

CASA FOR KIDS



Volunteer Policies & Procedures

The CASA for Kids policies and procedures outlined in this manual apply to both Payne and Logan counties.

Approved: September 10, 2013
Reviewed & Approved: July 15, 2014
Revised & Approved: April 5, 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CASA for Kids Staff.....	3
Emergency Procedures.....	3
CASA for Kids Mission Statement.....	4
CASA Volunteer Mission Statement.....	4
Relationship between CASA Program & Volunteer.....	5
Policies & Procedures between the Court & CASA Program: A Statement of Understanding.....	6
Agreement between CASA & the Court (Payne County).....	8
Agreement between CASA & the Court (Logan County).....	9
Role of a CASA Volunteer.....	10
Volunteer Recruitment.....	11
Diversity & Inclusiveness Policy.....	12
Review & Reporting of Cultural Diversity & Inclusiveness Policy Effectiveness.....	15
Transfer of a CASA Volunteer to Payne or Logan County.....	16
Volunteer Screening.....	17
Volunteer Training.....	18
In-Service Training.....	18
Reactivation of Volunteers.....	18
Summary of Kelsey Smith-Briggs Child Protection Reform Act.....	19
Volunteer Supervision, Support & Management.....	20
Volunteer Dos & Don'ts.....	21
Ethical Responsibility.....	23
Code of Ethics.....	23
Case Assignment & Release Procedures.....	24
First Steps in Volunteer Assignment of a Case.....	25
The Volunteers' First Steps in a Case.....	25
Safety Procedures When Volunteers Make Visitations.....	25
Standard Exception Documentation for In-Person Contact.....	26
CASA Case Load Rule Exception Form.....	27
Transportation of Children.....	28
Oklahoma Victims Rights Compensation Program.....	29
Oklahoma Casa Visitation And Courtesy Visit Policy.....	30
Maintenance of Records for Volunteers.....	32
Confidentiality Policy.....	33
Procedures Before Court Hearings.....	34
Ex Parte Communication.....	34
Case Staffings.....	34
DHS Policies & Procedures.....	35
CASA Volunteer Has a Complaint About a Social Worker.....	35
DHS Has a Complaint About a CASA Volunteer.....	35
Volunteer Grievance Policies & Procedures.....	36
Disciplinary Action/Non-Voluntary Termination of Volunteers.....	37
General Media Contact.....	38
Volunteer Media Contact.....	38
Best Interest Standards: Core Values.....	39
Best Interest Standards: Permanency Planning.....	40
Best Interest Standards: Interventions & Removal.....	41
Best Interest Standards: Termination of Parental Rights (TPR).....	42
Best Interest of the Child: What the GAL/CASA Can Do to Assure Permanence.....	43
Best Interest of the Child: What to Expect—Grief & Loss.....	44

CASA FOR KIDS STAFF

Executive DirectorRuth Cavins
Case Supervisor.....Trisha Glenn
Case Supervisor.....Jennifer Smith
Case Supervisor.....Terrie Kerr

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Suspicion a child is being maltreated but not in imminent danger:

Contact your CASA supervisor immediately.

A child is in imminent danger:

DO NOT REMOVE THE CHILD.

- First: Notify police.
- Second: Notify DHS hotline: 800-522-3511
- Third: Notify CASA Staff: (405) 624-2242

After Hours/Weekends:
Trisha Glenn (405) 612-4709
Jen Smith (405) 614-3323
Terrie Kerr (405) 743-9353
Ruth Cavins (405) 742-8523

MISSION STATEMENT

CASA for Kids

CASA for Kids is a nonprofit organization that recruits, screens, trains and supports community volunteers who advocate for the best interest of abused and neglected children in juvenile deprived court.

MISSION STATEMENT

CASA Volunteer

To objectively advocate on behalf of the child and act as an officer of the court to investigate all matters concerning the best interests of the child.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CASA PROGRAM & VOLUNTEER

The CASA for Kids program is an independent agency that advocates for abused and neglected children involved in the court system. Program staff are officers of the court. Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers are independent investigators appointed by the Court with and under the supervision of the CASA program. CASA volunteers are appointed to objectively advocate on behalf of the child and act as an officer of the court. Recommendations and reports submitted to the court are the voice of both the program and the volunteer. CASA volunteers are independent advocates for abused and neglected children involved in the court system but are not independent from CASA for Kids and abide by the policies, procedures and philosophies of the program.

A CASA volunteer is guided by professional CASA staff who have a thorough knowledge of children, families, statutory requirements and the social service delivery system. The CASA program staff defines the frame work for the volunteer's conduct and ensures that the recommendations reflect realistic expectations that are within the parameters of the court's jurisdiction. (*National CASA Guide to Program Development. Page 69-1992*)

The CASA program will provide approximately 1 full-time staff person to 30 active volunteers. Volunteers with active cases shall be in contact with CASA staff at least once a month and more if the case demands the attention.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES BETWEEN THE COURT & CASA PROGRAM
A Statement of Understanding

1. A CASA volunteer is sworn in by the juvenile judge before appointment to a case.
2. The CASA volunteer is assigned at the earliest possible stage of the court proceedings. Deprived cases will be given priority.
3. The judge and the program's administrator determine which cases are to be referred to the CASA program. Referral criteria are reviewed frequently and changed as resources of the program change.
4. All appointments and assignments are made by an appropriate order of the court.
5. The CASA Program, in cooperation with the court, retains the right to determine from among cases referred for appointment those it can serve appropriately, within the limits of its resources, capacities, and mission.
6. A CASA Program will notify all parties and agencies involved in the case of the CASA volunteer's appointment.
7. Ethic, cultural and religious diversity issues are considered in the appointment of volunteers to cases.
8. Volunteers are assigned to cases with consideration to their experience, understanding and skills in relation to the specifics of a case.
9. In determining caseload size, management and/or supervisory personal assess: the nature and difficulty of the tasks assigned; the work and time required to serve each child or to complete each task; the responsibilities that may be assigned.
10. A volunteer will not be assigned more than two (2) active cases at a time. If a volunteer has more than two (2) active cases at a time, justification documentation stating the reason why will be placed in the volunteer file. Under no exception shall a volunteer have more than five (5) cases at a time.
11. The CASA Program maintains complete case assignment records.
12. A plan for each child served by the CASA Program is developed based on the nature of the court referral.
13. The CASA Program has an established procedure to allow the immediate reporting to the court or through the appropriate agency of a situation in which a CASA volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger.
14. The CASA Program has established Policies and Procedures and staff to supervise the volunteer on case assignments.
15. The CASA Program has the authority to withdraw a volunteer from a case with the approval of the court.
16. The CASA Program has the authority to terminate a volunteer from the program when conflicts develop that are irreconcilable between the program and volunteer. The court will honor the program's request to withdraw the volunteer from a case under the supervision of CASA for Kids.

17. In the event a volunteer has failed to complete thorough investigation or to meet their obligations or to clarify missing or inconsistent information, the program staff may intervene in the case to assist the court in completion of the case and issue an opinion, if determined necessary by the Executive Director.

AGREEMENT BETWEEN
CASA AND THE COURT

I am the Associate District Judge for Payne County, Oklahoma. I have primary judicial responsibility in this county for all cases concerning abused and neglected children. I support the continuation of the Payne County CASA Association, a court appointed special advocate program.

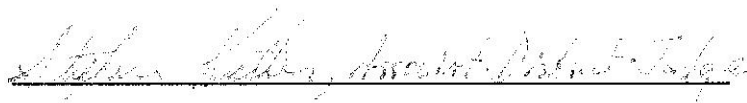
The purpose of a court appointed special advocate (CASA) program is to recruit, train and supervise volunteers to serve as guardian ad litem in court cases involving abused and neglected children; to objectively advocate on behalf of and in the best interest of those children; to act as an officer of the court to investigate all matters in the case; and to monitor the best interest of the child throughout the judicial proceeding.

I believe that the support of the court and a good working relationship between CASA and the court is important to the success of the program.

Further, I believe that open communication between CASA staff and administrative officials and the court is necessary and beneficial to the fulfillment of responsibilities and goals of the CASA program.

The Payne County CASA program is invaluable to Payne County Juvenile Court. Their role as guardian ad litem is almost always beneficial and in some instances critical to the resolution of court cases in the best interest of the children. I find the Payne County CASA to be professionally administered, and staffed with employees and volunteers who are dedicated to their mission. I feel very fortunate that my juvenile court is so well served by Payne County CASA Association.

February 28, 2014


Stephen L. Hetherington, Associate District Judge

AGREEMENT BETWEEN
CASA AND THE COURT

I, the Honorable Louis A. Duel, presiding Judge in civil child abuse and neglect cases in Judicial District 9, support development/continuation of the CASA Program, a court appointed special advocate program. I understand that the purpose of a court appointed special advocate (CASA) program is to recruit, screen, train and supervise volunteers to assist the court by making recommendations to the court as to what is in the best interests of abused and neglected children. I am aware that the support of the court and a good working relationship are critical to the success of the program.

I am also aware that the staff and administrative officials of the program have an obligation to communicate regularly with the court to evaluate the performance and obtain suggestions for growth and the future development of the program.

COMMENTS:



Judge's Signature

11/13/13

Date

ROLE OF A CASA VOLUNTEER

State Statute 7003-3.7 (1998-1999)

- B. 4. The guardian *ad litem* shall be appointed to objectively advocate on behalf of the child and act as an officer of the court to investigate all matters concerning the best interests of the child. In addition to other duties required by the court and as specified by the court, a guardian *ad litem* shall have the following responsibilities:
- a. review documents, reports, records and other information relevant to the case, meet with and observe the child in appropriate settings, and interview parents, foster parents, health care providers, child protective services for the child when necessary,
 - b. advocate for the child's best interests by participating in the case, attending any hearings in the matter and advocating for appropriate services for the child when necessary.
 - c. maintain the confidentiality of information related to a case as required by Article 7 of the Oklahoma Children's Code.
 - d. monitor the child's best interests throughout an judicial proceeding, and
 - e. present written reports on the child's best interests that include conclusions and recommendations and the facts upon which they are based.
5. The guardian *ad litem* shall be given access to the court files and agency files and access to all documents, reports, records and other information relevant to the case and to any records and reports of examination of the child's parent or other custodian, made pursuant to the laws relating to child abuse and neglect including reports generated by service providers.
- C. 1. Whenever a court-appointed special advocate is available to the court to serve as a guardian ad litem, priority shall be given to appointment of the court-appointed advocate to serve as guardian ad litem for the child regardless of whether a guardian ad litem has been requested pursuant to the provisions of this subsection.
2. A Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program shall be made available to each judicial district.
3. For purposes of the Oklahoma Children's Code, the term "court-appointed special advocate" shall have the same meaning as "guardian ad litem". In like matter, a court-appointed special advocate, except as specifically otherwise provided by law or by the court, shall have the same power, duties and responsibilities as assigned to a guardian ad litem by law and shall have such other qualifications, duties and responsibilities as may be prescribed by rule by the Oklahoma Supreme Court.
4. A court-appointed special advocate shall serve without compensation.

To review Title 10A. Children and Juvenile Code go to:

<http://www.oscn.net/applications/oscn/Index.asp?ftdb=STOKSTA1&level=1>

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

Volunteers will be recruited year round through local and area print and social media outlets. Volunteers will be formally recruited a minimum of twice a year prior to CASA volunteer training to be held as often as necessary to serve the need for and supply of volunteers. Volunteers will be recruited by:

- Recruitment stories and/or ads in local and area media
- Recruitment posters/fliers to be posted prior to trainings
- Email campaigns
- Telephone campaigns
- Social media campaigns
- www.casaforkids.com web site
- Contact via phone, mail, and email of prospective volunteers as maintained in the CASA Manager database.
- Speaking engagements with civic groups and organizations

Calls, email or mail correspondence will verify with each individual that they wish to remain a Prospective Volunteer if they are unable to attend the current training session.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVENESS POLICY

Goals

CASA for Kids diversity, at all levels of the organization, will accurately reflect the diversity of the service area, primarily in terms of race, ethnicity and gender. Additionally, the vision of CASA for Kids includes accepting diversity and differences, and therefore, no one will be discriminated against for any reason.

CASA for Kids will:

- ✓ Review demographics annually.
- ✓ Strive to match volunteer demographics representative of the children served.
- ✓ Strive to maintain a board reflecting the demographics of the children served.
- ✓ Use recruitment strategies to support demographic goals.

Diversity Plan

The CASA for Kids program uses annual court and CASA program statistics of children in custody to assess the demographics of the children eligible for CASA services. These demographics are discussed annually, or more often as deemed necessary by the CASA for Kids Board of Directors, and necessary changes to meet diversity and inclusiveness goals are reevaluated annually in the program End of Year meeting.

This program has noted that the demographics of the overall community service area and the demographics of the children to be served can be quite different. Therefore, board development and community support efforts are targeted so that volunteers may better reflect the demographics of the children eligible for CASA services as best as possible.

The program intends to continue to review statistics and demographics for the community at large and for the eligible children in the service area. However the program's ultimate goal is to recruit volunteers, both board members and advocates, that are best suited to perform their chosen tasks in advocating for the best interest of the children.

Diversity and Inclusiveness Strategies and Objectives

Strategy: Conduct outreach presentations for underrepresented groups at religious institutions, clubs, organizations, faculty groups; seek support of churches and other underrepresented groups regarding recruitment of members.

Objective: Identify underrepresented groups by reviewing program statistical data. Contact such groups via volunteers or board members who may know someone connected with such groups or assign a program representative to contact the group(s).

Strategy: Enlist religious organizations, businesses and media associated with underrepresented groups to publicize CASA.

Objective: Identify underrepresented groups by reviewing program statistical data. Contact such groups via volunteers or board members who may know someone connected with such groups or assign a program representative to contact the group(s) and ask groups to include CASA information in church

bulletins, classes, mailers, etc. Also, include such groups on CASA's newsletter email/ mailing list as well as volunteer training notification mailings.

Strategy: Participate in community events and fairs to distribute materials and recruit volunteers.

Objective: Contact local Chamber of Commerce or other local community groups for notification of public events in which to attend.

Strategy: Expand cultural/diversity training for volunteers, board and staff.

Objective: Offer program trainings and share trainings facilitated by other groups both in and outside of the local community.

Strategy: Ask all CASA volunteers and board members to help recruit at least one new CASA trainee for each training session.

Objective: Send out emails and/or newsletters asking volunteers and board members to recruit at least one trainee. Share list of names of prospective volunteers with Board and volunteers so they can contact people they may know who have already expressed an interest in CASA. Additionally, offer an award for Most Recruited CASA Volunteers to the person who recruits the most volunteers at annual awards ceremony.

Strategy: Support volunteers from all backgrounds.

Objective: Continue to offer flexible CASA training free of charge on at least a bi annual basis. Work with volunteers individually on their strengths and needs in regards to training, volunteer work, and continued education.

Strategy: Offer a handicap accessible building within walking distance of court house.

Objective: Maintain office location in a handicap accessible, community and county building that is one block from the Payne County Courthouse.

Strategy: Include Equal Opportunity Statement on all advertisements/announcements for all positions.

Objective: Continue to include this statement on above mentioned materials.

Strategy: Solicit suggestions from CASA volunteers, board and staff for potential candidates for CASA volunteers as well as potential board candidates with needed skill sets from underrepresented communities.

Objective: Send out emails or newsletters or visit in person and ask volunteers and board members to give input on new ways to recruit volunteers and/or board members in these areas. Include this question on the End of the Year program survey.

Strategy: Announce job openings to underrepresented groups via clubs, organizations, churches, professional groups and social networking.

Objective: Use contact list developed for CASA recruiting and send announcements to all on this list.

Strategy: Advertise in media associated with underrepresented groups.

Objective: Contact tribes, churches, or other groups that work with targeted underrepresented population and place advertisements for volunteer training, board openings, and employment opportunities in the group's media.

Strategy: Keep the board of directors apprised of diversity issues and areas of concern.

Objective: Incorporate diversity education, discussion and evaluation in board of director's annual meeting as well as inviting guest speakers knowledgeable of such information to board meetings and include diversity issues in board strategic planning.

Cultural Competency & Diversity Training

- Pre-service training for CASA volunteers and board uses National CASA Volunteer Training Curriculum and a variety of other resources to include cultural competency.
- Other educational and cultural diversity trainings will be offered periodically by CASA staff and/or local or area speakers as needed and available.

REVIEW & REPORTING OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVENESS POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

The CASA for Kids program will:

- ✓ Incorporate diversity evaluation in its annual meeting and board strategic planning.
- ✓ Volunteer recruitment efforts are reviewed annually with annual statistics that are compiled from both volunteers and eligible children.
- ✓ The demographics of the deprived children in the program service area are reviewed annually at a minimum. Changes are noted annually based on program statistics.
- ✓ The program will examine its own statistics and demographics as to the children for whom CASA has been appointed.

If at any time through any of the above mentioned reviews further action is needed an ad hoc committee will be formed to review and discuss problematic issues or areas of interest identified and will report to the board within 30 days of the formation of such committee.

All policies will be reviewed at least annually at the End of Year meeting held each July to identify what is working for the program and to identify possible improvement in these areas.

TRANSFER OF A CASA VOLUNTEER TO PAYNE OR LOGAN COUNTY

In the event a trained CASA volunteer from another county or state desires to continue work as a CASA volunteer with CASA for Kids due to circumstances such as relocation, commuting, etc the following policy applies:

- The volunteer transferring must meet all the training requirements set by CASA for Kids.
- A CASA for Kids staff member in a supervisory role must make a verbal request to an acting supervisor or Executive Director in the volunteer's current county for said volunteer's file.
- Despite the transfer of a volunteer's file to CASA for Kids, a transferring volunteer must submit CASA for Kids' Volunteer Application and undergo all required screenings.
- Transferring volunteer must interview with a CASA for Kids staff member in a supervisory role.
- Transferring volunteer must commit to volunteering with CASA for Kids for a minimum of one (1) year.
- Transferring volunteer will be required to attend selected CASA training sessions as deemed appropriate or necessary by CASA staff.
- Transferring volunteer must do one (1) hour of courtroom observation in Payne or Logan County Juvenile Deprived Court.
- Transferring volunteer must sign any required forms specific to CASA for Kids. These forms include but are not limited to, Confidentiality Pledge and Statement of Commitment.

VOLUNTEER SCREENING

The Screening process will consist of the following steps and will be in compliance with National CASA Standards.

1. **Initial contact:** All interested persons will receive a CASA Volunteer Application and any other informational necessary such as links to CASA's website, brochures, etc.
2. **Applications:** All completed and returned applications will be reviewed. All written applicants will receive correspondence regarding the status of their application. CASA volunteer applications will be in compliance with National CASA Standards.
3. **Criminal Records check:** Upon receipt of the required and signed background check form, a thorough background check meeting all national and state of Oklahoma requirements for CASA programs will be initiated.
4. **Personal Interview:** All applicants who successfully meet the requirements to be a CASA will be contacted by phone or in writing/email to schedule their personal interview. The interview must take place prior to Swearing In or any case assignment(s). Interviews will be conducted by one or both Case Supervisors.
5. **Volunteer Training:** Volunteer Training is required for all applicants who wish to perform the tasks and duties as a CASA Volunteer for CASA for Kids.
6. **Certification of the CASA volunteer:** Upon successful completion of all formal training requirements, the Case Supervisor(s) and/or Executive Director will recommend to the Court the names of those applicants who are to be certified as CASA volunteers for CASA for Kids. At such time a Swearing In Ceremony will be scheduled by the Case Supervisors and/or Executive Director with the Juvenile Court Judge.

All personal records received during the screening process, i.e. the application, records and reference checks, interview notes, etc. will be maintained by program staff. These records are to be marked "Confidential" and filed in a place not accessible to the general public.

CASA volunteers must meet the following criteria and all Kelsey Smith Briggs Act requirements:

- 1) Be at least 21 years of age
- 2) Never been found guilty of, or pleaded guilty or nolo contendere to, or have charges pending for, any felony or crime involving abuse or neglect, or abandonment of a minor child, or for related acts that would pose a risk to children.
- 3) Submit a written application with at least three (3) references
- 4) Submit to a personal interview
- 5) Pass all required background checks as listed in the CASA requirements for the KSB Act, an MVR check, and a written response from three (3) references.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

CASA for Kids volunteer training will be in compliance with National CASA utilizing National CASA training materials. Training will consist of a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training during which volunteers spend a minimum of 10 hours in personal contact with and under the supervision of program staff in order to evaluate the applicant's appropriateness to serve as a volunteer. The CASA/GAL program provides ICWA compliance information and resources to all volunteers. In-service training opportunities include, but are not limited to, cultural competency, disproportionality, disparity in outcome training, and recognizing abuse (see "In-Service Training").

CASA for Kids volunteer training will also be in compliance with Title 10 and House Bill 2840- Kelsey Smith-Briggs Reform Act (see next page).

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

CASA volunteers are required to complete a minimum of 12 hours of continuing education each year after completion of their formal training.

To meet this requirement the CASA program will provide In-Service training meetings, including refreshers in CASA training courses. In addition, CASA volunteers may use other appropriate or educational opportunities toward their 12 hours of continuing education. Examples: reading a book relating to your work; visiting with a therapist, physician, etc. regarding issues related to your work; seminars; educational programs on televisions; etc.

Volunteers should make a short written report (1 page or less) or provide other documentation such as a seminar agenda to the CASA office so this may be documented in your file. It is the volunteer's responsibility to report all continuing education hours to the CASA program in order for the volunteer to get proper credit for the hours. CE hours must be completed by December 31 of each year. Hours are prorated dependent upon the time of the year the volunteer is trained. The CASA program will cover the cost of registration for CASA volunteers to attend the state conference each year when the budget allows.

REACTIVATION OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers who have been inactive for three years or more must retrain and meet all training requirements. (Training will consist of a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training during which volunteers spend a minimum of 10 hours in personal contact with and under the supervision of program staff in order to evaluate the applicant's appropriateness to serve as a volunteer.)

Volunteers who have been inactive for less than three years must meet the requirement of 12 hours of continuing education, which will fulfill their required 12 hours for that calendar year. Other refresher courses or one-on-one training may be recommended, as needed, by CASA staff.

SUMMARY OF KELSEY SMITH-BRIGGS CHILD PROTECTION REFORM ACT

House Bill 2840 Signed 26th day of May 2006:

C. CASA language area

C. 5. No court-appointed special advocate shall be assigned a case before:

- a. completing a training program in compliance with nationally documented Court-Appointed Special Advocate standards. Documentation of training shall be submitted annually by local Court-Appointed Special Advocate Programs to the Oklahoma Court Appointed Special Advocate Association, and
- b. being approved by the local Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, which will include appropriate criminal background checks.

Note in this section that Oklahoma CASA Association is named in the law.

(Page 6) Section 4 amendatory of Section 7003-4.1

3. Uniform orders shall be used by the court in all deprived proceedings.

Orders will be the same for all court in format..... memorialize the recommendations of the parties....

Summary of House bill 1927 Signed June 4, 2007:

This bill was introduced by Oklahoma CASA Association, Inc. to make clear the background check wording in the Kelsey-Smith-Briggs bill of May 26, 2006.

C. 5.

- b. being approved by the local court-appointed special advocate program, which will include appropriate criminal background checks as provided in paragraph 6 of this subsection.

C. 6.

- a. Each local court-appointed special advocate program shall require a Criminal history records search conducted by the Oklahoma State Bureau of investigation, and any other background check requirements as set forth in Oklahoma Court-Appointed Special Advocate Association state standards for local programs, for any person making application to become a court-appointed special advocate volunteer or to be employed by the local court-appointed special advocate program.
- b. If the prospective court-appointed special advocate volunteer or employee of the local court-appointed special advocate program has lived in Oklahoma for less than (1) year, a criminal history records search shall be obtained from the criminal history state repository of the previous state of residence.
- c. The Oklahoma Court-Appointed Special Advocate Association shall pay the fee for the criminal history records search provided in the paragraph.

The effective date of HB 1927 is this November 1, 2007.

Membership policies of OKLAHOMA CASA ASSOCIATION Certification requires these background checks to be done effective July 1, 2007.

VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION, SUPPORT & MANAGEMENT

- Volunteers are under the supervision of the CASA Program Staff. Volunteers are held accountable for the performance of assigned duties and responsibilities. The Case Supervisor will utilize the following to evaluate the performance of the CASA volunteer:
 - Direct contact
 - Written reports
 - Attendance and participation at monthly meetings
 - Case records
 - Adherence to Policies and Procedures of the CASA program
- Frequency of individual or group supervision is arranged on the basis of volunteer needs, the complexity and size of the workload, and the newness of the assignment. **Volunteers will communicate with case supervisor at least once monthly.**
- Case Supervisors are easily accessible and will make every effort to provide quick and thorough guidance to CASA volunteers.
- The Case Supervisory ratio is approximately 30/1. This ratio is adjusted according to the number of employee work hours devoted to supervision and/or additional responsibilities the supervisor may hold.
- The Case Supervisor holds regularly scheduled case conferences with volunteers to review progress on each case and written case records. These conferences may also be staffed with the Executive Director.
- Program Staff (Executive Director and/or the Case Supervisor) shall be notified and must be present at staffings involving the District Attorney's office, attorneys, DHS supervisors and/or multi-disciplinary team meetings.
- Volunteer court reports will focus on the "best interest of the child" and may not be used as forum to disparage parties in the case or to complain about the quality of their job performance.

VOLUNTEER DO'S & DON'TS

1. The CASA volunteer reports any incident of child abuse or neglect to the CASA Case Supervisor and appropriate authorities.
2. The CASA volunteer does not engage in the following activities:
 - a. taking a child 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.
3. The CASA volunteer discusses all recommendations concerning the case with the program supervisor prior to submitting recommendations to the court.
4. The CASA Case Supervisors do not alter reports or recommendations without the knowledge and agreement of the CASA volunteer.
5. The CASA program has a clear policy to resolve conflicts between a volunteer and their program supervisor regarding the handling of a case, reporting of information, or the recommendations to be included in a report to the court.
6. The 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.
7. The CASA volunteer visits the child(ren) located in Payne or Logan County not less than once a month with age appropriate contact.
8. The CASA volunteer will consult with their supervisor on how to monitor children moved outside of Payne or Logan County or more than two hours away.
9. The CASA volunteer does not report the status of a child(ren) based solely on information provided by social workers, foster parents, caretakers, etc.
10. The CASA volunteer's opinions, recommendations, and status reports are made based upon their own independent observations of the child.
11. The CASA volunteer documents and credits all sources of hearsay information in court reports.
12. The CASA volunteer will attempt to communicate with DHS/Social Worker at least once per month.
13. The CASA volunteer will attempt to have regular contact with child's attorney, mental health, educational, community service agent and placement provider at least once per month.
14. The CASA volunteer will review permanency goals, educational and health information of each child and make recommendations regarding each.
15. The CASA volunteer will appear at all hearings if at all possible and submit written reports for all hearings requiring such. CASA volunteers will report important case developments to the court.

16. The CASA volunteer will participate in case staffing and any other meetings pertaining the child(ren).
17. The CASA volunteer will monitor the service plans for all parties.
18. The CASA volunteer will maintain complete case files and make sure that the office has the same information in the office file.
19. The CASA volunteer is guided by professional CASA staff that has thorough knowledge of children, families, statutory requirements and the social service delivery system. The CASA program staff defines the frame work for the volunteer's conduct and ensures that the recommendations reflect realistic expectations that are within the parameters of the court's jurisdiction.

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

- *Confidentiality:* The CASA volunteer must maintain confidentiality and respects the privacy of others in all matters relating to case assignments.
- *Respect, Fairness, and Courtesy:* The CASA volunteer should treat all parties to the case with respect, courtesy, fairness, and good faith.
- *Use of Authority:* The CASA volunteer should make appropriate use of authority in his/her case appointment, limiting the role of CASA to fulfilling responsibilities within the particular case.
- *Development of Knowledge:* The CASA volunteer should take responsibility for identifying and developing knowledge and fully utilizing information for performance of the CASA volunteer role.
- *Program Integrity:* The CASA volunteer should not represent his/her personal views or opinions as those of the program nor should the CASA volunteer refer to or use his/her participation with the program to advance his/her personal views in any proceedings unrelated to the case in which he/she was appointed as the CASA volunteer.

CODE OF ETHICS

Each CASA volunteer shall be required to read and sign the CASA Code of Ethics adopted by the National CASA Association and CASA for Kids. A Copy shall be given to each CASA and the original kept in the Volunteer's file in the CASA for Kids office.

(See Court Appointed Special Advocates Code of Ethics in the Volunteer Application)

CASE ASSIGNMENT & RELEASE PROCEDURES

- CASA staff receive a request for appointment of a CASA volunteer or make a recommendation based on case screening.
- Program staff consult and select a CASA volunteer and assign the case.
- Case Supervisor and CASA volunteer discuss the case assignment.
- Program staff and Judge each sign Court Order of Appointment.
- CASA volunteer receives a file from the Case Supervisor containing information from the Court file.
- CASA volunteer reviews preliminary information.
- CASA volunteer and Case Supervisor discuss how to proceed with case and develop a plan for investigation.
- CASA staff sends copies of CASA's Court Order and Letter of Introduction to all parties in the case.
- CASA volunteer conducts the investigation. CASA volunteer makes visits, conducts interviews, observes interactions, participates in conferences and multi-disciplinary team meetings, and reviews records that include but are not limited to: DHS, police, medical, school reports, etc.
- CASA volunteer checks with CASA staff frequently to review progress, work through problems and further develop the plan of action on the case.
- CASA volunteer writes a report to the Court after investigation and presents their findings and recommendations at review hearings.
- CASA volunteer submits their report to the CASA office as directed by Case Supervisor.
- Case Supervisor reviews the report, makes comments and discusses the report with the CASA volunteer.
- CASA staff types, copies, and distributes the report to all parties in the case.
- CASA volunteer meets with CASA staff to prepare for court. CASA volunteer attends Case Staffings with district attorney, social workers and CASA staff to review and share case information.
- CASA volunteer attends court hearings on their case and may speak to the Court about the facts and concerns regarding the case.
- CASA volunteer monitors the case until the case is dismissed by the Judge or the volunteer is dismissed from the case.
- In the event a CASA volunteer must be removed from a case or requests to withdraw, an Application for Withdrawal or Withdrawal and Reappointment must be filed with the presiding judge.
- CASA volunteer returns all confidential materials related to the case to the CASA office.
- CASA volunteer and CASA staff review and evaluate work done on the case and discuss supervision and training needs. Cases are closed by CASA staff in the CASA Manager database.
- CASA staff perform a Close Case Interview with CASA volunteers at the close of a case..

FIRST STEPS IN VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT OF A CASE
The CASA Office

The CASA staff will:

1. Notify all parties of the CASA volunteer's assignment.
2. Give all parties the contact information—CASA volunteer's name, telephone, e-mail address, Case Supervisor's name, telephone and e-mail address.
3. Obtain preliminary case file information for the CASA volunteer.
4. Obtain party contact information for CASA volunteer: names of attorney/attorneys, social worker, telephone, e-mail addresses, etc.
5. Obtain location of child: name and physical address of foster parents/caretakers.

THE VOLUNTEER'S FIRST STEPS IN A CASE
The CASA Volunteer

The CASA Volunteer will:

1. Contact social worker and set an appointment to discuss case.
2. If applicable, contact intake worker.
3. Contact foster parents/caretaker and visit the child(ren).
4. Contact parents.
5. Staff case with Case Supervisor and make outline on how to proceed on the case.
6. Keep in frequent contact with Case Supervisor between hearings.
7. Staff case with Case Supervisor at least seven (7) days prior to Review Hearing.

SAFETY PROCEDURES
When Volunteers Make Visitations

- ❖ Volunteers should never place themselves in compromising positions. Ideally, interviews should take place in public areas if CASA volunteers feel uncomfortable in a home setting.
- ❖ Volunteers should check "in" and "out" when going to an interview. This should be done with the CASA staff, the CASA volunteer's buddy or a family member.
- ❖ CASA volunteers may perform supervised visits on behalf of DHS one time per month if the CASA volunteer and the CASA Case Supervisor agree that this is in the best interest of the child, and that the CASA volunteer is comfortable with this arrangement.

CASA FOR KIDS
STANDARD EXCEPTION DOCUMENTATION FOR IN-PERSON CONTACT
(To Be Completed by CASA Staff)

Standard: The CASA/GAL volunteer shall meet in-person with the child once every thirty (30) days at a minimum. An exception may be granted at the discretion of program staff; however, the justification and reasons for a decision to permit less frequent in-person contact must be documented as to the justification and reasonableness of the exception.

Date Staffed: _____
Month(s) Requested for Exception: _____

CASA/GAL Volunteer

Name: _____ CASA Case Supervisor: _____

Name of Assigned Case: _____ JD #: _____

Appointment Date: _____

Location of Child: _____

Distance between CASA/GAL Volunteer and Child: _____

Describe frequency of children's services' contact with child: _____

Indicate Situational Factors

- Child Illness
- CASA/GAL Illness (or family illness)
- Runaway
- Incarceration
- Treatment Center with "No Contact" Policy
- Phone Contact Sufficient
- Excessive Distance
 - Provide time and mileage: _____
- Other _____

Describe alternative plan to monitor child:

Volunteer's Signature

Case Supervisor

Executive Director

End of Exception Date: _____

Reason for End of Exception Date (please circle):

Court Closure/CASA Withdrew/Child Moved/Other: _____

CASA CASE LOAD RULE EXCEPTION FORM
(To Be Completed by CASA Staff)

Purpose: To be used to document justification for exceptions to National CASA standards regarding number of cases a CASA volunteer may be assigned to at any given time.

Regarding: Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs
Standard 7: Volunteer Management

7.E.6. *A volunteer will not be assigned more than two cases 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 volunteer will not be assigned to more than five cases.*

Volunteer _____ # of assigned cases to date _____ Total # of children in current cases _____

Case to be assigned _____ # of children in case _____

Explanation of justification for additional case assignment: _____

CASA Volunteer _____ Date _____

Case Supervisor _____ Date _____

Executive Director _____ Date _____

TRANSPORTATION OF CHILDREN

The CASA for Kids program allows CASA volunteers to provide transportation to children and has necessary liability insurance to cover the program. To transport children:

- The CASA volunteer has a valid current driver's license; a safe driving record as indicated in the required MVR check; and adequate personal automobile insurance;
- The CASA volunteer has obtained the permission of the CASA program;
- The CASA volunteer has obtained the permission of the child's guardian or custodial agency;
- The CASA volunteer is knowledgeable of the potential personal risk of liability;
- The CASA volunteer has chosen to accept the responsibility.
- The CASA volunteer has given the CASA program a copy of their driver's license and verification of the automobile insurance.

OKLAHOMA CRIME VICTIMS COMPENSATION PROGRAM

The purpose of the Crime Victims Compensation Act is to provide a method of compensation for victims of violent crime. All funds come from federal and state offenders through fines and penalty assessments. An arrest of the offender does NOT have to take place in order to be eligible to file a claim; however, the victim and/or claimant is expected to fully cooperate in the apprehension, investigation, and prosecution of the perpetrator. The claimant is also expected to fully cooperate with the District Attorney's Office and Victims Compensation Board staff during the processing of the claim.

The Crime Victims' Compensation Program was created in 1981 with the passage of the Crime Victims' Compensation Act. The Act established guidelines for eligibility and the provision of financial reimbursement to victims of crime. Program guidelines were established with the first payments being made for crimes that occurred after October 19, 1981. The Oklahoma District Attorneys Council has administered the fund since the inception of the program.

The process begins with the victim or claimant filling out the claim form, and ends with a decision by the Crime Victims Compensation Board or Administrator.

- The crime must have occurred in Oklahoma.
- The crime must have been reported to law enforcement within 72 hours of the incident. The Board or administrator may find good cause for failure to report within this period. Exceptions are always made for child victims.
- The claim for compensation must be filed within one (1) year of the crime-related injury of the victim. The one (1) year deadline may be waived and extended to two (2) years for good cause, and may be extended beyond two (2) years only in child sexual assault cases. In no event can other claims be extended beyond two (2) years.
- The claimant is required to fully cooperate with the police, prosecution and other law enforcement entities during the investigation and prosecution of the offender.
- Compensation shall not be awarded to a claimant if it would benefit the offender or an accomplice, and the claimant must not have been the offender or accomplice.
- Compensation that could be awarded to a claimant shall be reduced or denied, depending on the degree of responsibility for the injury or death that is attributable to the victim.

Eligible Expenses: Funeral, Future Economic Loss, Traditional American Indian Services, Income Loss, Loss of Support, Medical/Dental, Rehabilitation, Counseling for Victims, Grief Counseling, Crime Scene Cleanup, Replacement Services (*Financial reimbursement may be available for foster care families.*)

More information is available at <http://www.ok.gov/dac> or by contacting the Oklahoma District Attorneys Council at 800-745-6098.

Local representatives within the District Attorney's Offices are:

- Payne County – Laurie McDougall – 405-372-4883
- Logan County – Kim Woodward – 405-282-0655

CASA FOR KIDS, INC & CRIME VICTIMS COMPENSATION

The children and families that CASA for Kids, Inc. serves may be eligible for Crime Victims Compensation. CASA program staff will provide Crime Victims Compensation training to CASA volunteers at least one time annually. CASA volunteers will provide information about Crime Victims Compensation to the children/families during their initial encounters on a new case. CASA volunteers may assist children/families with applying for Crime Victims Compensation.

OKLAHOMA CASA VISITATION AND COURTESY VISIT POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to set minimum standards and guidelines for CASA volunteers to visit children placed outside of a CASA program's jurisdiction. The Oklahoma CASA Association and its member programs agree in principle that CASA volunteers should have regular, in-person contact with the children on their caseload at least every 30 days, per National CASA Association standards. Regular, in-person contact with children allows the CASA volunteer to get to know and build rapport with the children on their caseload. Sufficient in-person contact allows CASA volunteers to effectively advocate for the best interest of the children to whom they are assigned.

Further, Title 10A of the Oklahoma Statutes (Per section 1-4-306) states that the CASA "reviews documents, reports, records and other information relevant to the case, *meets with and observes the child in appropriate settings*, and interviews parents, health care providers, CPS workers, and any other person with knowledge relevant to the case."

Taking into consideration both National CASA Association standards as well as state statute, the member programs of the Oklahoma CASA Association agree in principle that it is impossible for a CASA volunteer to successfully advocate for a child on their caseload when the CASA volunteer is not seeing the child regularly. This policy sets out the parameters for child visitation and courtesy visits among Oklahoma CASA member programs.

I. Minimum Child Visitation Policy

- A. Each CASA volunteer shall visit each child on their caseload at least every 30 days in their current home placement if the child lives within two hours of the front door to the CASA program, without exception.
- B. Each CASA volunteer shall visit each child on their caseload at least every 60 days in their current home placement if the child lives further than two hours from the front door to the CASA program, without exception. The CASA program staff will complete the appropriate "Exception to Monthly Visitation Form" as required by the National CASA Association when CASA volunteer contact is reduced.
- C. If a child moves to a placement that is more than two hours away from the front door of the CASA program, the program staff shall evaluate its resources, both human and financial, to determine if it has the ability to continue advocating for the child. This evaluation shall include an honest assessment of the volunteer's time commitments and willingness to drive to the child's placement location. The Oklahoma CASA member programs agree, in principle, that a CASA volunteer should have face-to-face contact with their assigned child(ren) at least every 60 days.
- D. If the program decides that it can meet the needs of a child who lives more than two hours away, the CASA program will determine whether or not they will need another Oklahoma CASA member program to conduct a courtesy visit.

II. Courtesy Visits

The Oklahoma CASA Association member programs agree that Courtesy Visits may be conducted only as a method of ensuring that a child or children are seen by a court-appointed special advocate on a regular basis. The member programs agree that the most appropriate method for visiting children is through an in-person visit, at least every 30 to 60 days based on the distance between the CASA volunteer's home program and the child's placement. However, in unusual or extenuating circumstances, a CASA program may request another CASA program to provide a one-time Courtesy Visit to a child or children utilizing either staff or volunteers, or a combination thereof. Prior to arranging a Courtesy Visit, the initiating CASA program must obtain an order permitting the Courtesy Visit from the court which has jurisdiction over the case. A CASA program must complete the initial portion of the attached Courtesy Visit Form to initiate its request for a Courtesy Visit. The CASA staff or volunteer conducting the Courtesy Visit is responsible for promptly completing the remainder of the Courtesy Visit Form following the Courtesy Visit. Additionally, the member programs agree that after a Courtesy Visit is conducted, the CASA volunteer assigned to the case must make a visit to the child within 30 days of the Courtesy Visit, meaning that a CASA volunteer must, at a minimum, never go more than 90 days without seeing a child.

To participate in a Courtesy Visit Program, the Board of Directors of the member program must adopt a Courtesy Visit Policy. In doing so, the Board of Directors and staff of the member program agrees to follow this policy in its entirety and to use the attached form to document and request a Courtesy Visit by another program. Only member programs in good standing with the Oklahoma CASA Association shall conduct Courtesy Visits.

Any deviations from this policy shall be documented with a clear explanation of the purpose of the deviation. This documentation shall be available for inspection during the annual site visit conducted by the Oklahoma CASA Association. For example: If a circumstance exists where a child is placed 6 or 8 hours away, is a teenager, and has had the same CASA for a few years and the relationship is solid, it would not be in the child's best interest to remove the CASA. They can communicate via phone, Facetime, Skype, etc. However, if an exception is made, it must be clearly documented what tasks the CASA will be completing in the absence of that visitation. The program must also determine and clearly document what the new minimum visitation will be in that particular circumstance.

Failure to comply with this policy shall cause a member program to lose its standing with the Oklahoma CASA Association. All liability for not properly following the policy shall be the liability of the member program and the Board of Directors.

MAINTENANCE OF RECORDS FOR VOLUNTEERS

CASA for Kids Maintains Complete and Accurate Records for All Children Served

1. The CASA program maintains, for each child served, a case record which includes:
 - biographical or other identifying information;
 - background on the nature of the presenting problem or reason for referral by the court;
 - court reports and any court orders related to the service being provided;
 - the service plan.
2. Records for all children served are kept up to date through:
 - current contact entries;
 - periodic progress notes or summaries.
3. Entries made in the case record are specific, factual, and pertinent to the nature of the service.
4. The CASA program maintains copies of all volunteer reports and correspondence concerning the case, notes from telephone, e-mail or in-person consultations.
5. Volunteer may maintain an open case file. The records are to be marked "Confidential" and kept in a private place.
6. Volunteer records are subject to review by the program supervisor at any time deemed necessary by the supervisor.
7. Upon termination of service, a closing summary of the services provided is entered into the case record.
8. Volunteer shall turn in their case records including all notes when the case is closed or if they are discharged from the case.
9. Maintenance of records of a closed case is the responsibility of the CASA program. These records are to be filed and marked "Confidential" in a place not open to the public. Hard copies are kept a minimum of seven (7) years. Electronic records are kept indefinitely within the program database. This information is uploaded weekly to state office to meet both contractual requirements and to serve as off site backup.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

1. In conducting interviews with parents, children, foster parents, teachers and other professionals pertaining to the case, the CASA volunteer may collect information but is prohibited from giving out any information to the person(s) being interviewed. There should always be a free exchange of information with your DHS case social worker, child's attorney, and CASA staff.
2. The CASA office will notify all parties about the CASA volunteer's assignment to the case. Attorneys may tell their clients not to discuss their case with the CASA volunteer. Casa volunteers should talk with their Case Supervisor for guidance if this occurs.
3. When discussing your case with other CASA volunteers, in a presentation (when requested), or with your family, the CASA volunteer shall NOT reveal any identifying information such as names or addresses. The identities of families involved with the Juvenile Court are strictly protected by law.
4. Remember that CASA volunteers are not "privileged information" professionals. Anything that you may be told may have to be reported to the court. Inform your CASA child and family of this in advance. At the onset of establishing your relationship with them they should be told this. This can prevent many problems down the road.
5. NEVER make any statement to the media regarding your CASA case or the CASA program. CASA volunteers should talk with their Case Supervisor for guidance if they are approached by the media regarding their case.
6. Mark your CASA log book and any records pertaining to your CASA case "Confidential". Keep these records in a private place at home where family members will not have access to them.
7. ALWAYS keep in mind your obligation to maintain confidentiality. If you are ever in doubt as to what to discuss with someone, call the CASA office before you release any information.
8. A breach of confidentiality is a serious problem which will result in removal from your CASA case.

PROCEDURES BEFORE COURT HEARINGS

- The CASA volunteer should discuss their case with their Case Supervisor two to three weeks prior to a hearing.
- Make a preliminary outline of concerns/assessments and/or recommendations.
- Contact service providers, etc. to get necessary documentation for Court Reports.
- Attend the staffing held before your hearing date is scheduled to discuss the case with all parties involved (see “Case Staffings”).
- Write the court report and submit to your Case Supervisor ten (10) working days before your case hearing. Case Supervisors are required to submit reports to parties in the case seven (7) days before the hearing.
- Social workers and attorneys are busy and are often out of their offices. If you have difficulty contacting them, talk with your Case Supervisor regarding the issue(s) in the case. Ask for assistance from the CASA staff in relaying case information to your social worker and the attorneys.

EX PARTE COMMUNICATION

The CASA volunteer should not engage in *ex parte* communication with the Judge. In other words, no conversation or correspondence concerning the case the volunteer is involved with should take place outside the courtroom with the Judge. This includes telephone calls or written correspondence. Volunteers are not to submit letters from foster parents or any other interested party or person or pass along any other type of information to the Judge outside of the courtroom.

In situations where the volunteer has sensitive information that is important for the court to know, but may create harm to the child or place the child or others in a compromising and/or difficult position if presented in court or in a court report, contact the CASA Executive Director. The Executive Director will provide guidance on how to proceed.

CASE STAFFINGS

The CASA volunteer, volunteer’s CASE Supervisor and/or Executive Director must be present at all multidisciplinary team meetings or staffings and all meetings that include the District Attorney’s office, attorneys or DHS supervisors. CASA staffings are held on Thursdays at noon in the Stillwater CASA office, prior to Monday court hearings. Cases set on the Monday docket will be staffed by: CASA program staff and volunteers, District Attorney, DHS workers and/or supervisors, other attorneys and interested service providers.

Volunteers should attend CASA case staffings when their case is to be staffed.

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS) POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Statement of Understanding

- The CASA volunteer shares with the DHS social worker any information they have obtained. Likewise, the social worker shares information with the CASA volunteer.
- The CASA volunteer attempts to negotiate and work out resolutions in the case at CASA staffing before the court hearings.
- The CASA volunteer's court reports will not criticize the social worker or make disparaging remarks, but will focus on the best interest of the child.

CASA VOLUNTEER HAS A COMPLAINT ABOUT A SOCIAL WORKER

- The CASA volunteer will discuss concerns they may have with their Case Supervisor and make a plan of action.
- The CASA volunteer should first address their concerns with the DHS social worker and attempt to correct the issue with the SHS social worker.
- If this is unsuccessful, the CASA volunteer should return to their Case Supervisor and discuss the issue with the Executive Director.
- The Executive Director will make the ultimate decision on what course of action to take. The Executive Director may contact that DHS social worker's supervisor to discuss the issue to try and resolve the conflict. CASA volunteers and other program staff should NOT contact DHS supervisors regarding conflicts with DHS social workers.

DHS HAS A COMPLAINT ABOUT A CASA VOLUNTEER

- DHS supervisor should contact the Executive Director to discuss concerns about the CASA volunteer.

VOLUNTEER GRIEVANCE POLICIES & PROCEDURES

All complaints or grievances shall be handled at the lowest level possible. When a conflict arises between a CASA volunteer and their Case Supervisor regarding the handling of a case, reporting of information, or the recommendations to be included in a report to the court, the following steps will be taken to resolve the issues:

1. Case Supervisor and CASA volunteer will try to resolve conflict. If they are unable to come to a mutual agreement;
2. The Executive Director will review the case with the CASA volunteer and the volunteer's Case Supervisor. The Executive Director may consult with other interested parties such as the child's attorney or other individuals experienced in deprived cases.
3. The Executive Director may staff the case with the CASA volunteer and conduct a Peer Review.
4. The Executive Director will make the ultimate decision regarding the conflict.

If the conflict in the case is unresolved and the handlings of the case, reporting of the information, or recommendations are inconsistent with program policies, program standards and/or training guidelines, the Executive Director may:

1. dismiss the CASA volunteer from the case; and/or
2. ask the CASA volunteer to resign; and/or
3. dismiss the CASA volunteer from the CASA program; and/or
4. appoint a new CASA volunteer to the case.

For information on the CASA for Kids program grievance policy, please see General Program Policies & Procedures/General Grievance Policy & Procedures.

Grievances Made by a Volunteer to Persons Outside the CASA Program

- CASA volunteers are under the direction and supervision of CASA for Kids and its program staff. The program's policies and procedures guide decisions made regarding conflicts between a CASA volunteer and its staff. Any individual receiving a grievance about the CASA program or staff or its policies, from a CASA volunteer, should refer the volunteer back to the program and to the Executive Director. The CASA volunteer shall make their grievance to the CASA program. All grievances and complaints will be handled by the Executive Director.

Grievances Made Against a Volunteer

- All grievances or complaints will be handled by the Executive Director regarding CASA volunteers. The grievance may be made in writing or verbally. The Executive Director will make the ultimate decision regarding the course of action involving the grievance using the program's policies and procedures as a guide in that decision.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION/NON-VOLUNTARY TERMINATION OF VOLUNTEERS

A CASA volunteer can be requested to resign, be put on probation, removed from a case or terminated from the CASA program for breach of policy and procedures and/or philosophies established by CASA for Kids.

1. Appropriate grounds for dismissal include but are not limited to:
 - the CASA volunteer takes action without program or court approval which endangers the child or is outside the role or powers of the CASA program;
 - the CASA volunteer engages in ex-parte communication with the court;
 - the CASA volunteer violates a program policy, court rule or law;
 - the CASA volunteer fails to complete required training;
 - the CASA volunteer fails to demonstrate an ability to effectively carry out assigned duties (refer to job description);
 - the CASA volunteer falsifies his/her application or misrepresents facts during the screening process;
 - there are allegations of child abuse/neglect against the volunteer;
 - a conflict of interest arises which cannot be resolved;
 - a CASA volunteer misrepresents him or herself as a CASA;
 - misuse of volunteer role for personal gain/reasons;
 - failure to maintain objectivity;
 - unwillingness to work with all parties on a case, including but not limited to parents, social workers, attorneys and other agencies;
 - a lack of correspondence within a 30-day period without notifying the CASA office, including but not limited to telephone, mail or e-mail.
2. The Executive Director has the authority to terminate or discharge a volunteer.

Grounds for immediate dismissal include:

1. Breach of confidentiality.
2. Willingly and knowingly violating policies, procedures and standards of the CASA program.
3. Confirmation of child abuse, either to the child to whom they are assigned or any other child.

Removal from a case:

Upon removal from a case or dismissal from the program, the CASA volunteer will immediately surrender all case records, notes, and reports to the CASA program.

Confidentiality regarding non-voluntary dismissals/terminations:

Information regarding why a CASA volunteer is dismissed or terminated from the CASA program is confidential between the Executive Director and the CASA volunteer. It is not the intent of the program to embarrass a CASA volunteer due to a conflict that may arise between the CASA volunteer and the program by notifying parties in the case or the Board of Directors about the issue. In situations when requested, the Executive Director may be required to provide this information to the Judge or Board of Directors. However, information about the dismissal or termination will be given only when requested and will be given *In Camera*. In other words, no other parties in the case are privileged to have this information.

GENERAL MEDIA CONTACT

When the media calls:

Only the person designated to speak should make any statement to the media. This person will be the Executive Director or a representative from the Oklahoma CASA Association.

CASA staff or volunteers contacted by the media concerning a crisis or unusual event are to notify the Executive Director or Board President, who will then respond to the media.

The media:

If a problem arises, the CASA staff or volunteers should obtain the following information and advise the Executive Director, Board President and/or the appropriate Oklahoma CASA Association contact:

- Name of reporter
- Name of the publication or media
- Telephone number
- List of specific questions
- Deadline

The press will repeat rumors or misinformation, so do not give any information about the case to the press. To assist the media in their job, the persons designated to speak on behalf of CASA for Kids, Inc. will release any factual information..

Assuring the proper balance:

CASA staff and volunteers should be sensitive to the media's needs, but we must also weigh them against our own. Newspapers have unalterable deadlines, and television news crews must meet scheduled broadcasts. As a result we will schedule news conferences, grant interviews, or issue statements at a time which will permit reporters to meet their deadlines if possible. We must be aware, however, that reporters will use these deadlines to pressure us into releasing information that may be premature. Be assured that you are not required to answer a reporter's questions if there is any doubt as to the accuracy of your information.

Do not speculate:

Never fall into the trap of speculation of an event, even if the reporter presents the question in an off-handed remark. If you speculate, you are spreading unknown facts.

VOLUNTEER MEDIA CONTACT

CASA volunteers should not make any comment to the media regarding their case or any other case information.

If you are contacted by the media:

1. refer the media contact to the CASA program office;
2. notify the CASA office about the situation.

BEST INTEREST STANDARDS: CORE VALUES
A Basis for Working with Families and Making Recommendations

1. Every child has the right to a permanent safe home at a minimum level of care.
2. A range of parenting styles and practices can provide a minimum sufficient level of care.
3. Priority must be given to clients at the greatest risk.
4. The state has the right to interfere in families lives in order to protect children.
5. The right of children to protection takes precedence over parent's rights.
6. Families are the most important unit for raising children.
7. Children cannot wait indefinitely for permanence, which must include a relationship with an attachment.
8. We should empower clients to take charge of their own lives and to make necessary changes.
9. The mission of public social service agencies is to ensure minimum, not ideal, level of childcare.
10. We must work to remove risk from children - not remove children from risk.
11. We should have the same standards for intervention and expectations for change throughout our involvement with a family.
12. The challenge is to balance issues of family preservation, child protection and a commitment to permanence.

BEST INTEREST STANDARDS: PERMANENCY PLANNING

Permanency planning is a social work practice philosophy which intends that each child entering the system will be provided a permanent, continuous, reciprocal relationship with a positive attachment figure in a minimum amount of time.

This philosophy should form the basis for all casework activity and decision making and includes the following principles and practices:

- *Minimum Sufficient Level of Care* is what the child needs in order to grow and develop. As a society, we can require that parents provide this level of care, and therefore we have the right and responsibility to intervene when this level of care is not provided. Conversely, we must recognize that we cannot intervene to insure a higher level of care even though our personal values may lead us to feel that children deserve a "better" life.
- *Least Detrimental Alternative* illustrates that each time we do something for a child we also do something to that child. It is clear that each move hurts, and that separation and loss and the grief that follows is a result of our intervention. Each time we make a decision we must be aware that often we are not doing what is "best" for a child, but what is the "least worst."
- *Goal Oriented* casework insures that all activity will be devoted to achieving permanence by enabling parents to rectify the problems that caused the child to be removed or by demonstrating that the parents are unable or unwilling to change their conduct or improve their condition.
- *Time Limited* interaction recognizes that a child's sense of time should guide our casework and that we must keep a sense of urgency about reaching a permanent plan for each child.

BEST INTEREST STANDARDS: INTERVENTIONS & REMOVAL

The standard for intervention and removal is not best interest but rather minimum sufficient level of care-who could decide for your child or mine what was ultimately in their best interest. We must be careful that our values about what is "best" are not the basis for our decisions.

1. We must evaluate the strengths and needs of the family and the child in the context of what is the function of the family. The question is not, "Is the child happy?" but rather, "Is the child safe?"
2. Parental behavior alone does not constitute a basis for continuing intervention or removal, unless there is a clear connection between the parent's behavior and harm to the child.
3. We must consider harm and the effect of the harm before we assume the right to intervene, and most especially the need to remove. The existence of a dangerous situation and the risk of harm is not in and of itself a sufficient basis for removal.
4. We intervene--that is, provide treatment services which may be involuntary--when we have determined that the level of care provided by the family has fallen below a minimum sufficient standard. We remove when the family cannot or will not improve that level of care, despite the services provided, or when the level of care is so far below an acceptable minimum level that the child is in immediate danger.
5. In order to fully pursue what is in the child's best interest, we must be aware that any time we do something for a child we also do something to that child.
6. We must constantly examine our values and prejudices, and ask, "Is it in the child's interest or in our interest?"
7. Removal will never be in the child's best interest unless the removal is part of a plan--not only for safety but also for a timely appropriate resolution.
8. All decisions of best interest begin and end with the focus on the needs and rights of the child to a permanent, safe, stable family.

*Jane Thompson, Attorney
N. C. Department of Justice*

*Jane Malpass, Consultant
N. C. Division of Social Services*

BEST INTEREST STANDARDS: TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS (TPR)

Termination of parental rights is generally a bifurcated or two-part decision for the court. First, has the agency shown the existence of one or more grounds for TPR? Second, if these grounds exist, is the very permanent decision to terminate the parent's rights in the child's best interest?

It is important, however, to realize that evidence showing the grounds for TPR is often critical to the "best interest" decision as well. Evidence as to the grounds in the TPR case that has been "built" with will answer the following questions for the court:

- Have all appropriate services been offered to the parents in a timely manner?
- Have the parents responded to those services in a way that demonstrates they are now able to provide a minimally sufficient level of care for their children?
- If the child has special needs, are the parents able at the time of TPR hearing to meet those needs?
- Is there a reason to believe that the parents could materially improve the conditions or behavior that led to the removal of their child in the next three months if given the opportunity?
- What type of relationship have the parents maintained with their child since he was removed?
- What progress or problems has the child experienced while in foster care?

In addition, the agency must also present evidence that answers these other best interest issues for the court.

1. What do we have to offer that is better than the present situation?
Will the foster parents adopt?
Do we have other adoptive parents waiting?
Have we made similar successful placements?
2. Have we looked at relatives?
Are they able to provide safety?
Are they able to provide permanence?
Is there a previous attachment?
3. Who are those persons already in the child's life to whom he is attached?
Can they adopt?
Can they maintain their contact?
Will they give "blessing" for the adoptive placement?
Will siblings remain together? Should they?
4. Can you balance what the child wants against what the child needs?
What has the child said?
Who has talked to the child?
Are you certain that the child understands the issues?
Are there confused loyalty issues?
5. What will happen to this child if TPR is not granted?
Who will "parent" this child when he is an adult?
Who will be his "forever" parent?

**BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD:
WHAT THE GAL/CASA CAN DO TO ASSURE PERMANENCE**

There are many things that the child's advocate can do to insure that the child in the system will not be forgotten. A few of these things are listed below. Following these will assure that the advocacy is focused on permanence.

- Constantly examine your own value system. Understand the difference between poor parenting and abuse and neglect. Make sure that you can accept a variety of parenting styles, even those that include behavior of which you do not approve.
- Carefully examine the record--understand the issues that brought the child into foster care. Ask agency staff about anything that does not make sense.
- Ask the parents why they think they lost custody of their child. Do not assume that they understand or agree with the agency's reasons.
- Recognize that we should be operating on the child's sense of time. Help others to hear the clock that is ticking that childhood away.
- Understand grief and what moving and waiting do to children. Keep permanent resolutions as the focus of your efforts.
- Keep child centered and family focused. Children need a permanent family now--theirs if possible--but not if it means the loss of their childhood.
- Recognize parent's strengths, but do not ignore their failings. Advocate to return the child when the parents have "fixed" what brought the child into care. Advocate for Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) if the conditions persist.
- Be a team player when possible--attend reviews--continue to investigate and assess--share with the social worker and the court what you learn.
- Aggravate the system if you have to--be a catalyst for change.
- Work for justice--act with mercy.

BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD: WHAT TO EXPECT—GRIEF & LOSS

Normal grief in children may look abnormal--grief is the result of the loss of an attachment figure. Grief and loss impact behavior no matter what the age of the child. Children cannot master developmental tasks when their energy is directed toward working on the grief.

The Stages of Grief:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| • Shock/Denial | Children may be shut down or compliant |
| • Guilt | Children feel responsible |
| • Bargaining | Children try to work it out, sometimes to get out |
| • Anger/Depression | Children act out or turn inward |
| • Sadness/Despair | Children begin to face loss or give up |
| • Resolution | Children can begin to build acceptances |

From the initial shock at the removal from the primary attachment figure to the point where a child may be able to reach a resolution can be expected to take two years. Unfortunately, many children in the child welfare system move three or more times in these two years. The result is a cycle of layers of unresolved grief. Resolution is never really possible. This lack of resolution and the cycle of unresolved grief results in a lack of trust in the world. After several placements, the fear of yet another loss affects the ability to form attachments.

****Children Cannot Survive Multiple Placements****

- They are continually dealing with grief without reaching resolution
- They are constantly facing the loss of attachment figures
- They lose hope for permanence and cannot trust