



A Powerful Voice In A Child's Life

CASA for Kids, Inc.

Volunteer Handbook

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GENERAL PROGRAM POLICIES

1.1 Scope of Policies

CASA for Kids, Inc. considers its greatest asset to be its group of trained community volunteers who together are reaching out to help abused and neglected children involved in the Washington County juvenile court system. Within our organization, volunteers dedicate their time and efforts to serve court ordered children as advocates (CASA's). These policies are designed to provide guidelines for the CASA volunteer.

1.2 Purpose of Policies

The purpose of these policies is to provide overall guidance and direction to volunteers serving as CASA's for Washington County. These policies do not constitute, either implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personnel agreement. CASA for Kids, Inc. reserves the right to change any of these policies at any time and to expect adherence to the changed policy. Volunteers will be required to sign an agreement indicating that they have read, understood and will comply with all volunteer policies.

1.3 Exception to Policy

On occasion, certain exceptions may be made to any of the above policies at the discretion of the Executive Director, Program Director or the Board of Directors of CASA for Kids, Inc.

1.4 Approval of Policies

Approval of the volunteer policies shall be the responsibility of the Board of Directors. Amendments to these policies are subject to ratification by the Board of Directors, which has the final responsibility for such amendments, and reserves the right to amend these policies in any way and at any time.

1.5 Service at the Discretion of the Agency

CASA for Kids, Inc. accepts the service of all volunteers with the understanding that such service is at the sole discretion of the program. Volunteers agree that the agency may at any time, for whatever reason, decide to terminate the volunteer's relationship with the program.

1.6 Speaking on behalf of CASA for Kids, Inc.

Volunteers are encouraged to speak about the program in general throughout the community. However, the Executive Director or Program Director should be informed of any scheduled speaking engagements volunteers may wish to arrange on behalf of CASA for Kids, Inc. so that staff can assist with written materials or accompany the volunteer to help with the presentation. **VOLUNTEERS ARE PROHIBITED FROM**

SPEAKING WITH THE MEDIA ON BEHALF OF CASA FOR KIDS, INC.

The Board of Directors has a coordinated plan for fundraising for the organization. Any ideas that volunteers may have to assist with fundraising are welcomed and appreciated. Volunteers should not initiate fundraising activities on their own on behalf of CASA for Kids, Inc. This avoids duplication of effort and the possibility of more than one CASA for Kids, Inc. representative approaching the same person or entity for support and/or funding.

1.7 Sexual Harassment and Discrimination

CASA for Kids, Inc. will seek to maintain an environment within the program, which is free from intimidation, discrimination, coercion or harassment, including sexual harassment.

Discrimination against a volunteer or client on the basis of age, handicap, race, national origin, marital status or sexual preference will not be tolerated.

In the event of a question, complaint or allegation regarding harassment or discrimination of any kind, the volunteer should speak directly with the Program Director. The matter will be investigated in a discreet and confidential manner and, after consideration of the facts, appropriate action will be taken in the best interests of both the volunteer and the program.

1.8 Alcohol/Drugs

Volunteers serving as advocates for CASA for Kids, Inc. are prohibited from being under the influence of, using, possessing, selling or otherwise being involved with alcohol, illegal drugs, or illegal use of drugs while engaging in their role as a volunteer for CASA for Kids, Inc.

1.9 AIDS - Communicable Diseases

CASA for Kids, Inc. will not tolerate discrimination against a volunteer who has become afflicted with HIV/AIDS or any other contagious medical condition. All staff and volunteers will respect the individual's right to privacy and maintain confidentiality regarding medical information and health status of all persons connected with CASA for Kids, Inc., **including clients**. The office will maintain current information on resources for counseling/support.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

2.1 Recruitment

Volunteers shall be recruited by CASA for Kids, Inc. on a proactive basis, with the intent of broadening and expanding the volunteer involvement of the community at large. Volunteers shall be recruited and accepted into the program without regard to gender, disabilities, age (over 21), race or other condition. The primary qualification for volunteer recruitment shall be suitability to perform the duties of the volunteer position.

Exceptions:

1) CASA for Kids, Inc. will not accept in to the program any individuals who have been convicted of any criminal act, or who have been adjudicated in juvenile court to have abused or neglected a child. This is inclusive of, but not limited to, any sexual offense, abuse, neglect or related acts that would pose risks to children or the program's credibility.

2) Individuals and/or their families involved in a pending Children and Youth Services case will not be considered for the program until their case is resolved.

2.2 Application

Individuals may apply to serve as volunteer advocates for the CASA for Kids, Inc. program by submitting a written application provided by the program. Included will be a release of information form and three (3) letters of reference. CASA for Kids, Inc. staff will individually screen applicants, and selected candidates will be invited to schedule an interview.

2.3 Interview

Candidates for a training class shall be interviewed in person by CASA for Kids, Inc. staff. The interview will seek to determine the volunteers' suitability for and interest in the volunteer position. The interview should determine the qualifications of the volunteer, his/her commitment to fulfill the requirements of the position, and should answer any questions that the volunteer may have about volunteering for CASA for Kids, Inc.

2.4 Background Check

All applicants for the volunteer position will provide Act 33 and Act 34 clearances.

2.5 Job Description

Every volunteer will be provided with a copy of the CASA for Kids, Inc. Volunteer Job Description and is encouraged to offer suggestions for changes in the position or its description.

2.6 Pre-Service Training

Volunteers are required to successfully complete thirty (30) hours minimum training for new volunteers. Each volunteer will be provided with a comprehensive training manual. Training will be provided by the Program Director and a variety of instructors and will include information on:

- a) Roles and responsibilities of a CASA for Kids, Inc. volunteer
- b) Confidentiality and data collection practices
- c) Cultural awareness
- d) Child abuse and neglect

- e) Child development
- f) Permanency planning
- g) Communication and information gathering (report writing and interviewing techniques)
- h) Juvenile court processes and protocols
- i) Child advocacy

In addition, each prospective volunteer will be required to observe the Washington County Juvenile Court in session. Observation must be two (2) hours before the Judge and two (2) hours before the Master. Acceptance into training does not guarantee acceptance into the program. If any individual does not complete the required training to become a CASA for Kids, Inc. volunteer, it is their responsibility to return the training manual to the Program Director.

2.7 Acceptance into the Program

The Program Director will determine acceptance of a volunteer into the CASA for Kids, Inc. program. Service as a volunteer child advocate with CASA for Kids, Inc. shall begin with the official swearing-in of the volunteer, which usually takes place shortly after satisfactory completion of the initial training and upon completion of background reference checks.

2.8 Length of Commitment

Volunteers serving as an advocate for children referred by the juvenile court are asked to commit to the program for a minimum of two (2) years. Ideally the volunteer would stay with their case until it comes to a satisfactory permanent placement.

2.9 Leave of Absence

Volunteers may request a leave of absence from their role as a CASA for Kids, Inc. volunteer. It is requested that the volunteer provide information regarding the time period of this leave to the Program Director as early as possible so that any active case may be transitioned to another volunteer.

VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION

3.1 Supervision

CASA for Kids, Inc. volunteers must maintain regular contact with program staff in order to review the progress of the case. The staff will be easily accessible and will provide guidance to the volunteer when he/she is assigned to a case.

3.2 In-Service Attendance

Volunteers serving as advocates are required to attend a minimum of twelve (12) hours of education in-service programs annually. These sessions may be provided by the

CASA for Kids, Inc. Program Director and/or other agencies approved in advance by the CASA for Kids, Inc. Program Director.

3.3 Volunteer Statistics

One of the many important responsibilities of the volunteer will be to track certain statistics on a monthly basis, such as volunteer hours spent on their case, and report this information back to the Program Director. These statistics are needed by the program for grant requests. CASA for Kids, Inc. relies heavily on grants to supply funds for the operation of the program and without this information the grants would not be available. The Program Director and/or Case Manager will explain to the volunteer the types of information to be tracked and how to record it.

3.4 Professional Conduct

At all times, CASA for Kids, Inc. volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that upholds the credibility and positive reputation of the program in the courtroom as well as in the community. Volunteers should dress appropriately for court and for other meetings wherein the volunteer is representing CASA for Kids, Inc.

3.5 Evaluations

CASA for Kids, Inc. volunteers will be required to participate in an annual performance evaluation with the Program Director or Case Manager. The evaluation is designed to be a positive tool for volunteer and program growth and success. CASA for Kids, Inc. will seek to maintain an open atmosphere where volunteers will feel free to express their opinions of any aspect of the program.

3.6 Complaints and Grievances

Every effort should be made to solve problems and issues cooperatively and informally before presenting them as a formal grievance. Should informal efforts fail, the following policy is set forth in order to provide an outlet for complaints and a systematic way to resolve the matter. All complaints will receive thoughtful consideration and will be discussed with the individual who raises them. Complaints and grievances may arise from external or internal (within the program) sources.

External: Because CASA for Kids, Inc. is involved in work that involves the future lives of children and families it is emotionally charged work that evokes a wide range of feelings. It is therefore expected that there will be concern from many of the parties involved, especially when the volunteer does not make recommendations that are in agreement with another's point of view. Should a complaint arise from someone outside the CASA for Kids, Inc. program, the volunteer should inform the Program Director of the details of the complaint. It will be the responsibility of the Program Director to request a written statement from the individual initiating the complaint. The written statement will be kept on record in the program office. In addition, the Program Director,

with the advice of the Executive Director and/or Board of Directors, will determine what action, if any, should be taken.

Internal: When a volunteer wishes to make a statement of dissatisfaction with a policy, practice, condition or supervisor's decision, he/she should first discuss the matter with the Program Director or Case Manager. If the problem is not resolved to the satisfaction of the volunteer, he/she should forward a written statement of the grievance to the Executive Director. If the problem is not resolved to the satisfaction of the volunteer, he/she should forward a written statement of the grievance to the Board of Directors. The Board's decision will be final. The volunteer will be entitled to receive a written response to the formal grievance from the Board of Director's outlining the position taken on the issue.

3.7 Progressive Discipline

It is the policy of the CASA for Kids, Inc. program to apply the practice of progressive discipline when necessary to correct volunteer misconduct or improve performance. Depending on the circumstances, misconduct will result in disciplinary action, which may include a verbal warning, written warning or dismissal. Verbal and written warnings shall be administered by the Program Director. Sometimes, a volunteer's actions are so dangerous or otherwise inappropriate that termination takes place immediately.

3.8 Dismissal of a Volunteer

Dismissal of a volunteer will normally follow the program's progressive discipline process that is based on performance reviews and include a sequence of verbal and written warnings. Dismissal of a volunteer is the responsibility of the Program Director, on the recommendation of the Executive Director. Immediate dismissal will take place only in the most serious of circumstances. Grounds for dismissal/termination may be, but are not limited to:

- Taking action without program or court approval, which endangers the child or is outside the role or powers of the program.
- Violating a program policy, court ruling or law.
- Demonstrating the inability to effectively and objectively carry out the duties of a CASA volunteer.
- Gross misconduct or insubordination.
- Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while performing volunteer duties.
- Lying or falsifying records.
- Initiating ex-parte communication with the Court.
- The existence of child abuse/neglect allegations.
- The existence of a non-resolvable conflict of interest.

3.9 Resignation

Volunteers may at any time, for whatever reason, decide to resign from their volunteer services with the CASA for Kids, Inc. program. It is requested that volunteers who intend to resign provide as much notice as possible of their departure and the reason for their decision.

3.10 Exit Interviews

An exit interview, whenever possible, will be conducted with a volunteer who is leaving the program. The volunteer will be asked to complete an exit interview giving their comments on the program. The interview will seek to ascertain why the volunteer is leaving and the possibility of involving the volunteer in some other capacity with CASA for Kids, Inc., as well as provide the opportunity for updating active case details and the return of all program materials.

3.11 Volunteer Records

Individual information and volunteer records are confidential. Any volunteer wishing to view his/her own personal information kept of file with the program may do so by making a formal request to the Program Director. Every effort will be made to provide timely access to these records during the normal business hours of the program. Any volunteer's request for making any additions, deductions, and/or corrections to these records should be made in writing to the Program Director who will review the request and then make a recommendation to the Executive Director on said request.

CASE RELATED POLICIES

4.1 Assignment - Right of Refusal

The Program Director and Case Manager matches volunteers to a particular court-referred case. Volunteers are free to refuse an assignment for any reason. If the volunteer does accept the case, the Program Director and/or Case Manager will meet with him/her to review the case information and, at that time, will provide the volunteer with the documentation necessary for the assignment. Volunteers must follow the directions of the Program Director regarding removal from case assignment or any limitations on contact with clients or former clients.

4.2 Cases out of Washington County

Should the case be transferred out of Washington County, the volunteer will relinquish the case, but may stay involved for a short period of time in order to facilitate the transfer of information to the new county of jurisdiction. Court jurisdiction will determine whether a volunteer will have the authority to continue the assignment.

4.3 Conflict of Interest

Volunteers should not be related to or acquainted with any party involved in their assigned case or be employed in any position with any agency that might result in a conflict of interest in their assignment.

4.4 Record Keeping

Once assigned to a case, a volunteer shall maintain a case file which is to include the original documentation of their appointment to the case, all note 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 they have received or sent in regard to the case. In addition, the Program Director and/or Case Manager will maintain an office file of the case. At the conclusion of the volunteer's involvement in the case, the entire file shall be turned over to the Program Director or Case Manager.

4.5 Reimbursement of Expenses

Volunteers are not eligible for reimbursement of expenses related to the course of their casework. Expenses that a volunteer incurs in his/her role as a child advocate should be reported as a tax-deductible in-kind donation.

4.6 Visits with the Child

Volunteers should visit face-to-face with the child/ren on their case at least monthly. Volunteers should avoid being in a position where someone could make a claim against the volunteer of abuse to the child by meeting in a public place or with other adults present.

4.7 Reporting of Abuse/Neglect

Volunteers are mandated reporters and shall report all suspected incidents of child abuse and/or neglect to the Program Director or Case Manager. Staff will advise the volunteer as to whether or not to phone the Childline (800-932-0313) with details of the problem. If the volunteer feels that the situation is an emergency, he/she should first call 911, and then notify the Program Director or Case Manager.

4.8 Volunteer/Client Relationships

Volunteers are **not** to provide direct services to any party involved in their case that could:

- a) lead to a conflict of interest or liability issue
- b) cause a child and/or family to become dependent on the volunteer for services that could and should be provided by other agencies or organizations.

The role of the volunteer is outlined in the Volunteer 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. Examples of **inappropriate volunteer practices are:**

- 1) Taking a child to the volunteer's home.
- 2) Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling to anyone involved in the case.
- 3) Making placement arrangements for the child.
- 4) Giving money or expensive gifts to the child or the family.
- 5) Engaging in activities which could jeopardize the safety of the child.
- 6) Engaging in ex-parte communication with the Court.

4.9 Transportation of Parties

A volunteer **may not** transport an assigned child, parent or any other party.

4.10 Observing Parent/Child/Sibling Visits

Volunteers are not to supervise any court-ordered visits. Supervision of visits is the responsibility of Children and Youth Services (CYS), who may delegate this responsibility to someone other than a CASA volunteer. Volunteers may "observe" visits between the child and the parents and/or siblings. The purpose of attending such visits would be to observe the family interactions. Volunteers should respect these visits as limited, valuable time that the family has to interact.

4.11 Volunteer Safety

No volunteer should feel obligated to put himself/herself in personal jeopardy as they perform their role as a CASA volunteer. If the volunteer is uneasy about entering a neighborhood, building or meeting with a particular party, the volunteer should arrange the meeting in a more comfortable location or arrange for another volunteer or staff person to accompany them.

4.12 Court Reports

A primary responsibility of the CASA volunteer will be to compile a written report on his/her case prior to each appearance in Court. The volunteer will receive extensive training from the program on how to write and process these reports. This report should be received by the Program Director or Case Manager one (1) week prior to the scheduled court appearance. The Program Director or Case Manager will then review the report, possibly offering suggestions to the volunteer regarding any needed alterations to the report and will give a final approval of the report before it can be submitted to any party to the case. If the program staff disagrees with any volunteer's recommendation, an additional report can be submitted to the Court under the Program Director's signature.

4.13 Confidentiality

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining strict confidentiality of all information to which they are exposed while serving in their official volunteer capacity, whether this information involves a party to their case, another volunteer or staff.

Volunteers are **not** authorized to solicit other persons outside the program to aid them with individual case activities.

A volunteer becomes an Officer of the Court upon assignment of a case. Any information pertaining to the individual families and/or child/ren that the volunteer receives in the discharge of his/her duties is **strictly confidential**. It may **not** be discussed with anyone except the following:

- a) The Washington County Juvenile Court
- b) CASA for Kids, Inc. program staff and volunteers
- c) The court-appointed attorney for the child
- d) A caseworker for CYS or private agencies assigned to the case
- e) An attorney representing the CASA for Kids, Inc. program
- f) Other individuals assigned by the Court to conduct a pre-adjudication or pre-disposition investigation on the case.

Discussion of the case with others, even if the family name and other identifying information is omitted, is strictly forbidden. Violation of confidentiality can result in the discrediting of the CASA for Kids, Inc. program and may be cause for immediate dismissal of any volunteer.