

CASA

(Court Appointed Special Advocate)

Mission Statement:

The Hamilton County CASA Program uses responsible, trained, caring volunteers to effectively promote children's best interests in court and provide greater assurance that their needs for secure, loving homes will be met.

Primary Goal:

The CASA concept is based on the belief that every child has an inherent right to a safe and permanent home and the opportunity to thrive. Our goal is to be a leader in child advocacy through dedicated volunteers and staff.

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Purpose and Role:

A Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer is a specially trained citizen who is appointed by a Judge or Magistrate to represent the best interests of a child in every stage of Juvenile Court proceedings. A CASA assists the Court in making a sound and well-informed decision in the child's case by providing the Judge or Magistrate with a carefully researched background investigation of the child and their circumstances. A CASA offers an unbiased view of the family's situation as well as a voice for the child in the courtroom.

Upon request of the Judge or Magistrate, the CASA will conduct an independent assessment of the facts and issues of an assigned case from the perspective of a neutral third party. This is accomplished by making field visits (e.g. home, school, etc.) and obtaining information from a variety of sources: parents, relatives, teachers, etc. The CASA will provide all the information gathered as well as any concerns about the case to the Judge or Magistrate through a written report at the next scheduled court hearing.

Volunteer Requirements:

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- Be 21 years of age or older
- Complete a written application containing information about educational background and training, employment history, and experience working with children
- Submit the names of 3 personal references (preferably ones who are not related to the applicant)
- Authorize records checks with the appropriate agencies, e.g. police, Child Protective Services, sex offender registry, etc.
- Participate in an individual interview with CASA program staff

** Hamilton County Juvenile Court actively recruits and selects qualified volunteers who are broadly representative of the community served. The Court administers personnel and volunteer practices without discrimination based upon age, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, or religion.*

Time Commitment:

The Hamilton County CASA Program will provide 30 hours of pre-service training for the volunteer prior to assignment of a case. These 30 hours are a combination of classroom learning, homework, and courtroom observation. Each case varies in the amount of time that a CASA volunteer will spend on it. Generally, a case requires approximately 5 to 10 hours of doing research and conducting interviews prior to the first court appearance. However, more complicated cases may take longer. Once acclimated to the process, CASA volunteers typically work 2 to 4 hours per month.

National CASA Association website: <http://www.casaforchildren.org/>

Tennessee CASA Association website: <http://www.tncasa.org/>