



## **CASA of Baltimore, Inc.** Volunteer Advocate Job Description

**Basic Function:** A CASA volunteer advocate is a trained community volunteer appointed by a Juvenile Court Judge to recommend what is in the best interests of an abused and/or neglected child. A CASA works as an official party of the judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys and social workers. Handling only one (or occasionally two) cases at a time, the CASA has time to thoroughly explore the history and circumstances of each assigned case.

**Supervision:** Direct supervision and guidance is provided by an Advocate Supervisor. Advocate Supervisors will be available to discuss case plans, progress, or problems, as well as provide other information needed by the advocate to fulfill his/her role as a CASA. Advocates will periodically be asked for feedback regarding supervision and overall satisfaction with the program.

### **Major Duties and Responsibilities:**

- Complete an extensive, independent review of each case:
  - Meet face-to-face, including virtually, with child at least one per month.
  - Meet with DSS social worker at the start of a new case to discuss case history, obtain pertinent case information, and to ensure development of a permanency plan.
  - Maintain monthly contact with the DSS Social Worker.
  - Speak with the child and relevant adults (parents, family members, school officials, doctors, and others involved in the child's life who might have facts about the case).
    - Contact with children's attorney at the start of the case to introduce yourself. Also contact at least once a review period.
    - Contact with biological parents and their attorneys (if represented) at beginning of case, and at least once a review period. Contact should be outside of the court setting, if possible.
    - Contact with school at least once a review period.
    - Contact with mental health providers at least once a review period.
    - Contact with physicians, dentist, and optometrists as needed.
  - Review appropriate records and reports.
  - Observe interactions between the child and parents/guardians/significant others.
  - Immediately report any incident of suspected child abuse/neglect to the assigned social worker or the Child Abuse Hotline (410) 361-2235 if the case worker is not available, and also inform Advocate Supervisor of incident necessitating report.
- Report findings to the court by submitting formal reports to the Judge at every scheduled hearing/review:
  - Provide a draft of a written report containing factual information to the CASA office 2 weeks prior to every hearing. Final Reports should be submitted to the Court 5 business days prior to the court date. (Please note that reports that do not contain sufficient information and/or are submitted to Advocate Supervisors 48 hours or less before a court date may not be submitted at the discretion of the Advocate Supervisor).
  - Attend court hearings concerning the child with Advocate Supervisor or Peer Coordinator.

- Ensure representation of the child’s best interest:
  - Be certain that all relevant facts are presented at the court hearings.
  - Attend appropriate meetings and participate in all planning conferences concerning the child.
- Monitor the case following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court:
  - Ensure that the judicial and child welfare systems are moving ahead to secure a safe, permanent home for the child.
  - Ensure that court ordered services are being provided to the child and family.
  - Monitor progress on completion of court ordered services to provide updates to the court.
  - Identify any additional services needed by the child, and work with all involved agencies and care providers to see that the child’s needs are met in between court hearings.
- Consult with the Advocate Supervisor concerning assigned case monthly.
  - At least two face-to-face meetings during the first 3 months of the case.
  - At least one face-to-face meeting each subsequent 3 months.
  - Develop a CASA case plan within the first 90 days from case assignment - to be completed in person whenever possible.
    - Case plans should be reviewed at, or shortly after, each review hearing. Follow up Case Plans can be completed in person or by computer and phone.
  - Review progress on child’s case and relevant records.
  - Use the OPTIMA case management program to record all contacts and activities concerning your case on an ongoing basis.
  - Arrange with the Advocate Supervisor for coverage of any conferences or court proceedings if unable to attend.
  - Keep CASA Advocate Supervisor abreast of any concerns related to the case and include them on correspondence relating to those concerns.

**Training/Support Plan:**

- CASA advocates are required to attend approximately 30 hours of pre-service training, a court observation, and 12 hours of in-service training annually.
- CASA advocates will appear before a judge upon completion of training to be sworn in as a court appointee.
- CASA advocates follow guidelines outlined in the CASA Volunteer Advocate Policies and Procedures.
- CASA advocates receive supervision and guidance from program staff.
- CASA advocates are encouraged to contact their Advocate Supervisor at any time with any questions or concerns.

**Time Commitment:**

- Advocates are required to make a 12-month minimum commitment to the program.
- Advocates are expected to attend all court hearings on their cases (approximately 2 to 3 per year), mediation sessions, and Family Team Decision Meetings.
- Advocates are expected to be available for case assignment and to accept cases immediately upon completion of pre-service training, unless other arrangements have been made.
- CASA advocates, on average, spend 10 hours a month on each case.



**Necessary Knowledge and Skills:**

- Ability to keep all child/youth and court information confidential.
- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing.
- Ability to respect and relate to people from various backgrounds.
- Ability to transport self.
- Ability to maintain objective.
- A basic understanding of child development and family relationships.
- Does not require specific educational training beyond a high school diploma or GED.
- Must be 21 years of age.
- Must undergo a mandatory background screening prior to acceptance.

**Benefits:** Although monetary rewards are not provided, there are many benefits to volunteering as a CASA. These include the opportunity to:

- Make a difference in the life and future of a child who has been a victim of abuse and/or neglect.
- Help a child/children find permanency in a safe, loving family.
- Assist judges in obtaining a clear picture of a child’s life and needs.
- Gain an understanding of the Juvenile Court legal proceedings, and social service agencies.
- Develop/utilize communication skills.
- Develop/utilize assertiveness.
- Utilize your past experience/skills.
- Form friendships with like-minded people in your community.
- Have access to training via local, state and national CASA.