



CASA in New Jersey Judicial Survey

Executive Summary Report

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) is a unique New Jersey non-profit organization. We are the only entity authorized by State Statute to utilize trained community volunteers to advocate for and help protect the best interests of abused and neglected children, one child at a time. CASA programs and their volunteers help the Judiciary and Department of Children and Families obtain better outcomes for children. CASA is recognized as a model of “public-private partnership.” Our programs are authorized by N.J.S.A. 2A:4A-92 to provide needed one-on-one advocacy and monitoring for children removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect. Incorporated into Judicial Best Practices, CASA assist the Judiciary in making the best decisions possible for these children.

In order to ensure that CASA is providing the best possible service to the court, a survey was conducted last year, and responses were received from 37 Family Court Judges. With an average score of 4.7 out of 5, the judges indicated they are satisfied with their local CASA volunteers. Similarly, the average score on satisfaction with their CASA program came in at 4.5 out of 5, with a score of 4.4 out of 5 when asked if they feel the Court – as well as the children and families -- are better served because of CASA volunteer involvement.

CASA volunteers conduct many activities in order to present their reports to the Court, but the most highly valued are the contacts and interviews with the children volunteers serve. One judge reported *“CASA can help the Court ‘a great deal’ with information about the ‘feel’ of the case. This information is invaluable.”* Another indicated *“I often learn things about the children that I do not learn from any other stakeholder who appears in court.”* And lastly *“I find their (CASA volunteers) opinions to be insightful, truly centered on the needs of the child...focused on small but important issues in the child’s life.”*

There are not enough CASA volunteers to assign one to all the children. When asked in the survey, one judge pointed out that (s)he assigns a CASA *“when it appears that the ‘totality of the circumstances’ show me that the case will be high conflict or seriously contested”*. The major factor considered is placement of a child – the number of placements and the length of time they have spent in care and the concerns the judge may have regarding the type of placement.

The judges surveyed felt that CASA input informs their decision-making the most in the areas of safety of the child or youth while in placement, service provision, and placement stability and permanence. Among the general comments, judges stated that they *“find CASA’s contribution invaluable,”* that they *“have benefitted enormously from CASA input,”* and that they *“have seen amazing things from CASA workers that are so compelling that it would bring a tear to your eye. Their commitment and dedication is inspiring.”*

