



Court Appointed Special Advocates®  
FOR CHILDREN

CASA® for Kids of East Texas

## **CASA® Volunteer Information & Application Packet**

Thank you for your interest in becoming a CASA® volunteer. We look forward to teaming with you to advocate for abused and neglected children.

Should you have any questions while reading and filling out this information packet, please call our office at 903-597-7725. It is important to schedule a pre-training interview. This gives you an opportunity to ask any and all questions you have and allows us to know you better. If you do not have an interview scheduled, please call or send an email to:

Kathy Elliott                      Community Outreach Coordinator                      [katherine@casaforkidsofet.org](mailto:katherine@casaforkidsofet.org)

---

### ***You Are Cordially Invited To Be A Hero...***

Imagine what it feels like to be the person who shows a child that heroes still walk the earth, that all grown-ups are not the same. To be the one that can restore a child's faith in people and can give them hope for the future. Think about a time in your life when you felt totally alone and in need, and someone stood beside you. Remember what a gift that was? You can give that same gift to an abused or neglected child by becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate®.

For the year 2010, CASA for Kids of East Texas, Inc. had 115 active volunteers, serving 425 children in Smith, Van Zandt and Wood Counties. Because of the infinite amount of child abuse cases, more children need your help every month.

### ***What is CASA?***

CASA for Kids of East Texas is a private non-profit volunteer organization located in Tyler that mobilizes community volunteers to break the cycle of child abuse and neglect. We speak up for abused and neglected children that are involved in the family court system in Smith, Van Zandt and Wood counties. Many children involved with CASA® (Court Appointed Special Advocates®) have been removed from the home by Child Protective Services (CPS), and reside in foster homes or residential treatment facilities. CASA® volunteers ensure that the child is in a safe environment, with the child's best interests being served. CASA® volunteers have the status of "officers of the court," giving them the power to affect real change in the life of a child.

### **CASA® Training: The Path to Advocacy**

CASA® Training is designed to prepare volunteers like you, to become a voice in court for abused and neglected children. The free training immerses you in an intensive and inspirational learning atmosphere. We put our volunteers through an accumulative 32 hour training program to develop them as competent, responsible individuals who through this training are able to exercise good judgment in deciding what is in the best interest of the child. It is designed to model values that are important to CASA®/GAL work, including independence, responsibility, self-awareness and respect for differences, critical thinking, and collaboration. We include in our training, education on the legal system, family dynamics, and risk indicator of abuse and neglect. Half of our training program (16 hours) is offered online so that you can work through the information at your own pace. The rest of the training program is offered in an interactive group setting at our office. These sessions are broken up into four 4-hour sessions and the schedule is flexible to meet the needs of the potential volunteer. This training is the beginning of your education as a CASA® Volunteer, which is then reinforced through your casework with a CASA® staff member. Training is also a time for you to develop relationships with your fellow classmates, as they will serve as an excellent resource and support network for you.

**What Is Expected Of You:** The process to become a CASA® Volunteer includes the completion of the application, a state and national criminal background check, driving record check, child abuse check and a pre-training interview with CASA® staff. The pre-training interview will include your volunteer, professional and childhood experiences, in addition to your opinions and feelings about working with children and families affected by abuse and neglect. Once the application process and interview is completed and approved, if you still feel that volunteering with CASA® is what you want to do, you will be ready for CASA® Training.

Upon the completion of training, you will be sworn in by the court, and will be ready to take your first case. CASA® staff will consider your preference of the number of children you would like to work with, as well as the age, gender, race and abuse issues with which you feel most comfortable, and will try to match you to a similar case if possible.

Volunteers spend an average of **10 - 20 hours per month** on the case, and are asked to commit at least one year to the case. CASA® volunteers work in various ways including:

- Attending court hearings and providing written and oral reports to the court regarding the best interest of the child.
- Provide written CASA® reports on a monthly basis, by the *fifth* of each month.
- Contacting the child monthly by phone or visits.
- Collaborating with caseworkers, attorneys, teachers, counselors, foster parents etc.
- Monitoring the progress of reunified families, helping to insure that abuse does not recur
- Following up on court orders, and reporting back to the court compliance or non-compliance with court orders.

### ***What You Can Expect From Us:***

We know that the most valuable asset is your time; because time is something you can never get back. CASA® Volunteer training will be a professional, comprehensive, fun and interactive environment geared for preparing you to be the strongest voice that you can be for a child.

Once you have been assigned to a case, a CASA® staff member will support and guide you throughout your casework. Our staff members have expertise in working on behalf of abused children and are there to coach the volunteer through casework, court appearances, report writing and working with children and families. The volunteer/staff team approaches the child's case jointly, insuring the best services are delivered to the child.

### ***What makes CASA® an effective solution to the epidemic of child abuse?***

CASA® is an effective solution because one volunteer is focused on the well being of one child or sibling group. Child Protective Services caseworkers can have up to 50 cases. CASA® Volunteers donate their time to insure that the child's physical, emotional, psychological and educational needs are met.

### ***What type of person makes a good CASA® volunteer?***

CASA® volunteers come from all socioeconomic, ethnic, education and religious backgrounds. Some work full time, some are retired. Some have children, others do not. Some have experienced child abuse or trauma first hand. The one thread that binds CASA® volunteers to their work with children is the knowledge that we have *all* been children. CASA® volunteers are good communicators, objective, responsible, committed, mature and understand the important role they have in a child's life. Both men and women are needed. No special experience or education is required, and you must be at least 21 years of age to be a CASA® volunteer. You must be able to successfully complete state and national criminal background checks, with no prior CPS history.

### ***How much time does it take to be a CASA® Volunteer?***

The same amount of time you spend each week doing something ordinary, like attending a movie, can be spent doing something extraordinary as a CASA® volunteer. Our volunteers average 10 - 20 hours of casework per month.

### ***How is CASA® funded?***

CASA® is funded by federal and state grants, private donations, planned giving, memorials, our annual fundraising event, "Justice is Served" and other scheduled fund raisers.

### ***Court Appointed Special Advocates® Job Description***

- Recommend to the Court, based on facts found during interviews and investigation, the best interest of a child who is involved in the court system as a result of abuse or neglect.
- Work for and achieve the goal of CASA – “That every child has the right to a safe permanent home.”
- Interview all parties: child/children, parents, foster parents, professionals, etc. (anyone who has/had contact with the child/children).
- Maintain records of all findings.
- Confer with the CASA staff prior to preparing court reports.
- Prepare court reports for the CASA staff’s review at least 10 days before court hearings.
- Appear in court to testify for the child’s best interest.
- Turn in all contact logs and records as instructed by the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the following month.
- Monitor the case to ensure that all court orders are followed.
- Investigate placements when the child may be placed.
- Work for permanency for the child/children.

### ***Benefits***

Although we cannot provide you with monetary rewards, there are many benefits to being a CASA/GAL volunteer. These include the opportunity to:

- Make a difference in the life and future of a child who has been a victim of abuse and/or neglect.
- Help a child find permanency in a safe, loving home.
- Assist judges in obtaining a clear picture of a child’s life and needs.
- Gain an understanding of district and family courts, legal proceedings, and social service agencies.
- Develop/utilize communication skills.
- Develop/utilize assertiveness.
- Utilize your past experience/skills.
- Form friendships with like-minded people in your community.
- Have access to training statewide.

### ***Equal Opportunity Statement***

It is the policy of CASA® for Kids of East Texas, Inc. to implement affirmatively equal service to all clients without regard to race, religion, sexual orientation, group, age, gender or national origin.

**Court Appointed Special Advocates® Volunteer Application**

- Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Name: Last \_\_\_\_\_ First \_\_\_\_\_ M.I. \_\_\_\_\_
- Address: \_\_\_\_\_
- City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_
- How long have you lived at this address: \_\_\_\_\_
- Have you lived outside of Texas in the last 5 years: \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
- If yes, where and when? (please give the complete addresses):  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Telephone: Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_
- Work: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_
- (If employed: May you be called at work?) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
- Other Names Used (Married, Maiden, Nicknames):  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_
- Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Emergency Contact Information:**

Name	Relationship	Phone

**Education History:**

Please select the highest completed:

High School: \_\_\_\_\_ College: \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate: \_\_\_\_\_

School	Major/Degree	Post Graduate Degree or Professional Training	Dates Attended

Are you presently enrolled in school?      \_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_ No

If yes, name of school and course of study:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Employment History:**

Are you currently employed:      \_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_ No

If so, will you be able to take time off for required daytime casework, including court appearances, mediations, case staffings, and family visitations at CPS?

\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_ No

Employer & Name of Supervisor	Occupation	Dates of Employment	Reason for Leaving

- Do you drive?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
- Do you have a valid & current Texas Driver's License?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No

If so, please provide the Texas license number: \_\_\_\_\_

- Do you have an automobile available to you?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No
- Do you have a valid & current automobile insurance coverage?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No

**Personal References:**

Please provide CASA® for Kids of East Texas with information on 5 people that you feel would be willing to act as a reference for you. Please note: **At least three of the five must not be related to you. We will be mailing these to them, so please provide complete addresses.**

Name	Address	Contact Number

**Responsibilities**

Have you ever applied to this or any other CASA® agency?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No

*If yes, please detail what agency, your position, responsibilities & reason for leaving?*

---

Yes	No	As a CASA® Volunteer will you be willing or able to:
		<i>Participate in our initial 32-hour interview and training program</i>
		<i>Participate in 12 hours of continuing education per year, beginning after first year of volunteer service.</i>
		<i>Commit a minimum of one year to being a CASA® Volunteer</i>
		<i>Attend all court hearings and meetings as scheduled</i>
		<i>Visit the child(ren) in their placements or homes</i>
		<i>Spend a minimum of 10-20 hours per month on your case</i>
		<i>Participate in fact finding and monitoring, &amp; report your findings in court reports &amp; monthly updates</i>
		<i>Remain neutral, objective, &amp; professional when working with children &amp; their families</i>

### ***Acknowledgement***

I am interested in becoming a CASA® volunteer and know of no reason why I should not be assigned to a child in the program. I am aware that the children in the CASA® program have been abused, neglected or abandoned by adults and since I do not want to be another cause of disappointment to the child, I agree to a minimum commitment of one year to the child(ren) and case to which I am assigned. The undersigned acknowledges and agrees that:

- CASA® is not obligated in any way to accept me into the volunteer training program by submission of this application
- There is no obligation, if called upon, to accept a case
- CASA® is not obligated to assign or actively seek to assign a case
- **CASA® retains the right to refuse any individual that it feels would not be in the best interest of the program, and further, that CASA® is not required to state the reason(s) for non-acceptance**
- The volunteer's personal file is held in strictest confidence and becomes the property of CASA® for Kids of East Texas, Inc.
- At any time during the pre-training interview process, volunteer training program, or service period with CASA® for Kids of East Texas that an applicant displays inappropriate behaviors or conducts themselves in a way that is insensitive to other races, cultures, genders, or age groups, we reserve the right to suspend or terminate the applicant.

### ***Authorization to Contact References***

I hereby give my permission to CASA® for Kids of East Texas, Inc. to inquire about my qualifications and/or character. I understand that this reference check may be made by phone, or in writing and will include present and past employers, volunteer organizations and personal references.

Further, I agree to clearance by any city, state, or national agencies, as well as the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services by means of a computer check.

### ***Authorization for Release of Information***

CASA® for Kids of East Texas, Inc. will complete a criminal record, driving record, and a child abuse check with the Texas Department of Public Safety, and the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services on all potential employees and volunteers. Background checks may also be conducted by city, state, and national agencies as necessary to ensure the safety and suitability of all program clients and participants. This is done to insure that the employees and volunteers have not been convicted of an offense that would be potentially detrimental to the CASA® program.

CASA® for Kids of East Texas, Inc. does not accept applicants if they have been convicted, or have prior charges pending, for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, violent act, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risk to children or to the CASA® program.

I hereby authorize the Texas Department Family & Protective Services and any other city, state or national agencies to release any record of information concerning my driving record and any crime committed or alleged to have been committed by me. This includes but is not limited to arrest records and conviction data.

I hereby release the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services and any other city, state or national agencies as custodian of such records, including all officers, employees, or related personnel, both individually and collectively, from any and all liability or for damages of any type which may at any time result to me, my heirs, family or associates because of compliance with this authorization.

The Texas Department of Family & Protective Services may obtain information from the Texas Department of Public Safety, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other law enforcement agencies as necessary.

Furthermore, I give my permission to CASA® for Kids of East Texas, Inc. to release information about my experience as a CASA® Volunteer to any other CASA® Program to which I may apply in the future. I have truthfully responded to all of the questions on this application under penalty of prosecution for perjury, and I agree to all authorizations and releases listed in the above application.

*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date* \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE MAIL APPLICATION TO:**

CASA For Kids of East Texas  
318 E. Fifth Street  
Tyler, TX 75701