

# SAN JUAN CASA PROGRAM

## **Mission Statement**

San Juan CASA volunteers advocate for the best interests of abused, neglected and abandoned children involved in the court system.

## **Reference Legal Status**

New Mexico Children's Court Rules and Forms

Article 1

General Provisions; All Proceedings

10-121. Court Appointed Special Advocates, Adopted, effective September 1, 1995,  
(attached)

## **National CASA Association**

The mission of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association, together with its state and local members, is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so that they can thrive in safe, permanent homes.

The San Juan CASA Program is a member of the National CASA Association and meets its standards and requirements.

## **The New Mexico CASA Network**

The New Mexico CASA Network's mission is to support volunteer advocacy for the best interests of abused and neglected children involved in the court system. The new Mexico CASA Network is an organization created to provide supplementary technical assistance and quality assurance) for Court Appointed Special Advocate Programs around New Mexico.

The San Juan CASA Program participates in quarterly CASA Program Director Meetings held by the NM CASA Network and takes advantage of training opportunities offered by the Network.

## **San Juan CASA Program**

Childhaven, Inc has contracted with the Eleventh Judicial District Court to provide Court Appointed Special Advocate Services from 1 July 2009 until 30 June 2010.

San Juan CASA Volunteer  
Policies and Procedures

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**1. CASA Volunteer Application and Screening Process:**

A. A CASA Volunteer shall meet the following qualifications:

1. Be a U.S. citizen or legal resident; and
2. Be at least twenty-one years of age.

B. Volunteer Application Process. A volunteer shall complete the following application process within three months of the application date unless a good cause extension is obtained from the CASA Program Director:

1. Complete an application
2. Provide one relative, and three non-relative personal references
3. Complete two readable fingerprint cards, and return them to the CASA office for the purpose of conducting criminal background checks with local and state law enforcement agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, New Mexico Child Abuse Registry and the New Mexico Department of Transportation.
4. Complete a personal interview with the CASA Program Director or CASA Volunteer Supervisor;
5. Attend 30 hours of initial Pre-Service Training, or successfully complete the National CASA Independent Study Curriculum
6. Sign and date a statement indicating that the CASA Volunteer has read, understands, and shall comply with these policies. The CASA Volunteer will read and initial to indicate that they have read and agree to the portions pertaining

to the Volunteer Minimum Performance Standards and the Volunteer Commitment. The CASA Volunteer will also sign the attached Confidentiality Agreement, and the CASA Volunteer Preference Form.

7. Complete a post-Training Interview with the Program Director or Volunteer Supervisor

## **2. Pre-Service Training**

CASA Volunteer candidates will attend 30 hours of initial Pre-Service Training, or successfully complete the National CASA Independent Study Curriculum. Training includes a minimum of 5 hours of court observation supervised by the CASA Program Director or the CASA Volunteer Supervisor.

## **3. Volunteer Commitment**

Volunteers who have completed the required initial pre-service training must agree to the following before being sworn in as CASA Volunteer:

- A. To commit to one year of service as a CASA volunteer (or at minimum working a assigned case to completion, which may be up to one year.)
- B. To commit an average of three to four hours a week on the case assigned.
- C. To commit to the attendance of hearings involving assigned case.
- D. To attend the minimum required 12 hours of CASA in-service trainings per year.
- E. To act in a responsible professional manner
- F. To be an independent advocate for the best interests of the child.
- G. To uphold the pledge of confidentiality.
- H. To maintain complete, accurate case files, recording all contacts and findings.
- I. To provide a monthly Contact Log to the San Juan CASA office identifying contacts made, hours of volunteer service, and miles driven in support of assigned CASA Case.
- J. To submit draft court reports to the CASA program on time and as required, five business days prior to any court hearing. (The CASA volunteer's Supervisor will not alter Court Report recommendations without the knowledge and agreement of the CASA volunteer.)
- K. Return all case files to the CASA office when the case has been dismissed or when the CASA Volunteer has finished his/her CASA commitment.

Initials indicate that the CASA Volunteer has read and agrees to the above commitment. \_\_\_\_\_

## **4. Certification and Selection Process**

A. Notification of Certification. The CASA Program Director or the CASA Volunteer Supervisor shall promptly notify the applicant accepted for certification. Applicants will be scheduled for a swearing in ceremony with the Children's Court Judge. Once an applicant has been sworn in, he/she may be assigned to a Neglect or Abuse case as a CASA Volunteer.

## B. Denial of Certification.

1. The CASA Program Director shall notify applicants or volunteers of the denial of Background Clearance from the Children Youth and Families Department Licensing and Certification Unit. For confidentiality reasons, details of the denial are not provided to the CASA Program Office or to Childhaven, Inc. The applicant may pursue the appeal process by contacting the point of contact identified on the denial letter.
2. The CASA program director may deny certification based on reference feedback, or upon observation during pre-service training where there are indications that a particular applicant might not be a good fit for the CASA program.

## **5. Appointment of CASA Volunteer to Abuse or Neglect Case** (maximum of two cases per volunteer)

CASA Volunteers are assigned to cases referred to the CASA Program office by the Children's Court Judge, Children's Court Attorney, GAL, Treatment Social Worker, service provider, foster parent or child. Volunteers are matched to cases based on the completed CASA Volunteer Preference Form (attached). Prospective assigned volunteer may review case file and accept/decline case. If the volunteer accepts the case, an Appointment Letter appointing CASA volunteer to the case will be written, signed by the CASA Program Director, and faxed to all concerned parties (Children's Court Judge, Children's Court Attorney, Respondent Attorneys, GAL, social worker). The CASA Supervisor will go over "next steps" and contact information with CASA volunteer to get them started on the case.

*The CASA volunteer supervisor will not alter reports or recommendations without the knowledge and agreement of the CASA volunteer.*

## **6. Volunteer Status**

A. A CASA volunteer serves at the pleasure of the court. The court may terminate the services of a volunteer without cause. The CASA Program staff shall take action toward any volunteer not adhering to the minimum performance standards of the CASA program, which may include limitations on types of cases, suspension, or termination.

B. Upon presentation of the Court Order for Court Appointed Special Advocate, confidentiality relating to the Petitioner, Respondents and their children is expressly waived regarding the case to which the CASA Volunteer has been assigned. Access to records includes but is not limited to medical and police reports, and any person is authorized to give such confidential information written or oral, to the CASA as a direct representative of the Court.

C. The CASA Volunteer shall receive notice of all hearings, staffings, investigations and other matters concerning the child. The CASA Volunteer shall have a right to participate in the formulation of any agreement, stipulation or case plan entered into regarding the child.

D. A volunteer shall be on active status if the volunteer engages in any of the following activities:

1. Appointed to a child neglect or abuse case;
2. Serving as a mentor to other volunteers; or
3. Otherwise regularly involved with the San Juan CASA program.

E. At the discretion of the CASA Volunteer's supervisor, leaves of absence may be granted to CASA volunteers. This leave of absence will not alter or extend the previously agreed upon ending date of the volunteer's term of service. A volunteer may be placed on inactive status if all of the following conditions are met:

1. Approved by the CASA Supervisor, for no longer than six months;
2. Not currently appointed to a child neglect or abuse case;
3. Not involved in the administrative aspect of the San Juan CASA program office;
4. Not a mentor to other volunteers; and
5. Not otherwise regularly involved with the San Juan CASA program.

F. San Juan CASA Volunteers may resign from their volunteer service with the agency at any time. It is requested that volunteers who intend to resign provide advance notice of their departure and a reason for their decision.

## **7. Confidentiality**

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a single staff, volunteer, client, or other person or involves overall agency business. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in termination of the volunteer's relationship with Childhaven or other corrective action.

## **8. Volunteer Minimum Performance Standards**

A. A San Juan CASA volunteer will:

1. Maintain complete written records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child.
2. Report any incidents of child abuse or neglect to the San Juan CASA program supervisor and appropriate authorities.

3. Contact, observe, or interview parties involved in the case, including the child.
4. Determine if a Permanency Plan has been created for the child, and whether appropriate services, including Reasonable Efforts, are being provided to the child and family.
5. Assure that the child's best interests are being represented at every stage of the case, attend court hearings, and make a written or verbal recommendation to the court according to the best interest of the child.
6. Monitor the case by visiting the child as often as necessary, but not less than once per month, to observe whether the child's essential needs are being met, and whether compliance of the court's orders are being carried out. The volunteer should have contact with the child often enough that the volunteer is able to make fact based recommendations to the court.
7. Attend and participate in any planning or treatment team meetings involving the child and his/her parents in order to keep informed of the progress being made on the Treatment Plans.
8. Remain actively involved in the case until the case is formally dismissed by the court.
9. Sign an oath of confidentiality (attached).
10. Inform the CASA Program Office of any ongoing investigations or legal activity that may jeopardize his/her ability to perform his/her responsibilities as a CASA volunteer.

B. A San Juan CASA volunteer should not become inappropriately involved in the case by providing direct service delivery to any parties that could:

1. Lead to a conflict of interest or liability problems; or
2. Cause a child or family to become dependent on the CASA volunteer for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations. Examples of inappropriate volunteer practices that **are appropriate grounds for dismissal** include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Taking a child home or sheltering a child in the home
  - b. Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling
  - c. Making placement arrangements for the child
  - d. Giving money or expensive gifts to the child or family
  - e. Breaking confidentiality by disclosing information to people who are not party to the case

- f. Taking action without program approval which endangers the child or is outside the role or powers of the San Juan CASA program
- g. Arranging for solitary excursions to isolated places involving only the CASA Volunteer and the appointed child
- h. Inability to effectively carry out San Juan CASA volunteer duties
- i. Falsifying volunteer application or misrepresenting facts during the screening process
- j. Failure to complete required ongoing training

C. A San Juan CASA volunteer **will not transport** a child in his/her personal vehicle.

D. A San Juan CASA volunteer should not be related to any parties involved in the case, or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest.

E. A San Juan CASA volunteer should not engage in any ex-parte communication with the judge assigned to the case on which the CASA volunteer is working.

Initials indicate that the CASA Volunteer has read and agrees to the above standards. \_\_\_\_\_

## **9. Ongoing Requirements for Continuing Education**

CASA Volunteers are required to attend 12 hours of In-Service continuing education training each year, beginning on the first anniversary of their swearing in as a CASA Volunteer. In-Service training opportunities are provided on a monthly basis by the San Juan CASA Program. In addition, volunteers will be notified of training opportunities in the immediate area, and of conferences and classes throughout the country. The CASA program will pay for the tuition and travel expenses of CASA Volunteers who attend training outside of the county, funds permitting. CASA Volunteers are required to provide copies of training certificates to the San Juan CASA office in order to receive credit for completed training.

## **10. Recertification Process**

If a volunteer leaves the CASA program for up to one year and is eligible for return, the volunteer shall, at a minimum, attend 10 hours of recertification training. If a volunteer leaves the program for more than one year and is eligible for return, the volunteer shall repeat the application process.

## **11. Conflict of Interest**

No person who has a conflict of interest with any activity or program of Childhaven, whether personal, philosophical, professional, or financial shall be accepted or serve as a volunteer with the agency.

## **12. Volunteer Code of Conduct**

- A. CASA Volunteers are representatives of Childhaven, Inc. in the community and, and as such, are required to conduct themselves in a professional and impartial manner at all times.
- B. The volunteer shall consult with his/her supervisor to resolve any ethical issues that arise.
- C. The volunteer shall serve and respond to requests without bias to race, religion, sex, age, national origin, or physical impairment.
- D. The volunteer shall not use or attempt to use the volunteer's official position to secure unwarranted privileges or exemptions.

## **13. Dismissal from Case or Termination of a Volunteer from Program**

- A. San Juan CASA Volunteers who do not adhere to the rules and procedures of the agency or who fail to satisfactorily perform their volunteer assignment are subject to dismissal. Grounds for dismissal or termination of a volunteer from the program include but are not limited to:
  - 1. Taking action that endangers the child or is outside the role of the statutory authority of the CASA program;
  - 2. Failing to demonstrate an ability to effectively carry out assigned duties;
  - 3. Failure to comply with San Juan CASA Volunteer policies and procedures.
  - 4. Falsifying the application or misrepresenting facts during the screening process;
  - 5. A finding against the volunteer of child abuse or neglect by a court or any authorized governmental agency;
  - 6. Existing conflict of interest which cannot be resolved;
  - 7. Allowing the appointed child to visit the volunteer's home or stay overnight with the volunteer
  - 8. Any action that would have required initial denial of certification as a CASA volunteer.
- B. No volunteer will be terminated until the volunteer has had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for possible dismissal with supervisory staff. Prior to dismissal of

a CASA volunteer, staff should seek the consultation and assistance of the Childhaven Executive Director.

C. Case files must be returned to the CASA or GAL program when the volunteer is discharged.

#### **14. Personal Liability**

Professional and general liability insurance and accident insurance are provided for all volunteers engaged in agency business. [Volunteers are encouraged to consult with their own insurance agents regarding the extension of their personal insurance to include community volunteer work.] Specific information regarding such insurance is available from the Personnel Department.

#### **15. Concern or Grievance Process.**

A. Decisions involving certification, or corrective action of a volunteer may be reviewed for appropriateness. If certification is denied, or corrective action is taken, the affected volunteer is entitled to submit a written statement outlining their grievance to the CASA Program director. If the grievance cannot be resolved at this level, the volunteer and the CASA Program Director will bring the grievance to the attention of the Childhaven Executive Director for final resolution.

B. The CASA Program staff shall document any complaints in the volunteer's file. Information and documentation shall be confidential and available only for use in considering volunteer's continuing certification for review by his/her supervisor.

C. The CASA Volunteer has the right to review their volunteer file under the supervision of the CASA program staff. CASA Volunteers should inform the CASA Program staff of any additions or corrections needed in their file documentation.

#### **16. Evaluations**

San Juan CASA Volunteers shall receive yearly evaluations to review their work. The evaluation session is utilized to review the performance of the CASA volunteer, to suggest any changes in work style, to seek suggestions from the volunteer on means of enhancing the volunteer's relationship with the agency, to convey appreciation to the volunteer, and to ascertain the continued interest of the volunteer in serving in that position. Evaluations should include both an examination of the volunteer's performance of position responsibilities and a discussion of any suggestions that the volunteer may have concerning the position or project with which the volunteer is connected. The evaluation session is an opportunity for both the volunteer and the agency to examine and improve their relationship.

#### **17. Exit Interviews**

Exit interviews, where possible, will be conducted with volunteers who are leaving their positions. The interview should ascertain why the volunteer is leaving the position, suggestions the volunteer may have to improving the position, and the possibility of involving the volunteer in some other capacity with the agency.