

# Richmond CASA Frequently Asked Questions

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## Why are CASA volunteers needed?

Judge David Soukup explains why he founded CASA:

“When I was sitting as a judge in juvenile court, I realized that there was no one in the courtroom whose only job was to provide a voice for those children. Caseworkers have obligations to their agency, the parent and others. Lawyers cannot investigate the facts and advocate for the mental health and social needs of the child. While sitting at juvenile court, I never got a night’s sleep without waking to wonder if at least one decision I made that day had been the best for a child. It struck me that it might be possible to recruit and train volunteers to investigate a child’s case so they could provide a voice for the child in those proceedings, proceedings which could affect their whole lives.”

## Exactly what does a CASA volunteer do?

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in court and other settings. The primary responsibilities of a CASA volunteer are to:

- Gather information: Review documents and records, interview the children, family members and professionals in their lives.
- Report back to the judge: Provide written reports at court hearings, appear in court.
- Make recommendations about services and placement: Ensure that the children and their family are receiving appropriate services and advocate for those that are not immediately available. Bring concerns about the child's health, education, mental health, etc. to the appropriate professionals. Review placement options, and advise the judge on where would be the best place for the child to live at this time.
- Be there for a child: Studies have shown that children have much better outcomes if they have one stable, caring adult in their life. You can be that person who is there for a child during this extremely stressful time in their life.

## Why should I become a CASA volunteer?

Richmond CASA volunteers explain why they donate their time to CASA:

“Being a CASA gives a voice to those who don’t have one. My relationship with the children I am advocating for touches me directly. The work can be challenging but also so rewarding and impactful.”

“I volunteer with CASA because I firmly believe that all children need a voice. I adore the relationships that I have developed with the children that I advocate for and watching them grow in many ways. I know that, as a CASA, we make a huge difference in court and the judge really counts on you to provide them the information that they would be unable to see/hear if you were not advocating.”

“I must admit, my favorite times as a CASA are the times each month interacting with my kids. I'm so in awe of their resiliency and ability to share their love.”

## Who can be a CASA volunteer?

You do not have to be in the legal or social services field to be a volunteer, and there’s no level of education needed. CASA volunteers are everyday citizens who want to help children in their community. We are looking for people who are organized, reliable, have good writing skills and can work independently. Volunteers must be over the age of 21, have reliable transportation and access to a computer. We welcome and encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply.

### **What is the time commitment like? Can I do this if I work full time?**

We have some volunteers who work full time, some who work part time, and some who are retired. Whatever your work situation, you may be able to fit CASA into your schedule. The time commitment tends to be the biggest concern for those interested in volunteering, so we encourage you to be very thoughtful about your ability to make the commitment. Please consider these expectations when thinking about your own schedule:

- CASA volunteers are asked to work 10-15 hours a month on their case.
- CASA volunteers must visit their children twice a month. These visits will be coordinated with the child's caregiver, and can be whenever works best for both of your schedules.
- CASA volunteers will need to be able to send emails and make phone calls during normal business hours.
- CASA volunteers are required to attend the court hearings related to their child. These are during the day, generally with 2-5 months advanced notice. There are typically 2-5 hearings per year.
- New volunteer training does take place during the evenings and weekends. However, trainees are asked to observe the Oliver Hill courtrooms for 4 hours total during the daytime hours.
- All other responsibilities can typically be done around the volunteer's schedule. For example, visiting the child and writing court reports can be done on evenings and weekends.

### **Do I need to make a long-term commitment to the program?**

We ask that our volunteers commit to serve for a minimum of 18 months. Volunteers are asked to stay with each case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home.

### **What sort of support will I receive?**

Once you are sworn in, you are assigned to a case manager (one of the four Richmond CASA staff). They will be with you every step of the way. They will assign you the case, provide you guidance while you are working your case, and review your report before it is submitted to the court. They are there to answer any questions you may have.

### **What is the screening process like?**

The first step is to submit a [Richmond CASA application](#) and email it to [heather.farber@richmondgov.com](mailto:heather.farber@richmondgov.com). You will then be asked to come in to the office for an interview with two staff members. At this time, you will be asked to complete several background check forms. After the interview, you may be invited to attend our next training session. We typically hold 3 training sessions a year. The training sessions involve 30 hours of classroom instruction and 4 hours of courtroom observation. Training is an extension of our screening process. At the end of the training session, volunteers are sworn-in as Court Appointed Special Advocates by a judge and are able to pick up their first case.

Upcoming Training Session:

*We are currently accepting applications for the 2018 Winter Training Session, which begins on January 23, 2018. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, and can be submitted anytime between now and January 9, 2018.*

[Winter 2018 Training Schedule](#)

[Richmond CASA application](#)

**To learn more, contact Heather Farber, Volunteer Coordinator, at 804-646-5180 or [heather.farber@richmondgov.com](mailto:heather.farber@richmondgov.com).**