



VOICES for CHILDREN/CASA

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

**VOICES FOR CHILDREN / CASA
350 STATE STREET, THIRD FLOOR
BINGHAMTON, NY 13901**

(607) 724-5153

Thank you for showing interest in the Voices for Children/Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Program!

After reading the job description and program overview, if you are interested in finding out more about becoming a CASA volunteer, please fill out the **Volunteer Application**, the three (3) **Authorizations to Release Information** forms, and then return them to the ACCORD office located at 350 State Street, Binghamton, NY 13901.

Court Appointed Special Advocates have the ability to help abused and neglected children in ways that few others can. Because they do not have the stigma, workload, or regulations that many service providers do, CASAs can take a more individualized approach with the children in their assigned cases. The enclosed materials should help answer questions about the role, history, and mission of CASA.

Upon receiving your application, the background checks will be submitted and reference forms will be sent to all of the references provided in your application. You will then be contacted by program staff to arrange an interview.

If you have any questions about CASA or the forms, please do not hesitate to call 607-724-5153 and you will be directed to CASA staff. Your interest in CASA and the welfare of children in Broome and Tioga Counties is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

The Voices for Children/CASA Program

Voices for Children / CASA Program Overview

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program provides CASAs, specially trained volunteers who are appointed by a family court judge, to work on individual cases of children at risk of abuse or neglect.

CASA volunteers are appointed by family court judges to advocate for the best interests of a child victim in cases of abuse and neglect. A volunteer's role in abuse and neglect proceedings is to present the court with a neutral perspective regarding what is in the best interests of the child. To prepare their recommendations, CASA volunteers talk with the child, as well as parents, family members, social workers and other persons involved in the child's life.

Currently, in New York State, there are approximately 26,000 children in foster care. Each child spends an average of 2.2 years in foster care. Between Broome County and Tioga County, there are over 1,000 children involved in the court system who could benefit from the assignment of a CASA. These children and their families are thrust into both social services and the court system where it is up to a family court judge to make important decisions about their future.

Judges often have to base decisions on incomplete information. Overburdened child welfare workers and attorneys for the children may not have the time or resources to thoroughly monitor court orders or to find out firsthand what is really best for each child. As reports of abuse and neglect keep crowding court dockets, children increasingly become lost in the system. CASA programs provide professional staff and trained volunteers to assist family court judges by fact finding, advocating, and monitoring permanency plans for children involved in family court proceedings and their families.

Studies show that children with CASA volunteers have a better chance of living in a permanent home than children who do not have a CASA volunteer assigned. CASAs often reduce the number of times a child moves from placement to placement. Cases which have a CASA volunteer assigned are more likely to have fewer adjournments, thereby saving tax dollars. A child with a CASA volunteer is more likely to secure needed services in a timely manner.

The effectiveness of CASA programs is due in large part to the personal motivation of the volunteers and the low number of cases each volunteer manages. CASAs spend considerable time and effort on their cases without monetary compensation and are willing to remain involved over extended periods.

The CASA program began in Seattle, Washington, in 1977 in response to the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. There are now over 1000 community-based CASA programs across the United States with approximately 68,000 volunteers representing over 240,000 abused and neglected children. The first New York State program was established in New York City during 1979. Since 1981, programs have been established in Albany, Broome, Chautauqua, Chemung, Dutchess, Erie, Genesee, Jefferson, Lewis, Monroe, Nassau, Onondaga, Orange, Otsego, Putnam, Rensselaer, Rockland, Schenectady, Schuyler, Steuben, Suffolk, Sullivan, Tioga, Ulster, Westchester, and Yates counties.

In Broome County, Voices for Children/CASA began as an independent nonprofit agency in 1993. In early 1998, the program joined an umbrella organization, ACCORD, A Center for Dispute Resolution, Inc. In 2005, the program expanded into Tioga County.

The increasing number of children in foster care in our state is one of New York's most troubling problems. The involvement of CASA volunteers in family court is an effective way to help children in foster care secure needed services. CASA volunteers make a huge impact on the world, one child at a time.

CASE EXAMPLE:

Brandon (name changed for confidentiality), a four-year-old local boy, was removed from his mother's care by DSS after a finding of neglect based on inadequate supervision and care. As a result of this finding, Brandon was placed in foster care and a CASA was assigned to his case. Upon meeting with Brandon, the CASA observed that he had yet to meet age appropriate milestones, especially in the areas of potty training and speech development. The CASA arranged for Brandon to be evaluated by Broome County's Early Intervention Program and speech and physical occupation services were started.

After further investigation, the CASA learned that Brandon had a grandmother who was able to take care of him. The CASA visited the grandmother's home and advocated for DSS to complete a home study. The grandmother's home was deemed appropriate and Brandon was able to live with his grandmother while in care, lessening the trauma and transitions of being in an unfamiliar home. The CASA also worked with Brandon's mother, supporting her as she attended parenting classes and encouraging her to take control of her life. With the extra support from CASA, DSS, and other direct service providers, Brandon's mother improved her situation and was able to provide Brandon with a safe and comfortable living environment. Today, Brandon is living happily with his mother and is developing at an amazing pace.



VOICES FOR CHILDREN/ CASA VOLUNTEER DESCRIPTION

Court Appointed Special Advocates (hereafter “CASAs”) are volunteers appointed by the family courts in Broome and Tioga Counties to ensure that the best interests of children are met. The CASA looks at the facts of the case, recommends a course of action to the judge (when appropriate), facilitates the resolution of any problems and monitors progress toward established goals.

I. Responsibilities of a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

- A. **Fact Finder** — discovers all relevant information by reviewing records and documents and interviewing parties.
 - 1. Upon assignment to a case, interviews the child, family members, foster families, teachers, doctors, therapists, case workers, and other interested parties to determine the facts.
 - 2. Researches alternatives available for the child, including placement with relatives and foster placement, and visits any homes suggested for permanent or temporary placement.
- B. **Advocate** — ensures that all relevant facts are before the court at hearings through written reports and oral testimony.
 - 1. Prepares a written assessment of the child’s situation that will aid the judge in deciding the child’s future.
 - 2. Attends court for every appearance.
 - 3. Works with interested parties to develop a permanency plan for the child.
 - 4. Advocates for the child’s quality of life issues (i.e.: health, insurance, and recreation issues).
 - 5. Advocates for necessary services for the child and the child’s family.
- C. **Facilitator** — ensures that the court’s plan for the child and family is carried out.
 - 1. Acts as a catalyst to families and assists in helping implement plans as prescribed by the court.
 - 2. Strives to promote a cooperative relationship and communication between all of the professionals working on the case in the direction of the best interest of the child.
 - 3. Strives to promote communication between family, foster family, and other systems.
- D. **Monitor** — ensures that all obligations to the child are properly met.

1. Maintains contact with the child, family and other interested parties to monitor progress towards goals.

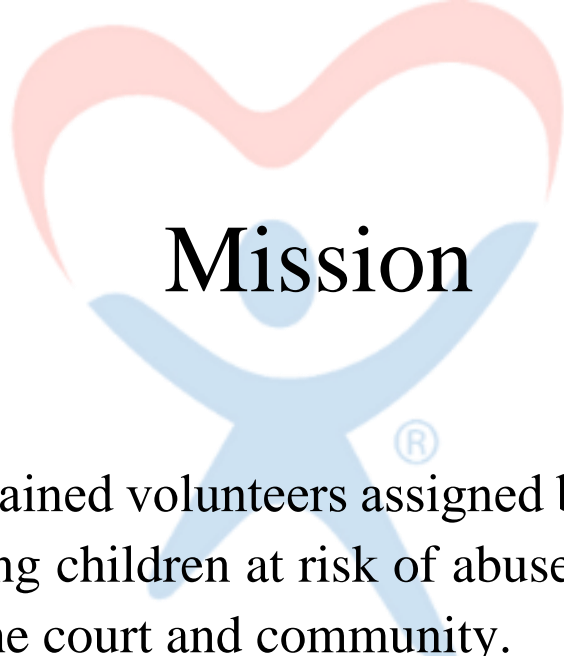
II. Qualifications of a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

- a) Is at least 21 years of age;
- b) Completes the basic, initial 32+ hour training and court observations;
- c) Clean background and State Central Registry of Child Abuse and Maltreatment checks;
- d) Exhibits sound judgment, maturity and a high degree of responsibility;
- e) Is interested in children and their rights and special needs;
- f) Has the time and commitment for at least a one-year case assignment;
- g) Has the ability to work with and relate to children, families, and professionals associated with their cases.

III. Requirements of a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

- a) Maintains strict confidentiality;
- b) Attends monthly CASA meetings;
- c) Keeps CASA staff informed of all related activities and attends monthly supervisions;
- d) Maintains up-to-date and complete files on each case assigned;
- e) Observes all deadlines and timetables involving an assigned case and turns in all reports on time;
- f) Supplies requested information, which may be needed for overall CASA program evaluation.

ACCORD, A Center for Dispute Resolution
Voices for Children/Court Appointed Special Advocates
350 State Street
Binghamton, NY 13901
Tel: 607.724.5153
Fax: 607.724.0059



Mission

CASA's are trained volunteers assigned by a Family Court Judge providing children at risk of abuse and neglect with advocacy in the court and community.

CASA volunteers facilitate permanency and safety through researching, reporting, and collaborating with service providers.

CASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

Voices for Children of Broome and Tioga



VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

The following information will be kept strictly confidential.

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Gender Identity: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Cell Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Are you currently employed: Yes No If Yes, Full-time or Part-time

Present Occupation: _____

Present Employer: _____

Employer's Address & Phone: _____

Emergency Contact: _____

Relationship: _____ Phone: _____

I am interested in working in: Broome County Tioga County Both

Education History:

Educational Institute

Field of Study

Degree/Year Graduated

Other Training: _____

Volunteer Experience: (*membership in clubs, faith communities, professional groups, etc.*):

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Dates Involved</u>	<u>Type of Experience</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Are you prepared to complete 32+ hours of pre-service training, court room observation, and a minimum of twelve hours per year of in-service training? Yes No

Does your schedule permit you to attend meetings and court hearings during the work day? Yes No

Are you prepared to commit to at least one year of volunteer service? Yes No

Languages spoken, other than English _____

Hobbies/Special Interests/Training _____

Do you have any cases pending in any court? Yes No If yes, please explain: _____

Have you been convicted of a crime as an adult? Yes No If Yes, please explain: _____

(A conviction will not bar you necessarily from becoming a volunteer.)

Have you ever been involved with the child protective system or family court? Yes No If Yes, please explain: _____

Do you hold a valid driver's license? Yes No Expiration date: _____

Driver license number: _____ State of Issuance: _____

How did you become aware of the CASA program? _____

Please list three (3) non-relative references below and provide the following:

Reference #1 (Name): _____ (Relation): _____

(Address): _____

(Phone): _____ (Email): _____

Reference #2 (Name): _____ (Relation): _____

(Address): _____

(Phone): _____ (Email): _____

Reference #3 (Name): _____ (Relation): _____

(Address): _____

(Phone): _____ (Email): _____

I, _____ hereby affirm that all of the answers provided on my volunteer application are true. I hereby authorize ACCORD and the Voices for Children/CASA program and other appropriate agencies to secure the following record checks: national criminal record; state criminal records; criminal records from the court/local jurisdiction; National Sex Offender Registry; child abuse registry or child protective services where permissible by law; and social security number verification. Any applicant found to 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 our program's credibility will not be accepted as a CASA volunteer.

I understand that the information requested in this application will be used only for the purpose of determining my suitability as a CASA volunteer. Further, I understand that completion of training does not guarantee that I will be assigned a case. I am aware of the sensitive and confidential nature of the official documents, reports and other material I will examine in my capacity as a CASA volunteer. I will discuss these matters only with those persons directly involved in the case or who will be consulted for their professional knowledge and expertise.

I also understand that if for any reason it becomes apparent that my activities are contrary to the policies, goals and/or philosophy of the CASA program and their desire to provide quality services to abused and neglected children, my services as a CASA volunteer will be terminated.

Signature

Date

Please return completed and signed application to:

ACCORD, A Center for Dispute Resolution, Inc.
Voices for Children/CASA Program
350 State Street
Binghamton, NY 13901

AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION

I, _____, List AKA names
(_____), DOB __ / __ / ____, currently residing at the
following address

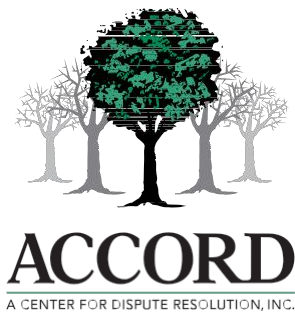
_____, hereby authorize the New York State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment to furnish all information which may be contained within the New York State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment to: **Chelsea Paterson** affiliated with **CASA of New York State, 14 Columbia Circle, Suite 206, Albany, NY 12203** (agency & address), on my behalf in accordance with the Child Protective Services Act of 1973.

The names and birth dates of the children belonging to the individual listed on the first line of this form as well as previous addresses of this individual are necessary to conduct a thorough and accurate search of the State Central Register database. Please furnish this information below.

Names and birth dates of children & Other Household Members:

Previous addresses starting with most recent (with dates):

Signature



350 State Street
Binghamton, NY 13901
www.accordny.com

(607) 724-5153

AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE INFORMATION

To Whom it May Concern:

I hereby authorize a representative of the ACCORD, Voices for Children/Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program to conduct an investigation into my background in conjunction with their official duties.

I further authorize any **Broome County Law Enforcement Agency** to conduct a criminal records check and to release the results of said criminal record check to the ACCORD, Voices For Children/CASA Program. All results will be kept in my file and be locked at all times.

I execute this release with the full knowledge and understanding that the information obtained about me is for the official use of the ACCORD, Voices for Children/CASA Program. I have read the above waiver, release statement, and fully understand what rights I am waiving by signing this document.

Full Name (print): _____ Date of Birth: _____

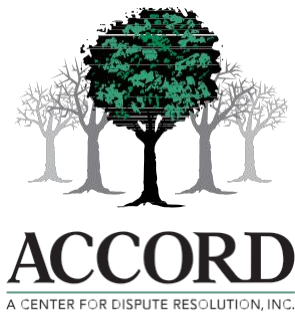
Address: _____

Phone: Daytime: _____ Evenings _____

Signature: _____

Witness: _____

VOICES FOR CHILDREN / CASA IS A PROGRAM ADMINISTERED BY
ACCORD, A CENTER FOR DISPUTE RESOLUTION INC.
WWW.ACCORDNY.COM



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Binghamton, NY 13901
www.accordny.com

(607) 724-5153

AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE INFORMATION

To Whom it May Concern:

I hereby authorize a representative of the ACCORD, Voices for Children/Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program, Broome County Department of Social Services, and Broome County Probation Department, to conduct an investigation into my background in conjunction with their official duties.

I further authorize **Choice Point Agency** to conduct a criminal records check and to release the results of said criminal record check to the ACCORD, Voices for Children/CASA Program.

I execute this release with the full knowledge and understanding that the information obtained about me is for the official use of the ACCORD, Voices for Children/CASA Program. I have read the above waiver, release statement, and fully understand what rights I am waiving by signing this document.

Full Name (print): _____ Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

Phone: Daytime: _____ Evenings _____

Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Social Security Number: _____

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