



PIEDMONT CASA ADVOCATE **FACT SHEET**

What is CASA?

Piedmont CASA Advocates 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. CASAs advocate for these boys and girls in court, the child welfare system, and the community.

What is a CASA Advocate's role?

A Piedmont CASA Advocate 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 Advocate provides the judge with a carefully researched report, always striving for outcomes that are in the best interests of their child or youth. To that end, CASAs submit hundreds of recommendations in their court reports. In a typical year, judges accept between 80% and 95% of those recommendations.

Can anyone volunteer to be a CASA?

CASA Advocates are ordinary citizens. No special or legal background is required. Advocates 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 Advocates, donate their time and skill in service to vulnerable children. In this life-changing work, the citizens of our community get to see firsthand how our legal and child welfare systems work.

Is there a typical CASA Advocate?

CASA Advocates come from all walks of life, with a variety of professional, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. There are more than 93,300 CASA Advocates nationally. Many CASAs are professionals with full-time positions. At Piedmont CASA, approximately 100 Advocates are active at any given time. Since 1995, we have trained more than 850 CASA Advocates.

What training does a CASA Advocate receive?

The 32-hour Piedmont CASA Training program is based on an enhanced version of the National CASA Advocate Training Curriculum. Our Advocate Training Team consists of four or five CASA Supervisors led by our Recruitment and Training Coordinator, as well as guest speakers from around the community who are experts in their field. As part of their training, CASA Advocates 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 Advocates. 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 Advocates?



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, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, and Madison. The vast majority come from homes surviving at or below the Federal poverty line. These young victims are Caucasian, African American, Multiracial, Asian, and Native American. Approximately 15% are Hispanic. 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 Advocate investigate a case?

To prepare a recommendation, the CASA Advocate 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 Advocate also reviews records pertaining to the child -- school, medical and case reports, and other documents.

How does a CASA Advocate 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 Advocate is able to stay with their child throughout the life of a case. This ensures that when service providers, placements, and schools change, our Advocate is there to provide stability for the child.

How many cases does one CASA Advocate carry?

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

How much time does it require?

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

How long does a CASA Advocate remain with the case?

A CASA Advocate 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 Advocate 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 Advocate differ from a social worker?

The CASA Advocate is an independent appointee of the court. For the social worker, each child is one of many in their caseload. For an Advocate, 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 Advocate compiles all 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 Advocate differ from an attorney?

The CASA Advocate 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 Advocates 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 Advocates. 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. The Commonwealth of Virginia declared CASAs essential workers.

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 Advocate,
please contact our Recruitment and Training Coordinator:**

Kari Joyner
kjoyner@pcasa.org
(434) 971-7515, ext. 119
pcasa.org

