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# Frequently Asked Questions



## 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 services that promote healing and strengthen families. Advocate for services that are not immediately available. Bring concerns about the child's health, education, mental health, etc. to the appropriate professionals. Visit the homes of parents and relatives, and make recommendations about placement options that are in the child’s best interest.
- Be a caring, consistent adult: Studies have shown that children have better outcomes if they have at least one stable, caring adult in their life. For a child in foster care, life can be stressful, inconsistent and isolating. You can be a support for a child during this difficult time.

## 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. The work can be challenging, but also so rewarding and impactful.”
- “Not one person on her case has remained the same throughout this past year except for her Guardian Ad Litem and me. I am a CASA, because I see the power in the consistency of a positive adult figure... It’s about standing up for what is right and seeing that a child’s best interest is taken into account.”
- “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.”

## 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, open minded, can work independently and have good writing skills and

interpersonal skills. Volunteers must be over the age of 21, have reliable transportation and access to a computer.

CASA strives to build a community of volunteers that reflects the diversity of the children we serve. Men, LGBTQ+ individuals and individuals who reflect the racial, ethnic, economic and linguistic demographics of Richmond City are strongly encouraged 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. We encourage you to be very thoughtful about your ability to meet 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 2-4 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 5 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. Children in foster care are experiencing a lot of changes. We want their CASA volunteer to be a source of consistency for the entire time their case is before the court.

### **WHAT SORT OF SUPPORT WILL I RECEIVE?**

Once you are sworn in, you are assigned to a case manager (one of the five Richmond CASA staff members). 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 reports before they are 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 may then be asked to come in to the office for an interview with two staff members. At that time, you'll need 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 typically involve 30 hours of classroom instruction and 5 hours of courtroom observation. During the pandemic, we have altered the format of our training for a virtual format. Training is an extension of our screening process. After successfully completing training, volunteers are sworn in as Court Appointed Special Advocates by a judge and are able to pick up their first case.

### **APPLY TODAY!**

We are currently accepting applications on a rolling basis. To view the upcoming training dates, visit [www.grscan.com/be-a-casa](http://www.grscan.com/be-a-casa). To learn more, contact Heather Farber, Volunteer Coordinator, at 804-646-5180 or [heather.farber@richmondgov.com](mailto:heather.farber@richmondgov.com).