



## PIEDMONT CASA VOLUNTEER **FACT SHEET**

### **What is CASA?**

Piedmont CASA Volunteers are men and women from our community who successfully complete a training course led by our professional staff. They are then inducted by a judge as **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs)** to represent the best interest of children who have been abused and neglected. CASA Volunteers advocate for these boys and girls in court, the child welfare system, and the community.

### **What is a CASA Volunteer's role?**

A Piedmont CASA Volunteer helps ensure that the unique social, mental, and physical needs of their child or youth are met. After conducting a thorough and independent investigation of the child's circumstances, the CASA Volunteer provides the judge with a carefully researched report, always striving for outcomes that are in the best interests of their children or youth. Last year, the court reports of Piedmont CASA Volunteers included 586 recommendations, 557 (95%) were accepted.

### **Can anyone volunteer to be a CASA?**

CASA Volunteers are ordinary citizens. No special or legal background is required. We strive for diversity so that our Volunteers reflect the diversity of our community and the children and families we serve. Volunteers are screened closely for objectivity, maturity, communication skills, competence, and commitment.

As a program, Piedmont CASA is unsurpassed in making use of our community's most valuable asset, its citizens, who as Volunteers donate their time and skill in service to abused and neglected children. As CASA Volunteers, men and women in our community get to see firsthand how our legal and child welfare systems work.

### **Is there a typical CASA Volunteer?**

CASA Volunteers come from all walks of life, with a variety of professional, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. There are more than 93,300 CASA Volunteers nationally. Many CASAs are professionals with full-time positions. At Piedmont CASA, approximately 100 Volunteers are active at any given time. Since 1995, we have trained nearly 800 CASA Volunteers.

### **What training does a CASA Volunteer receive?**

The 42-hour Piedmont CASA Training program is based on an enhanced version of the National CASA Volunteer Training Curriculum. Our Volunteer Training Team consists of four or five CASA Supervisors led by our Program Director, as well as guest speakers from around the community who are experts in their field. As part of their training, CASA Volunteers learn about the law governing child welfare, local practice, the dynamics of family violence, investigation, advocacy, trauma-informed care, resiliency, cultural competency, diversity, the five protective factors for strengthening families, and report writing.

Having successfully completed the training program and a thorough background screening, trainees are then inducted by the court as CASA Volunteers. At this point, they are assigned a case and, with the constant support and supervision of Piedmont CASA professional staff, can begin to advocate for their child or youth.



### **Who are the children assigned to CASA Volunteers?**

The hundreds of children we serve each year range in age from newborn to eighteen plus. They reside in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the counties of Albemarle, Greene and Louisa. More than 87% come from homes surviving at or below the Federal poverty line. These young victims are Caucasian, African-American, Multiracial, and Asian. Ten percent are Hispanic. They are almost evenly split between male and female. But they all have two things in common: their safety was so compromised that the courts had to intervene, and they are part of our community.

### **How does a CASA Volunteer investigate a case?**

To prepare a recommendation, the CASA Volunteer talks with the child, family members, social workers, school officials, health providers, and others who are knowledgeable about the child's history. A CASA meets with their child at least once a month and participates in family partnership and special education planning meetings, all aspects of Family Treatment Court cases, and other child-specific treatment team meetings. A CASA gathers information from physicians, therapists, lawyers, guidance counselors, social workers, teachers, caretakers, parents, and others. A CASA Volunteer also reviews records pertaining to the child -- school, medical and case reports, and other documents.

### **How does a CASA Volunteer relate to the children represented?**

Each child is unique and there is no one way to establish a relationship. The most important thing a CASA needs to do is offer their child trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings. Because they are not impeded by jurisdictional boundaries, a CASA Volunteer is able to stay with their child throughout the life of a case. This ensures that when service providers, placements, and schools change, our Volunteer is there to provide stability for the child.

### **How many cases does one CASA Volunteer carry?**

Piedmont CASA Volunteers work with one child or sibling group at a time. In the case of three or more siblings, two or more Volunteers are assigned to the children.

### **How much time does it require?**

Each case is different. Prior to the first court appearance, a CASA Volunteer usually spends about 20-40 hours doing research and conducting interviews. More complicated cases may take longer. Once initiated into the system, Volunteers work on average about 10-15 hours a month.

### **How long does a CASA Volunteer remain with the case?**

A CASA Volunteer continues until a case is permanently resolved. An average case is about 18 months. One of the primary benefits of the CASA program is that the CASA Volunteer is a consistent figure in the proceedings. Aside from providing continuity for the child, this enables the CASA to maintain and share pertinent case history with new social workers, caregivers, and service providers.

### **How does a CASA Volunteer differ from a social worker?**

The CASA Volunteer is an independent appointee of the court. For the social worker, one child is one of many in their caseload. For a Volunteer, that one child or sibling group is the CASA's caseload. Moreover, many team members involved with a child abuse and neglect case work with only one aspect



of the family situation. A CASA Volunteer compiles all of the information and presents it to the judge in a comprehensive report with fact-based recommendations as to the child's best interest – recommendations that are independent of state agency restrictions.

**How does the role of a CASA Volunteer differ from an attorney?**

The CASA Volunteer does not provide legal representation in the courtroom. That is the role of the attorney. However, the CASA worker does provide crucial background information that assists attorneys in presenting their cases. It is important to remember that CASA Volunteers do not represent a child's wishes in court. Rather they speak to the child's best interest.

**Do lawyers, judges and social workers support the CASA program?**

Yes. Juvenile and family court judges implement the CASA program in their courtrooms and appoint the Volunteers. CASA has been endorsed by the American Bar Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators.

**Do other agencies provide the same service?**

No. Piedmont CASA is the only organization providing this service, and we do not charge fees.

**To learn more about becoming a Piedmont CASA Volunteer, please contact:**

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