CASA/Prince George’s County

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Prince George's County, Inc. is a volunteer-based organization that partners with the juvenile court to improve the lives of abused and neglected children living in foster care. With a strong commitment to diversity, CASA/Prince George's County trains and supervises volunteers from the community who advocate for the best interest of children, recognizing and respecting each child's individual needs. By providing a voice to children in the foster care system, it is the goal of CASA/Prince George's County to promote the timely placement of the children we serve in safe, permanent homes.

History
CASA was founded in 1977 by David Soukup, a Seattle judge who became concerned about how quickly decisions concerning the lives of abused and neglected children were being made, despite a lack of detailed information. In response to this growing problem, Judge Soukup started training ordinary community members to advocate for the best interests of children living in foster care. The Seattle program was so successful that the idea spread and today there are over 950 local CASA programs and 75,000 CASA volunteers across the nation.

The Need
Each day 8,775 incidents of child abuse and neglect are reported nationwide and approximately 1,188 children are removed from their homes and placed in foster care or institutions. The Prince George’s County Department of Social Services investigates approximately 4,000 cases of child abuse and neglect annually. At any given time, more than 600 Prince George’s County children are living in foster care placements after being removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect.

Seventy-nine percent of the youth served by CASA volunteers are 12 - 21 years old and 58% have a permanency plan of Another Permanent Planned Living Arrangement (APPLA), a legal catch-all for children without hope of returning to a family member. Most youth with a plan of APPLA will age out of foster care without any connection to an adult or family member. Unfortunately, as the youth we serve reach the age of emancipation, they are unprepared to live completely on their own. Many are forced to live with family members who were considered unfit to care for them when they were minors, live from friend to friend, or live on the streets engaging in illegal activity in order to survive. Not only are they unprepared for adulthood or self-sufficiency but many are homeless on the day their case closes.

Children not matched with CASA volunteers often enter and exit the foster care system without ever having someone who can thoroughly assess their needs or advocate for their best interest. However, when a CASA volunteer is involved, children are half as likely to languish in foster care and that much more likely to be placed in a permanent home. For many neglected and abused children their CASA volunteer is the only reliable adult presence in their lives. And that single volunteer can often be enough to break the cycle of violence and neglect—not just for one child, but for generations to come.

The children are waiting for us. They are waiting for you!

What We Do
A CASA volunteer is appointed by the court to provide information and recommendations that aid the Judge or Juvenile Master in making decisions that are in the best interest of the child. The work of a CASA volunteer can be divided into four roles: investigator, facilitator, advocate and monitor. As an investigator, the CASA volunteer gathers information about the case by reviewing records and interviewing the child, parents, family members, social workers, school officials and any other resource that may provide pertinent information.
The CASA volunteer is also a key facilitator collaborating and increasing communication among the various parties involved to ensure that all appropriate services are made available to the child. Based on the information she or he gathers, the CASA volunteer works with their Case Supervisor to submit a detailed report to the court with recommendations as to what is in the child’s best interest. Recommendations are made around subjects such as education, medical or mental health, placement and visitation. In the case of older youth preparing to emancipate, the CASA volunteer helps to develop and execute a Transition Plan, ensuring that the youth is prepared to live independently when the case is closed. One of the most important stages of the CASA volunteer’s work occurs in court when she or he acts as an advocate providing a voice for the child in the courtroom. Finally, the CASA volunteer acts as a monitor for the court to ensure that past and present court orders are being implemented. The CASA volunteer continues working with the child and her or his case until the child is placed in a safe, permanent home.

How We Do It
CASA volunteers become extremely important to the children they serve. Because a CASA volunteer is generally assigned to one child or sibling group at a time, she or he can focus solely on the individual child or family’s needs. They are able to see the child frequently and become a consistent figure in court proceedings and in the child’s life. The average time volunteered by a CASA is 10-15 hours per month.

CASA volunteers are well prepared for their position. Potential volunteers undergo extensive interviews, a background screening and 37 hours of Pre-Service Training before they are able to accept a case. The training focuses on the role of a CASA volunteer, courtroom procedure, social services, the juvenile justice system and the special needs of abused and neglected children. Volunteers participate in 12 hours of in-service training each year, which gives the volunteers the opportunity to remain current on pertinent issues. Each CASA volunteer also receives one-on-one case supervision which enables CASA staff and volunteers to ensure the highest quality of service is being offered to the children.

Get Involved
The work done by CASA/Prince George’s County is all accomplished by ordinary citizens making extraordinary contributions. Your support allows CASA/Prince George’s County to continue providing voices to the abused and neglected children in our community. Get involved with CASA and lift up a child’s voice.

To determine if you are ready to become a CASA Volunteer, please go to www.speakforthechildren.org.
For more information about Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Prince George’s County, Inc. please contact us at:
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