volunteer commits an average of approximately 15 hours per month to the children and Cobb County CASA program, for a period of at least 18 months.

Important Questions to Consider Before Committing to Become a CASA Volunteer

You have the best of intentions in wanting to become a **CASA volunteer**. However, since we ask for a long and sometimes difficult period of commitment, it is vital to the children, the Court, the CASA Program, and yourself that you make this decision based on full knowledge of your own expectations and those of the program. Please take time to **seriously consider the implications** of the following questions and statements.

1. **Do you have the time?** Two to four hours per week may not seem like much time at all, but don't be fooled. Think of the times you finally finish work and dread going to an evening meeting...or, after feeding your family, taking a pet to the vet and returning home just to write a report. How many times have you wished you had just *one hour* to yourself? If your CASA children call on a free Saturday afternoon and need to talk, are you willing to give up a weekend afternoon? Will you *really* make the time, not only to see the children every 30 days, but also to see teachers, caseworkers, parents and others? Is your work schedule flexible enough to allow you to attend a court hearing? Can you truly commit 18 months to the children and program?
2. **Have you recently gone through changes?** In what shape and how stable is your own life? Have you recently had a life change such as divorce or marriage or medical problems? Have you lost someone especially close? Have you started a new job or had a baby or other persons added to your family? Are you still healing from your own neglect or abuse, and if so, how close to the surface are those feelings?
3. **Is your work or school pressure likely to change?** Are you seeking employment? Are you about to take on a new position or add responsibility to the one you have now? Is there a real possibility you'll be transferred within the next year and a half? Are you entering your senior year at college and expect extra pressure? Do you expect to graduate and likely leave the community within the next 18 months?
4. **What about your family?** Do you already sometimes feel as though you aren't spending enough time with your own family? Do you have large or especially intense family responsibilities? Have you talked with your family about taking on this role? How do *they* feel about it?
5. **What kind of role model will you be?** Have you had positive experiences with your own or other children in the past? Are you comfortable with children and aware of their need to be the children they are? Are you mature enough to be the adult a child could count on to speak up for them? Are you mature enough to do that speaking with angry parents, difficult professionals, attorneys attempting to make you look incompetent, judges and, most important, again, a hurt, wondering and frightened child? Can you maintain the confidentiality required of this role?

6. **Why do you want to volunteer with this program?** Are you looking to be a child advocate rather than a mentor to a “little brother” or “little sister”? Are aware that the CASA volunteer is not a heroine or hero, charging in on a silvery steed to save these children from harm? Do you know that the children will not think you’re the best thing since sliced bread? Can you agree that it is not your role to teach these parents a lesson or straighten out the system? Do you understand that this experience will not lead to an offer of employment?
7. **Do you need immediate results/rewards?** Are you able to await factual substantiation before making up your mind about parents and others? Are you able to maintain a high level of energy over a period of months, even if you feel the system should have acted differently in the beginning? Can you accept that others may need a much longer time to accomplish things you have already done or can do in a short order?
8. **Can you avoid feeling “it’s my way or the highway”?** Can you agree that other people’s lifestyles, though different from yours, can be acceptable for children provided they aren’t illegal or harmful to the children in a specific, provable way? Do you understand that it is the judge who makes the final decision?
9. **How strong are you?** With the help of the CASA staff, other CASA volunteers and your friends and family, can you take care of yourself through emotionally stressful and powerful periods so that we don’t abandon the children?
10. **Can you let go?** After 18 months of intensive advocacy for “your” kids, will you be able to stand back to let the birth parents (or surrogate parents chosen by the court) take on their proper responsibility? Can you remember to be the adult so the children can just be children? Can you move on and let them do the same?

Welcome to the world of CASA—a world of difficult questions and hard decisions. It is our hope that rather than being threatening in any way, this material is helpful to you in making your first big decision – “Should I go on?” If you would like to discuss any of the questions or statements please call the Juvenile Court of Cobb County CASA Program Coordinator at 770-528-2285.



Volunteer Description

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer is assigned to a child/children involved in a dependency case. The Volunteer speaks up for the child's best interests and continues on the case in order to ensure that there is permanency in the child's life. The Volunteer conducts an independent, fact-gathering mission to provide the judicial system with enough information to make a permanency plan for each child involved. The CASA volunteer's only job is to speak for the child, to assure his or her best interests do not get overlooked while in protective custody and to assist in having the child/children placed in a safe, nurturing, permanent home as quickly as possible.

- To gather information to ascertain the facts and circumstances of the child's situation.
- To seek cooperative solutions (with DFCS case managers, parents, relatives, other agencies, etc.) which will serve the child's best interests.
- To seek a permanent plan for the child, in a permanent placement.
- To maintain strict confidentiality of all information related to a child or their families.
- To provide written reports of findings and recommendations to program staff at least five business days prior to court hearings or Citizen Review Panels.
- To attend court hearings and Citizen Review Panels to represent the child's best interests.
- To communicate regularly with program staff about the case and steps taken to ensure the best interest of the child is advocated.
- To maintain genuine care and concern for the best interest of the child.
- To successfully complete the pre-requisites of the CASA screening process.

Program Requirements

- Must be at least 21 years old (by swearing-in date)
- Complete a personal face-to-face interview with a member of the CASA staff.
- Undergo a criminal background investigation including fingerprinting.
- Successful completion of the 30+ hour pre-service training program.
- Commitment of at least 18 months to the CASA program as an "Active Volunteer"
- Earn 12 hours of in-service training credit annually.



VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

Name: _____
(Last) (First) (MI)

Home address: _____

City: _____ County: _____ Zip: _____

Email Address _____

Telephone: Home() _____ Work() _____ Ext. _____

Occupation: _____ (circle one) Full time Part time

Employer and length of employment: _____

Work Address: _____

City: _____ County: _____ Zip: _____

May we contact you at work? Yes _____ No _____

Emergency Contact Name: _____ Number: _____

How did you hear about the CASA program? _____

Check any training or experience (practical, volunteer, or paid) in any of the following categories.

NOTE: None are required to be a CASA Volunteer.

___ Child Care ___ Mental Health ___ News/Media ___ Other:

___ Child Development ___ Counseling/Psychology ___ Writing/Editing

___ Child Welfare ___ Medicine ___ Public Speaking

___ Social Work ___ Education ___ Arts/Graphics

___ Personnel ___ Law ___ Fund Raising

___ Criminology or ___ Drug/Alcohol ___ Advertising/
Law enforcement Treatment Programs Public Relations

Please describe any of these experiences that might be applicable to CASA. _____

Please describe any other volunteer and community activities. _____

Educational Background (highest level completed/year):

Are you currently enrolled as a student? If so where/anticipated completion date:

Marital Status: _____

Names/Ages of children: _____

Other languages spoken: _____

Do you have access to transportation? _____

Have you ever worked for the Juvenile Court or DFCS? _____

Are you a foster parent? _____

List any charges, arrests, and/or convictions, other than traffic violations, and list dates, county/state, and disposition of each (An applicant having a charge or conviction for a crime involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or the CASA program's credibility is disqualified as a CASA volunteer. Applicants with other misdemeanor or felony charges or convictions that would not pose a risk to children or negatively affect the credibility of the CASA program will be considered on a case-by-case basis considering the time passed since the incident and the level of rehabilitation.)

Have you ever been investigated by the Department of Family and Children Services or an equivalent organization in another state for child abuse or neglect? ___Yes ___No

If yes, explain. _____

Please name any hobbies or special interests that you enjoy

When can you attend CASA training? Please check available times:

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|-----------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| Morning | | | | | | | |
| Afternoon | | | | | | | |
| Evening | | | | | | | |

Are there specific days when you cannot attend? _____

If so, why? _____

References: On this page, please list names and contact information of four persons who will be willing to provide referral information. (2 professional and 2 personal; family members not accepted) If currently employed, please list your supervisor first. Also, note that each person you identify will receive a reference form to complete and return to the Cobb CASA program.

1. Name _____ Occupation/Business _____

Business Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime phone _____ Relationship _____

2. Name _____ Occupation/ Business _____

Business Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime phone _____ Relationship _____

3. Name _____ Occupation/ Business _____

Business Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime phone _____ Relationship _____

4. Name _____ Occupation/Business _____

Business Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime phone _____ Relationship _____

Please answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper. Your answers may be handwritten or typed. (Two or three sentences each is sufficient)

1. Briefly explain why you want to be a CASA volunteer.
2. Briefly explain your philosophy of parenting, including the rights and responsibilities of both parents and children.
3. Briefly explain what role you believe society should play in protecting children versus assisting a family in overcoming hardships in order to function and ultimately live together as one unit.
4. Please write a brief autobiographical statement.



AFFIRMATION AND RELEASE

I, _____, hereby affirm that all of the answers provided on my volunteer application are true. I understand that the information requested will be used only for the purpose of determining my suitability as a Court Appointed Special Advocate. I understand that this application does not ensure appointment as a CASA volunteer. I understand that completion of training does not guarantee that I will be assigned a case. After successful completion of my training, I further understand that I will be expected to serve a minimum of 18 months with the CASA program. If unforeseen circumstances prevent me from fulfilling this obligation, I will submit a written resignation to the program director with as much advance notice as possible.

I am aware that I will be examining sensitive, confidential documents, reports and other material in my capacity as a CASA volunteer. I will discuss these matters only with those persons directly involved in the case at the Court or those who will be consulted for their professional knowledge or expertise. I will not divulge this confidential information to anyone else.

Signature

Date