

CASA

of Umatilla County



VOLUNTEER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. THE CASA MISSION

Mission Statement	5
Volunteer Advocates.....	5
History.....	5

B. THE CASA VOLUNTEER'S ROLE

Responsibility to Children	5
Safety and Permanency.....	5
Attitudes Towards Families	5
Culturally Appropriate Advocacy.....	5
Autonomy and Its Limits	6
Relationship to the Child Welfare System.....	6
Responsibility to the Court	7
Job Duties and Requirements.....	7

C. GROUND RULES FOR CASA VOLUNTEERS

Confidentiality	7
Mandatory Reporting.....	8
Ethical Behavior.....	8
Safety and Child Visitation.....	8
Transportation.....	8
Placement, Legal Advice and Counseling	9
Giving Gifts and Providing Resources	9
Grievances.....	9
Volunteer Caseload.....	9
Conflicts of Interest.....	9
Records and Materials.....	9
Agreement to Policies and Procedure.....	9

D. BECOMING A CASA VOLUNTEER

Recruitment and Screening.....	10
Reasons for Rejecting an Application.....	10
Record Keeping	11
Training.....	11
General Training Requirements.....	11
On-Going Training.....	11
CASA Oath and Swearing In.....	11
Volunteer Status Definitions.....	11
Active.....	11
Inactive or On Leave.....	11
Volunteer Transfers	12
Termination from the Program	12

E. UMCHS STAFF CASA POLICY

UMCHS Staff CASA Policy.....13

F. STARTING AND ENDING A CASE

Appointing a CASA to a Case14
Criteria for Case Appointments14
Referrals.....14
Volunteer Selection for Appointment.....14
Wait List.....14
Case Closure14
CASA Volunteer Removal14
Courtesy CASA’s14
Assigning an Additional Volunteer to a Case.....14
Transfer of Jurisdiction.....14
Saying Goodbye.....15

G. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & AGREEMENT

Acknowledgement and Agreement.....16

A - MISSION STATEMENT

The goal and purpose of CASA is to provide and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused or neglected child can be safe, establish permanence and have the opportunity to thrive. The ongoing development of Umatilla-Morrow County Head Start, Inc. as an agency is guided by the agency's mission statement: **Umatilla-Morrow Head Start is a caring, innovative network of quality individuals working in partnership with others to strengthen families and communities.**

History

Conceived by **Judge David Soukup**, the first CASA program began in Seattle in 1977. CASA came to Oregon in 1985 when the legislature authorized a pilot CASA project. **Umatilla-Morrow Head Start starting managing the CASA program in December 2008.**

B - CASA VOLUNTEER ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Volunteer Advocates: A child advocate is a trained community volunteer appointed by a judge to speak for the best interests of an abused and neglected child. A child advocate works as an official part of the judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys, social workers and other parties. By handling only one or two cases at a time, the child advocate has time to thoroughly explore the history and circumstances of each assigned case.

Responsibility to Children: CASA's first responsibility is to advocate for the best interests of the children served by the program. All resources are allocated and policies & procedures are enacted in accordance with this responsibility. Examples include screening and case management procedures, training programs, staff qualifications, ratios of volunteers to staff, ratios of children to volunteers and a commitment to the highest standards of confidentiality.

Safety and Permanency: Safety and permanency for children is a major focus of all CASA programs. Children require and deserve to live without the threat of physical or psychological harm to either themselves or to others in their home. Likewise, children require and deserve stability and permanence in order to develop bonds and attachments that lead to healthy, nurturing and meaningful relationships.

Attitudes Towards Families: Children love and value their families, even families who have abused or neglected them. Umatilla-Morrow CASA therefore recognizes that advocacy for the child is often closely tied to advocacy for the family. We promote respectful treatment of all parents and family members.

Culturally Appropriate Advocacy: Vision for Diversity

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association "Stands up" for abused and neglected children. Building on our legacy of quality advocacy, we acknowledge the need to understand, respect and celebrate diversity including race, gender, religion, national

origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or socio-economic status and the presence of a sensory, immigration status, mental or physical disability. We also value diversity of viewpoints, life experiences, talents and ideas.

A diverse CASA/GAL network helps us to better understand and promote the well-being of the children we serve. Embracing diversity makes us better advocates by providing fresh ideas and perspectives for problem solving in our global community, enabling us to respond to each child's unique needs.

Purpose of Providing Support and On-Going Training to CASA Volunteers: CASA volunteers require and deserve competent and professional support and training in order to provide effective and appropriate advocacy for children. Umatilla-Morrow CASA strives to offer support and training, which will maximize the volunteer's strengths and minimize their limitations.

The CASA Autonomy and Limits on Autonomy: The CASA, after appointment by the juvenile court, is the child's advocate and is given wide latitude by the CASA program to determine and advocate for a child's best interest. In fact, CASAs are encouraged to be vigorous in their advocacy efforts. CASA staff will normally support CASAs in this role. However, if the CASA program is in conflict with the opinions and recommendations of a CASA volunteer, the program may:

1. Submit a separate report to the court detailing its concerns, opinions and recommendations or,
2. If the program feels that either the welfare of the child or of another individual is jeopardized by the actions and/or recommendations of a CASA volunteer, the program may remove the CASA from his/her appointed case.

Communication: Positive and respectful communication is essential to the success of the CASA program. It is imperative that all individuals associated with Umatilla-Morrow CASA make all efforts to assure that venues of communication remain open and productive. This includes communication between staff and volunteers as well as with all other individuals and agencies engaged in the child welfare system. Communication between the program manager and volunteer is vitally important. **Reports and recommendations submitted to the CASA program, from the volunteer, will not be altered without the knowledge and agreement of the CASA volunteer.**

Relationship to the Child Welfare System: Umatilla-Morrow CASA values strong, professional and productive relationships and open communication with all the individuals associated to CASA cases and with the agencies working within the child welfare system. Although CASA volunteers often take positions in specific cases that are at odds with others on the case, the **CASA program does not cast itself in an adversarial role with any party.** CASA recognizes that reasonable people disagree and that the best outcomes for children result from a full and complete discussion of all issues and points of view.

Relationship and Responsibility to the Court: As the Umatilla and Morrow County Juvenile Courts' designated Court Appointed Special Advocate program, CASA has a responsibility to operate with the highest standards of ethics and accountability, doing nothing to discredit the Court or the position of trust the program has been given. As appointed officers of the Court, Court Appointed Special Advocates must consistently demonstrate **these high standards in all of their conduct, both inside and outside of the courtroom.** They must abide by the laws of **Oregon and the federal government and follow the rules of the Court**, doing nothing to bring dishonor to either the Court, the role in which they serve or to the CASA program. These expectations additionally and equally apply to the CASA staff.

Job Duties and Requirements: CASA Volunteers, when sworn in and appointed to a case, are required to:

1. Visit with the children on their case(s) at least once every 30 days.
2. Review all records pertaining to the child as available.
3. Report to their assigned CASA Supervisor and discuss the status of the children on their case regularly with **Peer Coordinator or CASA Manager.**
4. **Submit Log hours beginning of each month.**
5. Prepare written court reports for the Juvenile Court for all hearings associated with the child(ren) on their case. These reports must be submitted to the CASA Supervisor for review at least 5 days prior to the scheduled hearing. **(CASA staff is prohibited from altering reports or recommendations without the knowledge and agreement of the CASA volunteer).**
6. Report immediately to their CASA Supervisor any major case related events or concerns (child is moved, abuse reoccurs, concerns about foster family, etc.).
7. Report to their CASA Supervisor any case related meetings, e.g., CRB hearings, DHS staffing, Family Decision Meetings, etc.
8. **Share all written information with their CASA Supervisor before sharing it with any other party.**
9. Attend court hearings & CRB reviews, Family Decision Meetings, and other meetings about the child.
10. Maintain 12hrs of continuing education hours annually.
11. **Return case files and other case related information to CASA office within one month of the case closing.**
12. Immediate notify their CASA Supervisor of any criminal charges.

C. GROUND RULES FOR CASA VOLUNTEERS

Confidentiality:

A CASA volunteer must maintain absolute confidentiality regarding the children they represent and their families. This policy is the cornerstone of the CASA program, reflecting the CASA's legal (419B.112), moral, and ethical obligation to protect the child's and family's right to privacy.

CASA volunteers must hold in confidence all information regarding children and families. The case may not be discussed with the **CASA volunteer's own family or friends, regardless of geographic distance.** Confidentiality also applies to online and

social media communication. In addition, all volunteers are required to sign and abide by UMCHS “Online Communication & Social Media Guidelines” policy (**See Umatilla Morrow Head Start Policies for details**). **CASA’s must use extreme caution in transporting and storing written material about their case. Files at home must be kept in a secure file or storage unit.**

No information of any type may be released, except as follows:

- Legal parties to the case, as it assists in good case planning and service. Parties to the case may include among others: the judge (in court), attorneys and caseworkers assigned to the case. A prohibition on ex-parte communication specifies that documents given to one case party member **MUST** be given to **ALL** case party members.
- Umatilla Morrow CASA staff.
- Professional counselors providing mandated services to the CASA children in a case.

Any decision to release confidential information should be discussed with your CASA supervisor.

Mandatory Reporting: Upon the completion of training a CASA volunteer becomes a Mandatory Reporter and as such must report any incident or perceived incident of **Child/Elderly abuse or neglect** to the CASA supervisor and the appropriate authorities.

Ethical Behavior and Respect: CASA is committed to the highest standards of ethics and integrity in all of the work we perform. Unethical behavior is never justified or acceptable, no matter the intention or outcome. CASA, both staff and volunteers, will treat all people with respect and fairness, no matter who they are or what their relationship may be to the CASA program and the work the program does. Rude, disrespectful or demeaning behavior is considered unacceptable at any level of the organization.

Safety and Child Visitation: For the safety of the children, CASA volunteers are to remain within earshot or visual view of another adult when visiting with their child(ren.) This policy is intended to protect CASA volunteers from any false allegations as well as insure the safety of the child(ren).

Child Safety & Volunteer Background Checks: All CASA volunteers **MUST** complete a comprehensive background check as prescribed in the National CASA Program Standards as a part of their application process.

Transportation: In accordance with the recommendations of National CASA, **CASA volunteers are not permitted to transport their CASA children in personal or public vehicles during the course of performing their duties and responsibilities.** Protecting the child, volunteer, and program requires adherence to this policy.

Placement, Legal Advice and Counseling: A CASA volunteer is strictly forbidden from taking a CASA child home, providing legal advice or counseling. A CASA volunteer's role is not to make placement arrangements for their CASA child.

Giving Money or Gifts: CASA volunteers are not permitted to give money or expensive gifts directly to the child, the child's family or caregiver.

Grievances: If a CASA volunteer feels unfairly treated in any way, the volunteer is encouraged to speak directly with the **Associate Director of Administration to Deputy Director** and file grievance protocol (See UMCHS Policies for details).

Volunteer Caseload: It is desirable that CASA volunteers carry no more than two cases. In unique situations, a volunteer may be asked to add an extra case when a CASA's involvement is critical to the "Best interests of a child" and no other volunteer is available. In any case, a volunteer with more than two cases should be an exception to the rule.

Conflicts of Interest: The primary obligation of both CASA staff and CASA volunteers is to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children as objectively as is possible. Outside employment or personal business activities should not conflict with the volunteer's primary responsibility as a child advocate. Responsibility for recognizing and preventing such conflicts rests solely on the volunteer. It is strongly recommended that any suspected conflicts of this nature be brought to the immediate attention of CASA program staff.

Volunteers may not, in any way, use their position to obtain financial gain for themselves, any member of their household, their friends, or any business with which the volunteer, a member of their family's household or a friend is associated.

Volunteers may not enter into a professional or personal relationship with any client of Umatilla Morrow CASA during their tenure as a CASA volunteer advocate.

Records and Materials: Volunteers may not keep any confidential materials related to their assigned CASA case(s) upon case closure and/or separation from service. Such confidential materials include paper and electronic documents. **All paper documents pertaining to assigned CASA cases must be returned to Umatilla Morrow CASA for confidential shredding within 2 weeks of case closure or termination from service.** Electronic files pertaining to assigned CASA cases must be permanently deleted from all personal computers within 2 weeks of case termination or termination from service.

Agreement to Policies and Procedures: CASA volunteers must agree to abide by the policies and procedures of the Umatilla Morrow CASA program. These policies and procedures exist for the protection and benefit of the children, the volunteers, and the CASA program. CASA volunteers are obligated to familiarize themselves with these policies and procedures, follow them carefully, and bring any questions of interpretation to the attention of their CASA supervisor. **For greater detail regarding Policies please refer to Umatilla Morrow Head Start Policies and Procedures.**

Deliberate violation of any of these policies or procedures by a CASA will result in disciplinary action. This may include placement on probation, requirement of specific remedial action, and/or immediate removal from the duties of a CASA volunteer and from volunteering UMCHS.

Problems can and do occur and Familiarity with CASA policies and procedures and close communication with the CASA supervisor can help forestall problems.

D. BECOMING A CASA VOLUNTEER

Recruitment and Screening: Recruitment of volunteers will be conducted in such a manner as to seek a diverse group of qualified advocates, to be as culturally, ethnically, racially, socio-economically and linguistically reflective of the children and families served as possible. An individual may become a Court Appointed Special Advocate if they:

- Are 21 years old or older
- Successfully complete the application and screening process
- Demonstrate the capability to adequately advocate for a child or children
- Have no criminal record or history with a child protective service (CPS) agency; and
- Successfully complete 30 hours of initial training

Screening procedures include:

- Review and evaluation of the written application;
- Three written reference
- Criminal History Check
- Community screening process; and
- Interview with program manager, or other CASA staff

Reasons for Rejecting an Application: Reasons for rejection of an application to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate may include, but are not limited to:

- The application is incomplete, inaccurate, or otherwise unsatisfactory
- References are not returned or are unsatisfactory
- The applicant refuses to sign the release of information or provide necessary information to conduct background check
- Criminal records and/or CPS check is unsatisfactory
- The applicant has unresolved abuse issues, the applicant- or a member of the applicant's family- is currently involved or potentially involved with the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Welfare, has pending litigation as a victim or survivor of abuse, is currently in treatment for substance abuse, has physically, sexually or emotionally abused or exploited a child, holds values in conflict with CASA's core values, or is otherwise deemed unsuitable
- The applicant has falsified or misrepresented written or other information
- The applicant has been sanctioned or faces disciplinary action by a professional licensing or other governing body

- The applicant is employed or provides volunteer service in a capacity where conflicts of interest are perceived to be unavoidable; and/or
- In the estimation of CASA staff, it becomes apparent through the training process that the applicant will be incapable of fulfilling the role of a Court Appointed Special Advocate

Applicants who are denied will receive written notification that their application has been rejected.

Record keeping: Umatilla Morrow CASA will maintain records for all applicants to the program. Records associated with active and inactive volunteers, including volunteer personal data, application materials, training records, record of appointment and case related information, will be maintained and kept by the program

Training:

General Training Requirements: Umatilla-Morrow CASA requires thirty (30) hours of initial training and twelve (12) hours of annual.

On-Going Training: On-going training is required for all active and inactive volunteers. Umatilla Morrow CASA will alert CASAs to trainings available in exploration on many issues. Volunteers may submit attendance at workshops, seminars and other trainings attended as part of their employment, reading books and other material checked out from the program’s Library, and other volunteer positions to be considered as credit towards this annual 12 hour requirement.

CASA Oath and Swearing In: All CASA volunteers who successfully complete the 30 hour training and wish to become Court Appointed Special Advocates must take an oath and be sworn-in by a Circuit Court Judge.

Volunteer Status Definitions:

Active: Active volunteers are those currently appointed to at least one case by the CASA Program or by a Judge associated with a Courtesy CASA case from another jurisdiction.

Inactive: Volunteers will be considered inactive if they:

- **Have not been assigned to an open case for a 12 month period.**

Retired: Volunteers will be considered retired if they:

- **Resign from the program**
- **Have been inactive for 13 or more months**
- **Fail to actively engage in their assigned case**
- **Are terminated from the program by Umatilla-Morrow CASA**

Returning to Active Status from Retired Status: Volunteers with a “Retired” status may return to active status under the following terms:

- Provide proof of 12 hours of continuing education for each year they have been in a retired status.
- Completed updated criminal background check.
- Attend a one hour “Program Update Review.” During this session the Volunteer Manager will review any new changes to the dependency process or program policies and procedures.
- Sign the Volunteer Policy and Procedures Acknowledgment & Agreement statement.
- Acceptance of a case assignment.

Volunteers who have been retired 5 or more years must complete the application and training process like a new applicant.

Volunteer transfer from another CASA Program: Volunteers who were active in another CASA program within the past 12 months are required to complete the following:

- The other CASA program shall complete a Volunteer Referral Form which documents the volunteer’s length of service or CASA Training Certificate.
- Completion of a volunteer packet; including a criminal background check.
- Complete “Local Program Orientation” which includes review of the program’s service area, Volunteer Policies and Procedures, and Courthouse Handbook.
- Complete three hours of court watch.

Grounds for Termination: Volunteers may be terminated from CASA service if the agency determines one or a combination of the following:

- Violation of program policies and procedures, court rules, or law
- Gross misconduct or insubordination
- Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while performing volunteer duties
- Mistreatment or inappropriate conduct toward clients, families, co-workers or cooperating agency personnel
- Taking action without program or court approval that endangers the child, or is outside the role or powers of the program
- Breach of confidentiality
- Falsification of application materials or misrepresentation of facts during the screening process
- Falsification of any materials included in a report to the court
- Criminal activities
- Existence of child abuse or neglect allegations

The CASA volunteer shall be provided with a confidential memo identifying the reason(s) for the dismissal. At the time of a volunteer dismissal, all case materials and notes must be turned into the CASA office immediately.

E - UMCHS Staff CASA Policy

UMCHS staff who serve as a CASA may use their Head Start time to complete the following obligations:

1. Attend the Swearing in Ceremony.
2. Attend required court hearings, including the following: Permanency, Jurisdictional, Reviews and Termination of Parental Rights. **Note: Staff may not attend more than two Court Hearings within a Six month period.**
3. Attend Citizen Review Board (CRB) for their child or children. **Note: Staff may not attend more than two CRB reviews within a one year period.**

All other CASA responsibilities must be done on staff's own volunteer time. Some of these responsibilities include the following, but not limited to: Home visits, School Visits, Child Welfare visits, Health Care Professional visits, Attorney visits, Counselor visits, Adoption Committee and other Professional Community partner meetings.

F. STARTING AND ENDING A CASE

Criteria for Case Appointments: A case in which a child has a pending juvenile court matter involving abuse or neglect may receive Umatilla Morrow CASA services. The Circuit Court Judges appoint the Umatilla Morrow CASA program to the child's case. In turn, the volunteer manager appoints the CASA volunteer to the case. The program cannot accept appointments to cases involving solely delinquency or custody issues.

Volunteer Selection for Appointment: When assigning a volunteer to a particular child/case, CASA staff will take into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of each available volunteer and make a determination as to which individual volunteers would best serve the needs of the child(ren) on the case. All cases are unique and volunteers have varying levels of knowledge, skills and experiences. It is with this in mind that the program will seek to match the right CASA volunteer to the right case.

Wait List: The CASA "Wait List" consists of those cases that have been referred to the program, but due to a lack of volunteers or appropriate volunteers are not assigned a CASA. **Courts, Child Welfare, CRB or concerned Community members can refer a Child to CASA.**

Case Closure: Cases achieve closure when the Circuit Court removes itself and the state from custodial jurisdiction of the child(ren). This may be achieved by the child(ren)'s adoption or legal guardianship, a return to the biological family, the child(ren) reaching the age of majority (18), or by any court order mandating the end of such jurisdiction.

CASA Volunteer Removal: Removal of a CASA from a case may be voluntary at the request of the CASA, involuntary at the request of Umatilla Morrow CASA or the Court, or a result of case closure. Unless it is a result of case closure, Umatilla Morrow CASA will send an email notice notifying the parties that the CASA is no longer assigned to the case.

Courtesy CASAs: Umatilla Morrow CASA, on occasion, will be asked to perform "Courtesy CASA" services. These requests usually come from other CASA programs, parents, foster parents or others associated to a case that relocates to Umatilla or Morrow Counties. A "Courtesy CASA" is often requested in these instances to provide follow-up to a case. Though normally a short-term assignment, Courtesy CASAs still require a court appointment. As Umatilla Morrow CASA wishes to provide safety for all children, the agency will seek to provide Courtesy CASA's whenever possible.

Assigning an Additional Volunteer to a Case: Under certain circumstances, cases may benefit from having an additional volunteer appointed. This may occur, for instance, if the case would benefit from a certain expertise, e.g., bilingual skills. In such a situation, CASA staff would make a determination to appoint a co-CASA.

Transfer of Jurisdiction: If a case is transferred out of the jurisdiction of Umatilla or Morrow County Juvenile Court, the appointment and the involvement of the CASA volunteer ends. Should the volunteer and the CASA program wish the new jurisdiction

to appoint a CASA volunteer; the program will assist the volunteer to communicate with both the court and the CASA program in the new jurisdiction.

Saying Goodbye

CASA Volunteers have a time-limited relationship with the children on their cases. In the process of ending a case, it may be appropriate for a volunteer to make a “goodbye visit” to the child(ren) and family. **Always discuss this first with your CASA supervisor.**

Remember, every case is unique and every relationship is different. Discuss your ideas for future contacts, including the questions of cards and gifts, with your CASA supervisor.

G - ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AGREEMENT

I have received and read the Umatilla Morrow CASA Volunteer Policies and Guidelines. I understand that by signing this agreement and becoming a CASA Volunteer, I am agreeing to abide by these policies and guidelines in good faith and to the best of my ability.

Print your name

Signature

Date