

# Churchill County CASA



## **Policies And Procedures Manual For Court Appointed Special Advocates**

**2014**

## WELCOME

We at the Churchill County CASA office and 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court wish to welcome you to the program and give our thanks for volunteering as a CASA. There is no greater asset to our organization than you, no more important person to the children we serve than you.

### **Purpose of Policies and Procedures**

The purpose of these policies and procedures is to provide you with guidance and direction and to provide you with the information necessary to be in compliance with National CASA standards and the standards we have set for our program here in Churchill County. They do not constitute, either implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personnel agreement. Churchill County CASA (CCC) reserves the right to change any of these policies and procedures at any time and expects adherence to the changed policy. Areas specifically not addressed by these policies and procedures shall be determined by the Program Manager. You will be required to sign an acknowledgment indicating that you have read, understand, and will comply with all the policies and procedures. You will be notified of any changes made to this policy and procedure manual in writing.

Under particular circumstances, certain exceptions may be made to the policies and procedures of this program. Such exceptions will be made at the discretion of the District Court Judge, Program Director or Program Manager.

### **Exception to Policy**

If you request an exception to these policies it must be made in writing to the Program Manager. Approval must be obtained in advance of any action on your part as a CASA.

### **Our Mission**

Our mission is to advocate for the best interests of children involved in the court, primarily those who are victims of abuse and neglect; We train and support community volunteers who provide quality advocacy to help assure each child a safe, permanent, nurturing home.



### **Our Vision**

To change the world...Invest in the future... Bring the gift of hope...to all abused and neglected children, one child at a time.

### **Our Core Values**

We will conduct ourselves and our work with competency, professionalism, and persistence. We will provide independent, objective, factual information to the courts

through quality investigation and reporting. We will be an active participant on the child's case management team. We will continue to improve ourselves through education and experience in order to improve the lives of the children we serve.

## Code of Ethics

The following are the code of ethics established by the National CASA association. They are applicable to all CASA staff, CASAs and Friends of CASA (Friends of CASAs are volunteers who serve in a capacity other than a CASA).

### Obedience to the Law

Regardless of their personal feelings about the justice and appropriateness of particular laws, all staff, CASAs and Friends of CASA are to obey all laws in the performance of their work on behalf of Churchill County CASA (CCC).

All staff, CASAs and Friends of CASA will exercise the powers invested for the good of all members of the organization rather than for his or her personal benefit.

### Commitment to Diversity

The selection of staff members, CASAs and Friends of CASA, and the delivery of programs and services by CCC are to be carried out without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, economic status, gender, age, sex, sexual orientation or disability.

### Discrimination and Harassment

All CCC staff members, CASAs and Friends of CASA are to refrain from any sort of discrimination and harassment of any clients or co-workers based on race, religion, ethnicity, economic status, gender, age, sex, sexual orientation or disability.



### Communication of Information

Staff members, CASAs and Friends of CASA shall be open and honest in the communication of CCC information with their clients, the community, and the general public, except where confidentiality or the welfare of CCC may be jeopardized. This includes information contained in marketing, fund raising, and public relations material.

Staff members, CASAs and Friends of CASA are to be open and honest in their working relationships with each other.

No information about the agency or its programs relevant to the performance of an individual's responsibilities is to be withheld from that individual.

Specific efforts are to be undertaken to insure that staff members, CASAs and Friends of CASA are given complete and accurate information about CCC and the particular projects in which they are involved.

#### Responsibilities of and Toward Clients and the Public

The integrity, dignity, cultural background and autonomy of the organization's clients and public are to be respected fully at all times in the delivery of services and the presentation of programs. Services are to be delivered honestly, openly, and professionally and with compassion and respect for the clients served.

#### Confidentiality

Confidentiality in the relationship with all clients is to be respected and maintained unless breaking the confidence would avert harm to the clients, other individuals, the community, or the organization. An exception to this confidentiality policy is information learned which is required by law to be reported. If you have reason to believe that a child under the age of eighteen years is a victim of abuse or neglect you shall report the matter promptly to the Department of Child and Family Services at 775-423-8566. Any person who knowingly and willfully fails to promptly report any incident of suspected abuse will be terminated immediately.



#### Relationship with Other Agencies

CCC will strive at all times to be fair, open, and honest in its dealings with other agencies. This is especially true when working with the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS). It is the position of this organization that although we may have professional disagreements with DCFS and their workers; this will NOT result in an adversarial relationship. You are to respect the opinions of the DCFS worker, although you are not required to agree with them.

#### Training and Duties

You will be required to complete specific pre-service training, in compliance with the National CASA Curriculum, prior to beginning your direct service. Continuing education will be provided through monthly in-service events. You will be informed about additional opportunities to receive continued training through workshops, webinars and conferences.

#### Some Do's and Don'ts

##### Do:

1. REPORT suspected child abuse or neglect to 775-423-8566.
2. Contact the Program Manager immediately in an emergency or the next business day to inform her/him of the situation and what action you took.
3. DOCUMENT IMMEDIATELY everything that happened including date, time, place, persons involved, what your actions included, etc.

4. Call the Program Manager if you have any questions about your case.
5. Conduct quality interviews with all persons involved in the case.
6. Give the family and other involved persons a business card.
7. Visit the child at school (make every attempt NOT to pull out of class).
8. Attend status conferences and initial appearances, etc.
9. Attend and observe at family visitation (limit frequency, so as not to interfere with the family's time together).
10. Share information with DCFS caseworker and any attorneys including the Deputy District Attorney.
11. Attend family team meetings.
12. Have contact with the child(ren) assigned to your case at a minimum of once a month.
13. Return the case notebook when case is completed.
14. Call Project Manager if you are:
  - a) Going on vacation
  - b) Having surgery
  - c) Getting married or divorced
  - d) Lost your job or got a job
  - e) Having family problems
  - f) Involved in any situation that may affect your ability to do your job as a CASA.

**Do not:**

15. Make placement arrangements for a child. This is the role of the DCFS social worker.
16. Let the parents become dependent on you for service, because when you are no longer there, what have they learned to do for themselves?
17. Do anything you are truly uncomfortable about. Call the Program Manager to discuss it.
18. Give medicines, aspirins, vitamins, etc.
19. Authorize medical treatment for a child. Any hospital or doctor visits must be arranged so that the person with custody is present.
20. Give treats or feed the children (unless authorized by the Program Manager and social worker).
21. Give money or gifts to the child or child's family or caregiver.
22. Give legal advice or counseling.
23. Talk about your case in public with anyone - including attorneys, DCFS workers, etc. This breaks confidentiality.
24. Post any information on any social media.



**Length of Commitment**

Service as a CASA will begin with the your official swearing in, which usually takes place shortly after satisfactory completion of the pre-service (initial) training and upon completion of background/reference checks, and interview(s) with the Program Manager. You are asked to commit to the program for a minimum of one year although two years is

preferred. This time commitment is necessary because most cases last 12 to 18 months and as the CASA you are the ONE individual that the child learns to count on.

## Leave of Absence



You may request a leave of absence. It is requested that you provide information regarding the time period of the leave to the Program Manager as early as possible so that the appropriate exception forms may be completed and so that any active cases may be transitioned to another CASA if necessary. Depending on the length of the leave (i.e. a year), you may be asked to do some retraining upon your return to the program. Retraining from leaves of 12 months or so may include 12 hours in-service and/or repeat of core curriculum.

## Supervision vs. Coaching

Your role and responsibilities are clearly communicated through written policies, your job description and training. Those responsibilities will be reinforced through the “coaching” process. The Program Manager will “coach” you during the time you serve as a CASA. The term “coach” is used specifically as this organization is team based. You are not supervised in the sense that employees are in a traditional management structure. Supervision implies strict oversight, disciplinary actions and the ability to change the product produced. In our organization you are a valued volunteer who has specific professional skills and are trusted to complete the duties as you have sworn to do; that includes producing an independent recommendation to the Court.

The Program Manager will “coach” you in the specifics of your duties as it is his/her overall responsibility for ensuring that the CASA Program operates as the policies and procedures of the organization requires. To that end the Program Manager will provide guidance that may include assistance in editing court reports for grammar, content and format, and attending visits and/or case meetings. You are expected to review your case with the Program Manager through monthly phone calls, office visits or emails. The preferred method being office visits.

The most critical function of the Program Manager is to provide you with the necessary support for you to perform your duties. That includes offering advice, guidance and being a sounding board. Never hesitate to contact the Program Manager if you have questions or concerns.

## In-Service Attendance

You are required by National CASA standards to complete 12 hours of in-service training annually (after completion of your first year of service). In-service opportunities may include on-line training available through National CASA’s online curriculum or training provided by the Program Manager or other agencies deemed appropriate by the CASA program. You can also seek appropriate training opportunities on your own as long as you obtain prior approval by the Program Manager and are able to submit proof of training (such as a training certificate, letter, course grade etc.).

## Time and Travel Documentation

One of your responsibilities is to track certain information monthly, such as total hours spent and mileage on your case(s) each month, and to report this information to the Program Manager by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the following month. These figures are needed by the program for reporting purposes to National CASA and to reimburse you for mileage incurred in your duties.

The following guidelines include but are not limited to those activities which you should use when adding up case hours to submit each month:

- All child contacts whether by phone, email, or face-to-face. Face-to-face contact is required a minimum of one time a month unless an exception is specifically approved and documented with the Program Manager.
- All phone time. All calls whether answered or not should be counted.
- All time spent directly interviewing or talking with any persons related to the case. This includes all staffing and/or meetings you attend.
- Driving time. Begin clocking when you leave home or work to do any case-related activity. Continue counting your time until you return home or to work.
- Any time spent reading through documents or your case file.
- Time used for documenting contacts and events in your case log.
- Time used for staff consultation.
- Time used for the written preparation of all reports.
- All time involved in court: driving from home, waiting for your case to be heard, actual court time, visiting with clients, driving home or to job.
- All in-service or trainings attended.

All documented mileage will be reimbursed. Be sure and keep odometer reading from the beginning to end of the trip.

## Professional Conduct

At all times, you are expected to conduct yourself in a manner that upholds the credibility and positive reputation of CASA and the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court while in the courtroom and in the community. Communications by phone, fax or email should be of professional caliber whether addressed to staff, case contacts or other persons related to the CASA's duties. You are required to dress appropriately for court and for formal meetings where you are participating as a representative of the CASA program. Appropriate attire for men is dress slacks, dress shirt and a tie (a jacket would be appropriate but not required); for women appropriate attire is a dress, pant suit or dress slacks with a dress shirt. Casual attire is appropriate for meetings with children, foster parents, parents, the Program Manager and trainings.



You are issued an identification card after you are sworn in. This identification card is to be used and/or displayed only when performing CASA duties. Since the CASA office is

located in District Court, the presenting of the identification card is necessary to avoid being screened by the Deputy when Court is in session.

You are absolutely prohibited from being under the influence of, using, possessing selling, or otherwise being involved with illegal drugs or alcohol while engaging in your role as a CASA.



## Courtroom Etiquette

No food, drink, or chewing gum is allowed in the courtroom. All cell phones must be turned off or turned to vibrate. Speaking during hearings should be kept to a minimum and very quiet as it is hard to hear when a case is at the bench. If you need to have an extended conversation, please step outside the courtroom to do so. When at the bench, respect others who are speaking and do not interrupt (make notes - your turn will come). **NEVER INTERRUPT OR CORRECT THE JUDGE.** Address him as “your honor.” Address others formally by using their title, for example Mr. Smith, Ms. White or Dr. Jones.

## Program Evaluations

You may be asked to participate in an annual program evaluation. Participation is necessary to measure program outcomes and to facilitate change within the program if necessary.

## CASA Evaluations

Periodically, you may be asked to complete and submit self-performance evaluations. At case closure, the Program Manager will send a closed case evaluation form asking you for your perception of your role, effectiveness and/or impact on the case.

## Coaching

It is the policy of Churchill County CASA to coach rather than supervise the CASAs. If there is a situation where some form of misconduct occurred the Program Manager will meet with you to discuss the issue and hopefully together you can reach a positive conclusion that corrects the problem. If you and the Program Manager cannot reach a mutual decision or if the action was dangerous or highly inappropriate you may be asked leave the program.

## Dismissal from a Case

The Program Manager has the authority to dismiss a CASA from a case. Appropriate grounds for dismissal from a case include, but are not limited, to:

- The request of the CASA

- The request of the Judge
- Failure to make court appearances
- Failure to provide court reports
- Failure to turn in court reports in a timely manner
- Failure to act in a professional manner
- Failure to contact the child(ren) on a monthly basis without legitimate reason

## Dismissal from Program



The Program Manager also has the authority to dismiss a CASA from the program. Appropriate grounds for termination include, but are not limited, to:

- Violation of the Confidentiality Policy
- Failure to contact the child(ren) on a monthly basis without legitimate reason
- No contact with the Program Manager for 45 days, including no reports to the office, no response to emails, letters and/or failure to return phone calls to CASA staff.
- Displaying attitudes and actions of a discriminatory nature
- Inappropriate conduct toward a child, family, or others on a case
- Repeated failures to create reports to the Court and/or otherwise demonstrating an inability to effectively carry out assigned duties
- When the child's best interests are not being served
- Inadequate case activity on the part of the CASA
- Attempting to initiate *ex parte* communication with the Judge
- When the Judge requests termination
- When the CASA violates program policy, court rule or law
- The CASA takes action without program or court approval which endangers the child or is outside the roles or powers of the CASA program
- The CASA falsifies application or misrepresents facts during the screening process
- Failure to complete in-service training
- Allegations or child abuse/neglect or charges of a crime against a child or any gross neglect or misconduct
- References are not consistent with application or screening process
- Becoming inappropriately involved or over-involved with the child and family
- Violation of the program's nondiscrimination and/or sexual harassment policy
- Existence of a conflict of interest which cannot be resolved

## Resignation

You may, at any time, decide to sever your relationship with the CASA program. We understand that this program asks a lot of its CASAs and there may come a time where you can no longer serve; however we hope this never occurs. But if it does occur we ask that you provide advanced notice (at least two weeks) of such a decision to the Program Manager. It is expected that, insofar as possible, that you would continue to fulfill your responsibilities until another CASA can be assigned to the case. This is for the protection of

the children involved. Resignations should be made in writing so that the CASA office can notify all parties involved and assign another CASA if necessary. At the time of a resignation, it is your duty to physically return all files, notes, other case materials, and your identification card to the Program Manager within three days of your resignation date.

## **Exit Interviews**

CASAs that are leaving the program may be asked to complete an exit survey either by face-to-face interview or paper survey by mail. The survey will seek to ascertain why the CASA is leaving as well as provide the opportunity to evaluate the program.

## **Assignment: Right of Refusal**

You are matched to a particular case by the Program Manager. Case assignments will be made, whenever possible, with your preferences in mind. You are free to refuse an assignment for any reason. Prior to assigning the case, the Program Manager will make a copy of the court file for you to review; you and the Program Manager will discuss the case. If you do not believe the case is appropriate for you then you may refuse to accept and another CASA will be contacted.

## **Case Assignment Procedure**

The Program Manager will receive a request for appointment of a CASA by the Court. This normally occurs through the notification of a 72 hour hearing. The Program Manager will attend the 72 hour hearing and obtain as much information as possible to select a CASA that is best suited to the case. Once that decision is made, the Program Manager will contact that CASA about the case. If the CASA accepts that particular case, the case is assigned. The Program Manager will make copies of the court order and the file and will prepare a letter of introduction for the CASA to provide to any person requesting a copy during the investigation. If you are the CASA selected you and the Program Manager will meet to develop a plan for the investigation

Once assigned a case, you will conduct the investigation (visits, interviews, observations, conferences, records review, etc.). You will check back with the Program Manager periodically to review progress, work out problems, and further develop the case plan.

When it is time for a court hearing, you will review the information you have gathered and write a report. That report must be submitted to the Program Manager no less than ten working days prior to the court hearing. The Program Manager will review the report, make comments and suggestions and discuss the report with you. Once the report is finalized (no less than five judicial days prior to the court hearing), the Program Manager copies the report, files the original with the Court, and distributes it to all parties to the case. Extra copies will be made to hand out at court.



You will attend the court hearing and give your input when called upon. The Program Manager will also attend the court hearing and give support when needed. You will continue to monitor the case and work towards a successful completion until it is dismissed or until otherwise advised by the Judge. When the case is dismissed, your file and all other case materials, including notes, must be returned to the CASA office.

As a CASA you will not be assigned more than two (2) sibling/family groupings at a time. An exception may be granted at the discretion of the CASA program staff; however, the decision to permit a higher caseload shall be documented as to the justification for and reasonableness of the exception. Under the exception, a CASA will not be assigned to more than five (5) family/sibling groupings. The Case Assignment Exception form must be signed prior to appointing a new family/sibling group to a volunteer who is currently serving more than two (2) family/sibling groups.

### Case Selection Protocol

The types of cases determined by the Court to be appropriate for the appointment of CASA include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. **Abuse or neglect is substantiated.** It is clear abuse or neglect has occurred and services must be put into place before possible reunification.
2. **Permanent placement is at issue.** There is a clear indication that permanent placement of the child is or may become a significant issue and must be addressed as soon as possible.
3. **The child has special needs.** For example, the child is in residential treatment or a group home and return to the family or origin is unlikely.
4. **The child has been sexually molested.**
5. **Infants or toddlers who are medically neglected.**
6. **There is a need for educational advocacy.** These are children with no parent or guardian able or willing to monitor the child's educational needs.
7. **There are little or no resources for the child.** For example, parents not likely to reunify, or are absent, and no other permanent stable people are in the child's life.



### Time of CASA appointment:

The Court may refer a case to CASA at any time during dependency, and a qualified CASA shall be assigned to a case as early as possible after a court referral is made. All appointments and assignments are made by an order of the Court.

**The Program Manager shall consider the following criteria when assigning a case:**

- The complexity of the case;
- The geographic location of the child;
- The availability of alternative support persons in the child's life;
- The age and sex of the child;

- The cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious and other background characteristics of the child and family;
- The potential assistance a volunteer could provide;
- The availability of a particular volunteer to meet the specific needs of the child; and
- Such other factors deemed relevant to the assignment of the most effective CASA for the case.

### Notification of assignment

Notice to all parties regarding CASA assignment is the responsibility of the Program Manager. Notice shall be given to all persons who are entitled to receive notice of the hearings, and the caregiver of the child/ren.

### Commencement of case activities after appointment

As soon as feasible after appointment to a particular case, you will obtain access to appropriate case materials, including the court records, DCFS file and any other records necessary. You will meet with the DCFS worker prior to meeting the child or family members. You will receive immediate guidance from Program Manager in developing a plan of action for undertaking the duties and responsibilities of a CASA.

### CASA Credentials

After you are sworn in the Program Manager will issue you an identification card and business cards. The business cards will show the main CASA phone number. It is office policy to protect your privacy; it is strongly advised that you do not give out your cell phone or home phone numbers to anyone, nor should you give out your home address. The CASA office will take messages and relay any return contact information or messages.



We recommend that you get a second email address for your CASA work, through Google, Gmail, Yahoo or other appropriate email provider. Again, this protects you and your family's privacy and helps maintain confidentiality within your household when there are others using or having access to an existing email address. You are an officer of the Court when assigned to a case, so any emails you send within your role as a CASA should be professional and courteous. This includes your email signature. All emails must include the following confidentiality notice:

**CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE:** *The information contained in this email message and any attachment(s) is protected by state and federal laws governing disclosure of private information. It is intended solely for the use of the entity to whom this email is addressed. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that reading, copying or distribution of this transmission is STRICTLY PROHIBITED. The sender has not waived any applicable privilege by sending the accompanying transmission.*

***If you have received this transmission in error, please notify the sender by return email and delete the message and attachment(s) from your system.***

Also, the signature cannot contain any quotes or messages which indicate or promote any particular personal belief, value, religious or political views. While CCC recognizes you hold your own special beliefs, values and views, **PERCEPTIONS** by others that you may be using your CASA position to further your beliefs, or to otherwise convince others that their personal beliefs may be wrong creates a conflict of interest and/or adversely affects the effectiveness of your advocacy for the child/ren to whom you are assigned. This also includes personal standards of living, as there will be families who may not have the same standard of cleanliness that you may have. We need to remember that poverty is not abuse and a dirty (yet healthy) home is not abuse. Again, you are obviously entitled to your beliefs and values; we just ask that you allow others to have theirs as well (so long as they do not inflict harm on others).

### **Starting a New Case**

When you are assigned a new case, there are a number of steps that must be taken; the list below will help you remember.



- A. Review the court file. Make notations of questions about the information to ask the Program Manager and/or social worker.
- B. Call the DCFS case worker and make an appointment to visit with him/her.
- C. Meet with the DCFS case worker. Find out the current status of the case, location of the child/ren, addresses and phone numbers of all pertinent parties, and any questions about information that was not clear in the court file. Also look through the DCFS file as it often has helpful information that is not in the court file. Make copies of anything of interest.
- D. Compile a list of persons who should be interviewed - based on the court file and the interview with DCFS.
- E. Make an appointment to visit with the child/ren. Meet both the caretaker and the child/ren at this first meeting.
- F. Make an appointment to visit the parent(s).
- G. Make an appointment to visit with others who are appropriate: family members, attorneys, teachers, counselors, doctors, etc. Some of these professionals are very busy and a phone conversation can be utilized instead of making a face-to-face contact. The Program Manager can fax or email the court appointment from the CASA office to the necessary party if requested.
- H. The Program Manager is always available to attend the first home visit to provide support.
- I. On visits to the child/ren's school(s), proper CASA credentials must be presented to appropriate school personnel; however, do not display your CASA identification card or pins while in the school; you want to protect the privacy and best interest of the child while on school grounds.

## Case Conflict of Interest

You cannot be related to or acquainted with any party involved in your case, or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest (i.e. employed at the same business as the parent, employed at an agency where the child or parent is currently receiving confidential services).

## Record Keeping



Once assigned to a case, you shall maintain a case file at your home which is to include the original documentation of your appointment to the case; all notes and copies of documents relating to the case including court documents, assessments, medical records, etc.; all notes relating to phone calls and other interviews; and copies of all correspondence you have received or sent in regard to the case. You assume responsibility to maintain confidentiality of all records in your possession, whether written or computerized. Mark notes and/or records pertaining to your CASA case “Confidential.” Keep these records in a drawer or in a private place at home where family members will not have access to them. At the conclusion of your involvement with the case, your entire file, including notes, must be turned over to the Program Manager in a timely manner.

In addition to the record maintained by you, the Program Manager will maintain an office file on the case.

## Visits with the Child/ren

Upon becoming a CASA you made a commitment to visit each child on your case face-to-face a minimum of one time per month. These are National CASA standards, feel free to do more. If you cannot see a child at least one time every 30 days, you must notify the Program Manager so the appropriate exception form can be placed in the file. Granting of exceptions to face-to-face contact requirements are at the discretion of the Program Manager and must be documented in the office case file and in your file.

You should avoid being placed in a position where someone could make an allegation against you that you have abused a child. It is best practice to avoid meeting the child alone in a room with a closed door. If you need to speak to the child privately taking the child to the front yard where you can be seen but not heard is a better option.

## Safety

Your safety is of primary importance to the CASA program. You should never feel obligated to put yourself in personal jeopardy in the performance of your role as a CASA. If

you are uneasy about entering a neighborhood, building, or meeting with a particular party, let the Program Manager know and then arrange the meeting in a more comfortable location or arrange for the Program Manager to accompany you. If you feel harassed or threatened by a party to your case, this must be reported immediately to the Program Manager who will work with the you to take appropriate action which might include, but not be limited to, arranging for an escort whenever you might have contact with the individual; reporting the matter to the Judge, DCFS, the child's attorney and/or the Deputy District Attorney; and/or filing a police report.

### **Safety Procedures for Home Visits**

CASA program safety procedures for home visits have been set up in order to give you guidelines on avoiding possible harmful situations. Fieldwork is difficult and at times may be dangerous. Therefore:

1. All initial visits may be made in pairs, and are to be announced and planned. Appropriate personnel, such as the Program Manager, or another CASA may accompany you.
2. Safety factors to be considered in preparation for any home visit include: the intended purpose of the visit; the family's history of harmful behavior; domestic violence; substance abuse; the current psychiatric functioning and recent behaviors of all household members; the likely presence of others who may pose an additional threat; the surrounding environment; the family's past and present response to other services providers entering the home.
3. Dress in a fashion that is office casual and not conspicuous.
4. Jewelry and valuables: Do not make visits with expensive jewelry. Do not travel with large sums of money.
5. If you have a cell phone, take it with you and have it turned on.
6. Let the Program Manager know when you plan a home visit, and when you are expected to return.
7. Always ensure another person knows the vicinity and address of your proposed visit and anticipated time of return.
8. Upon approaching a building, if you do not feel totally comfortable about entering because of suspicious people in the area, dark conditions, etc., do not enter. Arrangements for another visit may be made at another time. A home visit that may pose a security risk should be terminated in a non-confrontational manner immediately.
9. Visits with children should take place in a public place or with other adults in the near vicinity to avoid claims of misconduct.



### **Safety for Phone Usage**

- Be aware that phone calls from your home or cell phone can leave a foot print or trace. Remember to use \*67 for your cell phone or home phone.

- Always use the CASA office phone number, fax and mailing address as your contact information.

***Please bring any safety concerns to the attention of the Program Manager immediately.***

## **Reporting of Abuse/Neglect**

You are a mandated reporter for child abuse and neglect. You must report all suspected incidents of abuse or neglect to the Division of Child and Family Services at (775)423-8566. Please inform the Program Manager that you have made the report.

## **CASA/Client Relationship**

You are not to provide direct service delivery to any party involved in your cases because that could lead to a conflict of interest or liability issues or cause a child or family to become dependent on the CASA program for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations. Your role as a CASA is outlined in the job description and does not extend beyond the duties listed therein. Good judgment and common sense should dictate the relationships with the parties involved in a case. CCC effectiveness and standing in Court depend on you maintaining a professional relationship with the children and families in your cases. It is critical that all staff, CASAs and other volunteers maintain professional boundaries with CASA children and families.

Examples of inappropriate CASA practices are:

- Taking a child to your home;
- Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling to anyone involved in the case;
- Making placement arrangements for the child;
- Giving money or expensive gifts to the child or family;
- Accepting or extending invitations to attend personal social engagements unless approved by Program Manager;
- Translating for any party while in court; and/or
- Engaging in activities which jeopardize the health and/or safety of the children.

*There may be situations when one of the children on your case needs clothing, shoes, school supplies, medical care etc. When those situations occur bring that to the attention of the DCFS case worker and the Program Manager to resolve.*

## **Observation of Parent-Child or Sibling Visits**



With appropriate notification, you should observe visits between the child and his/her family and/or siblings. The purpose of attending such visits is to observe the family interactions, not to interfere or intervene unless necessary to protect the safety and well-being of the child/ren. You should respect these visits as limited, valuable time that the family has to spend together. Supervision of visits is the responsibility of DCFS who may delegate this

responsibility to other parties, but NOT to you. It is a direct violation of CASA rules to supervise these visits.

## Court Reports

Your primary responsibility will be to compile a typed report on your case prior to each appearance in court. You will receive training from the Program Manager on how to write and process these reports as part of the pre-service training. **You must discuss all recommendations concerning the case with the Program Manager prior to submitting them to the court.** The report must be received by the Program Manager **ten days working days** prior to the court appearance in order to give the Program Manager enough time to



thoroughly review the report and then submit the report to the Court no less than 5 judicial days before. The Program Manager will review the report and offer input to you regarding any alterations to the report in the form of formatting, grammar or content. It is important to note that although the Program Manager can make suggestions or

comments regarding your report, he/she does not alter the content of the report or recommendation without your knowledge **and** agreement. Once the report is finalized, the Program Manager copies the report, files the original with the Court, and distributes it to all parties to the case. Extra copies will be made to give out with the Court, and distributes it to all parties to the case. Extra copies will be made to give out in court. If the Program Manager does not receive the court report at least **five judicial days** prior to court, you will be asked to give an **oral** report during the court hearing and the written report will be filed **after** the court hearing to become a part of the record.

## Case Confidentiality

You are responsible for maintaining strict confidentiality of all information to which you are privy while serving as a CASA whether this information involves a party to the case, another CASA, or staff. You are not authorized to solicit other persons outside the CASA program to aid you with CASA case activities.

You become an officer of the Court upon assignment to a case. Any information pertaining to the individual families or children that you receive in the discharge of your duties is strictly confidential. It may not be discussed with anyone except the following:

- The 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court as part of the court proceedings;
- CCC staff and any possible Co-CASAs assigned to the case;
- The Deputy District Attorney assigned to the case;
- The child's attorney;
- The Department of Child and Family Services

- Other individuals assigned by the Court to conduct investigations, evaluations or provide recommendations to the Court for any child or family member who is a party to the case;
- Any parties to the case who are privileged to get the information.

In conducting interviews with parents, children, \*\*foster parents, teachers, and other professionals pertaining to the case, **you may collect information but are prohibited from giving out information that is not allowed to the person(s) being interviewed.** Prior to interviewing a parent, you should contact the parent’s attorney as a courtesy. There should always be a free exchange of information with the DCFS case worker, the child’s attorney, and the Program Manager. **\*\*EXCEPTION:** Information pertaining to the direct care and needs of the child within the foster home may be shared with the foster parents. This information may pertain to the safety of other children in the home.

You are not a “Privileged Information” professional. It is critical that you clarify your position with your CASA child, their family and/or foster parents at the onset of the case. Any information given to you is subject to being reported to the Court, DCFS and the Program Manager.

When discussing your case with others not involved with the case, do NOT reveal any identifying information such as names, ages, schools, and addresses. This is particularly true when discussing your case outside the confines of the CASA program, for example, at home or in presentations. We understand that your family wants to know what you are doing; you can provide limited and highly general information such as you are working with a case involving three children. Do not discuss any particulars that could identify the family or the children.

When asked to give a presentation, please consult with the Program Manager about what you are allowed to discuss. Never make any statements to the press regarding your CASA case or the CASA program.



Always keep in mind your obligations to maintain confidentiality. If you are ever in doubt as to what to tell someone, call the Program Manager to check it out before you release any information.

### **Subpoenas/Requests to Testify**

From time to time, you may be asked to or will be subpoenaed to testify in other litigation (i.e., criminal or custody/divorce actions) regarding the children to whom you have been assigned. Contact the Program Manager immediately upon receipt of the request or subpoena. The Program Manager will let you know if it is a breach of confidentiality and/or if the situation requires intervention on the part of the CASA program.

## Internal Safeguards of Confidential Information and Records

Within your home, all CASA materials concerning a case must be filed in a secure file that is not accessible to any unauthorized persons.

**Electronic file safety:** Increasingly, we will all be dependent on electronic means of communication. There are some basic “netiquette” rules to follow:

1. Emails intended for one individual should not be copied or forwarded to another without the original author’s permission.
2. Use the “blind copy” when using individual’s email addresses in a group messages so you are not inadvertently sharing someone’s personal email account without their permission.
3. Be aware that many email programs automatically copy previous emails on a reply, so you may be inadvertently sharing discussions or information that was intended to be private or that we simply do not have someone’s permission to forward.
4. Emails can serve the purpose of recording a conversation in a way that allows documenting information or retrieving this information at a later date. However, this also means these can develop a life of their own, showing up at an inopportune place or time.
5. Stop and think before hitting “reply all” to consider whether everyone on an email NEEDS or SHOULD have the information you are sending. It can save time and energy to “reply all” to include people in a discussion. Conversely, it can unnecessarily clog people’s email boxes or share information you did not intend to share with someone.
6. Check the intended recipient to make sure you are communicating with the right entity.
7. Acknowledge receipt of emails as quickly as possible. Sometimes emails do vanish, and this helps you know that the intended recipient has received the information.
8. Spam filters will sometimes automatically send emails to your “spam” or “Junk” folder if the sender’s email is not recognized. Periodically check your spam folder to make sure you are not missing critical emails. The sender sometimes, but not always, will receive a message that the email has not gone through. This will sometimes happen if your spam filter recognized a subject line it deems inappropriate.
9. Be mindful of sending or opening attachments from unrecognized sources as they may contain viruses or objectionable material.

The tone of emails can miscommunicate your intent. We tend to be more conversational in email, but humor or a casual comment may be misconstrued. While email can be a positive tool for communication you should be very mindful and careful of your audience. Always remember to be courteous and respectful despite the circumstances. If you are upset, try typing a draft and come back to it later to change any of your wording; remember emails cannot be retracted.

## Emergency Case Situations

If anyone contacts you related to your CASA case for emergency reasons, there is very little you can do. Emergency situations may include, but are not limited to:

- Medical emergencies



- Child abuse or neglect
- Threat of bodily harm
- Family disturbance or fight
- Runaway child (or threatening)

If you believe the child is in imminent danger, immediately call the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction. **If you are on the premises, leave - alone.** For other situations not of imminent danger to the child, call DCFS:



- Normal Duty Hours (775) 423-8566
- After hours, call the Sheriff's Office and ask to have the on-call worker call you (775) 423-3116

You are required by law to report any suspected child abuse and neglect or information pertaining to a crime. If in doubt, call the Program Manager.

#### **NEVER:**

- Transport a child in a medical emergency.
- Attempt to intervene in any physical violent situation.
- Take the child off the premises.
- Take the child home or shelter the child in your home.
- Allow yourself to be put in the position of being the only adult aware of the child's whereabouts in a runaway situation. Contact the parent, police, social worker, or Program Manager immediately.
- Reveal the whereabouts of a child who is in police protective custody.

#### **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

- Advise the family and/or child of whom to call.
- Contact the necessary authorities yourself; especially if you doubt that the family and/or child will place the call.
- Contact Program Manager immediately in an emergency or the next business day to inform them of the situation and the action you took.
- Accompany the child along with the police or proper authorities.

**Document immediately** everything that happened including date, time, place, persons involved, what your actions were, etc.

#### **Transportation**

You are not allowed to transport the child/ren on your case according to the program's Transportation Policy. Exception to this policy may be requested through the Program Manager who will present the request to the District Court Judge. If granted you must sign the Statement of Acknowledgment of Risk and Liability of Transporting Children and Safe Driving Record Program form. If granted the approval will be either case or child specific.

If authorization is given to transport children on your case you must:

- Must report all accidents immediately, as required by law and agency rules; and
- Must report all arrests and traffic convictions to the Program Manager
- Must use required child safety restraints.
- Must obtain permission of the child's legal guardian or custodial agency,

## Driving Tips

The following are minimum safe driving rules for you to obey in addition to all state and local traffic laws and regulations.

- ✓ Do not take chances. To arrive safely is more important than to arrive on time.
- ✓ Drivers should be mentally and physically rested and alert prior to each trip.
- ✓ Do not drive while distracted. Pull off the highway where it is safe and legal to do so, in order to use cell phones, manage passenger behaviors, etc.
- ✓ Do not eat or drink while driving.
- ✓ Ensure that all doors and hatches are secure.
- ✓ Driver and passengers must wear seatbelts at all times. Children being transported must be secured in the appropriate type of car seat.

## In-Service Attendance

You are required by National CASA standards to complete 12 hours of in-service training annually (after completion of your first year of service). In-service opportunities may include on-line training available through National CASA's online curriculum with prior approval of the Program Manager or training sessions may be provided by the program Manager or other agencies deemed appropriate by the CASA program. Training credit will be given following submittal of any requested/required homework/certificate to the Program Manager supporting completion of the approved course.



# COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

## JOB DESCRIPTION

### Qualifications:

- A. Is at least 21 years of age.
- B. Has never been arrested for, found guilty of, nor pleaded guilty, nor nolo contendere to, nor has charges pending for any criminal offense involving abuse or neglect, or abandonment of a minor child, or for related acts that would pose risks to children or been required to register as a sexual offender.
- C. Submits a written application with at least three (3) references.
- D. Submits to a personal interview.
- E. Passes the background check including reference checks, social security verification and criminal record, sex offender registry and Child Abuse and Neglect Registry.
- F. Participation in pre-service interview.
- G. Successful completion of CASA pre-service training.

### Duties and Responsibilities:

- A. Primary goal is to identify and advocate for the best interests of the child.
- B. Conduct independent investigation of case
  - 1) Read and review all relevant records
    - a) Court's legal file
    - b) Division of Child and Family Services case file
  - 2) Interview all principals in case
    - a) Biological parents
    - b) Child(ren)
    - c) Foster parents or residential facility personnel
    - d) Extended family members, where appropriate
    - e) Others having pertinent information (teachers, physicians, etc.)
  - 3) Maintain all case information in strict confidence
    - a) Give case-related information to parties only
    - b) Ensure security of confidential material in case notebook
- C. Monitor and facilitate progress of case through system
  - 1) Ensure timely development of Case Plan
    - a) Verify that Case Plan is written and filed within guidelines of Court Policy
    - b) Report delays or problems to appropriate party
  - 2) Follow parents' progress in following Case Plan
    - a) Maintain independent personal contact with parent
    - b) Consult with service providers (therapists, etc.)
  - 3) Follow Division of Child and Family Services to achieve permanence
    - a) Maintain contact with DCFS caseworker
    - b) Attend Family Team meetings
    - c) Monitor implementation of Family Team meeting recommendations
    - d) Report deficiencies to Program Manager

- 4) Ensure child is adequately cared for and special needs are addressed
    - a) Maintain contact with child and foster parents or residential facility personnel
    - b) Consult with service providers
    - c) Report deficiencies to appropriate party
  - 5) Consult with child's attorney regarding case
    - a) Keep attorney apprised of current case developments
    - b) Clarify any legal questions regarding case
  - 6) Consult with other appropriate persons; act as facilitator among parties
    - a) Make recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child, and when appropriate, the child's family.
- D. Ensure all relevant information is available to the Court
- 1) Prepare CASA report to the Court
    - a) Review DCFS and Court files
    - b) Make recommendations regarding case
    - c) Turn in court report to the CASA office by assigned date
    - d) Update Program Manager on case status
  - 2) Ensure CASA presence at Court
    - a) Attend all court hearings
    - b) Maintain accurate, up-to-date case file
- E. Keep Program Manager informed of case activity and progress
- 1) Maintain regular monthly contact with Program Manager
    - a) Discuss case advocacy issues and concerns
    - b) Develop appropriate case strategies
    - c) Keep Program Manager informed of illnesses or vacations which would temporarily prevent CASA activity
  - 2) Keep all case records accurate and up to date
    - a) Record all contact and activities immediately on case log sheets in case file
    - b) **Turn in Monthly Activity Sheet** by due date
    - c) Review case documentation with Program Manager
- F. Pursue professional development in the areas of child welfare, family issues and related topics to include 12 hours of In-Service Training per year.
- G. **Return file and all papers, notes, etc. pertaining to the case to the CASA when the case is dismissed or the CASA resigns. Sign a confidentiality case release form.**

## Acknowledgement and Understanding

I \_\_\_\_\_ acknowledged that I have read and understand the contents of this Policy Manual.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

I \_\_\_\_\_ acknowledged that I understand the job description provided in the policy and procedures manual.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

*Please return this page to the CASA office.*