



What is CASA? Court Appointed Special Advocates

Each year about 1,000 New Hampshire children are thrust into court because they are victims of physical or sexual abuse, neglect or abandonment. CASA of NH volunteers advocate in New Hampshire's courts for the best interests of abused and neglected children, so they can grow up in safe, permanent homes. When a child is abused or neglected in New Hampshire, the judge appoints him/her a *guardian ad litem* (GAL). GALs do not act as a child's attorney, and they are not social workers.

Their role is to advocate for what is in the child's best interests. GALs become the 'eyes and ears' of the court, making independent, objective recommendations to the judge about what is best for the child based on the information they have gathered. After 40 hours of training as a CASA volunteer, you would carry out the following activities:

- Information Gathering - carry out an objective examination of the situation and needs of the child
- Facilitation - identify resources and services for the child
- Advocacy - speak up for the child to whom you are appointed
- Monitoring - keep track of whether the orders of the court are carried out, and report to the court when parties do not follow those orders and plans
- Visit the child(ren) - visit at least once a month in order to gain an understanding of his/her/their situation.

What are some real life stories of children who have needed CASA?

- At 6-months of age, a routine doctor's check-up revealed an alarming case of abuse. The infant was noticeably favoring his right arm, and a subsequent x-ray displayed 6 broken bones on that side of the tiny body. Leo's young mother offered an excuse: he had fallen off the bed during a diaper change. But the severity of the injuries and their various ages told doctors that this was no accident. With no father in the picture, Leo was placed in the care of his aunt and uncle.
- Jacqueline curled up under the covers to drown out the sound, while her mom and her boyfriend fought in the living room. This wasn't their first fight, but it was definitely the loudest the 5-year old could remember. When the police arrived that night, they took Jackie's mom and the boyfriend into custody. They were both high, and neither could care for her. Still in her pajamas, the terrified child was brought by a social worker to a home she had never seen before.

- Last winter, things were falling apart for Nixa. She had just turned 17, her step-father had recently moved into the home, and it seemed like they fought about everything. Sometimes the fights turned physical and pretty quickly, the situation spiraled out of control. It was clear that someone would have to move out. Nixa never thought that her mom would choose her new husband over her own children, but she did. Nixa, along with her younger sister, were forced out of the home. With nowhere else to go, she went to live with family friends, sleeping in a spare bedroom. The new caregivers alerted the child protection system, and charges were soon filed.

What does a volunteer of CASA say?

Pete Smith had no illusions of saving the world when he first trained to become a CASA volunteer. "I knew I couldn't just ride in on a white horse and rescue these kids," says Smith. But only a few months into his first case, Pete recognized how great his impact could be. During a hearing in Jaffrey/Peterborough District Court, Judge Runyon turned to Pete and asked his opinion of a therapeutic recommendation.

"At that moment, I was an independent voice for the child. I explained to the Judge in plain language what I thought was best while he listened closely. It was a very simple exchange, but one that continues to motivate me in this work." "This is a world I didn't have much exposure to in my career. I've had to come up to speed quickly on all of the terminology and variety of services the boys receive," explains Pete. "My hopes for them aren't any different, though. I want to make sure they have rich lives." Since joining the CASA team, Pete has volunteered over 300 hours for some of New Hampshire's most fragile children. He has come to learn that being an advocate isn't always a glamorous or easy role, but that it is a vital one.

"I get satisfaction from knowing that some of the things I've done have really changed the lives of children."

How has the H.O.P.E. Philanthropy Team contributed to this effort?

H.O.P.E.'s mission is to partner with organizations and engage in activities that strengthen and create sustainable, positive change in communities and the environment. The HOPE foundation has donated \$5,000 to CASA to help support the programs help to expand established local programs and recruit and train volunteers to give a child a voice.

What can you do? How associates can use Community Service Time (CST) to help CASA?

CASA does not have enough volunteers. CASA volunteers are ordinary people doing extraordinary things. They give their time to give NH children a better future. They get to know each victim's background, learn more about their caregivers, and advocate passionately for what is in their best interests. CASA cannot change what has happened to these kids, but we can re-write the ending to their stories. Associates interested in finding out more information can go to <http://www.casanh.org/volunteer/> for more information or contact Diane at 800-626-0622.

