CASA
COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

Reunifying Families Affected by Abuse or Neglect

My “crew”…

www.ahaprocess.com
Acknowledgements

- Laws and policies vary from state to state. Information in this presentation attempts to give general perceptions of the work of CASA Volunteers.

- This presentation uses information from:
  - National CASA Pre-Service Volunteer Curriculum (2017)
  - National CASA Website

What is CASA?

- A nation-wide organization of trained, citizen Volunteers who serve as advocates for children whose parents are involved in cases of abuse or neglect.

- Volunteers are appointed by the court to advocate for the best interest of the child(ren).

- In various parts of the country these Volunteers are called:
  - CASA Volunteers
  - Guardians ad litem (non-attorney)
  - Child Advocates
The History and Mission of CASA

1976: Judge David Soukup, Seattle Washington

Wanted impartial advocacy for children in the child welfare system

Believed well trained, ordinary citizens could best provide the information needed by the court

1977: First CASA Program established in Seattle

2018: Over 1,000 CASA Affiliate Programs in 49 of the 50 United States
(North Dakota uses paid advocates)
- Nearly 87,000 Trained Volunteers serve over 280,000 children
- Over 400,000 neglected and abused children are awaiting a Volunteer

The National CASA Association Mission

The mission of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association, together with its state and local member programs, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so every abused or neglected child in the United States can be safe, have a permanent home and the opportunity to thrive.
National CASA Vision

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association “stands up” for abused and neglected children. Building on our legacy of quality advocacy, we acknowledge the need to understand, respect and celebrate diversity, including race, gender, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and the presence of a sensory, mental or physical disability. We also value diverse viewpoints, life experiences, talents and ideas.

Guiding Principles

- Ethnic and cultural background influences an individual’s attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors
- Each family’s characteristics reflect adaptations to its primary culture and the majority culture, the family’s unique environment and the composite of the people and needs within it
- A child can be best served by a CASA/GAL volunteer who is culturally competent and (or) who has personal experience and work experience in the child’s own culture(s)
- To understand a child, a person should understand cultural differences and the impact they have on family dynamics
## Guiding Principles

- No cultural group is homogenous; within every group there is great diversity
- Families have similarities yet are all unique
- In order to be culturally sensitive to another person or group, it is necessary to evaluate how each person’s culture impacts his/her behavior
- As a person learns about the characteristic traits of another cultural group, he/she should remember to view each person as an individual

## Guiding Principles

- Most people like to feel that they have compassion for others and that there are new things they can learn
- Value judgments should not be made about another person’s culture
- It is in the best interest of children to have volunteers who reflect the characteristics (i.e., ethnicity, national origin, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability and socioeconomic status) of the population served
Training Requirements for CASA/GAL Volunteers

- Must be 21 years of age
- Complete a written application
- Complete 24 hours of in-class or online training
- Complete 10-15 hours of independent study
- Attend 10 hours of Courtroom observation
- Complete criminal background checks
- Provide references

Training Classes Include

- History and Mission of CASA
- Understanding the Court Process
- Cultural Competency
- Communication Skills
- Problems in Families: Substance Abuse, Mental Health Issues, Domestic Violence, Poverty
- Understanding children: Child Development, older youth, educational issues
- Process of working cases (Case Studies)
How are CASA Volunteers Assigned to Cases?

- At Judge’s request
- At Social Services’ request
- By CASA Staff

Once assigned, a Court Order is signed by Judge to allow Volunteer to access all needed information, interview parties and make recommendations to the court.

What do CASA/GAL Volunteers do?

- Investigate
- Advocate
- Facilitate
- Monitor
What CASA Volunteers “Do Not”…

- Provide direct services
- Transport children (except in some states)
- Provide counseling/therapy
- Make diagnostic conclusions
- Interject personal opinions
- Serve as advocate for parent or foster parent

Why are families in poverty more vulnerable to court involvement?

- A lack of understanding of how the “system” works
- By accessing other social services, the families are often under closer scrutiny
- A family history of generational abuse
- Poverty causes stress in families which may lead to abuse situations
- Children living in poverty are more likely to have trouble in school, become teen parents, and, as adults earn less and be unemployed more
- Poverty sometimes gets mistaken for neglect
Risk Factors in Poverty

Poor children face a greater risk of impaired brain development due to exposure to a number of other risk factors:

- Inadequate nutrition
- Parental substance abuse
- Maternal depression
- Exposure to environmental toxins
- Low-quality daycare

Poverty vs Neglect

Are the following safety issues?
- A family does not have a refrigerator
- A family lives in a rental unit with holes in the floor
- A family lives in a car
- A family does not have a regular pediatrician
- A family does not have electricity
- A family does not have money to buy the mother’s antidepressant medication
- A family does not have a crib for their infant
- A family has one parent who uses drugs
How does CASA Make a Difference?

- A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer is more likely to find a safe, permanent home:
- Children with CASA volunteers get more help while in the system and are more likely to have a consistent, responsible adult presence
- Children with CASA volunteers spend less time in foster care and are less likely to be bounced from home to home
- Children with CASA volunteers do better in school and score better on nine protective factors …

Protective Factors

- Neighborhood resources
- Interested adults
- Sense of acceptance
- Controls against deviant behavior
- Models of conventional behavior
- Positive attitude towards the future
- Valuing achievement
- Ability to work with others
- Ability to work out conflicts
How a CASA Volunteer Works the Case

Working a Case: Marky Greene

- Two weeks ago: A call was made to the CPS hotline by the kindergarten teacher and school nurse at Parkside Elementary. The callers stated that one of their students, Marky Greene, often comes to school with poor hygiene, that much of his clothing is not his size, and that he’s just come in with his third case of head lice in three months.

- A CPS social worker (SW) interviewed the child’s parents, Judy and Roy Greene. The family is Caucasian; the parents are in their late twenties. Per medical records, mother was diagnosed with bipolar disorder as a senior in high school. The Greene family moved here from a few states away. They have no extended family living nearby.
Marky Greene case (continued)

- SW found conditions in the home deplorable but not dangerous. CPS decided to file a petition for neglect but to allow the child to remain at home for the time being.
- Adjudication and disposition hearings were held the same day. Both parents attended. It was determined that the child’s placement will continue in their home until the 3-month review hearing. Parents were ordered to cooperate with CPS treatment plan. Judge admonished them to work hard and pointed out that Marky was still under court’s jurisdiction. He ordered CPS to not hesitate to take physical custody, should conditions in the home or family deteriorate.

Greene Family Genogram

- Judy Greene
- Roy Greene
- Jane: Paternal Rights Terminated; adopted 5 years ago—neglect
- Marky Greene
Interviews/Review of Records

- Social Worker: Ryan Headon (2)
- Marky (2)
- Parents: Roy and Judy Greene
- School Personnel
- In-home Therapist: Monica Morales
- Former Landlords
- Eviction Records

(Handouts)

Small Groups

- Read all the interviews and records
- Discuss what you would recommend to the court
  - Placement for Marky
  - Services for Marky
  - Services for Parents
- Choose a spokesperson
- 20 minutes
Recommendations

Emily’s Dragon

https://youtu.be/In9RdCyUFwA

Texas CASA
Published on Nov 28, 2017
Questions

Comments

Concerns

Contact Information

Eileen Bayens

eileen@casaogeechee.org

912-531-3947

www.ahaprocess.com