

CASA of Ellis County, Inc.
Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem Job Description

Job Description:

Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem are trained and supervised community volunteers who are appointed by Ellis County Court at Law No. 1, to provide factual information on behalf of a child(ren) placed in foster care due to severe abuse or neglect by their parents or other caretakers.

Background Requirements:

1. Must be 21 years of age.
2. Willing to commit at least one year of your time to a child's case.
3. Able to pass an extensive criminal background check that meets the minimum standards as outlined in Title 1, Part 3, Chapter 64, Rule 64:13 of the Texas Administrative Code.
4. Willing to attend an in-depth 30 hour training program and attend 12 hours of continuing educational trainings every year.
5. Able to interview a variety of individuals (parents, teachers, neighbors, etc.)
6. Able to effectively communicate orally and in writing.
7. Mature in dealing with emotional issues.
8. Willing to demonstrate sensitivity to cultural and ethnic differences.

Supervision by the CASA staff:

All CASA volunteer Guardians are closely supervised by the CASA staff, which includes the Volunteer Supervisor and Executive Director. A staff person, generally the Volunteer Supervisor, will attend every court hearing, mediation, child staffing, and most parent visits with the Guardian. The CASA Guardian will attend child visits on their own time. While the courts want to hear directly from the CASA Guardian, it is helpful to have a CASA staff person available to help guide them through the child welfare and legal system.

Training:

The CASA program provides in-depth volunteer training for every volunteer. Every potential volunteer must complete a 30-hour training program through the Ellis County CASA program (16 hours of classroom instruction; 14 hours of self-study). Training sessions are held in the evening and sometimes on the weekend, and will occur 2-3 times per year. Training contents include learning about child abuse and neglect, permanency planning for the child(ren), the legal process, your role as a CASA Guardian Ad Litem and much more.

Monthly Time Requirements:

A CASA volunteer Guardian Ad Litem will typically be required to volunteer at least 15-20 hours per month on a case. A child's case may last up to 1 to 2 years, depending on the outcome of the case. The following represents an example of the typical meetings a CASA volunteer would have throughout the month:

1. Attend daytime court hearings with at least 1-2 weeks advance notice from the courts. Court hearings can last anywhere from 1-3 hours and will occur at least every 60-90 days.
2. Attend daytime mediations with the family, the mediator, the CPS (Child Protective Services) caseworker, attorneys, and others to discuss the plans for the child(ren) in care. Mediations can last anywhere from 2-4 hours.
3. Able to visit the child(ren) either on weekends or in the evenings once a month. Visits with children are scheduled around the foster parent or placement facility where the child temporarily resides. Children are not always placed in Ellis County, but typically in close-by counties.

4. Able to observe at least two one-hour, daytime parent/child visitation sessions each month, at either CPS office in Waxahachie or other location designated by the CPS office.
5. Able to visit with parents or other relatives at least 1-2 times per month. Visits/interviews usually take place at the parents' home and last anywhere from 1-2 hours, depending on the information gathered. Most visits take place during the day or on the weekends.
6. Able to attend 2 Permanency Conference meetings (PC's) regarding the progress of the children to whom you are assigned. These meetings are held during the day, at the CPS office in Waxahachie and typically take place every 6 months and usually last no longer than 30 minutes.
7. Additional duties throughout the month are typically phone calls to the therapists or the children's school, and even the parent's attorney, if necessary. At least half of the volunteer's duties must take place during the day, but the remainder can usually be taken care of in the evening or weekend.
8. It is important for the CASA Volunteer to have flexibility in their daytime job so they may work their case.

Relationship with CPS and the Children's Advocacy Center (aka CAC or Gingerbread House)

Most people wonder what the difference between a CASA and a CPS worker is, as well as how the Children's Advocacy Center comes into play.

A CPS caseworker has the authority to remove children from dangerous situations and place them in foster homes until the parents are hopefully rehabilitated and reunification can happen for the family. The CPS caseworker also sets up a service plan or a plan of action to help the parents in their rehabilitation process. This service can be anything from drug or alcohol in/out patient treatment to parenting classes, counseling or anger management classes. A CASA Guardian does not remove children, nor do we set up services for the parents.

The Children's Advocacy Center goals are to minimize each child's trauma, provide immediate and on-going treatment and services, and to ensure proper investigation of cases. When a child is identified as abused, and when anyone, including a stranger, abuses a child, the CAC interviews the child and the family. This process can be very critical, but also traumatizing to a child. The CAC has trained professionals that interview the child in a friendly, non-threatening environment. A CASA Volunteer does not re-interview a child about any of the abuse that has occurred as we are not trained professionals in this manner.

CASA Volunteers make sure that the child's needs are being met throughout the duration of the case, as well as making recommendations in court in regards to the child's best interest.