



Juvenile Court

5501 Sixth Avenue
Tacoma, WA 98406
(253) 798-7900

TJ Bohl
Administrator

Dear Prospective Volunteer:

Thank you for your interest in the *Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA/GAL)* Program. Enclosed is a packet of information for your review. Please take a moment to logon to our web site at <http://www.co.pierce.wa.us/index.aspx?NID=1120> to view the informative seven minute CASA video. We encourage you to fill out an application for volunteer placement by following the link above or by submitting it in person, by mail, fax or email to:

Carrie Appling
Volunteer Services PCJC
5501 Sixth Avenue
Tacoma, WA 98406
Fax: (253) 798-7649
Email: Carrie.Appling@co.pierce.wa.us

We would like to go over any questions you may have about the program and schedule a time for you to observe Dependency Court. At that time, we will issue you a training manual to review and set up an informational interview with you to speak with a staff Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). We have several trainings available throughout the year and offer many other opportunities for additional learning and volunteer opportunities. The decision to commit to the CASA/GAL program is an important one and can be made when you choose to take a case at the conclusion of the four day training.

Juvenile Court staff provides excellent support and supervision for every volunteer with an active case. The Pierce County program meets all state and national standards. Our goal is to provide every child in foster-care throughout Pierce County, because of abuse, neglect, and abandonment, with an advocate. Please help us meet that goal.

We look forward to meeting with you and connecting you with a meaningful volunteer experience.

Sincerely,

Carrie Appling
Volunteer Services Coordinator
Pierce County Juvenile Court
Carrie.Appling@co.pierce.wa.us
(253) 798-3837



CASA/GAL

(COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE/GUARDIAN AD LITEM)

SUMMARY: A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a **volunteer** appointed by the Court to advocate for the best interest of a child who is alleged to have been abused or neglected. In order to do this, the CASA/GAL must *investigate* the facts of the case, *recommend* a course of action to the Court, *explain* the Court's findings to the child, *facilitate* the resolution of the presenting problems, and *monitor* progress.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Challenge the system to do what it should be doing without being confined by the established legal and social work professions.
- Ensure that the system acts responsibly towards the child.
- Provide consistent follow-up on the case progress and the parties' compliance with the Court orders.
- Thoroughly research assigned case, influencing what is included in the case plan.
- Be a full party to the Court proceedings and have access to all Court documents relating to the case.
- Review case documents, maintain complete records, and speak with relevant individuals.
- Focus not on the guilt/innocence issues, but rather on the information that relates to the child's welfare.
- Bring significant changes in the family situation to the Court's attention.
- Advocate for the child's best interest, including permanency planning.
- Conduct an independent assessment of the case facts/issues from the prospective of a neutral third party.
- Question social workers about the appropriateness of case plans.
- Develop recommendations for the Court, which are included in a written report.
- Participate in all hearings and settlements.
- Report volunteer hours monthly to Volunteer Services.
- Attend ongoing training workshops (12 hours per year.)

THINGS A CASA DOES NOT DO:

- ❖ The CASA *does not* diagnose when a child has special needs (i.e., medical, educational, or psychiatric), but rather observes behaviors and make the necessary recommendations for counseling, treatment, or medical attention.
- ❖ The CASA *does not* become a friend to the child and help them through rough times or take them on overnight visits.
- ❖ The CASA *does not* provide a home for the child.
- ❖ The CASA *does not* arrange for the child's placement, medical treatment, or manage the case plan for the social worker.
- ❖ The CASA *does not* supervise but rather observes visitation between parents and children.
- ❖ The CASA *does not* file legal documents with the Court without assistance of counsel or a CASA supervisor.
- ❖ The CASA *does not* contact the judge directly to discuss a case.
- ❖ The CASA's legal role is not to prove or disprove the allegations in Dependency Petitions.

TRAINING, EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE:

- Post high school education preferred.
- Must study the CASA/GAL Training Manual prior to and attend the four-day training.
- Must observe Dependency Court prior to the CASA/GAL training.

SKILLS:

- Interest in youth, their rights, and special needs.
- Ability to work with a child, family members, and professionals, using tact, concern and basic human relations skills.
- Must possess excellent written and oral communication skills.
- Ability to be objective and maintain confidentiality.
- Must possess professional attributes of diplomacy, objectivity, decision-making ability, appearance, demeanor, and the ability to function in an adversarial situation.
- Possess the ability to establish a rapport with at-risk youth, while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

REQUIREMENTS:

- Must be at least 21 years of age.
- Must have a high school diploma or GED.
- Must attend Court hearings on assigned case.
- Maintain an up-to-date and complete file on each case assigned.
- Must adhere to deadlines and timetables involving an assigned case.
- Must turn in all reports on time or early.
- Must make physical contact with children in their placement homes monthly.
- Must have a telephone and be available and responsive by email.
- Must have valid driver's license and a good driving record.
- Must pass a thorough background check.
- Must complete a screening and interview process.
- Must attend a four-hour Cultural Diversity Training and successfully complete a four-day CASA Training Course.

RELATIONSHIP:

- Supervised by the GAL/CASA Coordinator.
- Responsible to the GAL/CASA Coordinator, the Dependency Supervisor, and the Volunteer Services Coordinator.

TIME COMMITMENT:

- Must be willing to commit to a chosen case for the duration of that assignment (Average duration of a case is 18 months to 2 years).
- Investigation and preparation for the first court hearing is generally 15 hours over a six-week period.
- Monitor court orders and prepare for twice-yearly review hearings: average 5-10 hours per month.

What is a CASA?

In Spanish, “CASA” means “home”. In today’s juvenile justice system, CASA refers to a Court Appointed Special Advocate--a trained community volunteer appointed by a judge to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in Court.

The CASA concept is based on the belief that every child has a right to a safe, permanent home.

Each year nearly 300,000 abused, neglected and abandoned children in the U.S. are thrust into court through no fault of their own. In these cases, many children also become victims of an over burdened court system- a complex legal network of lawyers, social workers and judges who frequently do not have time to give detailed attention to each child who comes before them.

CASA was created in 1977 to ensure that the best interests of these children were being heard in Court.

When a CASA volunteer is appointed by a judge, he or she investigates that case by reviewing records and talking with anyone who has information about the child--parents, teachers, neighbors, doctors, school officials and most importantly, the child.

The CASA volunteer then submits a report to the Court that includes a recommendation on whether that child should remain in foster care, be reunited with parents, or be legally freed for adoption.

CASA's make a Difference!

In many cases, **CASA** involvement actually reduces the amount of time a child spends in foster care. Studies have shown that a child is more likely to receive support services when a **CASA** volunteer is on the case than when no such assistance is assigned.

What does a CASA do?

The CASA's goal is to ensure that a child's right to a safe, permanent home is acted on in a sensitive, expedient manner. The CASA represents the best interests of the child in a variety of ways. Some of the roles and responsibilities are:

INVESTIGATE

It is the CASA's responsibility to independently investigate the circumstances of the case. The CASA interviews the child, the family, the foster parents, teachers, doctors, and other involved persons.

MONITOR

The CASA serves as a monitor of agencies and person who provide services to the child. He or she makes sure that children and families receive the help that they need.

SPEAK UP

The CASA assures that the child's wants and needs are heard and that the best interest of the child is presented to the Court and the agencies dealing with the child.

REPORT

The CASA presents information to the Court and recommends a plan representative of the child's best interest. He/she regularly prepares a written report, which becomes a permanent part of the case record.

You can BE the Change!

"The CASA, is a child's voice in an adversarial process, plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the best interest of the child is represented in Court."

*Honorable Rosanne Buckner
Superior Court Judge
Pierce County*

"The strongest witness we ever have in our cases is the CASA volunteer. I can say that of all the things I've ever had in Court with regards to the child abuse, the best single program, without question, has been the CASA Program."

*Judge Craig Penfold
Dallas, Texas*

"We have reunited families, freed children for adoption, and tried to stop this constant turntable of moving children from foster home to foster home and so on."

Judge John Mendoza

What's in it for you?

- The pleasure of giving to others
- Gain knowledge about subject
- Learn court process
- Explore new personal talents
- Meet professionals
- Be involved in your community and make it a better place to live
- Gain professional experience
- Get on the job training
- Help protect abused children

Are you a mature, responsible adult?

Can you relate to families in stressful situations?

Do you have time to commit?

You CAN Become a CASA!

CASA volunteers are ordinary citizens, from all walks of life, with a variety of professional, educational and ethnic backgrounds. No special or legal background is required.

Once accepted, volunteers are trained in courtroom procedure, social service, juvenile court systems, and the special needs of a child who has been abused and neglected.

CASA volunteers do research and conduct interviews prior to their first court appearance. The average duration of a case is 2 years and a CASA must be committed to represent the child from the beginning to the end of Court involvement.

You can make a difference in a child's future. The first step is to contact the Pierce County Juvenile Court's Volunteer Services Coordinator at 798-3837.

You can be helpful to a child in a frightening and bewildering time. You can help that child understand the confusing court process, present that child's needs to the Judge, and provide continuity for that child whose future is being determined by the court.

