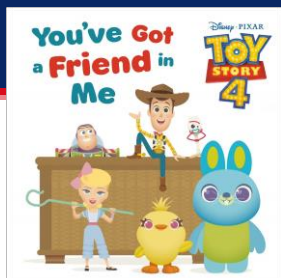


# CASA: A Friend of the Court



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## Vision and Mission

### VISION

Where every child who has been abused and neglected in the State of Tennessee is given the opportunity to thrive in a safe and loving home.

### MISSION

To support, develop, expand and unite local CASA programs in recruiting and training volunteers to advocate for Tennessee's children who have been abused and neglected.



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## History of CASA Nationally

- Created in 1977 by a Family Court Judge in Seattle, WA who wanted help in making decisions for kids

"As a judge, I had to make tough decisions. I had to decide whether to take a child from the only home he's ever known or leave him somewhere he might possibly be abused. I needed someone who could tell me what was best for that child-from the child's viewpoint. That's what CASA does."

-Hon. David Soukup, Founder of CASA



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## History of CASA in Tennessee



- The Tennessee CASA Association was formed in 1988 to support local CASA programs.
- Today 31 CASA programs serve 59 counties across the state. This leaves 38 counties **without** a CASA program.
- There are over **8,000 children currently in state custody due to abuse and neglect** in Tennessee.
- Another **20,000 children** are being monitored in their home by DCS, at risk of coming into custody and going to Juvenile Court.

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## Tennessee CASA Network



■ Operating with TOCY funding  
■ Interested in developing a CASA program  
■ None

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## Serving the Need in Tennessee

- **Year ending June 30, 2022, 1,721 CASA volunteers advocated for 5,258** of Tennessee's children who have experienced abuse and neglect.
- We believe that every child has the right to the safe embrace of a loving family.




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### CASA Authorization Statute

#### 37-1-149. Guardian ad Litem - Special Advocate - Appointment

(a) (1) The court at any stage of a proceeding under this part, on application of a party or on its own motion, shall appoint a **guardian ad litem** for a child who is a party to the proceeding. . .

The court, in any proceeding under this part resulting from a report of harm or an investigation report under 37-1-401 – 37-1-411, shall appoint a guardian ad litem for the child who was the subject of the report. A party to the proceeding or the party’s employee or representative shall not be appointed. . .



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### CASA Authorization Statute (continued)

- (2) Any guardian ad litem appointed by the court shall receive training appropriate to that role prior to such appointment.
- (b) (1) The court may also appoint a non-lawyer special advocate trained in accordance with the standards of the Tennessee Court Appointed Special Advocates Association (CASA) to act in the best interest of a child before, during, and after court proceedings.
- (2) The court-appointed special advocate shall conduct such investigation and make such reports and recommendations pertaining to the welfare of a child as the court may order or direct.
- (3) Any guardian ad litem or special advocate so appointed by the court shall be presumed to be acting in good faith and in so doing shall be immune from any liability that might otherwise be incurred while acting within the scope of such appointment.

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### The Court Appointment Order



#### The Court Appointment Order, by statute:

- Gives the CASA Volunteer and CASA Staff the authority to talk to anyone involved in the child’s life and access to all records on behalf of the child.
- Requires a comprehensive, written report from the CASA Volunteer with full information about the child and the family situation and best interest recommendations for the child.
- Requires Confidentiality in every aspect of the work.

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### Confidentiality

- CASA submits objective, comprehensive reports to the Court and the parties with information gathered from all sources.
- CASA distributes the report to – DCS, parents, attorneys, and Guardian ad litem – the parties of the case.
- While we can share information about the child with the Foster Parents, we can't share the CASA Report.




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### Memorandum of Understanding

In each Juvenile Court and in accordance with National CASA Standards, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is established between the court and the CASA program before any cases are assigned.

- Establishes the categories of dependency/ neglect cases under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court that are most appropriate for referral to CASA
- Establishes the role and responsibility of the CASA program and its volunteers
- Forms the working relationship between the Juvenile Court, Tennessee Dept. of Children's Services, and CASA
- Must be signed every four years or whenever there is a change in the presiding judge
- Must be updated in accordance with National CASA standards

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### Role of CASA Volunteer in Court:

**Fact Witness.** The CASA Volunteer tells the court what they **saw, did, and heard**. This is why it is so important that the CASA Volunteer hears and sees things, such as visits between parents and children.



**Recommendation Maker.** The CASA Volunteer gathers information to make recommendations to the court regarding what is in the best interest of the child based on facts and observations.

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### What CASA Volunteers Do:

➤ CASA Volunteers conduct an intensive investigation and make reports and best interest recommendations pertaining to the welfare of a child as the court may order.

**CASA Volunteers speak to:**

- The child
- Parents and extended family members
- Foster parents
- DCS and contract agency workers
- Guardian ad litem
- Teachers
- Clinicians and counselors
- Anyone involved in the child's life



➤ Monitor that the child remains safe, with all needs met. The goal is that the child achieves permanency as quickly, and with as little disruption, as possible.

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### A CASA Volunteer DOES NOT:

➤ Investigate the abuse of the child

➤ Provide direct services or give gifts



➤ Transport children for any reason

➤ Make any promises to the child regarding placement or services



➤ Supervise visitation



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### CASA Volunteers receive comprehensive training:

• 30-35 hours of pre-service training and court observation utilizing the 2017 National CASA Pre-Service Volunteer curriculum tailored for state and local laws and practices

• Topics include:

- CASA Volunteer Role and Court Report Writing
- Well-Being of the Child and Case Studies
- Trauma, Resilience, and Communication Skills
- Mental Health and Poverty
- Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence
- Cultural Competence and LGBTQ Youth
- Educational Advocacy and Older Youth

• 12 hours of In-service training annually



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### Relationship within Child Welfare System

While CASA functions as “extra eyes and ears” for Juvenile Court –  
CASA also functions as “extra arms and legs for DCS.”

Working within the “TEAM” is vitally important to achieve the best interests of children.



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### Benefits of CASA

- ❖ A child with a CASA volunteer is more likely to find a safe, permanent home,
- ❖ less likely to be bounced home to home,
- ❖ half as likely to re-enter foster care,
- ❖ do better in school,
- ❖ and get more help and services while in the system.
- ❖ Volunteers spend significantly more time with the child



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### Evidence of Effectiveness

At case closure,  
**90% of the CASA recommendations are implemented by the Court.**

**90% of children remain safe six months following case closure** because less than 10% re-enter juvenile court in less than six months.



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## The Need for CASA in each County

### Right Now...

- ✓ Think about the number of children in foster care
- ✓ Then think about the children who are being monitored by both DCS and Juvenile Court.
- ✓ Every one of these children need a CASA Volunteer.




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### First, the Juvenile Judge needs to say YES!

- ❖ **Second**, key leaders need to be identified who can develop a program and raise the resources necessary to support the program.
- ❖ The Juvenile Judge and staff are very important to educate the community about the need of children in Juvenile Court – the volume of the cases – and the complexity of the family situation.
- ❖ It is best when an established program can expand into a neighboring county.




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### CASA will help you!



- The Tennessee CASA Association is dedicated to helping interested communities develop strong, active CASA programs.
- We provide :
  - ❑ Technical assistance and training for new and developing programs, including directors and staff
  - ❑ Start up and ongoing support of CASA programs across the state
  - ❑ Legislative advocacy and representation for children in the statewide child welfare system

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## Connect with CASA

[www.tncasa.org](http://www.tncasa.org)  
[www.beforthechild.org](http://www.beforthechild.org)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/TennesseeCASA/](https://www.facebook.com/TennesseeCASA/)

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/tncasa>

**Instagram:** [www.instagram.com/tennesseecasa/](https://www.instagram.com/tennesseecasa/)

**LinkedIn:** [www.linkedin.com/company/tennessee-casa/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/tennessee-casa/)



Be  
For  
The  
*Child*

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## Contact Information:



Tennessee CASA Association Inc.  
745 S. Church Street, Suite 401  
Murfreesboro, TN 37130

Lynne Farrar, [lynne@tncasa.org](mailto:lynne@tncasa.org)

Office: 615-220-3990  
TN CASA Cell: 615-517-4613

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## 20,000 Children in Tennessee need a CASA Volunteer



**“Every Kid Is ONE Caring Adult Away from Being a Success Story.” – Josh Shipp**

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