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# **Guide to Program Development**

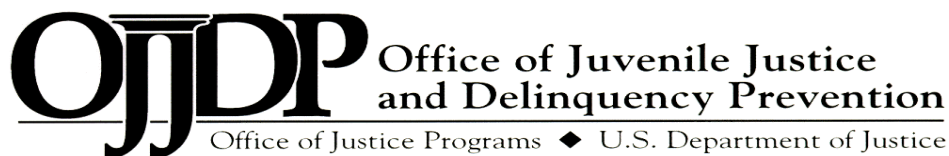
NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED  
SPECIAL ADVOCATE ASSOCIATION

100 West Harrison Street  
North Tower, Suite 500  
Seattle, WA 98119  
Tel (800) 628-3233

# **CASA: A GUIDE TO PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

## ***2002 EDITION***

National CASA Association  
100 West Harrison Street  
North Tower, Suite 500  
Seattle, WA 98119  
(800) 628-3233  
staff@nationalcasa.org



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# Table of Contents

- Introduction..... 7**
- Overview of CASA..... 8**
  - What Is CASA?.....8
  - Conditions that led to CASA.....8
  - The Search for Solutions.....9
  - CASA Offers a Solution.....10
  - Growth of the CASA Idea.....11
  - Who Supports CASA? .....11
  - The National CASA Association .....13

## *Section I: Planning a Quality Program 15*

- Chapter 1 Initial Planning Steps ..... 16**
  - Become Educated About the Problems.....16
  - Assess the Community’s Response to Child Abuse.....16
  - Make the Case for CASA.....17
  - Determine if the Program Will Succeed.....18
  - Obtain Judicial Support.....18
  - Enlist the Right People to Help.....19
  - Form a Steering Committee .....20
  - Plan the Committee’s First Meeting.....21
  - Next Steps .....22
- Chapter 2 Creating the Organization ..... 23**
  - The Mission.....23
  - Establish a Plan .....23
- Chapter 3 Organizational Structure ..... 25**
  - Establishing CASA as a Nonprofit Organization .....25
    - Articles of Incorporation .....25
    - Bylaws.....26
    - IRS Tax Exemption Letter .....27
  - Establishing CASA Under Another Organization.....27
    - Compatible Missions as a Starting Point.....28
    - Questions for Consideration.....28
    - Factors Supporting Successful Umbrella Arrangements.....29
- Chapter 4 Establishing the Board ..... 31**
  - Board Recruitment .....31
  - Considerations in Selecting Board Members .....32
    - The Judge .....32
    - Social Services Personnel and Public Attorneys.....33
    - Foster Parents.....33
    - Relatives.....33
  - Board Responsibilities .....33
- Chapter 5 The Power of Image..... 35**
  - Developing Community Support .....35

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Explaining the Benefits of CASA .....                            | 35        |
| Explaining How CASA Relates to Others in the System .....        | 36        |
| CASA Volunteers and Attorneys .....                              | 36        |
| Social Workers .....   | 36        |
| Citizen Review Panels .....                                      | 37        |
| Foster Parents .....   | 37        |
| School Personnel .....   | 37        |
| Mental Health/Substance Abuse Therapists and Counselors .....    | 37        |
| Medical/Public Health Professionals .....                        | 37        |
| Responding to Common Objections to the Program .....             | 38        |
| Gaining Visibility in the Community .....                        | 39        |
| Getting Started: The Basics .....                                | 40        |
| <b>Chapter 6 Funding the Program .....</b>                       | <b>41</b> |
| Developing the First Budget .....                                | 41        |
| Developing the Right Approach to Fundraising .....               | 42        |
| Possible Funding Sources .....                                   | 43        |
| Federal Funding for CASA Programs .....                          | 45        |
| National CASA Resource Development Protocol .....                | 46        |
| Introduction .....   | 46        |
| Research .....   | 46        |
| Submission of Funding Requests .....                             | 47        |
| <b>Chapter 7 Staffing the Program .....</b>                      | <b>48</b> |
| Where to Begin .....   | 48        |
| Developing the Job Description & Qualifications .....            | 48        |
| Getting the Word Out .....                                       | 50        |
| Reviewing Resumes .....  | 50        |
| Interviewing .....   | 51        |
| Other Screening Requirements .....                               | 51        |
| Selection and Hiring .....                                       | 51        |
| Employee vs. Independent Contractor .....                        | 52        |
| Additional Staff .....   | 52        |
| <b>Chapter 8 Establishing an Office.....</b>                     | <b>54</b> |
| Office Space .....   | 54        |
| Office Environment .....   | 55        |
| Furniture and Equipment .....                                    | 55        |
| Computer System .....  | 56        |
| Telephone System .....   | 56        |
| Copying .....  | 56        |
| <b>Chapter 9 Establishing a Relationship with the Court.....</b> | <b>58</b> |
| Role of the Volunteer .....                                      | 58        |
| Guiding Principles .....   | 59        |
| Agreement with the Court .....                                   | 61        |
| Frequent Communication .....                                     | 61        |
| <br><b><i>Section II: VOLUNTEERS.....</i></b>                    | <b>62</b> |
| <br><b>Chapter 10 Recruiting the Right Volunteers.....</b>       | <b>63</b> |
| Where and How to Find Them .....                                 | 63        |
| Getting Prepared .....   | 63        |
| STEP ONE: Determine the Type of Volunteers Needed .....          | 64        |
| STEP TWO: Determine how many volunteers you need .....           | 65        |

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| STEP THREE: Create a Recruitment Plan.....                              | 65            |
| STEP FOUR: Develop a Written Volunteer Job Description.....             | 67            |
| STEP FIVE: Develop a Volunteer Application.....                         | 67            |
| STEP SIX: Screening Volunteers.....                                     | 68            |
| The Initial Contact.....  | 68            |
| The Application.....  | 69            |
| Reference checks.....   | 69            |
| Central Registry and Criminal Records Checks.....                       | 69            |
| The Interview.....  | 70            |
| Training as a Screening Tool.....                                       | 71            |
| Spotting Red Flags.....   | 71            |
| Saying "No".....  | 72            |
| <b>Chapter 11 Volunteer Training.....</b>                               | <b>73</b>     |
| Designing Your Training Program.....                                    | 73            |
| Schedules.....  | 73            |
| History.....  | 73            |
| Speakers.....   | 74            |
| Frontline Experience: Courtroom Observation.....                        | 74            |
| <i>A Question of Balance</i> .....                                      | 75            |
| In-Service Training.....  | 75            |
| Volunteer Mentors.....  | 75            |
| <b>Chapter 12 Volunteer Management.....</b>                             | <b>76</b>     |
| Volunteer Supervision/Consultation.....                                 | 76            |
| Volunteer Policies and Procedures.....                                  | 77            |
| Retaining Volunteers.....   | 78            |
| Performance Evaluations.....  | 78            |
| Disciplinary Action.....  | 79            |
| Volunteer Recognition.....  | 79            |
| <br><b><i>Section III: Managing The Program.....</i></b>                | <br><b>81</b> |
| <b>Chapter 13 Financial Management.....</b>                             | <b>82</b>     |
| What is the Accounting Process?.....                                    | 82            |
| Establishing an Accounting System.....                                  | 82            |
| Establishing a Bank Account.....  | 83            |
| Internal Controls.....  | 83            |
| Financial Statements.....   | 84            |
| Audits.....   | 84            |
| Tax Returns.....  | 85            |
| <b>Chapter 14 Risk Management.....</b>                                  | <b>87</b>     |
| Fear of Legal Liability.....  | 87            |
| Liability of the Individual Volunteer.....                              | 87            |
| Liability of the Organization to the Volunteer.....                     | 87            |
| Liability of the Organization Because of the Actions of Volunteers..... | 88            |
| Minimizing the Risk.....  | 88            |
| Liability Insurance.....  | 88            |
| <b>Chapter 15 Program Operations.....</b>                               | <b>90</b>     |
| Policy Considerations.....  | 90            |
| Confidentiality.....  | 90            |
| Procedures for Handling Complaints and Grievances.....                  | 91            |
| Personnel Policies.....   | 91            |

Keeping Records ..... 92  
    Master File and Working File ..... 92  
    Schedule of Hearings (Docket) ..... 93  
Gathering Statistical Data..... 93  
    COMET ..... 94

***Section IV: Tools* ..... 96**

# *Introduction*

Developing a CASA program is a significant undertaking that requires the cooperation and commitment of many people. It also requires a great deal of research, planning, organizing, and plain hard work.

This manual is designed to help you through the initial steps and to assist you in the early phases of program operation. The material is based on the collective experience of over 900 local CASA organizations throughout the nation. Although each CASA program is truly a grassroots organization that must tailor its design to the unique needs and interests of the community it serves, all CASA programs do share common problems and challenges, particularly during their first few years of operation. This handbook offers the wisdom of those who have launched new programs. It is intended to be a general guide to program development, not a rigid program design.

As you begin your planning and development process, there are several resources available to assist you. Most states have a state CASA organization that can provide guidance and support, steer you to potential funding sources, and connect you to other programs in your state. Most state organizations have a director or designated representative who facilitates communication between the programs within the state, and acts as a liaison between the state and the National CASA Association. If a CASA network exists in your state, we highly recommend becoming involved with it. We also encourage you to seek out others in the CASA network. It is a network comprised of bright, dynamic volunteers and professional staff who are committed to the growth and concept of CASA.

Equally important is creating a strong relationship with the National CASA Association (NCASAA). National CASA was established to promote, assist, and support the development and growth of quality CASA programs. The Association provides training and technical assistance; an annual national conference for volunteers, staff, and board members; a quarterly newsletter, "The Connection"; grants for new and established CASA programs; and resource materials. Information kits, promotional items, and public service announcements are also available to programs, courts and community volunteers to increase public awareness of the CASA concept. The staff at National CASA is another resource. We are here for guidance, support and are willing to answer any questions.

For assistance or more information contact:

National CASA Association  
100 West Harrison  
North Tower - Suite 500  
Seattle, Washington 98119-4123  
1-800-628-3233  
E-mail: [staff@nationalcasa.org](mailto:staff@nationalcasa.org)  
Web Page: <http://www.casanet.org>

# *Overview of CASA*

## **What Is CASA?**

Each year in this country, more than 500,000 children are placed in some form of foster care and thrust into the court system. They have committed no crime, but are simply child victims who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned. It is then up to a judge to decide their futures. The judge must consider the following: Did the conditions at home warrant removal? Is the home now safe enough to allow the child's return or should that child be permanently placed in another home?

In the past, judges have often had to base these decisions on incomplete information. Overburdened child welfare workers and attorneys have not had the time or resources to thoroughly monitor compliance with court orders or to find out firsthand what was really best for each individual child. As reports of abuse and neglect keep crowding court dockets, more and more children have become "lost" in the confusing maze of the foster care system.

Today, more than 50,000 people are speaking up for these children as volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Guardians ad Litem (GAL). CASA volunteers are laypeople who are assigned by a judge to represent the best interests of children whose cases are before the dependency court. CASA/GAL volunteers serve as the eyes and ears of the judge, gathering relevant information about the child and the family. They interview anyone who might have information about the case - parents, foster parents, relatives, teachers, doctors and the child himself. The focus of this investigation is to identify the child(ren)'s needs, not to gather evidence for criminal prosecution. The volunteers then make recommendations to the judge regarding what, in their judgment, is in the *child's best interest*.

CASA/GAL volunteers currently advocate for children in over 900 program sites in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is estimated that they spoke up for the best interests of approximately 229,090 children in 2000. Though an impressive statistic, that is still only about a third of the abused and neglected children in the court system who need CASA volunteers.

The benefits of citizen volunteers in the court extend far beyond the courtroom to the community at large. CASA volunteers are speaking out for improved services for children. As they do so, they are also raising the public's awareness of the problems of abused children.

## **Conditions that led to CASA**

Over the past 50 years, attitudes toward abused and neglected children have changed dramatically in the United States. In the first half of the century, neglected and abandoned children were most commonly placed in institutional settings such as orphanages and asylums.



Abuse was considered a family matter, and children were rarely removed from their homes for physical harm inflicted by their parents. It wasn't until the early 1960s that child advocates succeeded in raising the awareness of the public and the courts, and child abuse was recognized as a serious problem and a crime. During this period there was also growing recognition of the importance of a child's attachment to caregivers. Judges began placing children in families instead of in institutions, giving birth to the modern system of foster care.

By the 1970s, however, foster care had become permanent for many children. It was not uncommon for children to be placed in a series of foster homes with no efforts made to reunite them with their parents or to find other permanent families. For many children, becoming a part of the foster care system meant the loss of a family for the remainder of their childhood.

### **The Search for Solutions**

In the 1970s, national attention focused on child abuse and neglect, leading Congress to pass two laws that were instrumental in restructuring child welfare services in this country. These laws also laid the groundwork for the development of CASA programs.

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-247), was one of the first legislative measures to address the importance of representation for children in juvenile or family court proceedings. In order to receive certain federal funds, the act requires the states to provide a guardian ad litem for children who are the subject of judicial proceedings as a result of allegations of abuse or neglect. The guardian ad litem (guardian "for the proceedings") or GAL, is defined as a:

"Person appointed by the Court to promote and protect the interests of a child involved in a judicial proceeding, through assuring representation of those interests in the courts and throughout the social service and ancillary service systems."

Though some states had implemented guardian ad litem legislation prior to the passage of the federal law, most passed legislation requiring the appointment of a guardian ad litem for the child as a direct result of P.L. 93-247. However, despite the legal mandate to do so, a 1990 national study funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, found that only 50% of the states were actually appointing guardians ad litem for every abused and neglected child in the system. The law simply was not being followed and the federal government did not have a system for monitoring compliance. When guardians ad litem were appointed, the study also found they were usually attorneys who had little time or training in matters pertaining to children.

Although P.L. 93-247 did much to improve a child's position in court, there were still many children being placed in foster care unnecessarily and many others who were remaining in foster care placements longer than necessary. To remedy the heavy and extended reliance on foster care, child welfare professionals and advocates launched a movement known as permanency planning. Permanency planning requires that agencies provide services to preserve a child's

family, expeditious reunification of the child with his or her parents if removal is necessary and alternative permanent placement for the child when reunification is not possible.

Permanency planning efforts emerged out of the recognition that a safe and permanent home is essential for the healthy development of a child. Research indicates that the lack of such an environment is a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy and social and/or emotional problems that often linger into adulthood.

In 1980, Congress passed P.L. 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act. This legislation was designed to encourage permanency planning in state child welfare systems by requiring that states, in order to be eligible for federal child welfare funds, show evidence that "reasonable efforts" are made to keep a family together before a child is removed from the home.

This Act established a number of requirements of social services agencies designed to prevent a child from remaining in limbo. They included:

- ◆ Goal-oriented case planning;
- ◆ Time lines for parents to complete the service plan;
- ◆ Regular court reviews of the case plan; and
- ◆ Reasonable efforts to reunify families if a child can remain safe.

### **CASA Offers a Solution**

The growing awareness of children's rights and subsequent changes in the law produced an environment of change in child welfare in which creative solutions to problems could be developed.

One such innovative program emerged in 1977 in Seattle, Washington, when King County Superior Court Judge David W. Soukup saw a recurring problem in his courtroom. He felt strongly that he was not getting all the facts needed to make well-informed decisions affecting the future of the children whose cases came before him. Such decisions included where the child would live, for how long, and under what conditions; what services and treatment should be ordered; and/or what steps should be taken to reunite the child with the birth parents or to place the child in a new family unit.

While attorney guardians ad litem were being appointed to abuse and neglect cases in Seattle, they generally lacked the time and the specialized training to conduct the in-depth investigation required in these cases. Social workers, responsible for many cases, had too little time to devote to each child. In court, there were attorneys to represent the interests of the parents and the state. Yet the child, whose future hinged on the outcome, was without a voice.

Judge Soukup believed that someone other than an attorney might be trained to speak effectively for children. He wondered if it might be feasible to recruit and train qualified individuals to step into the courtroom to advocate for children. In 1977, Judge Soukup's idea became reality when volunteers began representing the best interests of children as their appointed guardians ad litem. They later came to be known as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

In a short time, the judge's daring experiment proved to be an enormous success. Lay volunteers entered the court proceedings with enthusiasm, dedication, and professionalism. With proper training, they proved to be effective advocates for abused and neglected children. They conducted thorough investigations of each child's individual situation, made recommendations which reflected the best interests of the child, and monitored the case plan to ensure that the court's order was carried out in a timely manner.

CASA volunteers provided a fresh perspective to the juvenile court, one that questioned how families and children were being treated and what services were available to help them. Their presence on cases helped to ensure that children who were abused or neglected did not receive further abuse at the hands of an overburdened child welfare system.

In October of 1996, The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act was amended to include CASA volunteers as one of the court's options for guardian ad litem appointment:

"...in every case involving an abused and neglected child which results in a judicial proceeding, a guardian ad litem, who may be an attorney or a court appointed special advocate (or both), shall be appointed to represent the child..."

This legislative amendment serves as an acknowledgment by political leaders of CASA's strong reputation as a quality method of child advocacy.

### **Growth of the CASA Idea**

The CASA concept soon received the attention of the Children in Placement Committee of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). In October 1977, that body voted to endorse the volunteer CASA program as a model for safeguarding a child's rights to a safe and permanent family.

In 1978, the National Center of State Courts selected the Seattle program as the "best National example of citizen participation in the juvenile justice system." This recognition, along with a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (one of CASA's earliest and strongest supporters), made it possible for courts in other communities to develop programs based on the CASA concept.

Other early supporters who were instrumental in the growth of CASA were the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) and the International Association of Junior Leagues.

As communities adopted the CASA concept, new programs were established under a variety of names -- Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), ProKids, FOCAS, Child Advocates, Inc., and Voices for Children, Inc., to name a few.

### **Who Supports CASA?**

The CASA/GAL concept has been widely accepted by judges, child advocates and policy makers since the Seattle program began in 1977. It has affected hundreds of courts and thousands of

children and has been supported by a number of professional and government organizations, including the following:

- ◆ National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)
- ◆ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
- ◆ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children and Families
- ◆ The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation
- ◆ National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)
- ◆ National Federation of Women's Clubs
- ◆ Kappa Alpha Theta Women's Fraternity
- ◆ Points of Light Foundation
- ◆ American Association of Retired Persons
- ◆ International Association of Junior Leagues
- ◆ The American Bar Association
- ◆ The National Bar Association

Through its Permanency Planning Project, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) has promoted CASA and helped to educate judges about the potential value of using volunteers in their courts. The support of NCJFCJ has helped to build CASA's credibility in legal, social service, and child welfare circles.

In 1988, CSR, Inc., under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, published the results of a study entitled *National Evaluation of Guardians Ad Litem in Child Abuse or Neglect Judicial Proceedings*. After analyzing five types of GAL models the study found that:

"CASA volunteers are excellent investigators and mediators, remain involved in the case and fight for what they think is best for the child." The study concluded, "We give the CASA models our highest recommendation."

In August 1989, the American Bar Association, the country's largest professional organization of attorneys, voted to officially endorse the use of CASA volunteers to work with attorneys to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in juvenile court. Their resolution reads:

"Be it resolved that the American Bar Association endorses the concept of utilizing carefully selected, well-trained lay volunteers - Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) - in addition to providing attorney representation, in dependency proceedings to assist the court in determining what is in the best interests of abused and neglected children. Be it further resolved that the American Bar Association encourages its members to support the development of CASA programs in their communities."

Also in 1989, the Kappa Alpha Theta women's fraternity selected CASA as its national philanthropy. As a result, chapters and alumni groups across the country have assisted local CASA programs and state organizations in many ways.

### **The National CASA Association**

By 1982, it was clear that a national association was needed to provide networking opportunities and a unified image for CASA's emerging national presence. The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (“National CASA” or “the Association”) was formed that year.

Funding for the Association is provided through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) of the U.S. Department of Justice, corporations, individuals, and membership dues. This financial support allows the National CASA Association to promote the concept and growth of volunteer child advocates through ongoing services including training, technical assistance, resource development, continuing education and public awareness initiatives. The association has developed national Standards for CASA Programs and provides a national training curriculum.

The Association also hosts an annual national conference where volunteers, staff and others from throughout the child welfare and juvenile justice systems meet to exchange ideas and hear leaders in the field speak on various issues. National CASA also produces a quarterly newsletter, *The Connection*, to keep program staff and volunteers updated on the latest news from the child advocacy network.

National CASA produces *Feedback*, a bulletin of current news and important program information and conducts an annual program survey that provides valuable information about the organization of CASA programs, their services, and their needs.

In addition, the Association offers many services tailored to the new and/or growing program. It provides technical assistance both on-site and via telephone and internet communications, thereby assisting staff in programs across the country to share information and solve problems. It also provides public service announcements, brochures for the public and professionals, and a number of instructive guides on substantive topics such as program development, volunteer management, fund-raising and public relations.

## National CASA Association Recognition and Awards

- 1985 The President's Volunteer Action Award.
- 1986 American Federation of Junior Women's Club President's Award of Merit.
- 1987 Kiwanis International selects CASA as a Major Emphasis Program.
- 1989 American Bar Association endorses CASA.  
Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation adopts CASA as national philanthropy.
- 1990 U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect includes utilization of CASAs and volunteer GALs among critical first steps it recommends to bring the "national emergency" of child abuse and neglect in America under control.  
U.S. Congress authorizes expansion of CASA with passage of "Victims of Child Abuse Act of 1990" (P.L. 101-647), so that "a court appointed special advocate shall be available to every victim of child abuse or neglect in the United States that needs such an advocate."  
National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges names CASA "Outstanding Volunteer Program" in America's juvenile and family courts.  
American Society of Association Executives Award of Excellence.
- 1991 President and founder David W. Soukup meets with President George Bush in Oval Office during National Volunteer Week.  
Child Advocate of the Year, Sharon Lawrence, designated a "Point of Light."  
Foundation for Improvement of Justice Award.  
The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, names CASA an "Exemplary National Program in Juvenile Delinquency Prevention."
- 1992 David W. Soukup receives Caring Institute Award.
- 1996 Prevention for a Safer Society Award by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

***SECTION I: PLANNING A  
QUALITY PROGRAM***

## *Initial Planning Steps*

### **Become Educated About the Problems**

The first step in planning for a CASA program is to educate yourself about the problems of child abuse and neglect and your community's response. How well are the child welfare and judicial systems working in your community? Are the needs of abused and neglected children being adequately met? Do children who are the subject of court action have a voice to speak for their best interests? The answers to these questions are not simple and learning them will involve doing research and talking to a number of people, but the knowledge will enable you to become a powerful spokesperson to sell the CASA concept to community leaders and organizations.

It is very helpful as you begin the planning process to have close contact with your state CASA organization, local CASA programs, and with National CASA. State representatives may already be aware of someone else in your community who is interested in collaborating on the project, thus eliminating duplication of efforts and increasing effectiveness. Local programs will be more than willing to share their knowledge and experience and can often help you avoid making common mistakes or reinventing something that already exists. National CASA has various materials to assist you, from written manuals on a variety of program development topics to volunteer recruitment materials. They also have staff available who can answer most of your questions, whether general or specific. Take advantage of all the resources available to you – your job will be easier and the results better.

### **Assess the Community's Response to Child Abuse**

Some of the information you will need about your community include answers to the following questions:

- ◆ How many reports of abuse and neglect were made to child protective services last year?
- ◆ Of the reports received, how many were substantiated?
- ◆ How many new abuse and neglect cases were filed in court last year?
- ◆ What cultural and ethnic groups are represented in the child welfare population in your community?
- ◆ How does the percentage of minority children in foster care in your community compare to the percentage of the minority population as a whole?
- ◆ What is the average length of time children remain in foster care placement before a permanent plan is achieved?
- ◆ How many children were terminated from court involvement last year?
- ◆ Of that number, how many were returned home?
- ◆ How many were placed with relatives?
- ◆ How many were placed for adoption?
- ◆ How many children in your county are currently waiting for adoption?



- ◆ Is every child involved in an abuse or neglect proceeding appointed a guardian ad litem? If not, which cases do receive appointment? How many children were represented by a guardian ad litem last year?
- ◆ Who currently provides guardian ad litem services?
- ◆ How does the presiding juvenile court judge rate the current system of representation?
- ◆ Is the judge satisfied with the information being provided to assist his or her decision making?
- ◆ What was the total cost of the current system of guardian ad litem services last year?
- ◆ Does your state statute or court rules define the role of the guardian ad litem? If yes, what is it?
- ◆ Does your state statute specify who can serve as the guardian ad litem? If yes, who can serve?
- ◆ What is the average number of cases carried by a protective services social worker?
- ◆ What is the average number of foster care placements for each child in foster care?

Some of this information will be a matter of public record and can be obtained at the library. However, much of the data can be obtained only by interviewing child welfare and court personnel. Making contact with these individuals can provide other intangible information such as advice on the local political climate, community mood, and history of children's services leading to the current system. Unfortunately, solid data on these issues is not available in every community. If you are in this situation, you may need to make educated estimates based on what you can learn and advocate for better data collection as a starting point for better services to children. One key to success is to be well informed about the CASA program before you conduct the interviews. This will avoid misconceptions and enhance future relationships. Some key individuals to interview:

- ◆ Presiding judge of the juvenile or family court
- ◆ Director of the department of social services and other staff members
- ◆ Court administrator
- ◆ Representative from state attorney general's or county prosecutor's office
- ◆ State CASA office or state association president
- ◆ Other local CASA program staff
- ◆ Members of other child advocacy or civic/social organizations who are interested in child abuse issues (such as child abuse councils, Junior League, Urban League, National Council of Jewish Women, League of Women Voters, Kiwanis, etc.)
- ◆ Service providers who treat children referred by the court and social service agencies
- ◆ Members of the local bar association
- ◆ Business leaders with knowledge of the community and experience in volunteer programs

### **Make the Case for CASA**

Once you have conducted your interviews and gathered the desired data, you will need to interpret and summarize how well your community is responding to abused and neglected children. Some issues to consider are:

- ◆ Does the juvenile judge feel that he/she has enough time and information to make appropriate decisions for children?
- ◆ Do child protective services workers carry more than the recommended 20 cases at a time?
- ◆ Does every child who is the subject of an abuse or neglect proceeding have a guardian ad litem appointed?

- ◆ If there is a guardian ad litem appointed, does that individual conduct a thorough investigation, including meeting and interviewing the child, prior to going to court?
- ◆ Does the average foster child in your community experience multiple foster home placements?
- ◆ Does every child in the court's jurisdiction have the opportunity for a frequent, thorough review of his or her case?

If the answers to these questions or others raise concern for the children in your community, then a CASA program may be one solution. Having a CASA program will not eliminate abuse and neglect, and it will not prevent the need for foster care for some children. It will, however, help to ensure that the court has more of the necessary information to make the most appropriate decisions for the children involved. Additional information provided by CASA volunteers facilitates more expedient permanency planning for the children and reinforces compliance with the conditions set forth by the judge, both of which help improve the quality of life for children who have been abused and/or neglected.

### **Determine if the Program Will Succeed**

Need alone does not guarantee the success of a CASA program. The next step is to assess the feasibility of establishing a program. A number of factors are involved in making this decision, including:

- ◆ Is there judicial support for the program?
- ◆ Will the other child advocacy organizations in the community support the development of a CASA program?
- ◆ Will the bar association support the development of a CASA program?
- ◆ Is there a history of successful volunteer programs in the community?
- ◆ Is there potential for local funding?
- ◆ What are the strengths of the community that will facilitate the development of CASA?
- ◆ What are the barriers that will have to be overcome before CASA can be successful? What are the strategies for overcoming them?
- ◆ Has a CASA program existed in the community previously or did efforts to start a program fail? If so, find out what happened. Such information will provide insight into the challenges you may face.

If you conclude that there is a community need for CASA and that a program of this type has a realistic chance for success, you are ready to move to the next crucial steps in developing the program. These steps would consist of getting the court's support, involving people with the qualities and skills necessary to lead the program development effort, and obtaining the support and assistance of community leaders.

### **Obtain Judicial Support**

No element of program development is more important than obtaining judicial support. If the judge does not support the program, it stands little chance of success. Most judges have heard about CASA and have at least some knowledge about how it works. However, some may have negative perceptions of the program based on an anecdote they have heard or a personal bad experience with a volunteer in some other setting. Whatever the reason, some initial reluctance on the judge's part is not unusual and should not discourage you. Sometimes, you can counter the judge's objections by providing information and answers to specific questions and by letting

the judge know that she will be very involved in establishing the practices and procedures the volunteers will follow. Creating the opportunity for your judge to talk to other judges who have experience with CASA programs may also help.

Other ways of overcoming resistance are suggesting that the program be tried on a pilot basis for a limited period of time, with a limited number of cases, or appointing volunteers to a specific type of case. If, after all of these strategies have been tried, the judge is still not supportive, you may have to conclude that the time is not right and put plans for the program on hold. It is likely that this will not be a permanent situation. There have been situations in which a judge has initiated the development of a CASA program after initially rejecting it. So, if this happens, don't give up hope permanently. Within a few years, or only a few months, circumstances may change that will create the right opportunity for CASA to succeed.

### **Enlist the Right People to Help**

Enlisting the right people to provide leadership for the program's development is critical. They must be chosen carefully and sensitively. Because CASA will be a new program in the community, it will likely come under close scrutiny. The professionals who work with children and families will have many doubts and the public will have many questions. They will raise issues such as the prudence of involving volunteers in confidential child protection cases and about the qualifications of the staff and volunteers. Because at this point any misstep can derail the program, it is imperative that you engage individuals with strong credibility, commitment to the mission of the program and a healthy perspective about what the program can accomplish.

Some of the qualities that have been found to be essential in the leaders of CASA programs include:

- ◆ A commitment to working to improve the lives of children in need
- ◆ Tolerance for people with diverse lifestyles and values
- ◆ A belief that the best option for children is to be raised by their own families or in another permanent family if that is not possible
- ◆ A willingness to learn and an openness to new ideas
- ◆ A good reputation in the community
- ◆ The respect of the court
- ◆ Adequate time to commit to the planning and development of the program
- ◆ Good organizational skills
- ◆ Ability to lead and to motivate.

The experience of National CASA, and many programs across the country, has confirmed that individuals who serve other roles in the child welfare system have many attributes necessary to a successful program, but they have limited ability to lead the development of CASA in their communities.

Employees of child protection and other social services agencies may find that their involvement with CASA may create a perceived conflict between their commitment to CASA and their standing as a good employee. Consider, for example, a situation in which an individual's employer agency creates a policy that limits a CASA volunteer's access to children, a condition that severely limits the volunteers ability to be an effective advocate. Commitment to CASA would require being in opposition to the employer's policy, a conflict that would be difficult for anyone.

For these same reasons, foster parents, who in most communities are licensed by or contracted to the child protection agency, would have the same potential conflicts and blurring of roles as agency employees of the agency. Although their demonstrated commitment to children is laudable, it is best for all concerned if they are not involved as volunteers, staff, or board members of local CASA programs.

It is also wise to avoid engaging anyone who has current or past involvement with a case before the juvenile or family court. Court actions and decisions that impact our children or those to whom we have close connections are among the most emotional events a person can experience. Such events may affect our perspective of the court and our ability to be objective about similar issues for a lifetime. Although advocating for change in the system when one feels victimized is an understandable reaction, becoming involved in CASA is usually not the best action for someone in such a situation. The risk for negative consequences for the individual and lasting damage to the program is just too great.

### **Form a Steering Committee**

Establishing a steering committee is the first institutional step in setting up the organization. Steering committee members serve as a group of people who have endorsed the concept of the program and are willing to lend their names and volunteer their time to moving the concept through the exploration and startup phases. The defined membership and purpose of the steering committee offers legitimacy, shows visible progress and marks the beginning of community support for the program.

The steering committee is understood to have an impermanent leadership role: usually less formal than a board of directors, but with a similar level of responsibility leading up to the creation of the program's governing board of directors if it is determined that the program will be a nonprofit organization. Some members of the committee may be appropriate for membership on the regular board, but the time-limited nature of a steering committee makes it appealing to some individuals who would not have the time or interest in serving on the board.

The size of the committee is not set in stone. It should be large enough to assure that there are an adequate number of people to do the work and small enough to allow members to feel that they are part of a unified team effort. The number of members can vary from eight to twenty. The important thing is to make sure the group possesses the right attributes.

Determining who should serve on the committee will be influenced by many factors, including local politics. In order to attract early funding and to gain support in the community, this committee must include enough credible leaders whose names are recognizable and whose organizations are respected. Keep in mind also that while it may be easier to start the program if only friends and supporters of CASA are invited to join, it will not serve the program well once it is operating and working with other agencies. Acceptance of a new program is more likely if those who must work with it have been involved in its planning and design and are therefore invested in the program's success.

It is a good idea to consult with the chief judge about the composition of the committee. She may wish to actively participate or to designate someone from the court. Whether she chooses to participate personally or not, it will be important to keep her informed and involved throughout the planning process. The judge is also likely to have suggestions of others who should be

invited to serve on the committee. In fact they may be willing to issue the letters inviting potential members to participate.

Some examples of people to be considered for membership on the steering committee because of positions they hold in the community include:

- ◆ Judge(s)
- ◆ Court administrator (or court clerk)
- ◆ Representative of the local Bar Association
- ◆ Representative of the Prosecuting Attorney/Attorney General's office
- ◆ Local director of the department of social services (or a representative)
- ◆ Leaders of local nonprofit agencies who would work with the program
- ◆ Member of the media/press
- ◆ Member of the city council or county commission
- ◆ Leaders of key civic groups (examples: Junior League, NCJW, women's or men's clubs, church organizations)
- ◆ Representative of Kappa Alpha Theta (if there is an alumni or collegiate chapter in your community)

In addition to involving people in key positions, it is also crucial to have individuals who have knowledge of the legal and financial requirements for developing an organization, people who are experienced in fundraising, and someone who has knowledge of public relations and marketing. All of those invited to serve must be aware of the amount of time and energy it will take and be committed to staying with the committee until the program is off the ground. The actual amount of time from initial planning to the first volunteer training class varies from community to community, but a year is about the average.

### **Plan the Committee's First Meeting**

Regardless of the judge's role on the committee, her presence at the first meeting is important because it provides credibility and establishes the support of the court in the minds of those present. The agenda for this first meeting will set the tone for the program planning effort to follow.

If the participants have limited knowledge of the CASA concept, present an overview, allowing time for discussion. It is also effective to have materials on hand that can explain history, development and impact of CASA programs in other communities. These materials are available from the National CASA Association. A national overview can often help early planners understand CASA's purpose and affirm its credibility.

It is also very helpful to have a representative of your state CASA association or a director from another local program participate in the first meeting. They can provide valuable information about how CASA works throughout your state and will be invaluable in answering many of the questions that arise. Contacting someone as soon as you have a date for the meeting will help to assure that someone can be available.

Once the planning committee has been formed and has held their initial meeting, the real work begins. There are many questions to be answered, decisions to be made, and tasks to be accomplished. Program planning is like building a house. It requires many people and much hard

work, but if the foundation is built according to a well-conceived plan and the walls are constructed by a team with the right skills, in the end, everything will fit together and the house will be solid. Following the same rules in building a CASA program will assure that the program runs smoothly and the children served receive the best possible advocacy.

### **Next Steps**

Once the planning committee has a plan and schedule in place, they will then be ready to begin establishing the building blocks that will become the structure and foundation of the program. This next phase is likely to take a number of months. Members of the committee will sometimes be working alone or in groups of two or three to accomplish their assigned tasks. During this period, it is easy to lose sight of what is happening and even to lose focus. People are busy with their own responsibilities and it is easy to put off those “CASA duties” until a more convenient time. It is essential, therefore, that the designated leader of the committee be aware of what each member is charged to do and that she maintains frequent contact with the whole group. Meetings of the whole group may not be as frequent during this time, but occasional meetings are important to maintain the group’s enthusiasm and to provide accountability, especially for the procrastinators.

The following chapters discuss in some detail the activities that will be undertaken by committee members as they work toward program implementation.

## *Creating the Organization*

### **The Mission**

Effective planning begins with the mission of the organization. Though this may seem like an unnecessary step, it is important to have the group discuss and come to consensus about what the mission is. Because the mission statement serves to inspire people to become involved with the organization and to stay committed to it, it is crucial that every member of the planning committee feel a sense of ownership for the mission and be able to connect his work on the committee to its achievement.

A mission statement should be short (no more than two or three sentences) and should state clearly the ultimate purpose of the organization. When this goal is attained, the CASA program would no longer need to exist. This is in contrast to the statements of many organizations which describe what the organization does, rather than what it intends to achieve. Key elements in a mission statement for CASA would include court-based volunteer advocacy, abused and neglected children, best interests, and permanency. Consider the mission statements of two CASA programs:

- ◆ “CASA advocates for the best interests of abused and neglected children within the court system. Based on the belief that every child is entitled to a safe and permanent home, CASA works in the court system through trained volunteers in collaboration with key agencies, legal counsel and community resources to serve as the child’s advocate and represent the child in juvenile court.”
- ◆ “CASA advocates for the best interests of children who are under the protection of the juvenile court, seeking to assure safe, permanent families for them as quickly as possible.”

The process of developing the program’s mission statement can be an enjoyable, team building activity for the steering committee and should therefore be done early in the planning process. As the program develops, it should be reviewed on a regular basis and used as the guiding star for all planning steps. The mission will be useful to share with the individuals and groups whose support you will be seeking and with potential staff and volunteers (see additional examples of mission statements in the Tools Section).

### **Establish a Plan**

Once the mission is established, the committee’s next task should be to develop a plan which details all the tasks required to achieve the goal of implementing a program. This is a very focused and time-limited plan. It is not a strategic plan that lays out the long-term goals for the program’s growth. That kind of plan is also important and should be developed early in the organization’s operation, but it should be developed by those who will guide the program after it

is operating. The initial plan is the blueprint for the organization's design and construction phases that should include:

- ◆ **Activities:** Identify the specific decisions that must be made and the tasks that must be completed.
- ◆ **Timelines:** Include dates when each task should be completed.
- ◆ **Responsible party:** Identify the individual(s) who will be held responsible for accomplishing the task.
- ◆ **Resource requirements:** Identify all resources required to accomplish each task, including funding for supplies, postage, telephone, travel, etc.



## *Organizational Structure*

How your CASA program is to be structured may be a decision that has already been made for you. If the court has initiated the development of the program and has determined that public funds are available to fund its operations, many of the tasks related to setting up an independent corporation would not be necessary. Most CASA programs developing today, however, are established as independent nonprofit organizations or start out under the umbrella of an existing nonprofit agency, so it is likely that your program will be pursuing one of these avenues.

Whether to establish the program as an independent organization or to become part of another organization is a decision that the planning committee should consider very carefully. As you might expect, both structures have pros and cons. Each option is discussed in detail below.

### **Establishing CASA as a Nonprofit Organization**

Establishing CASA as an independent corporation at the beginning of the program's existence provides the advantages of assuring that the volunteers can be truly independent without concern for possible negative consequences to the program; allowing the organization to create its own image in the community; and providing autonomy in planning, budgeting, hiring, fundraising and other aspects of program and volunteer management.

On the downside, establishing a nonprofit corporation requires a number of legal steps that can be time-consuming and require specific knowledge of the law and tax regulations. There are a number of excellent resources available that can provide step-by-step instructions on how to form a nonprofit corporation. One good publication available from National CASA is **How to Form a Nonprofit Corporation** by Anthony Mancuso, published by Nolo Press. It is wise to consult an attorney as you proceed, although the necessary documents can be prepared by a lay person. There are three fundamental documents that serve as the basis for a legal nonprofit corporation:

- ◆ Articles of Incorporation (or "Charter" in some states)
- ◆ Bylaws
- ◆ Tax Exemption Letter from the Internal Revenue Service

### **Articles of Incorporation**

Corporations are created under the statutory authority of a state, and all states have specific statutory provisions relating to the formation of nonprofit corporations. Typical of the items required to be included in articles of incorporation are:

- ◆ Name of the corporation
- ◆ Duration of the corporation (usually perpetual)
- ◆ Purposes for which the corporation is formed

- ◆ Provisions for conducting the internal affairs of the organization
- ◆ Names and addresses of the incorporators
- ◆ Names and addresses of the initial board of directors
- ◆ Address of the initial registered office and name of the initial registered agent of the corporation
- ◆ Provisions for distribution of the assets of the corporation on dissolution

The statutes of each state are different, however, and your attorney should be consulted to assure that you conform to the requirements in your state. It is important that the articles qualify the organization as a nonprofit corporation by stating the organization's purpose appropriately.

## **Bylaws**

The Articles of Incorporation provide only a broad outline of the organization's form, and the initial board of directors (can be the steering committee for the purposes of incorporation) should quickly develop and approve a set of bylaws which will supplement the articles by prescribing more detailed rules for governing the organization. Bylaws provide the discipline required for orderly operation of the organization, and they should be written with an emphasis on fair treatment.

Bylaws often begin with a restatement of the name and purposes of the organization consistent with the articles of incorporation, but they add basic rules for operating the organization:

- ◆ The frequency, notice, and quorum requirements for organizational meetings
- ◆ Voting qualifications, proxies, and procedures
- ◆ The number and term of the board of directors, scope of authority, method of nomination and election to the board, and provisions for filling vacancies
- ◆ List of officers, method of nomination and election, terms of office, powers, duties, and succession
- ◆ The composition and duties and powers of the executive committee
- ◆ Title and scope of authority of the staff executive
- ◆ Record keeping and financial reporting responsibilities
- ◆ Bylaw amendment procedures and provisions for dissolution of the organization

It is wise to stop short of having too much detail contained in the bylaws so that the organization can retain some flexibility to change its operations without bylaw amendments. Bylaw amendments, although simpler than amendments to the articles of incorporation since the laws of the state are not involved, nevertheless often require a vote of the full membership of the organization, which can hamstring an executive and the officers and board in creating new operating structures to meet changing needs.

An illustration of the type of operating flexibility, which should be preserved for board action at a later time, is committee structure. The bylaws should prescribe the membership and authority of only one standing committee: an executive committee which is made up of officers who need to make decisions between board meetings. Beyond that, the bylaws should only provide that the board has authority to establish any other committees with whatever jurisdiction it prescribes. By preserving such organizational flexibility, the board is able to form new committees, or perhaps more importantly, eliminate obsolete committees without amending the bylaws (see example of bylaws in the Tools Section).

## **IRS Tax Exemption Letter**

Nonprofit organizations must take one more step in establishing their operations. In order for donations received to be tax-deductible and to qualify for reduced postal rates, they must establish their tax-exempt status with the IRS. Section 1.501(a) of IRS regulations provides that there shall be an exemption from income taxation for qualified organizations. Application for exempt status should be filed using IRS Form 1023. Copies of the organization's articles of incorporation and bylaws must be included with the application, and a full description of the purpose and activities of the organization must be provided. IRS Publication 557 provides detailed information on the filing process. Fees associated with the filing are usually several hundred dollars.

If the IRS determines that an organization has met the test for exemption, it will issue predetermination and final determination letters, which should be kept safely on file with the other fundamental organizational documents. Be aware that issuance by the IRS of tax-exempt status does not eliminate the need for the organization to file annual information returns with the IRS. Tax-exempt organizations other than private foundations must file Form 990, or Form 990 EZ, which is a shortened form designed for use by small organizations. An accountant or financial advisor should be consulted about the filing of this annual return.

There is also the possibility that you will need to obtain tax-exempt status from the state in which the organization is operating or is incorporated. Many states simply replicate the federal tax exemption regulations, and qualification under the Federal regulations automatically qualifies the organization in the state, but some jurisdictions require additional application and annual tax returns.

## **Establishing CASA Under Another Organization**

The second organizational model that has been used with increasing frequency is the development of new CASA programs under the administrative structure of an established organization. There are a number of advantages to such an arrangement, which make this option appealing to many CASA steering committees. Though the exact nature of the relationship between CASA and the "parent" organization varies somewhat, the benefits of such a collaboration can include:

- ◆ The use of the umbrella organization's tax-exempt status to raise funds.
- ◆ The use of existing office space and equipment.
- ◆ Availability of services such as bookkeeping, accounting, telephone, clerical support, and grant writing.
- ◆ Reducing administrative time and cost.
- ◆ Reputation and name recognition.
- ◆ Access to funding sources.
- ◆ Guidance in program and policy development from the umbrella organization.

Starting a CASA program under another organization should not be chosen simply because it is a shortcut to getting a program started, because this option also has its downsides.

A number of programs established using this model have made the decision after a year or two to become independent for the purpose of gaining more control over their own operations. One

CASA program that began as part of another agency was dissolved when the board of that agency decided to guide their organization in another direction. Other programs have not been allowed to expand to the extent necessary to serve more children.

If CASA is part of another agency, its visibility in the community and to a large extent the public's perception of CASA will be as a "project" of the parent organization. This perception makes it difficult for CASA to develop its own identity and may be an obstacle to recruiting volunteers and raising funds. If the parent agency does not actively publicize and promote CASA, the program may have little exposure in the community and may simply become lost.

Some sponsoring organizations charge the program an administrative fee, usually a percentage of the CASA portion of the budget, for the services it provides to the program. This is certainly a justifiable action and often remains a cost-effective way of doing business. However, some programs under this type of administrative structure have reported that this can become a problem when the percentage of the fee charged by the administering agency is increased each year. Once the fee reaches a certain level, CASA must consider whether or not it could purchase or provide the same services independently at less cost.

### **Compatible Missions as a Starting Point**

If the CASA program chooses to operate under an umbrella agency, it is vital that the parent agency's mission is compatible with the CASA mission and that the goals of each organization are compatible. It is not uncommon for an existing organization to initiate the development of a CASA program or to approach the planning committee about forming an alliance. Occasionally the committee will decide to approach potential sponsoring organizations directly. About 40% of CASA programs that were under umbrella agencies in 1998 were under nonprofit family and children's services agencies. Other common umbrella organizations include child abuse prevention councils, child advocacy centers, and agencies dealing with domestic violence.

### **Questions for Consideration**

If an umbrella structure is being considered, there are some fundamental questions that should be carefully considered prior to any agreement:

- ◆ Is the mission of the proposed parent organization compatible with that of CASA?
- ◆ What is the community's perception of that organization?
- ◆ Is there a potential for conflict if the two organizations are serving the same population?
- ◆ Is the organization financially sound?
- ◆ Will it be able to carry the additional startup costs for CASA?
- ◆ Is the sponsoring agency's interest long-term or do they wish to spin off the program in the future?
- ◆ How actively will the sponsoring agency market CASA, pursue funding for the program, and utilize existing political contacts to support CASA?
- ◆ What will be the role of the umbrella agency's board with respect to CASA?
- ◆ Will CASA have its own board to establish policies and set goals?
- ◆ What will be the financial relationship between CASA and the umbrella agency? Are there limitations on fundraising?
- ◆ How will future planning for CASA be approached after the program's establishment?

The committee should examine the potential for conflicts of interest that may occur between CASA and the parent organization when both organizations may be serving the same families. When this occurs, the potential for disagreement about the proposed permanent plan for the child or the visitation schedule between the child and parents is likely at some point. Issues of confidentiality also arise when one party has confidential information that the other would find helpful. If CASA is to be under such an organization, it is important to create procedures for dealing with and resolving conflicts prior to implementing the joint organization.

There are some community agencies that should not administer the CASA program because of an inherent conflict. The agency responsible for child protection in the community is an obvious example. Though their mandate is to protect the child, their role is to balance the interests of the state and the parents with those of the child while CASA is focused solely on the child. The office of the public prosecutor and the attorney general's office are two other obviously inappropriate entities for administering CASA.

### **Factors Supporting Successful Umbrella Arrangements**

The experience of many CASA organizations administered by umbrella organizations has demonstrated that there are a number of conditions that support the effectiveness of this type of structure:

- 1) **Independence of CASA.** In order to provide recommendations regarding the best interests of children to the court, CASA volunteers must be totally independent. There should be no possibility, or even the perception, that an umbrella organization could influence the volunteers or the program in any way.

This can be achieved, in part, by having a separate advisory board for the CASA program. The role of such a board would include:

- ◆ Developing and approving policies for CASA, including agreements with the court and social services when appropriate.
- ◆ Developing and recommending the program's budget.
- ◆ Promoting collaborative relationship with the umbrella organization and periodically reviewing the agreement that guides the relationship between the organizations.
- ◆ Promoting CASA through public relations activities.
- ◆ Monitoring and evaluating program operations.
- ◆ Developing and implementing fundraising activities for the benefit of CASA.

There should be members of the umbrella agency's governing board on the CASA advisory board and membership from the CASA board on the umbrella agency's governing board.

- 2) **Separate staff for CASA.** In the early stages of program development, an umbrella agency may be tempted to utilize existing staff to recruit, train, and supervise volunteers. Because of the nature of the work of CASA volunteers, access to expert supervision is critical to the volunteer's and the program's success. Volunteer supervision in a CASA program requires consistency and continuity. It can not easily

be assigned to staff who have other duties or divided up among several staff members. National CASA standards recommend that a full time supervisor should supervise no more than 30 volunteers. If the program expects to have that number of volunteers within the first year or two of operation, it is strongly recommended that there be separate staff for the CASA program.

- 3) **Written Agreement.** A formal written agreement between CASA and the umbrella organization outlining the responsibilities and rights of each should be developed. Such an agreement assures that both entities have carefully considered the implications of this arrangement in advance and that the unique needs of each organization will be balanced as implementation proceeds. The governing board of the parent organization should approve and sign this letter before the CASA program begins using the agency's tax-exempt status to raise funds.

The agreement should be for a limited time period, allowing adequate time to develop a solid working relationship and to work out any potential problems that arise. At least one year, but no more than two years is recommended. At the end of the agreed time, each party should complete an evaluation. The results should be shared jointly with both boards and appropriate action taken to resolve any problems or to modify the arrangement if either organization wishes to do so. This process should be completed annually thereafter.

The development of a CASA program within a sponsoring organization can be an effective method of combining community resources and creating a strong, sustainable program. Developing a plan that respects the uniqueness of each organization and realistically addresses the possibility of disagreements and conflicts will help to assure that the arrangement succeeds.

## *Establishing the Board*

At this point in the development of the program, it is time for the steering committee to develop the organization's governing board of directors. Though there are still planning steps to be completed, the organization is entering what can be considered the implementation phase. The pace of the action will increase and several things will be happening at the same time. Funding must be found, staff should be hired, policies and operational systems developed, and volunteers recruited. The board members who will oversee the program's initial operations should be involved in these steps and committee members can use additional help at this point. In fact, it is not unusual for some members of the committee, especially those who made a time-limited commitment, to decide to step aside at this point.

Establishing the board is another very important step and the decisions made now regarding the composition of the board and its role will significantly impact the ultimate success of the organization. A strong board provides both the energy and stability needed to assure the life of the program.

A key aspect to the successful operation of a board is its size. There are several considerations in determining the optimum number of members: the skills needed to fulfill the program's mission; the need for various constituencies to be represented; the need for enough people to serve on committees; and the need to have enough members so that no one member feels overworked. An optimum working board generally has 12-20 members. The initial board may be smaller in number with a plan to add more members as the need arises. The by laws should establish a minimum and maximum number of members.

The by laws should also establish the length of a board member's tenure. It is usually advisable to stagger the terms of board members so that a half or a third are elected every one or two years, for terms of two to four years. This assures that the entire board does not retire at once. Most organizations limit board members to two consecutive terms, a good approach that encourages the board to identify and cultivate new board members in a thoughtful and effective process.

### **Board Recruitment**

An effective board does not happen by accident. It must be carefully built and maintained by the collective efforts of every board member. When the executive director is hired, that person should also collaborate on identifying new board members. Two factors should serve as starting points. The first is the need for diversity: this includes diversity of demographics such as sex, age, and ethnic background; linkages to various sectors of the community; and the individual skills and interests which members bring. Strong boards have a composition that is representative of the larger world in which they operate.

The second factor is the need for commonality in board members. While acknowledging the need for diversity, the board must ensure that members have a shared belief in the mission and

essential values of the organization. Each member must be committed enough to give the time and resources needed.

The objective of the recruitment process is to identify and select people who can operate as a team in performing the board's duties. The first step is to identify those skills and characteristics that are needed on a well-rounded board. Common skills sought for newly forming CASA boards include human resources/personnel management, public relations/media experience, nonprofit management skills, accounting/financial management, office administration, fund development experience and volunteer management.

Potential board members should be interviewed personally by members of the committee to determine their interest and suitability and to explain the responsibilities and expectations of CASA board members. Friendship with a committee member should not assure a position on the board for anyone. Screening of potential members should be conducted using the same methods required for staff and volunteer applicants. This includes child protective services and criminal background checks. This sends the clear signal that CASA is a professional organization that is serious about finding quality board members. The board candidate should be informed in advance about the screening process and should be asked to sign a release authorizing committee members to obtain the necessary information.

Once board members have been selected, they should be given a thorough orientation regarding CASA, the planning process and progress to date, as well as what will be expected of each board member and the board as a collective body. Training for the new board on the roles and responsibilities of boards can be very helpful at this stage. In addition to the learning opportunity, it also offers a chance for new board members to get to know each other. Bringing in a consultant from United Way, the local community college or another nonprofit to provide the training is usually a good idea.

### **Considerations in Selecting Board Members**

A major goal in selecting board members for the new CASA program is the development of a professional and credible image in the community, particularly among the many professionals that will come in contact with the program once volunteers are assigned to cases. It is crucial, therefore, to develop a board of individuals who are not only qualified and committed to CASA, but who are also free of potential bias or conflict resulting from their employment or other organizations with which they are affiliated. CASA planning committees often specifically recruit people with these connections, believing that the program will benefit from their other affiliations. While this can be very helpful in the planning stages, once a governing board is established, it is wise to avoid using individuals from organizations where real or perceived conflict of interest may develop. A CASA board member must be able to make a firm commitment to carry out the duties of membership. As long as a potential for conflict exists, that person faces the likelihood that at some future point, one or both of their roles may be compromised (see Board Selection Characteristics in the Tools Section).

### **The Judge**

For example, consider the judge. If he initiated the development of the program and has been involved with the planning up to now, he may have a strong feeling of ownership and assume that he will be a member of the governing board. However, his membership on the board can



present a problem. The key issue is the necessity for program independence. A judge who will be appointing volunteers to cases and assuming a position on the board could compromise the program's independence. If the judge is perceived as being overly influenced by the CASA volunteer's recommendations or too closely involved with the program, other professionals may question the judge's ability to give equal consideration to the evidence of all parties in a case.

Most judges will not want to be a member of the board. They will generally want input on some policy matters and involvement in training of volunteers. These are important and appropriate roles for the court. However, some judges do not see any conflict in hearing cases and serving on the board. Obviously, this is a delicate issue that will take considerable diplomacy. Allowing the presiding judge to name a fellow judge, perhaps a retired judge or one who has left the bench, is sometimes a graceful out.

### **Social Services Personnel and Public Attorneys**

Having an employee from the public social services agency on the board looks like a good idea at first glance. However, when the inevitable conflict occurs between CASA and the agency, that individual may be putting his or her employment on the line if the conflict concerns agency policy.

A similar barrier exists in the case of a county attorney, prosecutor, or district attorney. These public employees are frequently involved in the same cases that CASA volunteers are assigned to but they have different roles. They may or may not be in agreement with the position of a volunteer in any given case. For that reason it is best to avoid even the possibility of conflict by not utilizing them as board members.

### **Foster Parents**

Foster parents are often the most vocal critics of the court and child welfare agencies. All too often, they have witnessed children being victimized by the system that is supposed to protect them. Often they are motivated to become involved with CASA because they see it as a possible remedy for the ills of the system. While their knowledge of the system would seem to make them suitable candidates for board membership, their roles may become blurred. Their ability to make objective decisions that will further the program's accomplishment of its mission may be compromised. It is better if they are encouraged to seek involvement with other organizations.

### **Relatives**

Often, interest in the CASA mission extends beyond the planning committee member to their families. Family members may also have time available or specific skills that would be useful to the CASA board. However, involving relatives of planning committee members or staff often leads to serious conflicts of interest. Any action taken can be questioned within the context of the family relationship. These perceptions can be even harder to deal with than realities.

### **Board Responsibilities**

Developing and clarifying the board's role at each stage of the program's development is essential because the board's involvement, commitment, sense of partnership, and strength can make a critical difference in an organization's ability to continue and to grow (see Board & Staff – Who Does What in the Tools Section). Staff and volunteers come and go, but a strong board

that brings in new members with new ideas on a regular basis is the foundation for the program's growth.

Most nonprofit leaders agree that it is the board's duty to do the following:

- ◆ Carry out the functions and obligations as designated by law or charter. The board should have a written description of the role and legal authority.
- ◆ Serve as a review body to counsel, advise, and deliberate with staff regarding program policy and operations. The board needs to take the pulse of the organization, to watch its spirit and to be sure it is progressing toward agreed upon goals.
- ◆ Set policy, authorize operational goals and objectives, and emphasize quality of overall corporate planning in the organization.
- ◆ Encourage the director to establish rules and procedures for the administration of the agency and see that they are followed.
- ◆ Serve as a public community relations organization. This means members need to have access to (or in some cases be a member of) the constituents and public of the organization - to hear from them and talk to them. This is necessary both to be able to interpret the organization to the public and the concerns and needs of the constituents to the organization. In other words, the organization must not operate in a vacuum.
- ◆ Monitor operations of the agency. This includes having access to necessary information regarding budget, program, problems and achievements so it can objectively evaluate the director and the agency itself.
- ◆ Support the agency with an annual contribution, and assist in securing additional funds. Appropriate board members should accompany and support the director in solicitation visits. In some cases they may want to make the presentation. Board members should engage in fundraising activities as necessary.
- ◆ Act as ambassadors, negotiators, and intermediaries between the agency and community members whenever problems arise. At times, this may mean taking a stand against some action that the program is being pressured to carry out. This task may sometimes require fighting a battle with politically influential people.
- ◆ In some programs, the board has primary responsibility for finances. The treasurer must keep financial records, prepare financial statements and reports, prepare budgets (together with staff), and safeguard the program's financial assets through bonding, insurance and internal controls.

## *The Power of Image*

### **Developing Community Support**

Although CASA programs have been around for over twenty years in some communities, it is still a relatively new concept to most people, so many community members will not be familiar with the role and purpose of a CASA volunteer. If the new program can successfully educate the public about who it is and what it does, it will likely meet less resistance. Public support is also a significant factor in building credibility and staying power. In other words, communities are less likely to discontinue support for a well-established program with a recognizable name.

Particularly in the initial stages of developing your CASA program, the ability to concisely state the program's purpose is essential when speaking to each agency and constituency within the community. You must also be equipped to respond to any objections which may be voiced. Because the needs and characteristics of each community are unique, the questions and responses in different areas will vary. However, history of growth and acceptance of CASA programs indicates that some issues and objections can be anticipated and resolved early.

### **Explaining the Benefits of CASA**

Some of the commonly cited benefits of a CASA program include:

#### ◆ **Quality Representation of Children**

A CASA volunteer is specially trained to conduct an independent investigation of the child's situation followed by a report to the court of all relevant information. The volunteer frequently has more time to devote to the case than the professionals involved and therefore can provide the court with more in-depth information. Social workers or attorney guardians ad litem can carry as many as 60 cases at a time while National CASA Standards recommend that a volunteer not be assigned to more than two children/sibling groups at a time.

#### ◆ **Quality Decision-Making by the Court**

A CASA volunteer is specially trained to conduct interviews with children, parents, and professionals to obtain important facts and opinions regarding the child's needs. Using the materials gleaned from the investigative process, the CASA volunteer, the volunteer's supervisor, and the attorney can engage in a process of joint case discussion. Considering a child's situation from several perspectives leads to more carefully considered recommendations that can positively affect the decision of the court.

#### ◆ **Community Awareness and Involvement**

Involvement of community volunteers in the court system provides the added benefit of educating citizens about the needs and interests of abused and neglected children. By engaging these citizens, we encourage the community to accept ownership of the problems of child abuse and neglect and to work at finding solutions and prevention measures.

## **Explaining How CASA Relates to Others in the System**

Most professionals in the community are very supportive of CASA once they are provided information about the role of the volunteer and how they will be required to interact with the advocate. In fact, many professionals have asked to have CASA volunteers assigned to the children with whom they work. Initially, however, there is usually some resistance when the program is new and those who work in the system have not had experience with CASA volunteers. Every professional who works in this field considers him/herself a child's advocate and they naturally feel that having someone else assigned to a child to fill that role is not necessary. It is important to establish clear and open channels of communication at both the agency and individual level to assure effective collaboration and cooperation. Establishing a clear understanding about the role of the volunteer and how the volunteer will relate to each player in the child's arena is a key first step toward creating good relationships (see Memo of Understanding in the Tools Section).

### **CASA Volunteers and Attorneys**

CASA volunteers and attorneys relate to each other in varied ways depending upon the model of representation that is established by the court and the CASA program. The most common models of interaction are:

- ◆ Attorney is guardian ad litem and the CASA volunteer is an independent "Friend of the Court" or is a party to the action, reporting directly to the court – no mandate to work together
- ◆ Guardian ad litem may be an attorney, a CASA volunteer or other non-attorney adult
- ◆ CASA is the guardian ad litem, teamed with attorney advocate
- ◆ CASA is the guardian ad litem, represented by attorney in court

Regardless of the model used in your program, the keys to successful collaboration with attorneys are a clear understanding of roles, commitment to teamwork, frequent two-way communication, and an established protocol for resolving differences when they occur.

It is also important to emphasize to your local legal community that the intent of the CASA program is *not* to provide legal representation for children. It is to make sure the best interests of children are heard in court, and this job is best performed in conjunction with an attorney. CASA programs must have either an attorney on staff or consult regularly with pro bono attorneys, contract attorneys, or attorneys appointed to serve jointly on a case for this purpose. In general, the legal profession has been quite supportive of CASA programs nationally.

### **Social Workers**

CASA volunteers and social workers tend to be in close communication and share information on most cases. It is of critical importance, especially in jurisdictions that assign CASA volunteers early in the court process, that the roles of each are clear. CASA volunteers do not deliver services but may locate and recommend them for a child or family. They often have input regarding the development of a case plan or may recommend a revision, but they do not formulate the plan. Just as CASA volunteers do not practice law, they do not practice social work.

When approaching a social service agency in your community, it is especially important to emphasize that it is not the mission of CASA volunteers to look over the shoulder of other

agencies. Rather, the purpose of the CASA or volunteer guardian ad litem is to ensure that the court has all the information it needs to bring about the expeditious placement of children in a safe, permanent home environment. In the majority of cases, the CASA volunteer achieves that goal through close cooperation with the caseworker, supporting the case plan and the department's recommendations.

Sometimes, however, the volunteer makes recommendations that are different from the caseworker's. Any resulting complications can be minimized if every effort is made to keep the attention focused on the child and the facts surrounding his or her circumstances rather than on the disagreement. Building a positive working relationship with the department, as with any other entity, requires open communication on a regular and ongoing basis. Sometimes relationships must be built with one social worker at a time.

### **Citizen Review Panels**

In many states and local communities, the federally mandated review of cases involving children in foster care is done by a panel of volunteers who are trained to consider information about how the child's case is progressing. CASA volunteers are excellent sources of information about the child's current needs and circumstances and are often asked to present this information to the review panel.

### **Foster Parents**

CASA volunteers communicate often with a child's foster parents about how the child is doing and what needs the child currently has. Foster parents are the best experts on any changes in behavior, school performance, medical or social needs, and what services are currently being provided by social services. CASA volunteers and foster parents do not always agree, but they are both focused only on what is best for the child and therefore have a strong partnership.

### **School Personnel**

CASA volunteers often contact schoolteachers, principals and counselors of school-aged children to see how they are progressing in school. If the child has special educational needs, the volunteer will check to ensure that those needs are met. In some states, they may serve in the capacity of educational surrogate in order to review a child's individual educational plan.

### **Mental Health/Substance Abuse Therapists and Counselors**

Treatment professionals can communicate with CASA volunteers, provided appropriate releases have been signed and/or court orders allow the release of information. Parents' progress in treatment and compliance with court ordered treatment is an important area of information that the volunteer reports to the court.

### **Medical/Public Health Professionals**

With appropriate releases or court orders, relevant medical records can be obtained and communication with medical professionals about the child's condition(s) can occur.

## **Responding to Common Objections to the Program**

Here are some of the most common questions and objections CASA programs have faced when first introducing the concept to the professionals and citizens in their communities. The responses are drawn from real program experience, and can help you prepare for any opposition you may face. The responses provided are not guaranteed to resolve the concerns, but they will hopefully steer the dialogue in a positive, helpful direction.

**Objection:** *"Adding one more person to the process is unnecessary and will further complicate the handling of the case."*

**Response:** The child is already involved in the process and his or her interests must be considered by a number of persons under the present system. Yet when so many people and so many institutions are involved on the child's behalf, sometimes the focus on the child gets lost. The CASA can be the thread that pulls all of these resources and caring people together. Designating one specially-trained advocate to speak for the child is more efficient and may actually save time since programs train volunteers in negotiating skills that can sometimes facilitate the progress of difficult cases (cases otherwise stalemated or polarized).

**Objection:** *"The caseworker is a trained professional, and does not need an untrained lay person interfering in case planning and management. The volunteer would be practicing social work without the training."*

**Response:** The social worker is indeed a trained professional hired for his knowledge of child development, the dynamics of abuse and neglect, and skills in helping families problem solve. The CASA volunteer does not practice social work and has no decision-making authority. When they testify in court, they are not considered expert witnesses. However, the volunteer does receive extensive training and has been selected because of his or her ability to be thorough and objective. CASA can help social workers who have high caseloads by giving the kind of focused attention to children that social workers would if they had more time.

**Objection:** *"The system is working fine; we do not need anyone else checking on us."*

**Response:** The CASA concept is not limited to courts and social service systems that are experiencing problems. The child is entitled to representation of his or her best interests, as specified in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. The use of trained volunteers in that role has proven a cost-effective model for meeting that requirement. The CASA volunteer serves as an adjunct to the system, ensuring that the system works well for the child.

**Objection:** *"If a new program is developed, funding will likely be cut from some other program to support this one, because there is no new money in this community to support new programs."*

**Response:** The impact of all permanency planning efforts is felt in the long term with a reduction in the costs of foster care, and reduced workload of court and social service personnel. By utilizing attorneys in an efficient manner, volunteers have actually saved money while offering greater representation for children. They can provide the background information necessary for the attorney's legal case.

**Objection:** *"CASA volunteers are practicing law without legal training or a license."*

**Response:** CASA volunteers receive extensive training in the substance of child welfare laws and local court rules in addition to the workings of the court system. However, CASA volunteers do not practice law; they have access to legal counsel to advise and represent them in legal matters and procedures beyond the scope of their training.

**Objection:** *"Volunteers cannot be trusted to work in the court system, carrying so much responsibility."*

**Response:** One of the foundations of the judicial system in the United States is the use of citizens as jurors. They are charged with the very serious responsibility to decide the outcome of cases, based on evidence presented. The CASA concept also assumes citizens are capable of responsible participation in the court process, and provides specialized training, clear role definition, and professional supervision to guide and support the volunteer.

**Objection:** *"What about the potential for liability when volunteers are used in the court?"*

**Response:** Some states have specific legislation addressing the issue of liability of volunteers in general, or specifically, CASA volunteers. Some nonprofit agencies have purchased liability insurance coverage for their volunteers. Whether or not a volunteer is covered under the state's liability protection or through a county risk maintenance plan will depend entirely upon the jurisdiction.

**Objection:** *"The information in cases of alleged child abuse and neglect is confidential and very sensitive. No one from the community should have access to that information about families and children in the community."*

**Response:** The CASA program emphasizes the importance of confidentiality when training its volunteers. The role as the child's representative makes the CASA volunteer a recognized part of the proceeding, with the need to know the information available to the other parties, and the same obligation to handle that information confidentially. The success of the existing CASA programs indicates that the confidentiality issue can be adequately addressed, and most programs state explicitly that violation of confidentiality is grounds for dismissal of a volunteer. In many programs, volunteers are required to sign an oath of confidentiality.

## **Gaining Visibility in the Community**

CASA/GAL programs are different from most other programs serving the court because they depend on public visibility to survive and grow. Unlike caseworkers, attorneys, or court personnel, CASA/GAL volunteers are recruited by outreach in the community. If the public has not heard of the program, it will be more difficult to effectively serve the community's children.

As a result, CASA/GAL programs face a unique challenge: they must work within the confidential parameters of the court and social services system while simultaneously promoting the program to the public. National CASA member programs need public visibility:

- ◆ To recruit volunteers
- ◆ To generate community support and credibility for the program
- ◆ To raise funds

This presents an ongoing challenge for most programs. Cases never stop coming in, but volunteers sometimes do. While the program may rely on word-of-mouth recruiting for its first group of volunteers, it is unrealistic to think this kind of “grapevine” effort will maintain a sufficient volunteer pool in the months and years to come. Free time is a valuable commodity for most people and they are most likely to dedicate volunteer hours for a program with a recognizable name and solid reputation providing a much-needed service for children.

### **Getting Started: The Basics**

New programs should reserve some money in their budgets for public relations materials. Don't perceive these items as a luxury; the dollars put into creating effective marketing tools now will pay off later in recruitment, fundraising and community awareness efforts.

- ◆ **General Information Brochure** - A professionally-designed and printed piece providing basic information about CASA: what the program does, how much time it requires, what skills are necessary, and where to volunteer or get additional information. Remember, this brochure will be many people's first impression of your program; it needs to reflect professionalism and credibility. A local adaptable brochure is available through National CASA to purchase or you can produce your own.
- ◆ **Business Cards** - For program director and/or any staff who deal with the general public.
- ◆ **Stationery** - Letterhead and envelopes using the CASA logo and following all graphic standards.

One benefit of your program membership in the National CASA Association is you may use NCASAA graphics and public relations materials available from the national office.

NCASAA materials have been designed so every program may use them, regardless of name. By using the materials developed by the National CASA Association, all network programs, including programs carrying other names (such as Guardian Ad Litem, ProKids and FOCAS) will have the means to graphically maintain a consistent national image.

To ensure we maintain quality in our visual image, members of the National CASA Association must adhere to the graphics standards when using these materials. Our purpose is to offer a means to achieve uniformity within the CASA/ GAL family, and to offer guidance to new members (see the Graphics Standard in the Tools Section).

The National CASA 's *Communications Manual for CASA/GAL Programs* specifically outlines ways to launch a successful public relations campaign for your program. It contains information on: designing printed materials; putting together an information/ press kit; working with the media; and getting a public service announcement on the air. Chapter 9, “Recruiting the Right Volunteers,” may also offer some helpful ideas to promote the program.



## *Funding the Program*

One of the great challenges facing the steering committee is finding the money needed to get the program off the ground. The court and community leaders may embrace the concept wholeheartedly, but they will still ask, “Who is going to pay for it?” Regardless of the enthusiasm for CASA, the commitment of those involved or the careful planning that is done, if the funds are not available, the program can never train the first volunteer.

Finding funding for a new organization that does not have a local track record, has little visibility in the community and doesn't have a staff requires creativity, and the willingness to try multiple approaches. The first step in securing funds is to determine how much you need and what for. Creating a budget of expenses for the first year of operation is the best place to start.

### **Developing the First Budget**

To determine what the actual costs of goods and services will be, take a look at other similar nonprofit organizations in your community. Members of the planning committee may be able to provide information based on their personal knowledge or experience in other organizations. The local United Way may be able to provide cost information from their member agencies. Your state CASA organization can share what other developing programs in your state have budgeted for necessary items (see examples of Startup Budgets in the Tools Section).

Although you might need to include other categories or distribute the items within these categories differently, the expenses of launching a CASA program usually fall into the categories below:

- ◆ **Personnel** – Includes federal and state taxes, the employer portion of social security, and employee benefits.
- ◆ **Equipment** – Includes a computer and printer, small duplicating machine, desk, chair, locking file cabinet for confidential records, a telephone and answering machine.
- ◆ **Volunteer Support** – Includes the purchase or printing of recruitment materials such as brochures and posters; training materials and other costs associated with training.
- ◆ **Facility** - Includes office space, maintenance, utilities, and cleaning.
- ◆ **Supplies** – Includes paper, pens, computer cartridges, business cards, letterhead, etc.
- ◆ **Travel** – Includes cost of mileage reimbursement for volunteers and staff, plus travel expenses such as meals and hotels associated with training and meetings for staff.
- ◆ **Telephone/Internet Service** – Includes the cost of installing the initial telephone line for the program, as well as funds for long-distance. Explore the need and cost effectiveness of installing a phone line for internet or fax access. It may be cheaper than adding one later.
- ◆ **Administrative costs** – Includes legal, accounting, and other costs of administering the program.

- ◆ **Insurance** – Includes professional and general liability, directors and officers coverage for the board, and liability coverage for volunteers (if you anticipate that you will have volunteers active on cases during the first year).
- ◆ **Staff Training** – Includes the registration cost for workshops or conferences, such as conferences sponsored by National CASA and your state organization.
- ◆ **Dues & Publications** – Includes program membership dues for National CASA and any dues for your state association. You might also include publications and training videos for the volunteers.

## **Developing the Right Approach to Fundraising**

Once you have identified the kind and amount of financial resources you will need to start the CASA program, you are ready to begin developing your funding plan. If people on the planning committee have experience in fundraising, they will be helpful during this phase of planning. If not, you will need to identify successful fundraisers who are willing to assist or would agree to provide training to members of the planning committee.

Funding sources want assurance that they are being asked to support a carefully researched and well planned program that fills documented community needs. Funding for human service programs - especially children's programs - is limited, and competition is stiff. Funders want to know that they are not throwing money away on a program that will fail because of poor planning, lack of coordination with those who will be affected, or duplication of efforts. You must be able to show a solid plan to support your request.

Three fundamental rules of successful fundraising are:

- 1) Know who you are asking.
- 2) Know what you are asking for.
- 3) Ask and ask again.

The success of any fundraising project will hinge on how well you know the person/agency/corporation you are soliciting. It is essential to have a clear, precise understanding of who the potential funder is, what types of programs it likes to support, and its funding history. Your request might be a good one, but if it does not fall within the funder's philosophy or budget parameters, you probably will not get funded.

A good strategy is to narrow your request to specific needs. It is rarely effective to approach an institution or organization with a blanket request. Funders usually prefer to fund defined projects rather than general operating expenses. It is also helpful to have a list of items, such as office furniture or computers, that the program needs. Use the budget as a blueprint for determining what your specific requests should be.

At the same time, you must be flexible. A potential donor might decline your original request, but offer something else that is needed. It is a good idea to prepare two or three alternative requests, based on what the donor is able to offer. The key to successful solicitation of in-kind contributions is to be clear on what specific items you need, and to be willing to ask for them - again, and again, from several different sources.

## **Possible Funding Sources**

***In-Kind Contributions.*** Donated goods and services are a major source of support for CASA programs, especially programs in the early stages of development. Many organizations that would like to support the development of CASA do not have cash to donate, but would be more than willing to provide in-kind support. Any goods or services donated to the program should be included in the budget as revenue. The contributor should determine the value of the contribution and provide the program with a written letter stating its value. In turn, the program, if tax-exempt status is in place, should provide a letter documenting the contribution for tax purposes.

The following are common sources of in-kind support for CASA programs:

- ◆ **The Court** - Office space, telephone, clerical support, supplies
- ◆ **Community Service Organizations** - Office and meeting space, printing, training materials
- ◆ **Bar Association** - Pro bono legal services, office space
- ◆ **Corporations, Businesses, Law Firms** - Paper, printing, computers, graphic design, office space, volunteer recognition materials

***The Court.*** If the program is court-initiated, funding may be available through the court or its funding agency - either the county or the state. If attorney guardians ad litem are currently being appointed at court expense and the statute in your state does not require that the GAL be an attorney, it may be possible to negotiate for a portion of that funding to be channeled into the CASA program. You should anticipate some resistance to this idea, and the support of the presiding judge would be essential to counter objections that will likely arise.

***The State.*** A number of states have passed legislation requiring or enabling the development of CASA programs and with funding appropriated in the state budget. Your state organization can provide information about how to qualify for these funds if they are available.

***Community Service Organizations.*** Other organizations committed to child welfare have supported the development of CASA programs in numerous sites around the country. Both the **National Council of Jewish Women** and the **International Association of Junior Leagues** have been instrumental in bringing CASA programs to many communities. If you have chapters or sections of these organizations in your community and have not already involved them in a planning committee, they should be contacted. Usually, these organizations set their funding priorities a year or two in advance, so contact them early in the planning process.

Churches, and service clubs such as Rotary, Kiwanis and Women's Clubs, can also be a great resource to help establish a CASA program.

***Kappa Alpha Theta.*** This national women's fraternity has adopted CASA as its National philanthropy and both alumnae and collegiate chapters have been helpful in supporting CASA programs throughout the country. Local chapters have helped CASA programs with financial and volunteer support, and sponsor community awareness events. Call the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation (1-800-KAO-1870) for the name of the nearest Kappa Alpha Theta chapter, or visit their website at [www.KappaAlphaTheta.org](http://www.KappaAlphaTheta.org).

**Corporations and Private Businesses.** Charitable contributions from corporations or businesses in your community may be available for new programs. The dollar amount and the application criteria will vary according to corporation or business philosophy, practice, and resources available. Investigate business sources on an individual basis. If planning committee members have had experience applying for contributions from local corporations, they may have valuable information on how to approach a company.

If you are unable to find anyone who has had experience with the particular company you want to approach, call and ask to speak to the person in charge of charitable contributions. Request information on their guidelines and priorities and be prepared to give a brief overview of the CASA program. If their stated purpose makes a cash contribution unlikely, you may consider a request for an in-kind contribution such as printing services or office equipment.

**United Way.** Some United Way agencies have venture grants to assist new programs with startup needs. These grants are separate from United Way agency membership, but may be available to member agencies starting new programs. If the CASA program is starting under the umbrella of an already established nonprofit agency in the community, startup support may be available from the umbrella agency.

**Private Foundations.** Private family, community and corporate foundations are sometimes open to funding new CASA programs, particularly if the foundation's field of interest includes family services or improvement of judicial responses to youth. Foundations generally prefer specific projects with clearly defined outcomes, time lines and indication of support from other sources. Some foundations will not fund operating expenses, but will consider requests for funds to produce or purchase the materials required to train CASA volunteers.

The reference departments of most local libraries have foundation directories available that provide contact information and funding priorities. There is also a wealth of information about foundations and other funding opportunities on the internet. Check with your state CASA organization for suggestions of foundations that are likely funding sources within the state.

A word of advice: well-known national foundations, such as Kellogg, Ronald McDonald Children's House, Annie E. Casey, and Edna McConnell Clark, prefer to fund national organizations or projects that have impact broader than one community or even one state. National CASA staff is regularly in touch with most of these funders and seeks grants that will benefit local programs when they are available. The best bet for local CASA programs is to focus on the many local foundations that are interested in funding programs at the community level.

- In 1991, National CASA, in agreement with state directors, established a protocol for approaching prospective funders who are not located within the immediate geographic area, and with whom they do not already have an established relationship. The program seeking funds should contact the CASA program located in the state or community of the funder, to learn if that program already receives financial support, or has a proposal pending with the prospective funder. Likewise, local and state programs should first check with National CASA before approaching a national funder. Please refer to the Resource Development Protocol at the end of this chapter to review the policy.

***IOLTA.*** The “Interest on Lawyer’s Trust Accounts” program funds CASA programs in many states. The CASA/GAL State Director, or other local CASA/GAL program may be able to provide you information on how it is administered in your state. Through the IOLTA program, attorneys place nominal or short-term client trust funds in an interest-earning account. An administrative body, usually the State Bar foundation, awards and administers the interest earned on the lawyers trust accounts.

## **Federal Funding for CASA Programs**

***The National CASA Association Grants Program.*** This is federal funding authorized by Congress specifically for the expansion of CASA advocacy for abused and neglected children. It is contingent upon an annual appropriation from Congress to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and administered by the National CASA Association. An announcement is made by National CASA, typically at the beginning of each calendar year, of the grant opportunities and applications available for that year. In every year, grants are made to establish new CASA programs, expand existing programs, as well as fund some demonstration projects. Be sure to contact National CASA for details of upcoming grant cycles. Funding for the CASA Program has been authorized by Congress through fiscal year 2005.

Other sources of federal funding for CASA programs are typically awarded by the federal agency to state agencies or commissions, for disbursement within that state. Wide discretion is usually given to the state to determine which agencies will receive the federal funds in any given year. Your State CASA/GAL director is probably the best source of information on what federal funds are made available to CASA programs in your state.

The following are the primary federal programs applicable to CASA programs.

***Children’s Justice Act.*** The Children’s Justice Act (CJA) provides grants to States to improve handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly sexual abuse and exploitation. A priority is programs which serve child victims and their families in order to minimize trauma. Up to \$20 million is available nationally for CJA state activities. Check with your State Director or National CASA Association for the name of the CJA Coordinator in your state.

***Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).*** VOCA funds support criminal justice advocacy, emergency legal assistance, information and referral services, personal advocacy, and assistance with filing crime victims compensation claims. VOCA grant funds can only support services to victims of crime, so that extensive documentation and reporting is required by grant recipients. The Office of Victims of Crime, the federal agency which administers the funding, gives states maximum discretion to set priorities and to determine which programs within the states are funded. For this reason, there is wide variance among states funding CASA programs. In the year 2000, 144 CASA programs in 19 states received VOCA funds. Your CASA/GAL State Director should have a good idea whether your state agency is amenable to funding CASA programs. To locate the VOCA contact in your state, and what activities were funded in the previous year, you can go to the following site: <http://www.usdoj.gov/ovc/fund/state>, (click your state).

***Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act.*** The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides formula block grants to all states and territories. States must submit their plan to OJJDP detailing how they will utilize the funds, which can be support for

programs to reduce or prevent delinquency or improve the juvenile justice system. A Juvenile Justice Specialist in each state is designated to coordinate the block grant, and State Advisory Groups (SAG) made recommendations on how the funds should be utilized. You should contact your CASA/GAL State Director to learn if federal juvenile justice funds support CASA programs in your state. It is best to work with your state organization to build a relationship with the state's Juvenile Justice Specialist and SAG, to pave the way for future funding of CASA if it is not already happening.

## **National CASA Resource Development Protocol**

### **Introduction**

Not-for-profit organizations must strive to obtain and sustain an optimal funding mix of public and private support to secure their future. However, we are experiencing escalating human service needs and costs, while the availability of government funds is being sharply curtailed. As a result, more organizations than ever before are appealing to the same foundations and corporations for private support.

Several funders across the country have acknowledged that they receive grant requests from multiple CASA programs. This is reasonable when the prospective funder's guidelines are appropriate for CASA program support, and the funder does not restrict giving to a specific geographic area. Even so, the best approach to a prospective funder should be made in coordination and cooperation with other CASA programs. That way the funder will not feel overwhelmed and disinclined because of numerous requests from CASA programs in a single grant-making period. Additionally, through a coordinated approach it is far less likely that one program's request could jeopardize the outcome of a pending request from another program.

### **Research**

NCASAA routinely send inquiries to funders throughout the country, requesting information such as annual reports, giving guidelines, funding priorities and eligibility of national organizations to receive funding.

When NCASAA learns of a prospective funder whose priorities are appropriate for CASA program support, yet restricts giving to a specific geographic area, NCASAA should provide lead to the member CASA program in that area.

Likewise, when state or local programs discover a funder which is not appropriate for its own program support, but may be appropriate for national projects, the program should provide that lead to NCASAA.

When a prospective funder is identified which provides funding for national projects as well as specific community support, *through the same office or funding mechanism*, NCASAA will proceed with respect and consideration for the member CASA program located in the state or community of the funder, whichever is more appropriate as described in the next section. Written guidelines provided by a prospective funder generally define the tiers of support which the funder will provide (i.e. support for projects with a restricted geographic area, regional projects or national projects). When the guidelines clearly restrict support to just one tier (local, regional or national), there is little potential for conflict between National and local CASA program requests. The guidelines may also describe separate mechanisms to support giving at two tiers. That is, a national corporation may, through its regional office, provide support for

nonprofit agencies within that geographic region. At the same time, the national corporation, through its headquarters office or a corporate foundation, may provide support for national projects. When grant-making is provided for multiple tiers, through separate mechanisms (i.e. regional office and a national office), again there is little likelihood for conflict.

### **Submission of Funding Requests**

1. Before submitting a request for funding, NCASAA will notify the appropriate CASA program located in the state or community of the funder. If the CASA program has a request pending, or is preparing a request for submission, and it is agreed that a request from NCASAA may affect the outcome of the CASA program's request, NCASAA may defer any action until the prospective funder acts upon the CASA program request. NCASAA and the CASA program should then come to agreement on the best timing of NCASAA's request. Certain circumstances may warrant notification after an initial contact.
2. A funder who provides ongoing support for a CASA program may also consider national projects. The state or local programs and NCASAA offices should discuss this, and may even inquire of the prospective funder if one tier of CASA program support excludes the other (if this is not evident in the written guidelines). If it is appropriate to the project, NCASAA/state/local programs may take the opportunity to team in their meeting with a prospective funder or collaborate on the grant proposal.
3. State and local CASA programs should notify NCASAA before approaching a national funder, most especially when NCASAA has an established relationship with that funder. NCASAA may have a request pending or ready to submit to the funder. NCASAA may also be able to provide information on the prospective funder or on previous approaches by CASA programs.
4. The fact that a prospective funder is located within a state or local CASA program's community is not, in itself, reasonable grounds for NCASAA to defer solicitation. Programs should coordinate their solicitations as described in #1 above.
5. NCASAA/state/local programs should make every effort to follow this protocol when there is a potential conflict with the development efforts of another program.

## *Staffing the Program*

The steering committee is likely to realize very quickly that in order to get a program fully operational, it will be necessary to have staff. Initial staffing is often a catch-22 situation – hiring an employee requires funding, but to be successful obtaining funding you need staff to coordinate and oversee fundraising activities.

At this point someone usually wonders aloud if the development of the program can continue without paid staff. After all, members have volunteered their time to do everything needed and things are progressing well thus far. Perhaps, the group may speculate, they could find a volunteer to run the office for a while until they have the necessary funds.

While having a volunteer run the office is one option, it may not be the best choice. Though a volunteer may be well qualified, hiring a salaried employee guarantees a time commitment and a regular work schedule. It also allows the board to have control over the nature and priorities of the work to be done and provides overall continuity for the program development effort.

Having professional staff is also an important step in establishing the credibility of the program with other professionals in the community, and it is staff who will assure the quality of the program's day to day operations.

### **Where to Begin**

The selection of the director is the most critical hiring decision for the startup program. Even the most dedicated volunteers can make only limited impact without adequate supervision and guidance. Since both program quality and viability are highly correlated with effective management, it is important the director be chosen wisely.

Initially, the board must decide whether to hire a full-time or part-time person. The decision should be based on the defined duties the person will be expected to perform; how involved board members intend to be in policy development and fundraising, and how many volunteers are projected for the first year or so. The experience of most directors in starting programs is that, even if the board is active and involved, the job requires at least 40 hours a week if it is to be done well. Most new directors find they spend full-time hours even if they are paid for part-time. If there is any way possible to generate enough funds, it is cost effective in the long run to employ a full-time director from the beginning.

### **Developing the Job Description & Qualifications**

Finding and hiring the right staff starts with a clear, concise job description. There is no formula for the perfect one, but at a minimum, a good job description should include:



- ◆ Basic skills required, both technical and educational
- ◆ Desired qualities beyond skills and education
- ◆ Duties and responsibilities
- ◆ Hours required
- ◆ Who the person will report to

Initially, the director will most likely be performing duties that will later be shifted to other staff. This should be explained during the interview process. Caution should be exercised to avoid developing a job description containing such an extensive list of duties that no one could perform them all effectively. Such a job description is frustrating for a new director and is a good way to set someone up to fail. A realistic job description serves as a guide for the employee and a basis for performance appraisals and salary increases. Key duties of an executive director usually include:

- ◆ Hiring, training and supervising staff
- ◆ Conducting or overseeing recruitment, screening, training, and supervision of program volunteers
- ◆ Providing professional perspectives to staff and volunteers regarding services
- ◆ Developing and maintaining procedures for case record keeping and supervising staff and volunteers in completing record keeping tasks
- ◆ Developing and maintaining procedures for managing information systems
- ◆ Serving as a professional liaison to the court, agency personnel, and the board of directors
- ◆ Planning program growth and development, including special projects, budgets, annual work plans, and analysis of trends in program services
- ◆ Representing the program to networks of service providers, and coalitions dealing with child welfare
- ◆ Overseeing day-to-day operations

The specific experience and educational requirements should be developed by the planning committee, in keeping with the present standards for comparable positions in the community. Fundamental requirements for the executive director should include:

- ◆ Knowledge of the juvenile justice system
- ◆ Awareness of trends in child welfare and permanency planning
- ◆ Familiarity with community resources and leaders who can facilitate establishment and growth of the program
- ◆ Understanding of the dynamics of child abuse and neglect
- ◆ Ability to provide training for volunteers and staff
- ◆ Good communication skills
- ◆ Ability to plan, organize, supervise, delegate and evaluate the program operations
- ◆ Knowledge of budgeting methods
- ◆ Interviewing and assessment skills

The director should also be flexible, creative, possess leadership qualities, have a professional appearance and be able to develop good working relationships with a variety of people.

Remember that the executive director generally is the program's official spokesperson in the community.

Of course, finding an individual with all of these qualifications is possible, but not very likely for a starting program. Such people are rare and they usually command much higher salaries than the program can afford. One solution to this dilemma is to focus on the skills in one area and plan to offer training in the additional areas of responsibility. This allows for the scope of duties to broaden as the demands of the program change and for the director's salary to increase at a comparable rate.

### **Getting the Word Out**

Recruiting the right person to fill the director's position may require sensitivity to the local political scene. In some communities in which there is strong resistance to the CASA program, hiring an attorney or a social worker known by the professionals in the area might be a wise move. A person who has credibility and long-established personal relationships may be a real asset in the early developmental stages of the program. On the other hand, there is the possibility that conflict will arise between new responsibilities and old allegiances. The board committee will need to assess this carefully.

Finding the right person usually requires a variety of strategies. Ads placed in the local newspaper's classified sections may bring a slew of responses, but many may be way off the mark in terms of qualifications. Sending a job announcement to your state organization, to court agencies and to other CASA programs may elicit more qualified candidates. Word of mouth is also effective, especially in small communities.

### **Reviewing Resumes**

As resumes arrive, develop a fair and systematic process to review them, always keeping in mind what skills are required for the position. With experience, each reviewer will develop his or her own rating system. Obviously, the main points of the resume are all important – the education, experience, skill levels, and any demonstrable communication and interpersonal abilities. Interest in and commitment to an organization's mission should be paramount.

Start judging a candidate as soon as you open the envelope. Does the resume look like it is written with care? Are there typographical or spelling errors? Is it orderly and easy to read? Is the cover letter direct and cogent or rambling and ineffective?

To uncover more intangible qualities in a candidate, look for evidence of:

- ◆ Sustained interest in a job or cause
- ◆ Loyalty to an organization
- ◆ Ability to be a team player
- ◆ Communication skills
- ◆ Attention to detail

## **Interviewing**

Conducting good interviews is a learned skill that requires careful preparation, execution and follow-up. It is perhaps hardest to master the techniques of putting applicants at ease. Proceed with the general understanding that applicants will be nervous, especially if several members of the committee are conducting the interview. During the interview, you should address administrative issues, such as salary and benefits, travel requirements and starting date, in addition to the job requirements.

All applicants should be asked a common set of questions that can help determine the candidate's job-related skills and experience, general intelligence and aptitude, attitudes and personality. Standardizing the questions from interview to interview helps to avoid discrimination. In addition to questions about background and experience, asking questions such as the following that have been recommended by experts in human resources can provide good insight into a candidate's suitability:

- ◆ What was your single most noteworthy achievement or contribution in your current job?
- ◆ What specific strengths do you bring to this job and this organization?
- ◆ How do you make important decisions?
- ◆ What risks did you take in previous jobs, and what was the result?

Obviously, the overall goal is to learn as much about each candidate as possible, as well as determine if that candidate's resume is accurate. Generally, an interviewer should try to determine the candidate's ability to do the following:

- ◆ Plan tasks
- ◆ Prioritize
- ◆ Solve problems
- ◆ Work on a team
- ◆ Apply knowledge
- ◆ Know limitations
- ◆ Take initiative
- ◆ Learn on the job
- ◆ Communicate with colleagues

## **Other Screening Requirements**

All candidates should be required to submit a written application and references. As part of the application or as a separate document, be sure to obtain the person's signed consent to contact references and conduct criminal record and child abuse registry background checks.

## **Selection and Hiring**

Once the most qualified candidate has been selected, the offer should be made in a letter accurately stating the job offer and employment conditions. Additional documents that should be contained in the employee's personnel record include:

- ◆ Employment application
- ◆ Copy of formal job offer and written acceptance

- ◆ Social security number
- ◆ Completed Form I-9 (to document immigration status)
- ◆ Federal, state, and local tax withholding forms as applicable

See National CASA's publication, [Achieving Our Mission](#) for additional discussion of the hiring process.

### **Employee vs. Independent Contractor**

Federal law requires employers to withhold income taxes, withhold and pay Social Security and Medicare taxes, and pay an unemployment tax on wages paid to employees. These payments are not required for independent contractors.

The wages of some employees may be exempt from some of these taxes. Nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations, for example, do not have to pay the federal unemployment tax, but they do pay social security and must withhold income taxes.

Whether an individual is an employee or an independent contractor does not depend on whether there is a signed contract. It does not depend on how the job is labeled or whether the person is full or part time. In most cases, the determination depends on the organization's right to control and direct the individual. The Internal Revenue Service has a list of questions to be considered in making this determination. However, those questions are irrelevant for officers of corporations who are specifically included within the definition of an employee (officers are generally those responsible for the day to day running of the organization).

### **Improperly classifying an employee as an independent contractor can result in the organization being liable for the employee's share of FICA taxes and withholding amounts.**

Information about the IRS requirements can be found in Publication 15-A, the Employer's Supplemental Tax Guide.

### **Additional Staff**

Depending upon the level of initial funding for the program and the projected rate of growth in the initial phase of operation, the organization will want to consider how administrative support (including word processing, bookkeeping, record keeping, and receptionist duties) will be filled. Hiring a part-time person can be cost-effective in that it frees the director and board members to concentrate on fundraising and volunteer development. Some organizations have successfully filled these responsibilities using volunteers or consultants contracted for specific projects.

Again, depending upon the amount of growth projected for the program, a volunteer coordinator will most likely be needed in the early stages of the program's growth. The national standards for volunteer supervision recommend that a full-time supervisor be assigned to no more than 30 volunteers. It is obvious then, that if the director is filling the role of supervisor in addition to administrative and other duties, volunteer supervision will be inadequate if there are more than a handful of active volunteers.

As with the director's position, careful attention should be given to developing the job descriptions for these additional positions and to the recruiting and selecting of the individuals to fill them. The personnel committee should work closely with the director on these tasks (see examples of job descriptions in the Tools Section).

## *Establishing an Office*

### Office Space

Establishing an official office is an important milestone for the developing organization because it is a strong symbol that the dream is becoming reality. Having an office is an indication to the community that the program is becoming a viable organization and provides a location for people to associate with CASA. It also allows the printing of brochures, stationery, and business cards with an address and phone number - important steps as you begin to plan for volunteer recruitment.

Office rent can be a big chunk of the monthly bills. So, before signing a lease, it is worthwhile to investigate the availability of free or very inexpensive space. Many CASA programs have been able to negotiate in-kind space in the courthouse or a nearby county or city facility. Such an arrangement is ideal because of proximity to the court and because other in-kind services such as telephone and the use of copy machines are often part of the arrangement.

If court or other government space is not available, you might have luck finding space to share with another nonprofit agency or a local law firm. This can be extremely advantageous, especially if there are meeting or training rooms and equipment that can be shared as well.

Other factors to consider as you look for office space are:

- ◆ **Terms of the lease.** Sometimes landlords are willing to give potential tenants a break on the rent if they will sign a long-term lease. Be cautious about entering into such an arrangement as the needs of the program may demand more or different space before the lease expires. It is also possible that donated space might become available and if the program is locked into a long-term lease, you may not be able to take advantage of that benefit. Also be wary of lease arrangements that include automatic increases each year.
- ◆ **Location.** It is desirable that the program be located in proximity to the court. Some programs have made office location decisions based on cost alone, without considering that staff, as well as volunteers, must make frequent trips to the court. If the office is located a significant distance from the courthouse or if the trip is inconvenient because of poor access or excessive traffic, the savings in rent may in reality not be cost efficient.
- ◆ **Size.** Space planners say that, ideally, an office should provide at least 200 square feet of space per person, including common space. Don't forget to consider the need for private space to interview potential volunteers and to discuss confidential cases during supervision sessions, as well as space for board members or volunteers who may help with office duties.
- ◆ **Anticipated growth.** While you may not need much space in the earliest stage of operations, try to anticipate potential growth to the extent possible, since leases are usually offered on a multi year basis. It is often difficult to break a lease if it becomes necessary and it is always expensive to move to a new location.

- ◆ **Utilities.** If the cost of utilities is included in the lease, the landlord will handle the monthly payments directly, but be aware that those rates may automatically increase each year. If you will be doing volunteer training in the office or holding other meetings at night or on weekends, be sure that the building will be lit and heated during those hours and that you will not be billed an additional amount for the extra hours. If the program is to handle its own utility bills, the landlord should provide estimates of the average monthly bills you can expect. It is a good idea to confirm the estimates with the utility company or other tenants, if possible.
- ◆ **Cleaning service.** How the office gets cleaned can also be tied to the lease. In some larger office buildings, the landlord often adds janitorial services to all the leases. In other places, the program may need to hire a janitorial service separately.
- ◆ **Security and safety.** Some security and safety measures are the program's responsibility regardless of the type of lease. Before signing a lease, be sure to consider the relative safety of the surrounding neighborhood and the security of the parking facilities, especially in the evenings when staff and volunteers may be coming and going. Be sure that fire exits are accessible and that fire extinguishers are available and in working condition, especially if there is a kitchen that may be used for cooking purposes. While most CASA programs are not legally required to adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act (which applies to organizations with fifteen or more employees), accessibility for disabled persons will be a consideration in volunteer and staff recruitment.

Before signing any lease, it is a good idea to have it reviewed by an attorney.

## **Office Environment**

In addition to the physical and legal considerations, it is important to assess how pleasant and functional the space is. Is it clean? Well lit? Is there adequate storage space for supplies and equipment? Is the workspace configured, or can it be arranged to provide staff the necessary environment in which to be productive and efficient? Will volunteers and potential volunteers feel welcome and comfortable? Does the environment project professionalism?

Much can be done to create a pleasant and professional office environment without spending a great deal of money. Freshly painted walls can work miracles if the landlord will agree to paint them or allow you to. It is usually possible to secure the donation of paint from local merchants and it is often not difficult to find volunteers who will give a Saturday to help with the painting.

Using posters, photographs, or framed children's art on the walls is also a creative way to make the office friendly and welcoming. Be sure also that you use art that depicts various cultures and ethnic backgrounds in order to make the office comfortable for everyone. Try to avoid clutter, which detracts from the professional image you want to project.

## **Furniture and Equipment**

Nonprofit organizations can often find businesses willing to donate used furniture and equipment or sell it at a very low cost. The donor gets the benefit of a tax deduction and saves the cost of disposal of old furniture or equipment. Contact local businesses that may be planning to remodel or expand their current space and may therefore be replacing existing equipment. If this option does not prove fruitful, there are many sources of used office furniture and equipment in most communities.

Before purchasing furniture or equipment, compare the cost of leasing which may, in some cases, be a more cost effective approach. Equipment, such as copiers, which generally needs to be updated every few years may be better leased than purchased.

### **Computer System**

In today's business environment, computer technology is a necessity. Besides word processing for volunteer reports and correspondence, programs utilize computers for accounting, data collection, publishing of program newsletters, and budget development. Access to the Internet is necessary for e-mail, access to many of National CASA's resources, financial grant reporting, and to conduct research on funding sources and child welfare issues.

In setting up the program's computer system, consideration should be given to the confidential nature of information that will be maintained. What kind of security will be provided, who will have access, and how long will information be retained are all issues that should be addressed in policy.

Many programs begin with one desktop PC and a good printer which will likely be adequate for a while. Though it is easy to obtain donated computers from businesses that are upgrading, the decreasing cost of computer hardware and rapid improvement of technology make purchasing a new PC with the latest pentium processor and sufficient memory to meet the program's future needs the best option.

The issue of training staff to utilize the necessary software applications and the maintenance of the equipment should also be considered. More discussion on these issues is contained in National CASA's Achieving Our Mission, Chapter 7, "Making the Most of Technology."

### **Telephone System**

Purchasing a telephone system can be very expensive so most small programs find that leasing is more cost effective. Although a one-line system may adequately service the program at the time of initial operations, you should consider obtaining a second line in order to have a dedicated line for Internet access and fax capability. There is a wealth of programmatic and management information available on National CASA's website and periodic live topical forums are an excellent source of staff training. E-mail has become a main source of communication between programs and volunteers as well as among programs across the country. Having a dedicated phone line for computer use avoids the necessity of tying up the only line when the computer is online.

Every CASA program should have an answering machine or voice mail service, especially if staff will not be available to answer the phone during normal business hours. The message on the answering machine should always be up to date and messages should be retrieved and responded to on a daily basis. Nothing will lose a prospective volunteer faster than poor telephone response from an organization.

### **Copying**

It is unrealistic to think that even the smallest office can do without a copier for its routine needs. Access to copying equipment is a must for court records, volunteer reports, and many other



things required daily. For the new program, you might begin by estimating the copying needs for a month. Then actually track a few months' volume and make adjustments to the budget if necessary. If copying is not provided by the court or umbrella agency, the program may want to consider leasing a machine or purchasing a used one. Large projects, such as volunteer training manuals or newsletters may be more economically sent out to a copy/printing company, especially if all or part of the project can be negotiated as an in-kind donation to the program.

## *Establishing a Relationship with the Court*

### **Role of the Volunteer**

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (P.L. 93-247), passed in 1974, for the first time required that children who are the subject of court proceedings, because of allegations of abuse or neglect, must have a court appointed representative to speak for their best interests. The legislation did not describe the guardian's duties, nor did it dictate whether the role had to be performed by a lawyer, although the tradition of appointing lawyers to perform this function continued in many courts. It was against this backdrop of lack of clarity that state and local communities developed systems of guardian ad litem representation. As a result, today children can be represented by an attorney, an attorney guardian ad litem, a paid non-attorney guardian ad litem, and/or a trained volunteer acting as the guardian ad litem or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). There remains a great deal of confusion over the roles of each of these forms of representation, whether their efforts are duplicative, and how the representatives relate to each other when more than one is appointed to represent the same child.

It is within this context that new CASA programs must develop a relationship with their court and establish the duties of the volunteer and policies and protocols for relating to the other players in the system. A number of states have statutory language that specifies whether an attorney or volunteer may be appointed the guardian ad litem; other state statutes detail the roles and responsibilities of the volunteer, what their qualifications and training must be, and what their rights and powers are.

There are still a number of states, however, that provide great discretion to the local courts. If your state is one of these, you will find variations in volunteer activities among your neighboring programs and sometimes even between different judges in the same court. The most common differences you will find involve the volunteer's role (including whether the volunteer is a full and independent party to the case), the formal status of the volunteer, the forms of attorney representation, the formal relationship between the volunteer and attorney for the child and the types of cases accepted.

You should become very familiar with what your state law says and how the law is implemented by local courts throughout the state. Your state organization should be able to provide you with a copy of the law and describe how local programs operate to comply.

There are five generally accepted activities associated with the guardian ad litem role:

- ◆ Fact finding information gathering
- ◆ Legal representation
- ◆ Negotiation/mediation

- ◆ Case monitoring
- ◆ Resource brokering

Fact finding or information gathering involves meeting with, interviewing and observing the child repeatedly over a period of time; visiting both the child's and the parents' homes; contacting caseworkers; reading the petition; reviewing the case record; and contacting other adults who might have pertinent information. These activities are those which help the advocate gain insight into what is best for a child, what kinds of services might be helpful, and what support is needed to move toward permanency.

Legal representation is the one function that must be performed by a licensed attorney. This includes appearance at hearings, filing of motions and other legal papers, and advising the child on legal issues. In this role the child's advocate may provide testimony, make recommendations to the court regarding the case plan, placement of the child, services to be provided, and visitation issues.

The third activity area is mediation and negotiation, including the development of agreements and stipulations. The fourth is case monitoring, including maintaining contact with the child and other parties, monitoring the child's special needs, and following up on court orders. The final activity area is resource brokering, including working in the community to help the child obtain needed services.

## **Guiding Principles**

Because local practice, including the understanding and wishes of your local judge, will help to determine how your program operates, it is important to establish mutually agreeable goals and expectations at the very earliest stages of program development. Regardless of the parameters of the volunteer's activities within the court, there are some guiding principles that will support quality advocacy. It is important to keep them in mind as you plan the approach to representation to be taken in your community.

- ◆ **The volunteer must have access to legal support.** Regardless of the program model, lay volunteers do not participate in the case as legal counselors to the child, but as individuals appointed to represent the child's best interests. Nor does the volunteer provide legal services in fulfilling their role. Established programs obtain legal assistance for their volunteers in a number of ways. Some programs - usually those administered by state agencies - have an attorney on the CASA staff or assigned to their program by the state attorney general's office. A number of programs contract with a private attorney when the need arises and some request the court appoint an attorney to represent the volunteer when necessary. Most other programs rely on pro bono (volunteer) legal assistance. In some programs, one or several established law firms in the community provide pro bono services to CASA. In other areas, the local Bar Association or the young lawyers division of the Bar have agreed to donate their time.

Legal assistance should be accessible as soon as volunteers are assigned to cases, so it is essential to determine what resources will be available in advance. Whatever plan you devise, it is wise to develop a written understanding of time expectations and roles. Also, don't assume that all attorneys have knowledge or experience in juvenile law or an understanding of the problems of abuse and neglect. These subjects are not generally

required in law school, and most attorneys choose not to practice in this area. This does not mean, however, they are not committed and interested. Capitalize on their willingness to become involved and assume they are seeking opportunities for learning, growth, and service to others. Provide written materials about CASA as well as abuse and neglect. Offer training opportunities which include other attorneys as presenters as well as CASA volunteers. Don't forget to thank your volunteer attorneys and recognize them as you would any volunteer.

- ◆ **The volunteer must be independent.** This means that no one with ties to any of the parties should serve in this role. It also means the volunteer must be permitted to conduct a thorough fact-finding investigation. There should be no conflict or fear of retribution against the program that would make it difficult for this person to present recommendations consistent with the child's interests.

If the child is old enough and mature enough to state his or her own wishes and they differ from what the volunteer considers to be in the child's best interests, there should be a procedure that allows the volunteer to inform the court. This allows the judge to consider the necessity of appointing an attorney to represent the child's wishes.

- ◆ **The volunteer should be appointed to the case at the earliest possible time** and should remain involved until the child is in a legally sanctioned permanent placement and the case is dismissed from the court system. It is important to note that although the volunteer is appointed prior to adjudication, he or she does not investigate the allegations of abuse and neglect. His or her role during the initial stages of a case (prior to the court's ruling on the allegations) is to gather facts related to the child's past and current situation to determine what services have been previously provided to prevent foster care placement and to assess what services are necessary to meet the child's needs and to reunify the family.
- ◆ **The volunteer should receive notice of all hearings, staffings, and other case conferences related to the child.** In addition, the volunteer should receive copies of all requests for discovery and responses, copies of correspondence and other appropriate documents.
- ◆ **The CASA volunteer should have complete access to all information related to the child and his or her situation.** Such information may include: records of social service agencies, law enforcement, the court, schools, public health, medical providers, substance abuse treatment, and mental health history. The volunteer must also be allowed to interview: the child, parents, social services staff, law enforcement personnel, and any other individuals who have knowledge of the child.
- ◆ **The volunteer should have immunity from liability for performing their role in a responsible manner.** As an officer of the court, the volunteer usually has statutory immunity from liability when performing duties described in his or her job description unless an act, or failure to act, is willfully, wrongful or grossly negligent. If immunity is not prescribed in your state law, the court should address it in court rules or on the order of appointment for the volunteer.

## **Agreement with the Court**

A written agreement with the court is an excellent way to define the goals and expectations of the relationship between the court and the CASA program. Once it is developed, it should be signed by all judges who will be appointing volunteers, the president of the CASA board, and the program's executive director. The agreement should be reviewed annually and modified or refined as the need arises. What is covered by the agreement will vary based on local wishes. The following are issues that might be included:

- ◆ Role and duties of the volunteer
- ◆ Criteria for cases to be referred for volunteer assignment
- ◆ Procedures for prioritizing cases when an adequate number of volunteers is not available
- ◆ Procedures for the court's referral of cases to the program and the program's selection of the appropriate volunteer to be assigned
- ◆ Procedures for the court's feedback on the performance of volunteers
- ◆ Expectations regarding volunteer reports submitted to the court (e.g. format, deadline, distribution, etc).

## **Frequent Communication**

There will be many issues to emerge that will go beyond the scope of the written agreement. For this reason, it is important to build in frequent face-to-face opportunities for communication between the director and the presiding judge. It may be difficult because of the competing demands on the judge's time. The director should be flexible but persistent in pursuing regular meetings because they present the best opportunity for the court to be made aware of the ramifications of its directions and permit the airing of any court-related difficulties that have arisen within the program. Though it is inappropriate for a presiding judge to sit on the board of a program, his or her input and consideration is critical to the healthy functioning of the program. There must also be an arena for timely resolution when differences of opinion occur.

# ***SECTION II: VOLUNTEERS***

# *Recruiting the Right Volunteers*

## **Where and How to Find Them**

Recruiting, screening and selecting volunteers is an ongoing process for any CASA program. Since community volunteers are the backbone of CASA, program directors and CASA staff spend a great deal of time focusing on how to get the most qualified volunteers into the program, and keep them once they are screened and trained. Many new CASA programs fill their first training class primarily through word-of-mouth news about the program. Beyond the first class, however, it will likely be necessary to engage in community-wide marketing to keep a constant flow of applicants coming in.

No matter how you decide to handle volunteer recruitment, remember that it is one of the most important - and most visible - jobs in the program. The person responsible for recruiting volunteers helps to mold the program's image, and is your front line representative to prospective volunteers. The recruiter will determine the quality of the volunteers who join the program, and will be the person who screens for competency, responsibility and stability. As a "community ambassador" for the new program, the recruiter must be articulate, objective and approachable.

## **Getting Prepared**

Volunteer recruitment is a marketing effort. You are trying to promote the program in a way that will:

- ◆ Attract males and females of all ages who represent the ethnic and cultural groups in your community.
- ◆ Attract them on an ongoing basis, to replace volunteers lost through natural attrition.
- ◆ Generate visibility for the program in the community.

To be most effective, your recruiting effort needs to be thoroughly researched and a written plan developed. The plan should clearly outline your goals, what you intend to do to reach those goals, and when you can realistically expect to accomplish them. Funding sources may request to see a copy of your recruiting plan and ask specifically if you target any minority populations.

The CASA program should produce a standardized packet of written information which clearly explains the purpose of CASA, defines the role and responsibilities of the CASA volunteer and explains the commitment of time required. Your recruitment plan should outline specific strategies to attract male and female volunteers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and from a variety of age and socioeconomic groups. It should be designed to also make the public aware of the problems faced by abused and neglected children who enter the courts.

## **STEP ONE: Determine the Type of Volunteers Needed**

Since the CASA volunteers you recruit will be meeting the specific needs of your community, take a moment to think about the type of person you are looking for. What skills should he/she have gained in other employment or volunteer settings? What attitudes should the volunteer possess? What training? What interest do you want your volunteers to have in child welfare or child abuse/neglect?

Also keep in mind the demographics of the children you will be serving. Do they come from largely rural areas? Inner-city communities? Will your program be serving a large number of minority children? Children who do not speak English as a first language? Children with disabilities? Once you determine the needs of the children, then you can concentrate on recruiting volunteers who will be sensitive to the needs of those children and can communicate effectively with their families.

The CASA volunteer must also have certain qualities that are not tangible. He or she should be an emotionally mature and stable person, who has experienced satisfying relationships with children. He or she should be objective and receptive to individual lifestyle choices. The applicant should also possess a sense of self-worth, exhibit self-assurance, be able to deal with hostility and rejection, and be flexible enough to accommodate change.

Successful CASA volunteers commonly have some skills that enable them to perform their duties effectively and efficiently, and to apply the knowledge gained through the pre-service training and consultation with the program staff. These include the ability to:

- ◆ Interview, observe, listen and analyze written material
- ◆ Write clearly and concisely
- ◆ Investigate and do research
- ◆ Express themselves verbally
- ◆ Plan and set goals
- ◆ Make decisions
- ◆ Organize tasks
- ◆ Pay attention to detail and accuracy
- ◆ Be assertive
- ◆ Be a credible witness
- ◆ Negotiate
- ◆ Follow guidelines and policy
- ◆ Be tactful

These skills may have been gained in other volunteer settings, through employment, or through life experience. A professional background is not required in order to possess these skills, and persons with no previous work or volunteer experience can be successful in the CASA program if they have acquired these skills in some other way.

Some CASA programs use graduate or law students as CASA volunteers. However, it is sometimes difficult to secure a firm time commitment when you must work around class schedules, vacations, and the fact that many students tend to move from the area when they graduate.



Avoid an elitist attitude when recruiting volunteers. Keep in mind that a degree does not assure a good volunteer. Over the years, CASA program directors have found that successful volunteers come from all walks of life - business executives, teachers, factory workers, homemakers, nurses, senior citizens.

Many people who would like to give of their time and energy and who would make excellent CASA volunteers, cannot financially afford to do so. Volunteering can be expensive if you consider such expenses as gasoline, parking, long distance phone calls, and childcare. Many CASA programs find that to recruit and retain good volunteers, they must budget for reimbursement of at least some expenses.

### **STEP TWO: Determine how many volunteers you need**

This information will be largely based on your budget, program model and the expectations of the court. Although your goal is to always recruit as many potential volunteers as possible, keep in mind the realities of your training and supervision capabilities. CASA programs generally start out modestly, taking a few cases at a time until the program is operating smoothly. Your first training class shouldn't include more people than you can comfortably handle. The time lapse between recruitment, screening and training is crucial. The kind of volunteer needed for a CASA program is the type of person who is heavily in demand. Many programs have found that unless they use volunteers within a short time, they are picked up by other organizations. If you do have an overflow of qualified applicants, then select your core group and try to put the others to work in other jobs until they can be assigned to cases.

Keep in mind that you need to have an adequate staff to volunteer ratio to ensure timely and thorough case management. The ratio specified in the National CASA Program Standards is one supervisor to 30 volunteers.

The needs assessment conducted in the planning stages should indicate how many dependency cases come through the court. Your judge can help you determine the number of cases that are likely to be referred to the CASA program. It will also be necessary for the planning committee and/or the court to decide how many cases each volunteer should optimally handle. Ideally, each volunteer should be limited to one case at a time.

### **STEP THREE: Create a Recruitment Plan.**

Your CASA program may be ready to go, but it won't get far if no one has heard of it. Because the program relies heavily on lay volunteers, odds are you will have to go outside child welfare circles to do your recruiting. At this point in the planning process, you need to outline how and where you will seek volunteers.

**Determine what your product is.** Your product is what the program accomplishes - how CASA helps children - and what benefits it provides to those who want to volunteer. Use this information to develop your message and informational materials such as brochures, posters and/or public service announcements (see NCASAA's [Communications Manual for CASA/GAL Programs](#)).

Research has shown that the most frequent reason given by CASA volunteers regarding their motivation for being involved in the program is an overwhelming desire to help children. The other highest responses suggest that volunteers want to meet the needs of the community, to

effect positive change in the community, and to use and develop their knowledge and talents. Having this information will help you formulate an effective message that will attract potential volunteers with similar motivations. The CASA program offers volunteers some unique experiences including the following:

- ◆ Active participation in the court and child welfare system that produces significant and positive results in the life of a child.
- ◆ Experience that may apply toward career advancement.
- ◆ Increased knowledge of child welfare issues and the court process.
- ◆ Belonging to a group of individuals who are concerned with similar issues.
- ◆ Being active and involved in the community.
- ◆ Making professional contacts in the field of child welfare.
- ◆ The opportunity to help improve life for a child.

**Decide how you are going to get that message across to the public.** There are many methods that can be successful in promoting the program in the community and you will probably want to utilize several in order to appeal to a broad range of audiences. Some of the most frequently used are:

- ◆ General information brochure
- ◆ Newspaper articles
- ◆ Public service announcements (PSAs)
- ◆ Posters
- ◆ Speaking engagements
- ◆ Direct mail
- ◆ Newsletter
- ◆ Press releases
- ◆ Special events
- ◆ Display booths at fairs or malls
- ◆ Celebrity endorsements
- ◆ Audio visual materials (videos)
- ◆ Program Website
- ◆ Billboards

**Determine what audiences you need to reach and place your message accordingly.** Consider approaching the following:

- ◆ Community service groups (Junior League, National Council of Jewish Women, Kiwanis Clubs, Rotary Clubs, League of Women Voters, Kappa Alpha Theta chapters)
- ◆ Minority service organizations (the Urban League, the NAACP, etc)
- ◆ Professional organizations (teacher's union, nursing association, American Bar Association, medical auxiliary, Sigma Delta Chi Journalism Society, business round tables)
- ◆ Colleges and universities (school of social work, law school, criminal justice department)
- ◆ Community colleges and technical schools
- ◆ Churches, synagogues, mosques (bulletins, special project groups)
- ◆ Employers and employees (company newsletters as well as print and electronic bulletin boards)

- ◆ Television, newspapers and radio (through stories and public service announcements)
- ◆ State Bar Associations

A good way to reach your preferred audience is to consider your marketing approach early in the planning stages of the program. For example, some CASA programs have invited leaders of other community service organizations (from which they might like to recruit) to serve on the planning committee. Others ask media leaders, public officials, and/or CEOs of local businesses and corporations to serve on the advisory council or board of directors. These representatives can be valuable salespeople for the program. Their community contacts and influence can not only help you recruit volunteers, they can be extremely valuable in fundraising and legislative efforts as well.

Although volunteer recruitment, like fundraising, is an ongoing effort, it is generally helpful to schedule volunteer recruitment efforts in concentrated doses, three or four times a year. Response is generally low in the summer months and during holiday seasons, so those months could be used for planning and media promotion, not for general recruiting.

And remember, your recruiting and marketing efforts may not pay off immediately. Not every inquiry leads to a volunteer. Don't be discouraged. Keep in mind that a potential volunteer may need to hear the message several times before actually picking up the telephone and requesting an application.

#### **STEP FOUR: Develop a Written Volunteer Job Description**

The volunteer job description serves several purposes. First, it gives prospective volunteers a clear, concise idea of exactly what the program is and what it expects of them. Second, it gives the CASA program a chance to clearly outline the parameters of the job. This can help diffuse false expectations and/or inappropriate behavior before they have a chance to develop (see example of Volunteer Job Description in the Tools Section). Third, a written statement will add credibility to the program since it can also serve as "official" documentation to the court, the state, the media, or even potential funders on exactly what CASA volunteers do (see Statement of Commitment in the Tools Section).

The job description should be provided to all CASA volunteers before they are accepted into the program. Once they are assigned to cases, the job description should be used as a basis for guiding their activities and evaluating their performance.

#### **STEP FIVE: Develop a Volunteer Application**

One way to find out whether or not the potential volunteer would be suitable for the program, and has the necessary qualifications, is through the volunteer application. Most CASA programs use this as the primary way to gather the basic information necessary for screening.

Most programs develop application forms that are similar to job applications. They cover the basics: educational background, work experience, other volunteer or community service work, criminal record, and personal history. The application is also useful as a way to elicit other information about an applicant such as the applicant's motivations, expectations, and personal values regarding children, families and abuse/neglect. Questions on these issues can help you discover a person's past experience with children, and their previous involvement with other

child-related organizations. Questions requiring written responses also give you an idea of the applicant's writing ability.

Such questions might include:

- ◆ What motivates you to apply to volunteer with this program?
- ◆ What do you think of when you hear the words 'child abuse'?
- ◆ Why do you think parents would abuse their child?
- ◆ What's your personal history or experience with child abuse?

### **STEP SIX: Screening Volunteers**

Not every applicant will be appropriate for a position as a CASA volunteer.

CASA volunteers carry a great responsibility because they work with children who have been abused or neglected. All of these children carry emotional scars from their ordeals. They need trust, respect, and the interest of a mature adult who can make objective, well-informed decisions about their future without becoming too personally involved. CASA volunteers do not serve the same purpose as a "Big Brother" or "Big Sister." If this is the type of role the applicant desires, then the CASA program is probably not the right choice.

The program should develop a written screening procedure that details the screening methods that will be employed. It is important to assure that every applicant is screened using the same procedures and that every staff member who conducts screening follows the procedure in every case. Remember that screening of applicants begins with the initial contact between the potential volunteer and the program and involves several steps. Many inappropriate volunteers will screen themselves out once they understand the role and the commitment required. The self-selection process is an important step in volunteer screening. Applicants should not feel like they have failed if they decide to drop out in the process. CASA is not for everyone, and programs may experience as much as a 50 percent attrition rate as applicants sort through the demands and responsibility of the position. Make it clear from the beginning: "It's OK to decide you do not want the job." Think of other ways to channel the applicant's interest - perhaps on the newsletter or a fundraising event.

### **The Initial Contact**

Your phone rings. The caller has heard something about your new program and might be interested in volunteering. At this point, there are several pieces of information you should give potential volunteers:

- ◆ Go over the CASA job description, explaining exactly what a volunteer does and the job parameters.
- ◆ Explain the time commitment, making it clear to the potential volunteer that they can expect to spend 80 or more hours investigating and preparing a case for court.
- ◆ Make sure you convey a clear message about the appropriate volunteer/child relationship. The CASA role is very different from a job that encourages a personal relationship with the child - a common impression held by many when they first hear of CASA. CASA volunteers do not become an intrinsic part of the child's life, they do not replace parents, and are not encouraged to take the child on outings or to their homes.
- ◆ Pass on information about the basic requirements (i.e. age, background, criminal records check). Also make it clear that final acceptance as a volunteer will not be made until after the applicant successfully completes training.

- ◆ Offer to send the inquirer an application, a brochure, and a copy of the job description.
- ◆ If the individual is not interested in a CASA volunteer position, consider discussing other volunteer possibilities within the program.
- ◆ Record the inquirer's name, address, and telephone number. Even if nothing materializes out of the conversation, you know this person has an interest in your program. Their name could be added to your fundraising list for future solicitation or to your mailing list to receive your newsletter.

## **The Application**

Once you have described the program to a potential volunteer, he or she should then complete the CASA application form (see example of Volunteer Application example in the Tools Section). The written application is a very important part of the volunteer screening process, and should be required of every applicant. Never waive this requirement; the information in the written application can prevent surprises or unexpected problems later on. If the applicant is unable to write in English, it is essential that you obtain the information contained in the application. The program will need to decide if the volunteer's other assets outweigh an inability to write a good report. The program could assign another volunteer, staff member, or translator to work with the volunteer on court reports. Your program could also explore a dictation system. Have the volunteer sign the application, pledging that the information is correct. Be sure to ask the applicant to list other names they may have used in the recent past. This is important for central registry and criminal record checks.

CASA programs handle completed applications in several different ways. The process largely depends upon the availability of staff and the program's philosophy. Many programs schedule an interview with the potential volunteer as soon as the completed application is returned, then do follow up on references and record checks. Others review the application and determine whether the person should be accepted into training based solely on the information contained in the application. They then use the training process to screen the applicant, with the interview being conducted after the training.

## **Reference checks**

Some programs call references on the phone. Others ask the applicant to distribute a written reference questionnaire to be completed by three employment and/or personal references. Those who provide references should be assured that the information they provide will be held in confidence (see Reference Request example in the Tools Section).

## **Central Registry and Criminal Records Checks**

Central Registry is the state-run information database that contains the names of convicted child abusers. It is important to see if potential volunteers have a past history of substantiated child abuse/neglect allegations or a past criminal history. Volunteers should be made aware of the policy on these checks at the outset. Let applicants know that everyone is checked routinely and that it is not done on a selective basis. National CASA Association Standards require that a CASA program does not accept applicants if they have been convicted of, or have charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or to the CASA program's credibility.

Be sure to have the applicant fill out an information release form (see example of Authority to Release Information form in the Tools Section). If your program operates as a part of the juvenile court system, you may be able to access both the Central Registry and police records on an inter-agency basis. If your program operates outside the juvenile court, you can either obtain record checks on an informal basis or through a formal written agreement. Be aware that in some states there is a charge for obtaining these reports. Check with your state organization or other programs to determine if your state is one of these. There is also a chance you may be denied access altogether. Contact your local law enforcement agency for information on local protocol on conducting these checks.

Your program will need to establish a policy stipulating what will be allowed for volunteers accepted into the program and what will not be allowed. For instance, you may learn from the Central Registry report that the volunteer applicant was reported for child abuse but the incident was not substantiated. Though unsubstantiated reports are supposed to be deleted from the registry, they nevertheless sometimes show up.

Records of criminal incidents that took place when the individual was a juvenile also may show up. Though juvenile records can be expunged once the individual becomes an adult, few are aware that this is not automatic, but must be requested in writing of the juvenile authorities. You will probably want to eliminate from consideration anyone convicted of any violent crime. Before you set a policy that excludes applicants with any felony conviction, you may want to consider the nature of the crime, how long ago it was, and what the person's history has been since.

### **The Interview**

The purpose of the volunteer screening interview is the same as a job interview: to choose a person who is appropriate for the position.

Although volunteer applicants may not have the kind or amount of experience which would be ideal, it is important to determine if they have the ability to learn about the work, the interest to pursue the position, the commitment to complete the required training, the maturity and ability to perform the duties of the position, and an attitude consistent with the philosophy of the program.

If you structure the interview carefully, you can help to ensure that the necessary information is gathered. Because different people will often have different impressions, consider using a team to conduct the interview (see Volunteer Interview Format and Questions example in the Tools Section). Other helpful suggestions for the interview include:

- ◆ Make sure the applicant understands what CASA is and what the volunteer does and does not do. The applicant must understand the requirements of the job, so a review of the position description is often an effective way to begin the interview. If the applicant seems confused about specific requirements, they should be clarified immediately.
- ◆ Have the applicant elaborate on previous experience. The applicant's philosophy will often emerge during this portion of the interview. By hearing about past experiences, you can often gain insight into the motivation and/or attitudes this individual holds. This does not mean you should automatically reject someone if he or she has been involved with a program whose philosophy is in conflict with CASA's, but it might indicate that this person needs further investigation to determine his or her ability to function successfully in the program.

- ◆ Ask structured questions that will elicit information about personal values and motivation. These are similar to questions you may have asked on the volunteer application, but a personal interview will give the applicant a chance to speak in depth about his or her feelings. The purpose of this portion of the interview is to screen for any biases or strongly held values that may hinder objectivity. You are looking for red flags.

### **Training as a Screening Tool**

Some volunteers who have made it this far in the program will begin the training and determine that this is not the volunteer position they feel suited to or really want. They will screen themselves out. The hours of personal contact in training also give the CASA supervisors the chance to observe applicants closely, both in a group and individual context and spot characteristics that might be inappropriate. Some applicants may need to be screened out. For these reasons, it is strongly recommended that a program not make a final commitment to accept a volunteer into the program until after the pre-service training is completed. Because training is such an important part of screening, it is important that staff be involved. If an outside trainer or trainers are used exclusively, their observations should be shared with the staff.

### **Spotting Red Flags**

Sometimes applicants are drawn to a CASA program because they were victimized as children, and want to prevent another child from going through the same thing. This is an attitude that you need to consider very carefully in your screening process. Most programs have found that volunteers who cite their own personal history as an abused child as their main reason for volunteering are unable to perform the duties of a CASA volunteer effectively. They are unable to remain objective for the child they represent. If a volunteer has an unresolved personal history of abuse, he or she sometimes experiences trauma and confusion as they attempt to serve the child. Their own need to understand their past history can be a stumbling block.

Some applicants with troubled childhoods will be comfortable describing their own experience, and have resolved the issues surrounding their own dilemmas through counseling, therapy, and/or self-help groups. These men and women can be empathic advocates for children, but only if they have dealt successfully with their own past.

Conflict of interest is also a consideration in screening for CASA volunteers. Some CASA programs allow foster parents to become volunteers while others do not. If you decide to accept foster parents as volunteers, they should never be assigned to children who are in their care. The assignment of board members of your CASA program as CASA volunteers represents another area for possible conflict of interest. For example, if a board member is unable to perform adequately as a CASA volunteer, the program director may find it difficult to tell the board member that they will be unable to continue serving in their capacity as a CASA volunteer. Another problematic situation arises when board members who also serve as CASA volunteers must make policy decisions regarding issues related to CASA staff and volunteers. (See Conflict of Interest statements in the Tools Section).

Ultimately, it will be up to the director or volunteer coordinator to use professional judgment to decide if an applicant would be an appropriate volunteer. If you are in doubt, it is best to favor the child. Although it may be hard to turn down a person whose intentions seem good, it is better than taking an unnecessary risk.

The CASA program may also attract applicants with a personal motive, such as searching for a child to adopt or to "save." This is also an inappropriate motivation that could lead to problems in the relationship between the child and the volunteer.

Sometimes applicants are motivated out of hostility or anger at the court over a decision that had an adverse effect in their lives. Others may meet all written criteria, but are unable to grasp the CASA concept or the intricacies of the court and child welfare system. You may encounter applicants who believe the rights and interests of the parents are primary; these individuals are not suited to the position because their interest is contrary to the philosophy of the program.

## **Saying "No"**

One of the most important abilities the program director or volunteer coordinator must have is the ability to say "no." As hard as it may be, turning down an applicant is much better than risking harm to the children the CASA program is designed to serve. You must also consider your liability risks, and the reputation of your program in the community.

Although your planning committee has created very specific criteria for accepting volunteers, sometimes the determination may depend on your "gut feeling." An applicant might meet all written qualifications, and give appropriate answers in the interview. But if you do not feel right about accepting the person, it is best to go with your instincts.

When an applicant is evaluated as not being suitable for the program, it does not necessarily mean he or she cannot be involved in CASA. Many potential volunteers may find they are more suited for clerical or administrative functions in the office. Someone who is not an appropriate volunteer might be an excellent fundraiser. An applicant who may not be right for advocacy in court might be able to edit your newsletter. Think of alternatives for applicants who do not meet the program's volunteer criteria; support can come in many forms.

Don't fail to let the applicant know the results of his or her evaluation. If the person is turned down, notify the applicant by letter or phone. Although the applicant deserves the courtesy of follow-up, be careful when you explain the reasons he or she was turned down. You may not want to release any information regarding why the individual was not accepted, especially when the decision is based on confidential information provided by references. It is a good idea to inform the program's attorney and to seek legal advice about how to proceed.

It is also a good idea to avoid accepting volunteers into the program as a courtesy. As uncomfortable as it may be to "reject" someone, accepting the person - and then just letting him/her sit by awaiting assignments that will never come is rude. Give your applicants the respect of dealing with their situations in an above board and direct manner. To do otherwise may result in a negative impact on the program's image in the community.



## *Volunteer Training*

Training is an important and ongoing function of the CASA program. If a volunteer understands his or her responsibilities and the CASA program's relationship to the system, he or she will become a more effective advocate. Giving volunteers knowledge, skills, cultural sensitivity, and self-confidence through thorough training empowers them to become highly skilled at their jobs.

When a volunteer is asked to begin training, he or she is required to make a commitment to attend all classes and complete the course. However, it is important the volunteer understands this does not ensure acceptance into the program. That commitment comes only after an applicant has successfully made it through all required training and screening and a post-training interview.

### **Designing Your Training Program**

#### **Schedules**

In organizing and planning volunteer training, there are a number of things to consider. First, to appeal to a broad range of individuals, you will need to schedule training sessions at the time and place that is most convenient for the majority of people. Working people may have difficulty attending during working hours. Single parents may have trouble getting away in the evenings. Weekends may be inconvenient during vacation months. You will not be able to accommodate everyone's needs, but if you offer training more than once a year, you may want to offer one session at night and one during the day. Another variation that some programs have found successful is to hold training over several evenings and then a long session over a weekend.

#### **History**

The Comprehensive Training Program for the CASA/GAL began as a research project sponsored by the Permanent Families Task Force of the Minnesota Supreme Court. Through funding from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), the Task Force determined that one way to address the issue of permanence for children was to respond to concerns raised about effective training of CASA volunteers by developing a CASA/GAL training curriculum.

In January of 1990, the seminal Comprehensive Training Program for the CASA/GAL was officially unveiled at a training institute in Seattle, Washington. Since that time, developments in adult learning theory, changes in federal and state laws, new information about relevant subject matter, and especially the changing situations of the children we serve led to the need for a revision.

NCASAA staff, in collaboration with a Training Curriculum Advisory Committee and project consultants, began revising the curriculum in 1998.

The first phase included a comprehensive survey conducted in the fall of 1998 to insure the

curriculum revision would address the training needs of the CASA/GAL network. The Training Curriculum Advisory Committee, composed of representatives from a diverse group of state and local programs in the network, used this survey information to update the list of skills, knowledge and attitudes required of today's CASA/GAL volunteers. They determined the goal of the training to be "volunteers who are competent, reasonably autonomous, able to exercise good judgment, and focused on the best interests of the child in their role as CASA/GAL volunteers." They set a course for development of a skills-based, interactive, case-based and practical curriculum to meet this goal. Efforts to facilitate local adaptation were designated as a priority.

The revised Training Curriculum was rolled out to the CASA/GAL network throughout 2001. Intensive three day facilitator training sessions have been offered in conjunction with the national training conference and at state and regional training sessions in 2001 and 2002. The Volunteer Curriculum, Facilitator Manual and customization guidelines are available to member programs at [www.casanet.org](http://www.casanet.org). National CASA standards require programs to provide a minimum of 30 hours training including instruction on the court and child welfare systems, child abuse and neglect, relevant state and federal laws, permanency planning and family preservation, and the roles and responsibilities of the CASA volunteer. While the new CASA/GAL Volunteer Training Curriculum meets these standards, some customization at the state and local level will include and reflect local laws and language.

## **Speakers**

CASA programs often conduct training for their volunteers with help from a variety of trainers and/or experts from the community. Many agencies will provide quality training without cost to the program. For example, many programs have a representative from Child Protective Services present the training session on the role of CPS and the services they provide to families and children. A psychologist from a local agency or university might be willing to teach the unit on the dynamics of child abuse. It is recommended that the guest speaker provides a copy of the relevant units from the training manual for preparation purposes. Use your contacts and resources when planning your training, and do not be reluctant to ask for this support. It can be helpful, even comforting, for volunteers to meet some of the professionals with whom they will be working before becoming involved in cases. Sample letters to send to guest speakers are included in the facilitator manual that accompanies the draft Volunteer Training Curriculum, which is also available on [www.casanet.org](http://www.casanet.org).

## **Frontline Experience: Courtroom Observation**

After the classroom portion of the training is completed, NCASAA recommends each participant observe a court proceeding to see a CASA/GAL volunteer at work. This can be followed by a debriefing session to allow volunteers to ask questions.

Courtroom observation is an important part of training. It offers new volunteers a chance to compare what they have learned in the classroom to the realities of the courtroom. An experienced CASA volunteer can help your training group make that transition and provide invaluable advice.

Another training method used by CASA programs involves arranging an opportunity for the new volunteer to accompany an experienced volunteer on visits and to court. Such "shadowing" experiences can also be done with a social worker or attorney and can be a powerful learning opportunity.

## ***A Question of Balance***

This is a handbook available through National CASA which many people have found to be an especially valuable resource in helping CASA volunteers utilize what they learn in training most effectively. The book guides the volunteer through the considerations and decision-making processes necessary to arrive at recommendations for the court. Particularly helpful are the decision inventory questionnaires at the end of the book.

## **In-Service Training**

Once accepted into the program, volunteers need continuing educational opportunities. A volunteer's education does not end when the first training class is over. The courts and child welfare system are subject to constant reorganization and scrutiny, and CASA volunteers must be made aware of statutory changes and new developments in child welfare. The National Standards require that a program offer at least 12 hours of in-service training opportunities each year.

Some programs conduct volunteer surveys to assess training needs. Often, directors acquire new information at conferences and want to pass it along to volunteers. The judge or court staff may suggest areas in which they feel CASA volunteers could benefit from further training. Perhaps because there is an increase in a certain type of case coming through the program (i.e. more children who are sexually assaulted, emotionally abused, or have problems with substance abuse); volunteers may need additional training on these issues.

In-service training sessions are important because they provide volunteers the opportunity to learn new skills, network with each other, and share ideas and resources. CASA staff come in contact with many people all day long, but the volunteers do their jobs in isolation. It is quite possible for two people to be active volunteers for the same program and never meet face-to-face. In-service training not only provides these volunteers with the opportunity to refine their skills, but it also gives them a chance to get to know one another, to feel part of the same "team," and to talk with people who share common concerns and experiences.

## **Volunteer Mentors**

In addition to the volunteer supervisor, some CASA programs have incorporated a mentoring component to their program in which they match the new volunteer working on his or her first case with an experienced volunteer. This method of on-the-job training offers the new volunteer access to an experienced person who can answer questions and discuss the details of the case. For the first group of volunteers, you might consider assigning volunteers to cases in pairs (as "teams") so they may confer about procedure and case planning. Any disagreements over recommendations should be resolved in consultation with their program administrator.

As follow-up, the CASA volunteer supervisor needs to be available to volunteers for consultation and direction throughout the case. It is impossible to anticipate all problems or to wait for a regularly scheduled staff meeting to discuss them. Someone in the CASA office – be it the program director, volunteer coordinator or other staff person – needs to be available to answer and respond to any questions or concerns from volunteers.

# *Volunteer Management*

## **Volunteer Supervision/Consultation**

CASA volunteers do not get paid for their work, but that does not mean program managers should be reluctant to establish guidelines for their behavior. These are people who are handling sensitive, confidential information in sometimes volatile situations. They must adhere to strict regulations in their actions and be accountable for those actions if they are inappropriate.

When a program operates under a set of well-planned guidelines, the court is then assured of quality control. The judge knows the volunteer is guided by someone who has a thorough knowledge of children, families, statutory requirements and the social service delivery system. The professional staff defines the framework for the volunteer's conduct, and ensures that the recommendations reflect realistic expectations that are within the parameters of the court's jurisdiction.

A good CASA manager establishes guidelines to deal with problems before they arise. These guidelines should be spelled out to the volunteers throughout recruiting, screening and training, the job description, the policy manual, the confidentiality statement, and in the interview. Reiterate the guidelines in training, and when a volunteer is assigned a first case.

Volunteers should feel free to express their frustrations, ask for advice, or just vent their feelings. These consulting sessions can produce positive results by diffusing anger, preventing inappropriate actions, recommending alternatives, or heading off burnout. It is also a good idea to supply volunteers with an emergency number where someone from the program can be reached after office hours. While the staff should not make a habit of taking after-hours phone calls, someone does need to be available in the event of an emergency.

The CASA supervisor can also reinforce volunteers through non-crisis, positive feedback. If someone is a great fact-finder but writes poor reports, consider giving that volunteer special instruction on preparing written information. If a volunteer is meticulous and responsible but afraid to speak in court, consider visiting the courtroom during a case and giving that person honest feedback on his or her performance. Each volunteer will bring a unique set of skills and needs to the program. Some will need a great deal of guidance to complete a case, while others will acquire the information and skills they need. Individual differences in volunteers require individual attention.

Because the role of the CASA volunteer is unique and most easily understood by others doing the same work, volunteers can benefit enormously from peer group meetings. Regularly scheduled volunteer meetings can give volunteers the chance to raise questions, ask for advice, compare progress, and identify recurring problems. Regular meetings also are a chance for the supervisor to offer support and encouragement to the volunteers. This time can be used to relay program information to volunteers, such as the number of children served, number of volunteer

hours contributed, feedback from the judge, and suggestions on ways to improve the program's operations. Volunteers should also be kept up-to-date on federal and state legislation affecting the children they service and the volunteer's ability to serve them, research findings, and new community resources. Maintaining on going contact with the volunteers allows them to feel a part of the program and share in its successes.

Another effective supervision strategy is to hold regularly scheduled staff meetings for paid employees and volunteers. Having an established time set aside for "debriefing" keeps the lines of communication open.

## **Volunteer Policies and Procedures**

Either as a part of the program's policy manual or as a separate volunteer handbook, policies and procedures detailing all aspects of volunteer management should be documented and communicated. Every volunteer has the right to know what is expected and what he or she has the right to expect in return. The volunteer policies should include:

- ◆ Job description detailing duties, qualifications, and expectations
- ◆ Oath of Confidentiality
- ◆ Requirements for pre-service and in-service training
- ◆ Volunteer application
- ◆ Permission/release form for obtaining criminal and employment history
- ◆ Reference forms or letters
- ◆ National CASA's Program Standards
- ◆ Court order/appointment form
- ◆ Case procedures
- ◆ How assignments are made
- ◆ Flow of cases
- ◆ Record keeping expectations
- ◆ Court report format/outline
- ◆ What the volunteer can expect
- ◆ Supervision
- ◆ Evaluation
- ◆ Support
- ◆ Training
- ◆ Reimbursement of expenses, if applicable
- ◆ Procedures for handling complaints or grievances
- ◆ Requirements for keeping and reporting volunteer hours

Some CASA Programs make the decision to allow their volunteers to provide transportation to children. In this case, it is necessary that the program carry liability insurance. National CASA's program standards discourage programs from allowing volunteers to accept the responsibility of transporting children.

You may think of other issues that should be contained in your program's volunteer policies and procedures. Again, as in all aspects of program planning, the more preparation and attention to detail you expend in the early phases, the less likely you are to have problems in the future.

## Retaining Volunteers

An organizational climate that attracts and retains volunteers does not happen accidentally. Here are some factors that organization researchers have identified as important to today's volunteer:

- ◆ **Structure** - Volunteers like to be a part of an organized group that has structure, but allows for flexibility.
- ◆ **Responsibility** - Volunteers like the feeling of being their own boss and not having to double check all decisions.
- ◆ **Reward** - Volunteers like to be rewarded appropriately for a job well done. A good program will emphasize positive rewards rather than punishment.
- ◆ **Risk** - Volunteers like a sense of challenge and permission to take calculated risks.
- ◆ **Warmth** - The feeling of good fellowship in the work group atmosphere is also important. It helps if a program has a prevailing mood that is friendly and informal, without cliques.
- ◆ **Support** - A good program fosters a sense of mutual support and helpfulness on the part of managers and others in the group.
- ◆ **Standards** - The emphasis should be on doing a good job.
- ◆ **Conflict** - A difference in opinion shouldn't be considered a liability. Problems should be aired and resolved, not ignored. Divergent opinions are heard and valued.
- ◆ **Identity** - A volunteer likes the feeling of belonging to a group and being a valuable member of a working team.
- ◆ **Evaluation** – Volunteers want to know where they stand and how they can improve. They deserve honest feedback.

Most programs require volunteers to make a commitment to remain with the program for at least one year. Many programs report that their volunteers on average, remain beyond that time period. Programs that conduct exit interviews with volunteers who are leaving the program have found the most common reasons volunteers leave are:

- ◆ Lack of adequate time to do the job well
- ◆ Insufficient supervision, resulting in feelings of isolation or poor preparation
- ◆ Changes in family or work situations

## Performance Evaluations

Like paid staff, CASA volunteers' performances should be evaluated on a regular basis. Feedback and skill development are important since volunteers do not receive a monetary reward.

A volunteer is often evaluated after he or she has been with the program six months and yearly thereafter. If problems arise between the scheduled evaluations, an additional evaluation can be arranged.

The purpose of the evaluation is to give feedback and offer input to help the volunteer improve on the job. It is not a punitive process. Avoid using "performance evaluation" as jargon for criticism by the supervisor. The evaluation process should be a positive and helpful experience for the volunteer. Allow the volunteer to participate by offering an opportunity for self-evaluation. Ask what areas he or she would like to improve, or special topics he or she could learn more about. Include the volunteer's goals, along with the supervisor's goals, in the performance evaluation.

Performance evaluations can also serve a variety of other functions. They can be excellent opportunities to solicit feedback on supervision. They can also be:

- ◆ A natural time for volunteers to review whether or not they wish to remain with the program
- ◆ An opportunity for the supervisor to encourage alternative or additional program functions
- ◆ A time for soliciting general suggestions about the program.

To develop a volunteer performance evaluation form, begin with the position description and rate the volunteer's performance in each area. Then proceed to the volunteer's individual goals, and determine jointly with the volunteer whether those goals were met completely, in part, or not at all. If the volunteer falls short of the goals, explain why. Next, review the volunteer's self-evaluation, and discuss any areas of concern. Finally, the performance evaluation should include a plan of action to address any training needed or desired during the next year (see the sample Volunteer performance evaluation form in the Tools section).

### **Disciplinary Action**

There are times when a supervisor must be very clear and firm in directing a volunteer. This can be difficult when supervising an unpaid worker because there is a tendency to worry about appearing "ungrateful" for the volunteer's contribution and commitment. However, it is important to remember that the volunteer has agreed to perform the duties of the position as outlined in the program policy manual. Anytime the volunteer violates these standards, he or she must be told what behavior was inappropriate and why.

Some violations of conduct may be so serious that a volunteer should be terminated immediately. Some of these include appearing in court or making contacts while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, offering drugs or alcohol to a child, any form of child abuse, breach of confidentiality, or an intentional violation of a court order. This is not an all-inclusive list, and it is up to each program to determine its own parameters. If termination becomes necessary, the supervisor should document the reason in a letter to the volunteer, keeping a copy for the volunteer's file. These files should be maintained permanently.

A separate file should be maintained on each volunteer. The file includes, but is not limited to:

- ◆ Completed application form and references
- ◆ Dates the volunteer completed pre-service training
- ◆ Signed agreement regarding confidentiality and adherence to program policy
- ◆ Record of any stated preference for types of cases or restrictions on case assignment
- ◆ Correspondence
- ◆ Learning and training goals
- ◆ Performance evaluations
- ◆ Record of any disciplinary action taken by staff regarding the individual's conduct
- ◆ Cases assigned

### **Volunteer Recognition**

Never assume volunteers know they are appreciated. Recognition of volunteers' contributions should be part of the formal and informal operations of the program. Volunteers who do not receive frequent feedback and recognition begin to wonder if they are doing a good job and if

anyone cares about the work they do. This often creates a lack of motivation and can result in high volunteer attrition.

The CASA staff should always be aware of these factors and acknowledge when a volunteer has done a good job. Try to pass on praise from other parties, such as the judge, caseworker, child, parent, relatives, attorney, or others involved in the case. Mention accomplishments in the CASA newsletter or at staff meetings. Submit photographs or news items to National CASA to be included in the National newsletter, *The Connection*. A sincere and spontaneous thank you note to a volunteer for a job well done is also a welcome bit of positive feedback.

Many CASA programs hold special recognition events to formally thank volunteers for their work. Each year during National Volunteer Week (in April), many human service agencies hold dinners or parties for their volunteers. April is also Child Abuse Prevention Month, which offers the CASA program an opportunity to recognize volunteers and highlight the program's commitment to children, as well as to gain media attention. These events are also excellent opportunities to give volunteers some momento of service, such as a certificate, flower, or pin. Items bearing the CASA logo are available for purchase through National CASA.



***SECTION III: MANAGING  
THE PROGRAM***

## *Financial Management*

Regardless of its size or type of organization, every nonprofit, from a university hospital to a local CASA program, needs to maintain accurate financial books and records. In the initial stages of program development and operation, financial management can be very simple. As the organization grows and receives income from multiple sources and has more than one or two staff, accounting procedures and controls will necessarily become more complex. If you begin at the program's outset by establishing a financial management system that is in compliance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP), few changes will need to be made in the future. It is a good idea to seek the advice and services of an accountant or someone with extensive knowledge of financial management when you are developing your system. The information offered is intended to offer some basic guidance. It is not intended as a thorough discussion of all the issues that must be considered to assure adequate financial accountability (see Financial Policies & Procedures in the Tools Section).

### **What is the Accounting Process?**

The accounting process encompasses the recording and reporting of transactions affecting the financial status of an organization. Processes and procedures must be implemented to generate useful financial statements and to secure the assets of the organization. Meaningful financial data cannot be produced without a mechanism to capture, record, review, summarize, and report information. This entire process is called accounting.

Bookkeeping is simply the recording of transactions. While accounting and bookkeeping are often used interchangeably, their differences are significant. Bookkeeping is just one facet of accounting and financial management. Accounting refers to the entire process of recording and reporting and requires that systems (automated or manual) be in place to facilitate bookkeeping and to produce accurate, meaningful financial statements and management reports.

The accounting process can be described as an ongoing, monthly cycle consisting of:

- ◆ Cash receipts and disbursements
- ◆ Journal entries
- ◆ Closing procedures
- ◆ Financial statement preparation
- ◆ Review and analysis

### **Establishing an Accounting System**

Establishing an accounting system, while not directly fulfilling the program's mission, is nevertheless a critical administrative task. A well-designed system, even if it consists solely of manual ledgers, can mean the difference between timely financial information and incomplete, unsupported records.

Usually, the number of transactions (deposits, checks, and journal entries) will determine whether or not it is cost-effective to automate the accounting process. A new program that has only one or two funding sources and limited assets may simply “keep the books” in a checkbook supplied by the local bank or a check register accounting system in which checks are manually recorded in a ledger at the same time they are prepared. This combination of checkbook and expense distribution journal provides a simple way of recording receipts and disbursements while maintaining your checkbook balance.

It is strongly advised the organization move to an automated accounting system as soon as funds are available. An automated system does not have to be complicated. There are numerous software applications available that do not require any previous accounting or bookkeeping experience. Most accounting programs will run on the most basic computers and are easily installed and maintained. The factors to consider in determining which software will meet your program’s needs include:

- ◆ Does it do what you need it to?
- ◆ How easy is it to use?
- ◆ Is it easy to install?
- ◆ What reports can be produced?
- ◆ Can data be uploaded and downloaded to diskettes for use in other applications?
- ◆ Is the cost reasonable?
- ◆ Is training and support available?

Check with other CASA programs to see what programs they have found effective.

### **Establishing a Bank Account**

If you have not already done so, you must open a bank account so funds can be deposited and vendors paid. Most new CASA programs have relatively simple banking needs. This does not mean the decision to use a particular bank should be taken lightly. First, you must decide the program’s basic service needs. They usually encompass deposits, withdrawals, and obtaining bank balances. More extensive banking services could include direct deposit for payroll, debit and credit transactions processed through the Automated Clearing House, lockbox services, credit card accounts, lines of credit, and online access to bank account information via your personal computer.

Most banks can provide all of these services. Assuming all banks appear to be the same, how can you find the bank that is right for the program? One good way to start is to contact other groups of a similar size that might have the same service needs as CASA. Using references from other nonprofits is an excellent way of identifying a bank that offers services to meet your needs. The bank you use personally or that serves for-profit firms may not be the best for serving nonprofits. Visit the bank and discuss your expected needs with the bank officer.

### **Internal Controls**

The objectives of internal financial controls are to safeguard the organization’s assets, to ensure the reliability of financial records and reports, to promote operational efficiency, and to encourage adherence to policy. A good financial control system should have written policies which describe:

- ◆ Clear lines of authority and responsibility
- ◆ Separation of duties
- ◆ Procedures for authorization
- ◆ Procedures for record keeping
- ◆ Physical control over assets and records
- ◆ Accurate documentation and sufficient audit trail
- ◆ Independent review and audit of finances

## **Financial Statements**

There are many possible kinds of financial statements that can be prepared, but the ones most commonly required include the following:

- ◆ **Balance Sheet.** The balance sheet summarizes the assets, liabilities, and fund balances of the organization. It is a snapshot taken at a specific point in time, presenting the financial position of an organization on a specific date.
- ◆ **Statement of Activity.** This report measures, in fiscal terms only, the effectiveness of your program's ability to carry out its mission. It reports the actual revenues and expenses and compares the results to the current budget.
- ◆ **Statement of Functional Expenses.** This report, reported for the same period as the statement of activity, shows expenses by category such as salaries, rent, postage, etc.
- ◆ **Statement of Cash Flow.** Also prepared for the same period, this report shows the cash receipts and cash payments during that time frame.

It is generally not necessary to provide the board with a full set of financial statements each month. At a minimum, however, they should receive a statement of activity each month which follows the same format as the approved budget, calculating variances, explaining the reason for the variances, and offering suggestions for corrective action if needed. Other reports may be requested by the board on a quarterly basis and a full set of financial statements must be prepared at the end of the program's fiscal year.

Financial information should be provided to the board as soon as possible after the designated reporting period ends so that necessary corrective action can be made in a timely manner. Of course, it takes some time to prepare the statement, but most programs should be able to produce a monthly report within two weeks after the end of the month. A full set of financial statements for the year should be available within five or six weeks after the end of the year. If your accounting system cannot meet these deadlines, something is wrong and should be corrected.

## **Audits**

Although your organization may not be required to have an audit, it is generally recommended that an audit be performed, even if your funders do not require it. An audit opinion stating that the financial statements accurately present the balances and results of operations is critical in fundraising and receiving grants. Internally, an audit assures financial statements are accurate and complete.

An auditor will perform tests of your accounting system, review the internal accounting controls, examine your documentation, perform analytical review procedures, and confirm cash accounts and other balances in order to render an opinion on the financial statements taken as a whole. The audit will also include a review of the accounting principles being followed and the financial

statement format to determine whether or not they comply with generally accepted accounting principles.

There are several levels of audit and audit reports that can be done by an accountant. A full audit includes an opinion, a statement of financial position, a statement of activities, a statement of cash flows, and footnotes. The footnotes disclose the nature of the operations, a summary of significant accounting policies, a description of significant events, and detailed information on the organization's commitments and contingencies. For a full audit, the auditors will require a management representation letter addressed to them that acknowledges management's responsibility for the fair presentation of the financial statements. Usually, the executive director and a member of the board are asked to sign the letter. In addition to the audited financial statements, the auditors should provide you with a management or internal control letter in which they discuss any suggestions they have for improving your financial policies and procedures.

A lower level of audit is a review of financial statements. The resulting review report indicates the testing performed is less than that of a full audit and that only analytical review procedures were applied. A review provides only limited assurances that the financial statements are complete. This type of audit may be appropriate when the program is new and cannot afford a full audit.

The lowest level of service auditors can perform is a compilation. This type of report states the account balances presented are those provided by management. The auditor takes no responsibility for the accuracy of the numbers. This type of audit is appropriate only for programs that have a CPA prepare their monthly financial statements.

The cost of a full audit can be several thousand dollars, a real burden on programs that have minimal funding. You may be able to negotiate for a lower than normal fee, particularly if you are able to have the work performed off-season. Another possibility for a lower fee is to obtain the services through the local chapter of the Association of Certified Public Accountants.

## **Tax Returns**

There are various reporting requirements for nonprofit organizations at the local, state, and federal levels. Filing of IRS Form 990, Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax, is required if the organization has gross revenue in excess of \$25,000 per year. Nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations are also required to file the 990-Schedule A. The filing must be done by the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the fifth month after the end of the year. A penalty of \$10 per day is assessed late filing or incomplete forms.

If the program has raised more than \$1000 from an unrelated business such as some types of product sales, Form 990-T must be filed. Some types of income derived from unrelated business are subject to federal tax (and possibly state tax). The filing and payment of any taxes due must be paid by the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the fifth month after year-end.

If an extension is needed, IRS Form 2758 may be used to request it. The program is required to maintain a copy of your Form 990 tax return on file and available for the public's inspection.

Once the program employs paid personnel, it is required to file federal payroll reports, including a W-4 for each employee to claim exemptions for federal withholding and a W-2 for each employee at the end of the year to report income and deductions.

The director may want to ask the auditors to complete the annual tax return and request an extension when necessary. They can also advise you on other state tax filings required.

# *Risk Management*

## **Fear of Legal Liability**

Fear of legal liability has become an increasing worry for volunteer programs in the past few years. Although there is very little hard data about the actual number of lawsuits, two things are clear:

- ◆ The possibility of a CASA program being involved in an incident that results in legal action is increasing.
- ◆ The fear of such involvement is affecting the behavior of those who manage volunteer programs.

It is important not to get carried away with concern about liability when managing volunteers. The risk of liability operating a volunteer program is not much different from that of operating one with paid employees.

The kinds of risk inherent in a CASA program generally fall into three categories: liability of the individual volunteer, liability of the organization to the volunteer, and liability of the program because of the actions of its volunteers.

### **Liability of the Individual Volunteer**

In most states volunteers are somewhat protected by immunity clauses in state law. However, they can still be personally responsible if someone is harmed as the result of their willful failure to follow program rules, abuse of a child, misuse of an automobile, negligence, or exercising poor judgment.

### **Liability of the Organization to the Volunteer**

When an individual joins an organization as an unpaid employee, the organization assumes certain obligations to that volunteer. These fall into two general categories: protection from harm, and personnel rules.

In protection from harm, an organization has an obligation to not recklessly endanger its volunteers. Basically this means either eliminating dangers or adequately alerting and preparing volunteers to deal with dangers. Volunteers, like paid staff, are owed this obligation to be adequately prepared and trained for their volunteer duties.

In personnel rules, volunteers are provided the right to fair treatment by the agency in hiring, firing, and other supervisory actions. Although this area of law is in rapid development at the present, current interpretation of the law prevents the organization from taking non-job related actions against volunteers. This does not mean that you can not turn down a volunteer applicant,

but it prohibits turning them down based on their membership in a certain class of individuals defined by age, sex, race, disability, or religion.

### **Liability of the Organization Because of the Actions of Volunteers**

If a CASA volunteer injures someone while performing CASA related duties, the volunteer might be sued and the program might be sued as well. This could occur under one of two legal approaches:

- ◆ A volunteer acting within the scope of his or her duties can make the agency responsible because he/she is considered an agent of the organization, carrying out work on its behalf. The actions of the volunteer are, in essence, the actions of the program.
- ◆ Volunteers who commit actions clearly outside the scope of his or her work (such as theft or child abuse) may also open the organization to a suit. This is possible if the agency is itself guilty of negligent hiring, training, or supervision of the volunteer. In this case the agency may be held responsible because of its own failure to prevent the volunteer from injuring another party.

### **Minimizing the Risk**

Developing management policies and procedures with an eye toward preventing or minimizing the potential risks, is a good way for a new program to reduce the chance of legal involvement. By taking the steps to identify potential risks associated with the CASA program and evaluating how they can be controlled, the board can develop appropriate protective measures early thus avoiding many of the small mistakes that can turn into big disasters.

Most risk can be controlled by carefully screening volunteer applicants, providing thorough training to both volunteers and staff, assuring there is adequate supervision of volunteers, and periodically reviewing the organization's policies and procedures to assure they are understood.

The next step is assuring that everyone involved adheres to the policies and procedures consistently. That means never skipping a criminal background check or allowing a volunteer to take a child home "just this once." If anyone in the program fails to adhere to the program standards and harm occurs as a result, the program's potential liability is increased.

### **Liability Insurance**

The board will want to consider three types of insurance: liability for board members, liability for the program volunteers and staff, and theft and fire insurance for the office and its contents. The types and amounts of coverage will vary based on your program's unique characteristics. Consulting local insurance agents who are familiar with nonprofit organizations will provide helpful information. It is also a good idea to consult with your state organization and with other local programs about their coverage.

National CASA has worked with an insurance company that can offer advice and coverage anywhere in the country. Call the national office to obtain their material and contact information.

One final note: Many CASA programs have chosen not to purchase liability insurance because they assume the court will dismiss any suit filed against the program. While this may be true, the dismissal of a suit does not preclude the necessity of hiring legal counsel to prepare briefs to



present to the court regarding the action. It may be difficult to find pro bono legal assistance in such incidents and it is probably not possible for an attorney who sits on the board to also serve as the program's attorney since he or she is also a party to the action as a board member. An insurance policy that provides coverage of legal fees may be worth considering.

## *Program Operations*

### **Policy Considerations**

Good program management requires the creation of some formal rules and procedures. The development of overall policies can be done in phases corresponding to the developmental phase of the program. For example, you will want to have at least basic personnel policies before the director is hired and volunteer policies before the first class of volunteers is trained. It is impossible to develop policies to cover every potential issue and you may not want to restrict your options by having written rules for every situation. Sometimes the flexibility to use good judgment is the best way to handle a difficult situation. A good guide for the fundamental policies to establish initially is the National CASA standards for local programs. The process of developing policies should be a joint effort of the board and the executive director.

Because of the nature of the work done by CASA volunteers, their involvement in the courts, and the potential risk this work poses, there are some practice issues a program should carefully analyze from every perspective before committing to a policy. Some of them have been discussed in previous chapters. Others for consideration are discussed below.

### **Confidentiality**

Preserving the privacy rights of citizens and maintaining the confidentiality of personal information is a major concern in many segments of society. Because of the sensitive nature of CASA work, these concerns are even more critical for CASA programs. A breach in confidentiality can cause irreparable harm to the child and family involved. It can poison working relationships between CASA and the professional community and cast doubt on the value of the program. In the worst cases, it could even result in litigation.

For these reasons, it is important that staff and volunteers are clear about what is meant by confidentiality in this context. Something as simple as discussing a case in the hall, the elevator, or the bathroom, or leaving information on the coffee table at home can have unforeseen consequences.

To minimize risk, most programs have a volunteer sign a confidentiality agreement at the time of acceptance to the program. Some reinforce its importance by executing a separate document each time a new case is assigned. How confidentiality is to be handled in staffing or team meetings of volunteers should also be specifically addressed (see the Confidentiality Policy in the Tools Section).

In virtually all programs, violation of confidentiality is cause for immediate dismissal of a volunteer. This is appropriate given the potentially devastating consequences to individuals and to the program.

Equal importance should be placed on the confidentiality of personal information about volunteer applicants, both those who are accepted to the program and those who are not. If information of a confidential nature is kept in files, it should be kept in locked files with limits on who has access.

### **Procedures for Handling Complaints and Grievances**

CASA is involved in sensitive work that evokes a wide range of emotions. It is, therefore, to be expected that criticism will arise from many of the players involved, especially when the CASA volunteer makes recommendations that are not in agreement with the opinion of others. If volunteers are doing their jobs well, there will often be someone angry with them. Volunteers should be trained to expect this and given support in learning how to accept it. One supportive technique is having a written procedure in place for handling complaints, should they arise.

Complaints can come from many sources, including parents or other parties to a case, social workers, other agencies, attorneys, or people in the community. They can also be directed at various people, including a volunteer, staff person, or board member. The program's procedure should address the following:

- ◆ what constitutes a formal complaint (must it be in writing, etc)
- ◆ with whom the complaint must be filed
- ◆ when complaints shall be handled by staff vs. when they shall be handled by the board
- ◆ when the board is involved
- ◆ whether it should be the whole board, a committee, or one individual

The complaint procedure components listed above apply to both internal and external complaints. In other words, it applies to outside parties filing grievances against a CASA employee or volunteer, as well as to a CASA employee or volunteer filing a grievance against another person affiliated with CASA.

Knowing in advance how such problems will be addressed will help to alleviate the anxiety and discomfort that naturally accompanies these situations. Most complaints are not serious and should not be threatening to those involved. However, because of the sensitive nature of CASA's work, all complaints are cause for concern and should be given adequate consideration.

### **Personnel Policies**

Perhaps no policies are more important than the policies governing the hiring and management of personnel. No matter how new or how small, organizations should have at least minimal policies in writing. No area exposes programs to greater potential for liability than the mishandling of personnel matters. Because the legal ramifications are significant, you should have personnel policies reviewed by an attorney knowledgeable about employment law before

they are adopted by the board and distributed to staff. At a minimum, policies should be developed that address the following:

- ◆ Hiring procedures
- ◆ Work Schedule
- ◆ Compensation
- ◆ Employee benefits
- ◆ Code of conduct
- ◆ Performance evaluations
- ◆ Workplace safety and security
- ◆ Termination policies

All personnel related policies should be developed with full knowledge of the implications of the following:

- ◆ Federal minimum wage
- ◆ Equal employment opportunity
- ◆ Job safety and health
- ◆ The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992

## **Keeping Records**

One of the primary operational tasks is the maintenance of accurate records. In addition to financial records which were discussed in the previous chapter, the program must, at all times, be aware of the status of every case assigned by the court. The following discussion provides guidance on the types of records to maintain for this case management function.

### **Master File and Working File**

When CASA is appointed to a child via court order, the program will obtain or receive a packet of information from the clerk or court administrator containing all pertinent legal documents and notices. This includes copies of all pleadings filed with the court, a copy of the court order appointing CASA, and the date and type of the next hearing scheduled.

These documents are the heart of your master and working case files. They should be placed in your master filing system under the child's name, or under the docket number, thereby helping to ensure confidentiality. Many programs, which use manual systems, keep these records filed in chronological order. Any subsequent information about the case will be added to this file resulting in a comprehensive record of the case throughout its lifetime. This is also a logical place to keep a record of communication between the CASA office and the volunteer.

The volunteer who is assigned to the case will also need a working case file. Make copies of your original documents, and give them to the volunteer at the time (s)he is assigned to the case. As the volunteer works on the case, (s)he can use this file as a place to also keep the dates and notes from interviews, information on how to contact various parties, and copies of reports provided by the caseworker or parents.

It is critical for volunteers to realize that the materials contained in these files are confidential in nature and that they take precautions to safeguard their working files when they are in their possession. A procedure for destroying or returning working files to the program should be established. A time frame for keeping office files and procedures for destroying them should be agreed upon by the program and the court. National CASA recommends establishing an agreement with the court in which the records no longer needed by the CASA office are returned to the court, where they will be disposed of in the manner in which the court is accustomed.

### **Schedule of Hearings (Docket)**

It is also necessary to keep a complete record of court hearings for each case. Your docket form should include:

- ◆ Juvenile court case number
- ◆ Date and type of hearing
- ◆ Child's name
- ◆ CASA volunteer's name
- ◆ Caseworker
- ◆ Changes in dates (continuances)

This information can be gleaned from the court docket, court orders, or verbal orders from the attorney general's office or the administrative office of the court. When you develop a system for keeping track of the case's hearing schedule, keep in mind that information will change frequently. Parties often ask for continuances or the judge may determine additional information is needed before the hearing can be effectively concluded. The schedule of upcoming hearings should be a working document, able to accommodate change. It should also verify notification of the appropriate people regarding the change.

Sometimes the volunteer will be the first to know of a change in the schedule and will notify the CASA office. The staff should then try to confirm that information by contacting the juvenile court office or the attorney general's office.

The CASA Program must follow written policies and procedures regarding access to, use of, and release of information about the children it serves to ensure that children's confidentiality is maintained at all times. To help assure that records maintained in the CASA office are secure, physical security measures should include locked filing cabinets and access codes for office computers.

### **Gathering Statistical Data**

There are several reasons why CASA programs should pay close attention to gathering accurate and timely statistics. One primary reason for record keeping is to facilitate efficient program management. It also demonstrates accountability: to the courts, children and families, the community, funders and the media. Additionally, the 1996 amendment to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act requires states to report on the number of children for whom advocates were appointed to represent their best interests, and on the number of court contacts

between the advocate and child. Most often, the states have only the data collected by CASA programs to report.

When choosing projects to fund, most foundations and/or community service organizations want evidence that a cause is worthy and that it effectively serves a community need. Testimonials alone are not enough to convince these potential funders to offer financial support. They need to see solid data that illustrate the program's accomplishments.

Likewise, statistics can help to solidify your public image and credibility. Funding sources look for facts that show why the program is needed (abuse and foster care statistics), what it is doing (numbers of volunteers, the hours they spend on the job), and the results/outcomes (number of children served, cost savings to the court).

This information is also a powerful motivator in other public awareness projects. If you can quote positive figures in speeches, informational materials, or for fundraising projects, your program will be perceived as valuable and effective.

One of the most effective statistics the CASA program can cite is the amount of volunteer time contributed to the program and the children it serves. By documenting the time contributed, you can make a credible argument for the value of volunteers. This information can help in your public relations efforts and in seeking support from funders.

It is recommended that programs require volunteers to track the number of hours spent on specific activities associated with their cases. These activities include attending hearings, foster care reviews and meetings; contacts in person and by phone with children, parents, supervisors, social workers, therapists, and others; travel to appointments and hearings; and writing and editing reports.

## COMET

Keeping all of the statistics up to date can be a full time job in itself, leaving you with less time to dedicate to your volunteers and the children they represent. To remedy this situation while meeting the need for reporting, National CASA has provided an effective child-centered database to compile and update important program information on children and volunteers. COMET (**C**ASA **O**utcomes, **M**anagement and **E**valuation **T**ool) can help programs keep and manage vital case information, produce activity reports, evaluate their effectiveness, and measure outcomes for the children they serve. COMET can, and should, be modified to fit local program needs, terminology, and reporting requirements. This database is free to National CASA member programs (see sample reports with statistical information from the COMET database in the Tools Section).

In addition to tracking statistics, COMET can be used for:

- ◆ Reviewing the history of placements
- ◆ Tracking the changes in attorneys, case workers, and others involved in the case
- ◆ Compiling data needed to determine outcomes for each child

- ◆ Maintaining monthly and annual child and volunteer demographics and numbers, making it simple to complete the National CASA annual program survey
- ◆ Determining if volunteers have met training requirements and reporting on individual and group trainings
- ◆ Evaluating program effectiveness and performance

Each program must determine what information is necessary to serve its needs and purposes. Privately funded programs can use the data in grant applications and to justify spending to Funding sources. Up-to-date information can also improve the program's position with local media.

Other resources to assist in your data collection are the Achieving Our Mission manual and a technology guide, Computers and the Internet, both of which are available through National CASA.

# ***SECTION IV: TOOLS***

The Tools are sample files and these can be downloaded from CASAnet.  
Go to: [www.casenet.org/download/guides-manuals](http://www.casenet.org/download/guides-manuals)