ATHENS CASA/GAL PROGRAM

VOLUNTEER MANUAL

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook provides a general explanation of the Athens County **Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian Ad Litem** Program policies and procedures as they affect the volunteer advocate. The handbook is meant to be used as a reference in conjunction with your training manual.

The contents of this handbook are informational only. The handbook is not a contract. The terms of the handbook are subject to change at any time at the sole discretion of the Athens CASA/GAL Program

DISCLAIMER FOR VOLUNTEER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Notification

This handbook provides a general explanation of the Athens CASA/GAL Program policies and procedures as they affect volunteers.

The handbook is presented for information purposes and is meant to be used as a reference in conjunction with the volunteer training manual. The policies expressed in this manual do not constitute an employment contract, expressed or implied.

The terms of the handbook are subject to change at any time at the sole discretion of the Athens CASA/GAL Program. Notice of changes affecting volunteer policies will be communicated.

Acknowledgement

I have read and understand to the provisions in this manual.

_____
Signed

_____
Supervisor

_____
Date

ADMINISTRATION

MISSION STATEMENT

GOAL OF THE PROGRAM

PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

ATHENS CASA/GAL PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT

The Athens County CASA/GAL Program is a court-based, non-profit organization that utilizes trained community volunteers to serve as **C**ourt **A**ppointed **S**pecial **A**dvocates. CASAs advocate in juvenile court for the best interests of children that have experienced abuse or neglect.

GOAL OF THE PROGRAM

The immediate goal of the Athens CASA/GAL Program is to provide trained community volunteers to advocate for the **"best interests"** of children who come into the Athens County Juvenile Court system as a result of abuse, neglect or dependency.
Our long-term goal is to provide a CASA for each and every child who enters the court system as a result of said court proceedings.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

As a CASA volunteer under the guidance of Program staff, you are helping to fulfill the objective of the Athens CASA/GAL Program to provide advocacy for children adjudicatetd abused, neglected, or dependent, who are the subject of judicial proceedings, by:

- Conducting an independent investigation concerning each child
- Factually and objectively reporting findings and observations to the Court
- Ensuring representation of the child's best interests in all judicial proceedings and other matters relating to the child
- Monitoring each case until the terms of the Court orders have been fulfilled or the case is dismissed or closed.
    - Investigate all circumstances surrounding the child's case.
    - Collect all relevant historical information about the child and gather first hand, updated information.
    - Report the findings and make fact based recommendations to the court regarding placement (short term and long term), visitation and services that will serve the child's best interest.
    - Monitor the case to ensure that necessary services are received, that Family Service Plans are updated in a timely manner and address the needs of the child and family, and that court orders are followed.

PROGRAM TARGET POPULATION

The Athens CASA/GAL Program serves children from birth to 18 years of age who have been allegedly abused or neglected, or are dependent on the court for suitable placement. Children will be served without discrimination based on a child's age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability or religion. The target population of service is children who are at risk of sexual harm, children under the age of six, and sibling groups of two or more children who are in need of more intensive monitoring of their situations to aid in permanency planning.

Referral Procedures

The Athens County Juvenile Court Judge must sign a court order to appoint a CASA. Upon receipt of the court order, the CASA Program will match the case to an appropriate volunteer, if one is available.

VOLUNTEER ROLE AND FUNCTION

JOB DESCRIPTION

FUNCTION/RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CASA VOLUNTEER

ROLE OF THE CASA TO THE CHILD

CONDUCT

TRANSPORTATION

CONFIDENTIALITY

REQUIRED SKILLS/ABILITIES

CASA IDENTIFICATION

VOLUNTEER SAFETY

ENTERING OF HOMES EMPLOYER CONTACT

STATEMENTS TO THE PUBLIC CORRESPONDENCE

ACCESS TO LEGAL ADVICE

ATTIRE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE JOB DESCRIPTION

POSITION
Court Appointed Special Advocate / Guardian ad litem (CASA/GAL) volunteer.

REPORTING RELATIONSHIP
Reports to assigned CASA staff.

TIME COMMITMENT
30 hours pre-service training; 1 courtroom observations; 12 hours of annual in-service training; other flexible hours as necessary for the assigned case (2-10 hours per month).

POSITION PURPOSE
To serve as a Court Appointed Special Advocate / Guardian ad litem (CASA / GAL) volunteer, working independently to investigate and monitor cases of juvenile abuse, neglect and/or dependent in the Athens County Juvenile Court.

Role and Responsibilities

- Attend screening interview, court observation, pre-service and in-service training sessions.
- Serve on at least one case annually by investigating and monitoring the situation while the child is under court jurisdiction. Conduct an independent investigation to gain a thorough understanding of the assigned case.
- Conduct interviews with the child, Athens County Children Services caseworker, parent/guardians, relatives, friends, attorneys, teachers, neighbors, foster parents and/or any person with relevant information about the child; review files at appropriate agencies relative to the child's case.
- Have regular and sufficient contact with the child to ensure in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court. The CASA/GAL volunteer shall meet in person with the child once every thirty days at a minimum. An exception may be granted at the discretion of program staff; however, the justification and reasons for a decision to permit less frequent in-person contact must be documented
- Conduct a case conference with the CASA staff as to preliminary findings and to review progress of the case, including permanency plan.
- Maintain and provide to the office, as required, accurate and timely forms and case records, including monthly case updates and court reports.
- Attend all pertinent hearings, reviews and/or meetings to advocate for the child's best interest and provide testimony when necessary
- Maintain mandated standard of confidentiality on information pertaining to each case.
- Reports any incident of child abuse or neglect, or any situation in which the CASA volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger to the CASA supervisor and appropriate authorities, following state legal requirements for mandated reporting.
- Determine if a case/permanent plan has been created for the child
- Make recommendations for appropriate services for the child, including reasonable efforts, are being provided to the child and the family when appropriate and act as a facilitator among the parties.
- Maintain complete written records about the case, including dates, regarding appointments, interviews, and information gathered about the child, the child's life circumstances, and significant others
- Report any incidents of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect to the CASA Executive Director and

to the appropriate authorities

- Assure that the "**child's best interests**" are being represented at every stage of the case, attend court hearings, and provide a signed written report with findings and recommendations to the Court, based on what placement and services are best for the child
- Participate in any planning or treatment team meetings involving the child, in order to keep informed of progress in the case and to act as the representative of the child's best interests
- Monitor the case to determine whether the child's needs are being met and whether appropriate action is being taken to fulfill any court orders in a timely manner and that review hearings are held in accordance with the law
- Inform the court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by court rules.
- Advocate for the child's best interests in the community by interfacing with mental health, educational and other community systems to assure that the child's needs in these areas are met.
- Receive direct supervision and guidance from Program staff by consulting regularly concerning the assigned case, reviewing progress in the case, and reviewing recommendations and court reports with the staff prior to submitting them to Court. Note: CASA supervisors are prohibited from altering reports or recommendations without the knowledge and agreement of the CASA volunteer.
- When a conflict exists between a CASA volunteer and CASA staff, the CASA Executive Director has the final say regarding recommendations to the court
- Remain actively involved in the case, until formally discharged by the Court
- Return the entire case file to the CASA office after the case is closed

VOLUNTEER QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifications

- Must be at least 21 years of age.
- Must successfully pass screening/background check (See screening process).
- Successful completion of 30 hour pre-service training program and 1 courtroom observation.
- Attend a minimum of 12 hours in-service hours annually.
- Able to respect and relate to individuals from various backgrounds and cultures in a caring and sensitive manner.
- Good oral/written communication skills.
- Understands and is willing to commit to a two-year volunteer position serving on a minimum of one (1) assigned case.
- Willing to accept supervision, training and evaluation from the professional staff
- Able to provide own transportation.
- Must be a dedicated child advocate, willing to learn the best possible means to assure that the needs of the children in the Athens County juvenile justice system are being met.

Benefits to the Volunteer

- Ability to impact the life of a child who is in the juvenile justice system as a result of abuse, neglect and/or dependency.
- Opportunity to interact with all facets of the juvenile justice system and its key players.
- Opportunity to gain extensive knowledge about child abuse and neglect and the legal and social service systems in Athens County.
- Increased awareness of educational opportunities (conferences, workshops, etc.) in the child advocacy and juvenile justice arena.
- Opportunity to become part of the growing community of child advocates, assuring that all children who need a CASA / GAL volunteer will have one.

REQUIRED SKILLS / ABILITIES
The following lists the basic skills and abilities required in order to fulfill your duties and responsibilities as a CASA volunteer.

- Ability to keep all client and Court information confidential
- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing
- Ability to gather and accurately record factual information
- Ability to respect and relate to people from various backgrounds (such as socio-economic, cultural, educational) in a variety of settings
- Ability to maintain objectivity
- Ability to deal with hostility, anger, and other emotional attitudes—your own and others
- A basic understanding of child development
- A basic understanding of family relationships
- Capability of transporting oneself to a variety of locations.

IMPERMISSABLE CASA ACTIVITIES
A CASA volunteer should not become inappropriately involved in the case by providing direct service delivery to any parties. This could lead to a conflict of interest, or liability problems, or might cause a child or family to become dependent on the CASA volunteer for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations. Examples of inappropriate volunteer practices are:

- Taking a child to the volunteer's home or sheltering a child in that home, or any other home other than the child's.
- Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling to a child or family.
- Making placement arrangements for the child.
- Giving money or substantial/valuable gifts to the child or family, or caregiver.

A CASA volunteer should not be related to any parties involved in the case, or be employed in a position and/or agency that might appear to be a conflict of interest, and thereby undermine the value of your information/insights and possibly compromise the basis for final outcome for the child.

VOLUNTEER SCREENING
To ensure that volunteers accepted into the CASA program are competent and of good character, the Athens CASA/GAL Program carefully screens all volunteer applicants using the following procedures:

- Applicant must submit a written application containing information concerning personal experiences with child abuse and or neglect, educational background, employment, volunteer history and experience working with children.
- The applicant shall participate in a personal interview with CASA staff.
- The applicant must provide three references from persons unrelated to the applicant, preferably one of whom has directly supervised the applicant.
- All volunteers must complete a national, state, and local criminal records check, social security verification, sex offender registry check, motor vehicle and if permissible by law, child protective service check.
- Applicant's name will be provided to the Athens County Department of Job and Family Services, Athens County Juvenile Court, and the CASA Board of Trustees. Information may be provided by the Athens County Department of Job and Family Services for the purpose of protecting children.

The volunteer applicant will not be accepted into the CASA Program if:

- Convicted of either a felony or misdemeanor which is a sex offense, a crime affecting family

relationships, child abuse, or neglect, assault, battery or a crime against public morals or related acts that would pose risks to children or the CASA program's credibility;

- Found to have charges pending for criminal offenses or offenses listed above;
- The applicant refuses to sign a release of information for appropriate law enforcement checks;
- At the discretion of the CASA Program director, the applicant cannot successfully carry out CASA duties and responsibilities.

VOLUNTEER SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT

All volunteers accepted into the CASA Program must successfully pass screening and training requirements. The CASA Program will notify all applicants in writing of the status of their application. Those not selected will, if possible, be referred to alternative volunteer opportunities more suitable to them. Any volunteers who have transferred from another CASA program will have to complete the full application and screening process. In addition, any volunteer who transfers to this program from another program must complete, at minimum, the training regarding the local court, laws, program policies and procedures, investigation and report writing.

Volunteers are sworn in by a presiding juvenile court judge. The judge or magistrates determine which cases shall be referred to CASA. All appointments and assignments must be made by an appropriate order of the court. CASA volunteers are assigned when possible, at the earliest stages of the court proceedings. A CASA should not carry more than two cases simultaneously unless otherwise approved by the CASA director. The CASA volunteer will have complete and immediate access to all records and documents pertaining to assigned case.

VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION

The CASA Program staff is easily accessible to provide guidance to an active CASA volunteer. The CASA Program staff and volunteer will maintain regular contact in order to review progress of the case. The CASA Program staff works as a team with each CASA volunteer throughout the life of a case. Together supervisors and volunteers will assess how to proceed with an investigation, identify critical issues and develop case recommendations. The CASA volunteer and the CASA Volunteer Coordinator will work diligently to address any conflicts that arise between them in order to preserve the integrity of their team and working relationship. If a conflict arises that cannot be resolved, either the volunteer or the program coordinator shall contact, in any convenient forum, the executive director to seek assistance and advice. The executive director will address the conflict in a manner that is in the child's best interest and in accordance with the Athens CASA/GAL Program mission.

The CASA volunteer and the CASA Program coordinator will work diligently to address any conflicts that arise with regard to recommendations in order to preserve the integrity of their team, their working relationship and to promote the child's best interest. If a conflict arises, the CASA volunteer and the program coordinator will rectify the conflict with a compromise concerning the recommendations. Any compromise established will not jeopardize child safety, the best interests of the child or the agency mission. If a conflict arises that is unable to be resolved between the CASA volunteer and the program coordinator, either the volunteer or the program coordinator shall contact, in any convenient forum, the executive director to seek assistance and advice. The executive director will address the conflict in manner that is in the child's best interest and in accordance with the Athens CASA/GAL Program's mission. If the CASA volunteer and the CASA staff are unable to reach an agreement regarding the volunteer's recommendations, an additional report will be submitted to the court under the executive director's signature. The volunteer must submit all recommendations concerning the case to their direct supervisor in a written report at least one week prior to the court review date. The report shall not be altered without the permission and understanding of the CASA volunteer.

Volunteer/staff ratio for supervision of volunteers shall not exceed thirty to one.

CONDUCT
CASAs will encounter a variety of individuals (caseworkers, parents, foster families, etc.) during the course of their investigations. These individuals will be from differing educational and socio- economic backgrounds.

All CASA volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner when dealing with others.

It is understood that situations do arise which can be frustrating for the volunteer (un- cooperativeness on the part of parents, strongly differing opinions between yourself and the caseworker, frustration over the Court's decisions, etc.) Tears, angry words, outbursts, etc., are never an appropriate response to a difficult situation and usually impedes or impairs the function of the other participants. Displays of emotion are to be contained until such time as the CASA is alone or with office staff. Strive to clearly represent the facts and calmly communicate your interpretation of the situation as you see it.

When a situation such as this does occur, CASAs should contact the office staff in order to discuss the situation and the volunteer's feelings about it.

Severe or repeated disruptions to the proceedings and functioning of the other participants, caused by a CASA's conduct, may be grounds for dismissal from the Program.

Mandated Reporting
All Guardians Ad Litem and Court Appointed Special Advocates are mandated reporters under Ohio Law. Failing to report suspected child maltreatment while on duty as a CASA/GAL can result in legal consequences. Athens CASA/GAL Program requires CASA volunteers to report suspicions of child maltreatment to the appropriate authorities at all times. Failure to report could result in dismissal from the program. Volunteers are encouraged to consult with staff if questions arise regarding reporting requirements.

TRANSPORTATION
Athens County maintains limited liability insurance to cover the program when its volunteers provide transportation to children and families. Athens County CASA/GAL program does not encourage volunteers to transport children, but does understand it may be necessary at times. However, CASA/GAL volunteers who choose to transport children or families do so at their own risk and must carry appropriate automobile insurance. Before transporting, you:

- must have a valid driver's license as well as a safe driving record
- must have adequate personal automobile insurance
- must have on file at Athens County CASA/GAL program your signed Transportation Liability and Release Form; and
- must obtain the permission of the child's legal guardian or custodial agency (ACCS or other party)
- must obtain permission of the Athens County CASA/GAL program supervisor
- must be knowledgeable of the potential personal risk of liability
- must choose to accept the responsibility

CASA/GAL volunteers must obey all traffic laws regarding road safety and child restraints. If the appropriate child safety restraint or booster seat is unavailable or is not able to be safely and securely installed in the volunteer's vehicle, CASA/GAL volunteers are not permitted to transport. CASA/GAL volunteers must observe their automobile manufacturer's recommendations regarding airbags and safety. CASA/GAL volunteers must not transport children across state lines.

All volunteers must report any current criminal charges or investigations regarding the operation of their automobile or status of their driver's license to their Athens County CASA/GAL Program Supervisor immediately. Athens County CASA/GAL reserves the right to suspend the CASA/GAL's privilege to transport children pending resolution or investigation into the charges.

Athens County CASA/GAL will maintain a file of your Transportation Liability and Release Form, Driver's license number and current insurance coverage. This information will be updated yearly. Transporting children and families is a personal choice of all volunteers and is not any expectation or requirement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Athens CASA/GAL Program employees and volunteers are committed to respecting the child's right to privacy by maintaining confidentiality.

Volunteers:

CASA/GAL volunteers are responsible for maintaining confidentiality of all information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a party to their case, another program case, another volunteer, or staff. Volunteers are not authorized to solicit other persons outside the CASA program to aid them with specific duties outlined in the CASA position description.

A CASA/GAL volunteer becomes an officer of the court upon assignment to a case. Any information pertaining to the individual families or children that the CASA/GAL volunteer receives in the discharge of his or her duties is confidential. It may not be discussed with anyone except the following:

- County Juvenile Court
- Program staff
- Child Protective Services, its' employees and agents and service providers assigned to the case
- Other parties to the case and their counsel
- Others outside the agency whose request for access to confidential information are permitted by statute or by the court

Volunteers must ensure care with their case file. Volunteers should maintain their files in a way and place that does not allow for any breach of confidentiality. Access to the volunteer's file is limited to the court, authorized agency personnel and others outside the agency whose request for access to confidential information is permitted by statute or the court. The volunteer should confer with their volunteer supervisor before releasing their case file to any involved party. Volunteers must also return their entire case files to the program within two weeks of case closure.

Violation of confidentiality can result in the discrediting of the CASA program and may be cause for immediate dismissal.

Employees and Interns:

All information provided by clients or potential clients is confidential and may not be disclosed outside the agency without written permission from the client unless required by law. If the client is incompetent, written permission must be obtained from the client's legal guardian or representative. If there is any question about whether a disclosure is appropriate or necessary, the case manager must consult with the supervisor and the Executive Director.

Program staff should take measures to ensure that all electronic and hard copy correspondence, files and records are safely and securely maintained. Case files must remain in a locked cabinet, to which all staff have a key in order to ensure staff can access records at any time.

Care will be taken by all staff and volunteers to protect the identity of clients within email transmission by omitting the client's name where possible.

CASA IDENTIFICATION
Upon successful completion of the CASA training, all volunteers will be issued a CASA photo identification card. Arrangements for obtaining the identification card will be made by the CASA staff.

Upon resignation or dismissal from the CASA program, the identification card is to be returned to the CASA office.

VOLUNTEER SAFETY
No volunteer should feel obligated to put himself or herself in personal jeopardy as they perform their role as a CASA/GAL. If the volunteer is uneasy about entering a neighborhood, building, or meeting with a particular party, the volunteer should arrange the meeting in a more comfortable location or contact the supervisor for advice.

ENTERING OF HOMES
At no time shall a CASA enter the home of a child when a parent or legal guardian is not present. This applies even when the child would allow access.

If a CASA suspects that a child is in the home alone or in danger, the Childrens Services caseworker should be contacted. Be aware of an individual's sense of privacy. For example, the CASA should not peer into the home window.

If a parent refuses access in the home, it should be appropriately documented and reported to the Court at the next hearing.

STATEMENTS TO THE PUBLIC
The purpose of this policy is to ensure that consistent and approved information is released to the public. This policy applies to all CASA/GAL volunteers, CASA staff, and members of the CASA Board of Trustees. In order to maintain the highest level of professionalism:

- The official spokespersons for the organization shall at all times be the Executive Director and/or the President of the Board of Trustees
- All requests for speaking engagements and volunteer recruitment on behalf of the Athens CASA/GAL Programbe referred to the appropriate Athens CASA/GAL Program staff
- All inquiries on cases assigned to the CASA office shall be referred to the Executive Director or the President of the Board of Trustees
- All inquiries from the public, the court, or community organizations and agencies on matters considered sensitive or relating to the policy, procedures or issues of the Athens CASA/GAL Program shall be referred to the Executive Director or the President of the Board of Trustees
- All inquiries from the media (television, radio, press) shall be referred to the Executive Director or the President of the Board of Trustees.

CORRESPONDENCE
At times, CASAs will find the need to correspond with other professionals or agencies involved in their cases. Any correspondence written by the CASA to the professional or agency is to be reviewed, approved, and copied by the CASA staff, prior to being mailed.

If assistance is required in the composition of a letter, the CASA should contact the office for guidance.

All correspondence is to be typed on CASA letterhead stationery, unless otherwise approved by CASA staff.

ACCESS TO LEGAL ADVICE
Requests by a CASA volunteer for legal advice regarding his/her assigned CASA case shall be made to the supervisor of volunteers. If the supervisor confirms the need for legal advice, the supervisor will be responsible for making the necessary contact.

ACCESS TO VOLUNTEER FILES
Volunteers are granted access to their records with approval by and in the presence of the Executive Director. Volunteers may review and make copies of all components of their files with the exception of references which are confidential. If volunteers wish to make additions or corrections to the information contained in their records, the volunteer must: a) discuss the proposed additions/corrections with the Executive Director; b) provide written explanation for the desired additions/corrections to the Executive Director. In the case of the Executive Director, the Program Coordinator would be substituted in the above procedure wherever the Executive Director is noted.

ATTIRE
During the course of carrying out duties, a CASA will be in a variety of settings (parents' homes, meetings with professionals, courtroom, etc.) Since open communication of information is a major objective, attention needs to be given to achieving an environment that is unthreatening, non- judgmental, and without unnecessary distractions, in dress and behavior.

> **COURTROOM** - When attending Court hearings, it is requested that CASAs dress in a business- like manner; for example: suit, dress, or dress slacks conducive to the seriousness of the court proceedings
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> **HOME VISITS** - When meeting with parents, foster parents, children, etc., it is suggested that the CASA wear clothing that is both casual and comfortable; for example: jeans, casual slacks, etc. Dress and behavior in sharp contrast to the living standards of the environment, may be perceived as judgmental or intimidating. In settings where the home is poorly maintained (unclean, bug infested, etc.), one's "good" clothing is not recommended, for obvious reasons
>
> **MEETINGS** - When meeting with professionals involved in the case, dress slacks/dresses are considered to be appropriate.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
Volunteers shall refrain from posting inappropriate material, links to inappropriate websites, or undesirable comments, references or pictures anywhere on the web where the posting directly or indirectly makes reference to the Wood County CASA Program or any name meant to refer to the organization. Volunteers found to be in violation of this policy may be sanctioned at the discretion of the Wood County CASA Program Director.

This policy includes public postings to any electronic media including, but not limited to intranet and internet forums, blogs, web logs, photoblogs, online web communities, list serves, internet diaries, instant messaging, text messaging, podcasts, amateur video sites, and all web postings -- such as those in chat rooms, on bulletin boards, websites or web pages. Wikis, public/shared email, online compilations of photographs or videos, and links to any of the foregoing items are also prohibited.

"Inappropriate material" shall be defined as postings, depictions or descriptions of illicit substances and/or

their paraphernalia, underage drinking; harassing, hostile, false, or confidential information and any other acts that violate local, state, federal, or the Wood County CASA Program policies. Also prohibited are prejudiced or discriminatory statements against any individuals, businesses, government agencies or groups. Volunteers within the CASA Program should avoid creating the impression that the views expressed through any electronic or social media outlet are anything more than personal opinions.

VOLUNTEER PROCEDURES

TIME COMMITMENT

VACATIONS

TIME SHEETS

EXPENSES

GRIEVANCE POLICY

EVALUATIONS

RESIGNATION FROM THE CASA PROGRAM

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

DISMISSAL FROM THE CASA PROGRAM

TIME COMMITMENT
Volunteers are requested to commit themselves to the program for a minimum of one year. Volunteers are to be available for case assignment and to accept cases upon request of the Program staff unless:

- There appears to be a conflict of interest with the parties involved
- A serious conflict in values exists between the CASA and an issue relative to the case
- The CASA has informed the Program Coordinator of a pre-planned vacation or personal commitment
- The CASA cannot participate due to illness
- The CASA has requested a temporary respite from service.

VACATIONS
If a CASA plans to be out of town, the CASA office should be notified as soon as possible. Should an emergency occur which will conflict with a scheduled meeting or Court hearing, the CASA staff should be contacted immediately. This allows the staff to appear for the CASA.

MONTHLY REPORTS/TIME REPORTING

Some funding sources ask CASA to supply the number of hours worked by each volunteer during the preceding calendar year. Hours should include time spent in meetings, in Court hearings, making phone calls, etc. In order to comply with this request, we are requiring that CASAs complete a monthly time sheet. This form is to be returned to the CASA office by the 5th of each month. Monthly report templates are available from the CASA office.

EXPENSES
Some of the expenses that you incur as a CASA can be covered by the Program (if you choose to submit them). We are able to reimburse for mileage. Blank forms for expense reporting are available in the CASA office.

Mileage - If volunteers travel to home visits, meetings, etc., they may be reimbursed for mileage. If volunteers choose to be reimbursed, a mileage reimbursement form must completed including the destination, case, and the number of miles round trip. Please note that all travel reimbursement is based upon available funding.

GRIEVANCE POLICY
Every effort should be made to solve problems cooperatively and informally before presenting them as a formal grievance. Should informal efforts fail, the following policy is set forth in order to provide an outlet for complaints and a systematic way to resolve the matter. All complaints will receive thoughtful consideration and will be discussed with the individual who raises them. Complaints and grievances may arise from external or internal (within the Program) sources.

External – Because CASA is involved in work that involves the future of the lives of children and families, it is emotionally charged work that evokes a wide range of feelings. It is therefore common and expected that there will be criticism from the parties involved, especially when the CASA does not make recommendations that are in agreement with their point of view. Should a complaint arise from someone outside the CASA organization, the volunteer or supervisor to whom the complaint was given, should inform the Executive Director of the details of the complaint. It will be the responsibility of the Executive Director to decide if the complaint has substance and to request a written statement from the individual initiating the complaint. The written statement will be kept on record in the CASA office. In addition, the Executive Director, with advice from the Board if needed, will determine what action, if any, should be taken.

Internal – When a CASA volunteer wishes to make a statement of dissatisfaction with a policy, practice, condition or supervisor's decision, the volunteer should first discuss the matter with the supervisor. If the problem is not resolved to the satisfaction of the volunteer, s/he should forward a written

statement of the grievance to the Executive Director. In the event that the volunteer is still not satisfied with the conclusion of the matter after involvement of the Executive Director, the volunteer should present the written grievance statement to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. The Board's decision will be final. The volunteer will be entitled to receive a written response to their formal grievance from the Executive Director outlining the position the Director or the Board has taken on the issue.

In order to deal effectively with complaints from individuals and/or organizations regarding the services provided by the CASA Program, the following grievance procedures shall be followed by staff, volunteers and board members. If a complaint is lodged against a CASA volunteer it will be dealt with in the following manner:

- The volunteer's supervisor shall be notified
- The matter shall be reviewed and resolved by the appropriate program staff or the Executive Director if the matter involves Program staff. Such review shall include contact with the complainant and the volunteer
- The Executive Director shall determine whether the matter should be taken to the Executive Committee for their review, according to the nature of the complaint
- A written reply shall be made to the complainant with copies to the Executive Committee of the CASA Board of Trustees and to the volunteer.

EVALUATIONS

VOLUNTEER EVALUATIONS

Evaluation of a CASA's job performance will be conducted yearly. The evaluation covers such areas as a CASA's attitude, reliability, ability to work with others, and so forth. Evaluations will be conducted by the CASA Program Development Coordinator. These evaluations are intended to provide the volunteer with feedback as to the quality of their work.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

In conjunction with the evaluation of the CASA's job performance, volunteers will be given the opportunity to evaluate the CASA Program. Volunteers will not be required to identify themselves when evaluating the Program. Results of these evaluations will be used to better the Program and assist in meeting the needs of the CASA volunteers.

RESIGNATION FROM THE CASA PROGRAM

It is hoped that once a CASA has been trained, they are willing to commit to the program for a period of at least two years. It is understood, however, that there may be circumstances which arise in a CASA's personal life which would prevent them from continuing with the program. If such a situation should arise, it is requested that the CASA complete the following steps:

- Notify the CASA office at least two weeks prior to resignation
- Submit to the office a summary of the case(s) on which they are working. This provides the next person assigned to the case(s) with up-to-date information
- Submit to the office all notes and information relevant to the case(s). This will ensure the continued confidentiality of the case(s).
- Hand in to the office your CASA identification.

Completing the above steps allows the staff to handle the case until such time it can be reassigned.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE A CASA volunteer may at any time take a leave of absence from the program. It is understandable that sometimes CASA volunteers need to take time off from taking cases. If a CASA volunteer takes a leave of absence of more than 1 year (but less than 5 years) the CASA volunteer must complete the 12

hours of in-service training before he/she can take another case. If a CASA volunteer takes a leave of absence for more than 5 years that volunteer will have to undergo the full application process, as well as the 30 hours of pre-service training.

VOLUNTEER TERMINATION POLICY

There may be times when the Program Development Coordinator or the Executive Director will find it necessary to remove a CASA volunteer from the Program.

Preliminary Actions

If a CASA/GAL volunteer's work is unsatisfactory several corrective actions can be made before termination is considered. Preliminary actions taken are within the discretion of the Executive Director.

- Closer supervision
- Reassignment to another case
- Suspension and reenrollment in upcoming training class

Grounds for dismissal will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Taking action without Program or Court approval which endangers the child(ren) or is outside the role or powers of the CASA program
- Violating a program policy, Court rule, or law
- Failure to complete required ongoing training
- Falsifying information on the volunteer application or misrepresenting facts during the screening process
- Gross misconduct or insubordination
- Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while performing volunteer duties
- Engaging in ex parte communication with the Court
- Failure to demonstrate an ability to effectively carry out assigned duties
- Failure to report suspicions of child maltreatment
- Existence of child abuse/neglect allegation against the volunteer
- Conflict of interest arising which can not be resolved.

ROLE OF THE CASA TO THE CHILD

To arrive at an understanding of the advocate role, it is easy to say what we are "not" to a child. We are not Big Brothers or Big Sisters. We are not guardian angels. We are not attorneys speaking for or against the child's wishes or social workers planning for the entire family. We contribute to the "eyes and ears" of the Court, by making independent, objective recommendations regarding the child's best interest.

But what are we in our dealings with a child who we perceive NEEDS us? How involved in their life do we become? What criteria do we use to determine if our role is appropriate, is legitimate?

We look to the child and the individual circumstances to guide us. Who are the primary caretakers? Will we undermine their role? Will we be alert to what extent we may be satisfying our own needs as we carry out our function? The very fact that you, as CASA, are present during this period shows the child that someone else cares. The child's past experience may well include other adults having taken a meaningful part in the child's life, and then leaving—promoting fantasies for the child that can never be met in their real world.

Each situation is unique. We are not robots. However, the very best we can do for the child is to help ensure that the Court receives all the facts so that the court order will reflect the child's best interests.