



**Warrick County CASA, INC.  
Volunteer Policies and  
Procedures Manual**

**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates

**FOR CHILDREN**

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**WARRICK COUNTY**

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Dear Volunteer,

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program of Warrick County is pleased to welcome you to this organization. Since 1977, CASA has provided a "Voice in Court" for children in foster care. As a volunteer, you are a critical component in the advocacy efforts of this organization. Your commitment to the philosophy and goals of CASA will help us sustain and maintain a high level of effectiveness and professionalism.

This manual will provide information about some of the basic volunteer policies of Warrick County CASA. All volunteers are expected to respect and follow these policies, including future changes or additions to these policies.

This manual is not a contract; it does not guarantee any fixed terms and conditions of a volunteer's participation in the CASA program. Your service as a volunteer will last only as long as you and CASA mutually agree, though CASA looks forward to a long and mutually beneficial relationship with all our volunteers.

The volunteer program is an integral part of CASA. Your commitment to our policies and procedures will make CASA a stronger and more effective organization. This commitment will also aid you in your advocacy efforts and enable you to provide many children with a sense of permanency and belonging.

We hope your stay with us will be long and mutually satisfactory. We encourage any suggestions you may have for improving our services or volunteer policies and procedures.

Sincerely,

Diane Alexander- Executive Director

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## **Section 1: CASA STANDARDS**

### **History of National CASA/GAL Association**

Judge David W. Soukup, a Juvenile Court Judge, watched as many parties entered and exited the juvenile dependency courtroom, but he never heard anyone speak strictly on behalf of the child.

Inspiration came when Judge Soukup had insufficient information to make a life-changing decision for a

3-year-old girl who had suffered from child abuse. Judge Soukup's idea of training volunteers to speak up in the courtroom on behalf of a child's best interests came to fruition in 1977. The first CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) program was established in Seattle (King County), Washington, and was endorsed as a model for safeguarding a child's rights to a safe and permanent family by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. As the program model continued to grow and develop in other states, the National CASA Association was formed in Seattle, WA in 1984. In 2000, 174,000 children were served by 47,000 volunteers in 900 program offices throughout the country. The CASA network has reached over 2 million children since CASA's inception.

### **History of Indiana CASA Association**

The development of GAL/CASA in Indiana can be attributed in part to the efforts of the Indianapolis Bar Association, the American Bar Association, and the Lilly Endowment through their Law and Child Project. The Project, launched in 1982, focused attention on the statewide need for appointment of trained community volunteers and attorneys in child abuse cases. The 1982 Indiana Children in Need of Services statute did not require the appointment of GAL/CASA advocates in any case. The Project was designed to promote, develop, and implement county CASA programs. Between 1982 and 1988, the Project initiated 26 county CASA programs. In 1989, the Indiana Supreme Court formed the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA, and that office provides all technical support and certification to local programs.

As of 2019, there are CASA volunteer programs in 86 of Indiana's 92 counties, with over 4491 volunteers speaking up for nearly 26,431 children. There are still over 3602 children on waiting lists for volunteers in Indiana.

### **The Warrick County CASA, Inc. Mission Statement**

The Warrick County Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program is a 501c3 program that recruits, screens, and trains volunteer child advocates to work in the court system in collaboration with other key agencies, legal counsel, and community resources to represent the best interests of children in juvenile court proceedings. CASA advocates make recommendations regarding appropriate protective and rehabilitative services necessary to ensure a safe and permanent home for every child adjudicated as a child in need of services within Warrick County.

The Warrick County CASA, Inc. adheres to the *Core Model* of providing screened, trained, and qualified community court appointed volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children and youth who are before the court as a result of abuse or neglect as defined by the state child welfare laws, living at home or in out-of-home care. CASA volunteers advocate for children from birth through the age defined by the state statute (21 years of age in IN) as the limit to youth remaining in care.

## 1.1 CASA Program

1. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. operates under a non-profit organization.
2. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. mission and values are consistent with the National CASA/GAL *Core Model*, adopted by our governing body, and abides by the Guiding Principles which recognize the importance of family preservation and reunification, equity, diversity, inclusion and collaboration.
3. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. is inclusive and actively recruits qualified staff reflective of the children served.
4. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. administers its human resources practices without discrimination based upon age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws.
5. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. is in compliance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Act and publicizes our equal opportunity policy on recruitment materials.
6. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. operates with access to legal counsel.
7. Warrick County CASA, Inc. follows written policies and procedures regarding access to, use of, and release of information about the children it serves to ensure that the confidentiality of children and their families is maintained at all times.
8. Warrick County CASA, Inc. has a written policy to protect confidential information of staff, volunteers, governing body and advisory committee members, and donors.
9. The management and operation of The Warrick County CASA, Inc. assures adequate supervision of CASA volunteers. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. keeps written records on each applicant, volunteer, and case. The program also has written management and personnel policies and procedures, screening requirements, a comprehensive training curriculum, and keeps relevant data on the operation of the program.
10. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. 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.
11. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. has an established procedure to allow the immediate reporting to the court or through the appropriate agency of a situation in which a CASA volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger.
12. The Warrick County CASA, Inc. shall be an inclusive organization whose volunteers, staff, and board members reflect the children they serve and their community in terms of gender, ethnicity, and cultural and socio-economic background.

## 1.2 CASA Volunteer

1. A CASA volunteer is an individual who is at least 21 years of age and has successfully passed the application and screening process (which includes a written application, personal interview, reference and criminal background record checks), has successfully completed the National CASA/GAL Association *Pre-Service Training*, serves under the supervision of the program, and is appointed by the court to advocate for children who come into the court system as a result of abuse or neglect as defined by the state child welfare laws. A volunteer reviews records; facilitates a prompt and thorough review of the case; and interviews appropriate parties in order to make recommendations on what would be in the

best interest of the child.

2. A CASA volunteer has successfully completed a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training that includes instruction on the court and child welfare systems; child abuse and neglect; relevant state and federal laws; permanency planning and family preservation; cultural awareness; and the role and responsibility of a CASA volunteer.
3. A CASA volunteer obtains 12 hours of continuing education annually related to the work of best interest advocacy.
4. A CASA volunteer does not engage in activities which jeopardize the safety of the child, the integrity of the program, or the objectivity of the volunteer; or activities which are likely to result in conflict of interest or expose the program or the volunteer to criminal or civil liability.
5. A CASA volunteer respects the right to privacy by keeping information that would identify parties involved in CASA cases confidential.

## Section 2: VOLUNTEERING AT CASA

### **2.1 Application and Screening Process for Prospective Volunteers**

All prospective volunteers must complete a written application containing information about one's educational background, training, employment history, and experience working with children; provide the names and addresses of three non-relative references; participate in a personal interview with CASA staff; and pass the following background checks: criminal records, dox pox, Safehire, and DCS registry checks, and National Sex Offender Registry Check.

If the prospective volunteer has lived in another state in the past 7 years, the CASA program secures criminal record checks for any county or state not covered by a national criminal background check in which the person has resided for the previous 7 years. The same requirement applies to securing a child abuse registry or child protective services check where permissible by law.

Warrick County CASA, Inc. 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.

Warrick County CASA, Inc. does not accept applicants if they refuse or fail to sign a release of information form or submit the required information necessary for any of the background checks as required by National CASA/GAL *Standards for Local Programs*.

Warrick County CASA, Inc. considers if an applicant is found to have committed a misdemeanor or felony that is unrelated to or would not pose a risk to children and would not negatively impact the credibility of the program, the extent of the rehabilitation since the misdemeanor or felony was committed, as well as other factors that may influence the decision, to accept the applicant as a volunteer.

It is CASA policy to verify information on applications. Acceptance or continuation as a volunteer is dependent on the application being complete and correct.

All volunteers must undergo all of the background checks initially performed at the time of application and every four years throughout the term of their service. Volunteers must immediately inform CASA if at any time they are faced with any criminal charges or child abuse/neglect investigation or charges during the time they are volunteers.

## **2.2 Initial Orientation and Training of Prospective Volunteers**

CASA provides prospective volunteers with an initial 30-hour pre-service training and directions for completing the Mandated Reporter Training\* (“Training Program”), which is a prerequisite to being assigned a case. The purpose of training is to increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of volunteers so they can fulfill the roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer. Attendance at pre-service training is essential to your success as a CASA volunteer.

Pre-service training topics include:

- Roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer
- Court process
- Dynamics of families including mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence and poverty
- Relevant state laws, regulations, and policies
- Relevant federal laws, regulations and policies
- Confidentiality and record keeping practices
- Child development
- Child abuse and neglect
- Permanency planning
- Community agencies and resources available to meet the needs of children and families
- Communication and information gathering
- Effective advocacy and court report writing
- Cultural competency
- Special needs of the children served

Prospective volunteers must attend all of these training sessions. The Training Program is part of the screening process, and acceptance to participate in training does not guarantee the individual will be sworn in as a CASA volunteer.

Upon successful completion of the Training Program and acceptance as a volunteer by CASA, a volunteer will be sworn in as a Court Appointed Special Advocate by a Judge of the Warrick County Courts. Prior to being sworn in and assigned to work on a case, all volunteers must have signed and submitted to the CASA program the following:

- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Volunteer Policies and Procedures Manual
- All required background clearances and references (three non-relative)



## **2.3 Court Observation**

In addition to the 30-hour Training Program, the program requires each volunteer to complete 3 hours of court observation time while court is in session to observe dependency proceedings before appearing in court or assigned a case.

## **2.4 Volunteer Evaluations/Termination of Relationship**

CASA supervisory staff will work closely with the new volunteer for the first months, communicating weekly. At the conclusion of the month, Volunteer Coordinators will meet with the volunteers to provide feedback and elicit feedback from the volunteers to ensure their volunteer experience is successful long-term. Thereafter, CASA will annually evaluate volunteers. CASA expects these evaluations to be helpful in sustaining a long and mutually productive association with each of our volunteers. Volunteers are invited to use the evaluation sessions to discuss areas of concern and to make suggestions about improving the volunteer program.

We reserve the right, however, to determine at any time whether or not an individual's participation continues to serve CASA's best interests. If CASA determines that its best interests are not being served, in its sole discretion, it may work with a volunteer to develop a plan to improve their efforts or may terminate the relationship immediately.

Grounds for dismissal of an advocate include, but are not limited to:

- Violation of program policies and procedures, court rules or law
- Failure to effectively carry out assigned duties
- Breach of confidentiality
- Failure to visit the child regularly
- Misrepresentation of factual information to CASA staff, the Court or parties to the case
- Failure to report significant information to the Court
- Failing to disclose a conflict of interest or conflict of interest that cannot be resolved
- Initiation of ex-parte communication with the Court
- Existence of child abuse or neglect allegations
- Falsification of application materials or misrepresentation of facts during the screening process
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol while performing volunteer duties
- Gross misconduct or insubordination
- 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
- Failure to complete training or obtain required 12 hours of in-service training
- Providing legal advice or therapeutic services to a party to the case

## **2.5 Volunteer Exit**

We hope you will find a rewarding and enjoyable volunteer experience with CASA; however, we realize that for one reason or another, sometimes the volunteer relationship must end. If you voluntarily decide to leave the program, please give as much notice as possible in writing to your Volunteer Coordinator or the Executive Director. Written notice shall include the reason for resignation and the last day the volunteer will work their case, along with the volunteer's signature and the date the notice is being given.

If CASA ends your relationship, we will contact all parties involved in the case and discuss the next steps to ensure the best interest of the children you were serving are met.

All records must be returned within 10 days of the last day of working the case. If files are not returned within 10 days, a second request will be made. If files are not returned within 10 days of the second request and the volunteer has not made contact with the office to schedule the return of records, a certified letter should be sent and the green card confirming receipt of the certified mail should be kept in the file.

### **Exit Interviews**

Upon leaving CASA's service, you may be asked for your comments concerning your period of volunteerism. Your input helps us to evaluate our policies, procedures, work environment, and other variables affecting your volunteer experience with us.

## **2.6 Volunteer Status**

### ***Active:***

An active volunteer is currently appointed to and working a case. Active volunteers maintain all background clearances and renew clearances every four years. Additionally, active volunteers obtain 12 hours of in-service training annually.

### ***Inactive participant:***

An inactive participant is a volunteer who is currently not assigned to a case, but continues to meet all annual continuing training hours (12), maintains quarterly contact with their supervisor, and attends all mandatory volunteer training/in-services. Generally, inactive volunteers are available for appointment to new cases, unless alternatively agreed upon with their supervisor. Volunteers may stay inactive for a period of up to 12 months.

### ***Ineligible:***

An ineligible volunteer is currently not eligible to be assigned to a case due to being out of compliance with either or both the background clearance requirements or continuing training hours requirement. If the volunteer remains ineligible for greater than 6 months, the volunteer will be asked to complete training as determined by CASA supervisory staff. If a volunteer remains ineligible for greater than 12 months, the volunteer will need to complete the initial Training Program (30 hours) before being reinstated as an active volunteer.

***Dismissed:***

A dismissed volunteer is a volunteer who has been asked to leave the CASA program. Any volunteers dismissed from the program will be considered ineligible for future reinstatement as a CASA volunteer.

***Leave of Absence:***

A volunteer may request a leave of absence from all duties associated with Warrick County CASA, Inc. at any time. The length of leave may be up to 6 months from the beginning date of leave. After 6 months, the volunteer will be requested to resume status as an inactive participant (see above).

**2.7 Transfer of Volunteers**

A qualified CASA volunteer who transfers from another CASA program must complete the full application and screening process, and at a minimum, training regarding the local court, laws, program policies and procedures, investigation and court report writing.

**2.8 Reactivation of Volunteers**

Warrick County CASA, Inc. will determine training necessary for volunteers who have been either inactive for a period greater than 12 months or ineligible for a period greater than 6 months to become reactivated as a CASA volunteer.

**Section 3: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF A COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE**

**3.1 CASA Volunteer Job Description**

**Role of the Court Appointed Special Advocate Volunteer**

A CASA is a trained volunteer child advocate sworn in by the court to represent the best interests of children who are abused and neglected and are active cases in the court system. The CASA investigates the child's circumstances, provides fact-based information, and makes recommendations to the court while becoming a source of support for the child.

The Warrick County CASA, Inc. is independent, but works closely with the court, DCS, counsel, and other professionals involved in a child's case. CASA volunteers work under the direct supervision of the Executive Director and Volunteer Coordinators to further the child's welfare and to expedite the case through the system. A CASA has regular, in-person contact with children sufficient to have in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court.

A CASA's ultimate goal is to move a child out of temporary placement – usually within the foster care system – into a safe and permanent home. This could mean a return to the parent's care, adoption, the appointment of a legal guardian, or some other permanent living arrangement that satisfies the court and meets the child's needs

**Responsibilities of the Court Appointed Special Advocate Volunteer**

CASA volunteer best interest advocacy is driven by the guiding principle that children grow and develop best with their family of origin if that can be safely achieved. CASA volunteers serve

children from birth through the age defined by state statute (up to 21 years of age) as the limit to youth remaining in care.

CASA volunteers advocate for children's best interest through the following responsibilities, depending upon the needs of each individual case:

1. Obtain first-hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by conducting an ongoing review of all relevant documents and records and interviewing the child, parents, social workers, teachers and other relevant persons to gather information about the child's situation.
  - This "independent" assessment is conducted under the guidance of and through regular communication with CASA supervisory staff.
  - After meeting with CASA supervisory staff, the next step is generally for the CASA volunteer to make an appointment to meet the Family Case Manager (FCM) and review relevant Department of Children Services (DCS) case files. There are specific documents that are considered crucial to the CASA volunteer's role as investigator. They are:
    - (1) Verified petition;
    - (2) Child permanency plan;
    - (3) Family service plan;
    - (4) Follow-up reports required of DCS;
    - (5) Any police reports;
    - (6) Any medical, psychological or psychiatric reports;
    - (7) Any relevant educational records; and
    - (8) Any photographs or X-rays that have been made of the child.
  - The next step is to make an appointment to visit the caregiver's home and meet the child and their caregivers.
  - Then, the CASA volunteer schedules direct interviews with the parents, social workers, relatives, school personnel and others having knowledge of the facts of the situation. This is crucial to getting a clear picture of the child's life. The CASA volunteer is encouraged to obtain additional educational, medical, and other records as they pertain to the child, where permissible by law, and/or with the proper release of information.
  - The CASA volunteer will need to determine if a permanent plan has been created and whether appropriate services, including reasonable efforts, are being provided to the child and the family.
  - The CASA volunteer should continue to seek new information throughout the time the child is assigned to the volunteer and should have regular in-person contact with the child, twice every thirty (30) days at a minimum.
  - One In-person visit contact should take place where the child lives to ensure in-depth knowledge of the child's environment for informed recommendations to the court. Other visits can occur at school and during visits with parents.
  - An exception to monthly in-person contact may be granted at the discretion of CASA supervisory staff; however, the decision to permit less frequent in-person contact shall be documented as to the justification for and reasonableness of the exception.

2. Formulate recommendations in accordance with the best interest of the child.
  - The CASA volunteer is to confer with the CASA supervisory staff and utilize many factors in formulating this recommendation to the Court, including:
    - (1) Current age and sense of time
    - (2) Level of maturity
    - (3) Culture and ethnicity
    - (4) Degree of attachment to family members including siblings
    - (5) What situation would best provide continuity, consistency and a sense of belonging and identity.
  - Seek cooperative solutions. The CASA volunteer may function as a mediator among conflicting parties to facilitate the resolution of problems and to foster positive steps toward achieving permanence for the child.
3. Provide timely submission of contact logs regarding the case in Optima. This is the program's case management software and confer regularly with the Volunteer Coordinator staff to seek guidance and provide new case information. In each case, the assigned Volunteer Coordinator and CASA volunteer will communicate at least once a month so as to update records and contact logs and participate together in scheduled case conferences.
4. CASA volunteers prepare written court reports for all permanency review hearings. These reports are based upon the information gathered by the volunteer, which supports the recommendations about the child's needs and best interests that are included in the report.
5. Appear at all regularly scheduled hearings to represent the child's best interest, ensure that all relevant facts are presented, and provide testimony when necessary.
6. Make recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child and family and recommendations concerning permanency.
7. Monitor implementation of service plans and court orders and assess whether court-ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and whether review hearings should be scheduled with the Court.
  - The Court should be made aware of any failure to provide court-ordered services or of the family's failure to participate in those services.
8. Inform the Court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by court rules or statute.
9. Advocate for the child's best interests in the community, including interfacing with mental health, educational and other community systems, to assure the child's needs are being met in all areas.
10. Collaborate and coordinate with legal, child welfare, and other partners to ensure service provision that is in the child's best interests.

11. Participate in all scheduled case reviews with program supervisory staff.
12. Maintain complete records in Optima about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances.
13. Report any incident of child abuse or neglect, or any situation in which the CASA volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger to the appropriate authorities and CASA supervisory staff.

### **3.2 Time Commitment**

Volunteers are expected to devote the necessary time to serve as a Court Appointed Special Advocate. While there is no minimum or maximum amount, CASA staff encourages volunteers to spend 5-10 hours per month volunteering. In an effort to assure continuity and effective advocacy for the children assigned to the volunteer, advocates are expected to commit to a minimum one case, and stay committed to that case and child until permanency is achieved.

### **3.3 Casework Files and Reports**

All volunteers must maintain complete and up-to-date records in Optima on each assigned case, as defined during initial volunteer training. Notes must be clear, accurate, and devoid of slang and jargon.

Reports should present an unbiased, factual and historical record and should be free of subjective editorial comments. Each volunteer must keep abreast of all deadlines and timetables involved in cases. Reports must be turned in on time. If volunteers are unable to meet a deadline, they must notify the assigned Volunteer Coordinator immediately.

Upon case closure, or resignation or removal of a volunteer from a case, the volunteer must turn in all case files, including notes and materials to their Volunteer Coordinator.

Case Notes and Documentation: Volunteers are required to keep case notes and records of advocacy activities and proceedings of their assigned case in Optima. This documentation is to be inputted into Optima weekly or as the activities occur.

Court Reports: Volunteers are required to submit completed court reports to their CASA Volunteer Coordinator no less than 14 days prior to the court date. The CASA volunteer is responsible to discuss all recommendations concerning the case with their supervisor. CASA Volunteer Coordinator may alter the report or recommendations only with knowledge of the appointed CASA volunteer. The CASA Volunteer Coordinator supervisor is responsible for submitting the final court report to all parties to the case. All efforts between the CASA volunteer and CASA supervisor need to be made to come to an agreement on recommendations. If there is no agreement, the CASA Volunteer Coordinator and CASA volunteer will work with the Executive Director to resolve differences<sup>1</sup>.

### **3.4 On-Going Volunteer Training**

Warrick County CASA believes that proper training is an essential ingredient for success as a volunteer. All volunteers are required to participate in 12 hours of additional in-service enrichment opportunities each year. The number of in-service training hours required of newly trained volunteers will be adjusted (or prorated) depending on the time of the year the volunteer is trained. CASA provides a schedule of training sessions that are designed to supplement the basic training program and fulfill this mandated requirement.

Additionally, volunteers are encouraged to attend relevant workshops on their own and make use of eLearning opportunities offered by the National CASA/GAL Association. To encourage a diverse learning experience, no more than four hours of continuing education should be completed by reading books/articles or viewing videos.

### **3.5 Confidentiality: Your Responsibility as a Court Appointed Special Advocate**

Warrick County CASA volunteers are committed to respecting the child's right to privacy by maintaining confidentiality in a manner that is consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and National CASA/GAL Association Standards. All volunteers must acknowledge and comply with this Confidentiality Policy prior to taking a case and any subsequent cases.

The guidelines set out below govern circumstances in which the CASA volunteer requests or receives information. However, these guidelines cannot cover every possible situation, which may arise. Any questions and/or concerns the CASA volunteer has regarding confidentiality or the application of this policy should be discussed with the Volunteer Coordinator. These questions and/or concerns will be resolved on a case-by-case basis.

#### General responsibility to protect confidential information about the parties to a case

Warrick County CASA expects volunteers to respect children and families' rights to privacy in regard to personal information. No information should be released to family or friends of parties involved in a case without the express consent of the person whose information will be disclosed.

Warrick County CASA volunteers are responsible for maintaining confidentiality of all information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a party to their case, another program case, another volunteer, or staff member. Volunteers are not authorized to solicit other persons outside the CASA program to aid them with specific duties outlined in the CASA volunteer position description.

A CASA volunteer becomes an Officer of the court upon assignment to a case and their court order details the confidential information to which they have access. Any information pertaining to the individual families or children that CASA volunteers receive in the discharge of their duties is confidential and must not be used for any purpose other than advocating for the child(ren) in the cases to which they are assigned. This information must not be discussed with anyone except the following:

- The Court and as otherwise ordered by the Court;
- Child's Guardian ad Litem;

- CASA program staff;
- Department of Children Services (DCS) Caseworker (FCM), Supervisor, and Solicitor; and
- Others whose request for access to confidential information is permitted by statute or court (e.g. counsel for the parties when appropriate).

If it is necessary to obtain any further privileged/confidential information about someone who is directly related to the case but is not the child, the CASA volunteer may need to obtain from that person a written release of information, which allows the professional, hospital or treatment center to discuss the matter with the CASA volunteer.

While a person may sign a release allowing the CASA volunteer to obtain confidential information, they may not authorize disclosure to other parties to the case and/or their attorneys. The CASA volunteer shall review the signed release form very carefully and if the volunteer has questions regarding the form, seek guidance from the Volunteer Coordinator.

#### Expectation of the parties' confidentiality.

Unlike doctor-patient or lawyer-client relationships, there is no privilege of absolute confidentiality for information provided to CASA. In fact, it is CASA's job to transmit the information it collects to the Court. It therefore becomes important to inform all parties and sources of information to a case of this fact. At the beginning of a case, CASA should carefully inform all parties and sources of information regarding what records would be maintained about them and what information will be shared, with whom, and under what circumstances. CASA volunteers are required to communicate about the confidential relationship and limitations of confidentiality as it pertains to the CASA-child relationship at the beginning of their appointment to the case.

#### Internal safeguard of confidential information and records.

In order to ensure maintenance of confidentiality, Warrick County CASA has adopted certain procedures for volunteers to follow regarding case records. In the CASA office, all copies of letters and reports concerning a case are uploaded electronically to Optima, the program's case management software.

Volunteers who keep case files outside the CASA office (either in paper or electronic format) must take the steps to ensure that the files are maintained in such a way to prevent inadvertent disclosure to persons without a right to see them. In addition, volunteers must ensure that they have a private place for phone conversations about their CASA duties. Volunteers must return their entire case files to the program within two weeks of case closure.

No discussions of any individual or family situation of any kind are to be held in hallways, elevators or other public places. At any group case review held for consultation or review, all parties should be referred to by first names and last initial only (e.g. Mary S., Jose R.). Full names must be used in CASA case supervision and staff meetings in order to ensure that the staff is fully aware of all cases for which they are responsible.

Violation of confidentiality can result in the discrediting of the Warrick County CASA program and may be cause for immediate dismissal. Volunteers must sign a statement of confidentiality upon



acceptance of each case.

### Duty to Disclose

CASA volunteers are mandated reporters. Therefore, in some situations, CASA volunteers and staff may have a duty to immediately disclose information. This arises primarily in the areas of (1) child abuse or neglect or (2) harm to self or others.

1. Child abuse or neglect:

CASA is required to report any case of suspected child abuse or neglect to the Department of Child Services (DCS) immediately by calling Hotline at 1-800-800-5556. If a CASA volunteer makes a report to Hotline, they are to immediately inform the Volunteer Coordinator or Executive Director of the call and the suspected abuse or neglect.

2. Harm to self or others:

If you learn someone may harm their self or others, you have a duty to disclose this information immediately through the following avenues:

- the police, if for instance the child indicates that they have a weapon, or access to one, and intends to use it; (911)
- the 24-hour/7-day DCS hotline at: 1-800-800-5556
- the Children and Youth caseworker, if the worker is not available, speak to the Children and Youth caseworker's supervisor
- your Volunteer Coordinator or Executive Director

## **3.6 Responsibility and Relationship to the Court**

Warrick County CASA has a responsibility to operate with the highest standards of ethics and accountability. CASA volunteers take an oath of office upon completion of the Training Program and shall be held accountable to fulfill the duties of CASA. This program has been provided a position of trust in the courtroom, therefore as appointed parties to the case, CASA volunteers must consistently demonstrate high standards in all of their conduct both in and outside of the courtroom. CASA volunteers must abide by the Indiana State Statute, the Juvenile Act, the rules of the County Courts and Federal laws as they pertain to Court Appointed Special Advocate.

In Indiana, CASA volunteers serve as a "party to the case". The "party to the case" model permits the volunteer to make recommendations to the court. Therefore, it is critical that the CASA volunteer formulates an independent assessment of the case through having regular contact with the child and obtaining information from the child and important players in the child's life.

Recommendations regarding the child's placement and needed services shall be supported by the volunteer's research and observations or other primary source documentation the volunteer has gathered.

## **Section 4: VOLUNTEER SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

## **4.1 On-Going Case Supervision**

Warrick County CASA assigns each volunteer a Volunteer Coordinator to provide support appropriate to the volunteer's needs and complexity of the case assignment. The Volunteer Coordinator is easily accessible and provides timely and thorough guidance to the volunteer. During the first month, the Volunteer Coordinator will communicate with the volunteer weekly to provide enhanced guidance and support. Thereafter, the Volunteer Coordinator will be available to meet/communicate with the volunteer as needed, no less than one time per month. Volunteer Coordinators will ensure that case progress is reviewed on a regular basis and will verify accurate completion of all written case records. CASA volunteers are encouraged to take advantage of Child and Family team meetings(CFTM) or case conferences to ask questions, address concerns, and discuss anticipated recommendations for upcoming court hearings.

## **4.2 Case Assignments**

A new CASA volunteer will be assigned to one case. However, a volunteer may be assigned an additional case if they indicate a willingness to carry multiple cases, and CASA supervisory staff feels that the CASA volunteer would be capable of managing multiple cases adequately. When assigning cases, the nature and difficulty of the tasks assigned, the work and time required to serve each child or to complete each task, past and current performance, and any additional responsibilities held by the volunteer, will be considered.

A CASA volunteer will generally not be assigned to more than two cases at a time. An exception may be granted at the discretion of the Executive Director. However, the decision to permit a higher caseload shall be documented, with justification for and reasonableness of the exception. A volunteer may not be assigned to more than three cases for any reason or exception.

## **4.3 Delaying Case Assignment**

Unless an exception is granted prior to acceptance into the initial Training Program, volunteers who successfully complete the initial Training Program are expected to accept a case assignment within one month after being sworn in. Following the month, the volunteer will be considered an inactive participant (see Section 2.6 Volunteer Status).

## **4.4 Case Evaluation**

Volunteer Coordinator or Executive Director will conduct an in-person review of the volunteer's work at case closure, or annually for cases lasting longer than 12 months. This evaluation will consider case highlights, actions taken by the volunteer, volunteer strengths, and opportunities for improvement, and will be documented in writing and kept in the volunteer's file.

## **4.5 Case Closure**

Removal of a CASA volunteer from a case may be voluntary at the request of the CASA, involuntary at the request of the Court or CASA program, or a result of case closure when dependency is terminated. The Judge must sign a motion to withdraw for a CASA volunteer to be removed from a case unless it is a result of case closure. If the CASA volunteer is removed from the case, whether it be voluntary or involuntary prior to termination of dependency, the

CASA program will notify parties to the case, other professionals, and family members involved in the child's life that the CASA volunteer no longer has the authority to obtain information related to the child. A copy of the motion will be retained in the case file.

After a CASA volunteer is legally removed from a case, Warrick County CASA is no longer responsible for the volunteer's involvement with that child and family. Further contact is at the sole discretion of the child and family. If the child and family does not want any contact with the CASA volunteer, then the volunteer should not pursue the relationship. If the volunteer chooses to remain in contact with the child and family, they do so at their own discretion and risk. Any continuation of the relationship between the volunteer and the child is not in any way endorsed or affiliated with Warrick County CASA.

It is Warrick County CASA stance that CASA volunteers have a time-limited relationship with the children they serve. As a case nears termination of dependency and court involvement, it is our suggestion that the volunteer arrange a "final goodbye visit" to communicate to the child and family that you are no longer needed since they are now cared for well enough to be out of the system. We understand that each case is unique and every relationship is different, and will help you discuss the best way to facilitate this closure.

## **Section 5: SAFETY POLICY & PROCEDURES**

When performing your CASA volunteer duties, always use common sense. Never put yourself in a situation that feels unsafe. Please call your Volunteer Coordinator whenever you have questions, concerns, or need advice. Your safety is important to us, so please do not take risks.

### **5.1 Field Visits**

Warrick County CASA's safety procedures for field visits have been established in order to give volunteers guidelines on avoiding possible harmful situations. The following suggestions for ways to protect yourself have proven to be extremely effective with our volunteers:

- Dress in a fashion which is casual and not conspicuous.
- Avoid exposing expensive jewelry or other items. Keep jewelry hidden under shirts or blouses. No volunteer should travel with large sums of money.
- Before going in the field, verify the appropriate route with your Volunteer Coordinator already familiar with the area.
- Upon approaching an area or a building, if you do not feel totally comfortable because of suspicious people loitering, darkness in the hallways, etc., do not enter the area or building. Another visit can be made at another time, and if necessary, arrangements made to have someone accompany you.
- A neutral location, such as a local fast food restaurant or CASA office, can be used as an alternate meeting location if the home area or building does not feel safe.

### **5.2 Personal Involvement with Children and Families**

Warrick County CASA's effectiveness and standing in court depends on volunteers maintaining professional relationships with children and families. Volunteers and staff are expected to refrain from becoming personally involved with CASA children and families. If they do become personally involved, volunteers may be removed from a case at the discretion of the Executive

Director.

***Prohibited Activities:***

In addition to those actions and activities prohibited elsewhere in this manual and during training, volunteers are not allowed to engage in the following:

- Taking a child to their home or any home other than the child's
- Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling
- Making placement arrangements for the child
- Giving money to the child, the child's family or caregiver
- Giving expensive gifts to the child, the child's family or caregiver

### **5.3 Child Safety**

- Volunteers are expected not to put themselves in situations where they are completely alone with a child. If a volunteer arrives for a visit with the child and finds no caregiver present, the volunteer is not to enter the home.
- When visiting with children, it is advisable that the CASA volunteer remain in visible contact with another adult, for example, if visiting with a child in their home or foster home, conversation can take place outside in the yard or in another room with the door open. Please note that CASA encourages volunteers to seek a private space to speak with the child, but that space should be in sight of a caregiver or in a public setting, such as an outdoor space.
- CASA volunteers are encouraged to limit time spent in the child's bedroom. The CASA volunteer shall ask the child's caregiver to view their bedroom but shall not enter the bedroom alone with the child.
- Under no circumstances is a CASA volunteer to address sexual abuse issues with a child unless a trained professional caseworker is present or the child's counselor in a pre-approved visit.

If the child discloses abuse to you, **DO**:

- Believe the child
- Control your emotions
- Encourage the child to talk with professionals
- Document anything the child says to you
- Provide the child with support
- Reassure the child that they did the right thing by disclosing and that the abuse was not their fault
- Call Hotline: 1-800-800-5556
- Give the child and family members time to deal with their emotions
- Work with the professionals as requested and needed
- Recommend no contact with the

perpetrator If the child discloses abuse to you,

**DON'T**:

- Conduct your own investigation
- Interrogate the child
- Record or videotape the child
- Force the child to talk
- Require the child to tell others

- Ask why or challenge the child's honesty
  - Try to change the child's mind
  - Touch the child without asking permission
  - Make any promises to the child (you will have to call Hotline to make a report)
- Be sensitive to the way children interpret physical contact. All physical contact should be gentle and appropriate. Children have the right to refuse physical contact.
- Whenever you are in the company of a child, ensuring their physical and emotional safety is a large part of your responsibility.

## 5.4 Recognizing Suspected Child Abuse

Warrick County CASA recognizes that mandated reporter training is necessary for volunteers to recognize child abuse and understand how to report it. Therefore, all volunteers will be required to participate in the training as part of the initial Training Program and every five years thereafter. Listed below are the categories of Child abuse. CASA volunteers are required by law to report suspected child abuse as a mandated reporter.

Categories of Child Abuse:

- Bodily injury
- Serious mental injury
- Sexual abuse or exploitation
- Serious physical neglect
- Likelihood of bodily injury or sexual abuse
- Medical child abuse (also known as Munchausen by Proxy)
- Per se definitions:
  - Physical violence that endangers the child
  - Restraining or confining the child
  - Shaking a child under one year old
  - Striking a child under one year old
  - Interfering with the breathing of a child
  - Having a child present at a meth lab
  - Leaving the child in the care of a sexual offender
- Engaging a child in a severe form of trafficking in persons or sex trafficking (includes sex and labor trafficking)

If you suspect child abuse, you must immediately report it (referenced in Section 3.5).

To make a report:

1. Call HotLine at 1-800-800-5556

When making a report of suspected child abuse or general child well-being concerns, it is important to provide as much information as possible. The below list will give you a general idea of what information trained specialists at ChildLine will ask you for:

- Name and physical description of the child
- Age or approximate age range of the child
- Name, home address, and telephone number of legal guardian or parent of the child
- Name or physical description of suspected child abuse perpetrator
- Home address and telephone number of suspected child abuse perpetrator
- Suspected perpetrator's relationship to the child
- Description of the suspected injury to the child
- Where the incident took place
- Any concern for the child's immediate safety
- Your relationship to the child
- Your contact information

## **5.5 Transportation Policy**

Warrick County CASA does not require, nor do we recommend that volunteers transport children under any circumstances. If you do decide to transport the children, you are doing so at your own risk.

Volunteers within the Warrick County CASA program do not transport children to their parents' homes, visitations, therapy and/or appointments with physicians, dentists or other service providers. It is the responsibility of the case worker within the Department of Child Services (DCS) to arrange transportation for the necessary appointments.

If you choose to transport a child or children, you do so at your own risk. Warrick County CASA will assume no responsibility for your actions.

## **5.6 Travel Policies: Automobile Use and Business Expenses**

Volunteers will be required to use their automobile on all CASA business. Mileage can be reimbursed (as long as funds are available and are subject to change) or they can be considered an in-kind donation to the organization and the volunteer can choose to itemize this expense for tax purposes accordingly. Volunteers are responsible for complying with all state laws regarding operation of motor vehicles, maintaining current liability insurance coverage and a valid Driver's License. Any accident occurring while conducting CASA business must be reported immediately to the Executive Director.

## **Section 6: CASA RELATIONS AND AGENCY POLICIES**

Ultimate responsibility for all CASA cases rests with the Executive Director and CASA supervisory staff. As a volunteer, however, you too represent CASA, and what you do reflects on the organization. Always conduct yourself in a way that reflects favorably on CASA. Volunteers must comply with all rules and policies. CASA may change these rules and policies when warranted, at its discretion.

## **6.1 Accommodating Persons with Disabilities Policy**

Warrick County CASA is committed to complying fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and ensuring equal opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities. Pre-service inquiries are made regarding only an applicant's ability to perform the essential functions of the position. Reasonable accommodation is available to all disabled volunteers in situations in which their disability affects the performance of job functions. All selection decisions are based on the merits of the situation in accordance with defined criteria, not the disability of the individual. CASA is also committed not to discriminate against any qualified volunteers because they are related to or associated with a person with a disability. CASA will follow any state or local law that provides individuals with disabilities greater protection than the ADA.

## **6.2 Equal Employment Opportunity**

It is Warrick County CASA's policy to provide Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) to all volunteers and applicants for advocacy without regard to age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws. Our EEO policy applies to all areas of advocacy, including recruitment and selection, training and development, awards and recognition, termination, and recreational and social activities.

CASA sustains these principles by ensuring decisions affecting your advocacy are made based on your individual demonstrated abilities. Effective utilization of qualified, available volunteers requires more than just a statement of policy.

All volunteer recruitment materials will state "CASA is an Equal Opportunity Employer."

## **6.3 Filing of Discrimination Complaints to the Office of Civil Rights**

Warrick County CASA is required to ensure all program staff, volunteers, and board members are provided with the following information in order to file complaints of discrimination with the Federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR). A discrimination complaint may be related to a claim to have been denied the benefits of, excluded from participation in, subjected to discrimination under, or denied employment in connection with any program or activity, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or age.

The information below is to assist you in providing guidance regarding the proper steps to file complaints of discrimination with the Federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Formal complaints should be filed as soon as possible (under some civil rights laws you only have 180 days after the incident to file a complaint; others, such as the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 and the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, provide a year).

Information about applicable laws, complaint forms, and the investigative process is available at the website for the OCR: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ocr>. To file a civil rights complaint with OCR, the aggrieved person(s) must complete a Complaint Verification Form (download from the OCR website) and send the form to:

Office of Justice  
Programs Office for

Civil Rights  
810 7th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C.  
20531

After receiving the letter of complaint, OCR will make the determination if an investigation will be initiated. OCR will contact the complainant as well as the agency in question.

#### **6.4 Working Environment and Conflict of Interest Policy**

CASA endeavors to promote a comfortable and productive working environment for all volunteers. In keeping with this policy, sexual, racial, religious, ethnic, or other kinds of harassment of, or by volunteers is a violation of CASA policy and will not be tolerated. We expect volunteers to treat each other and CASA staff with respect. Please let us know if you experience any difficulties in this regard.

CASA volunteers are required to follow the organization's conflict of interest policy.

##### ***Conflict of Interest:***

Each volunteer is expected to work for the best interest of CASA's mission at all times. Each volunteer has an obligation to avoid any activity, agreement, business investment or interest, or other situation that could create the appearance of or be construed as a conflict with the agency's best interests or as an interference with the volunteer's duty to serve the agency and/or its clients to the best of their ability.

These actions include, but are not limited to:

- Using position for private gain.
- Giving preferential treatment to any person.
- Losing complete independence or impartiality.
- Making a CASA decision outside official channels.
- Having a direct or indirect financial or personal interest that conflicts substantially, or appears to conflict substantially, with the volunteer's duties and responsibilities.

A CASA volunteer shall not be related to any parties involved in a specific case, or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest.

##### **Personal Gifts, Entertainment and Favors:**

A volunteer will not seek, solicit or accept, directly or indirectly for their self any gifts, gratuity, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value from a person(s) who:

- Has or is seeking to obtain, contractual or other business or financial relations with CASA.
- Conducts operations or activities that are regulated by CASA.



- Has interests that may be affected by the performance or nonperformance of the volunteer's official duties.

**Disclosure of Conflict of Interest:**

Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can affect the program's good standing in the community and the ability to fulfill its mission. Volunteers shall disclose any relationships and/or interest which may present a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest as soon as they arise to their Volunteer Coordinator or the Executive Director.

Should any volunteer not disclose a conflict of interest prior to the act then disciplinary action may be taken, up to and including dismissal.

## **6.5 Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policy**

Warrick County CASA, Inc. will not tolerate unlawful discrimination and expressly prohibits any form of unlawful harassment on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws. CASA is committed to an environment free from all forms of discrimination and harassment in which all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. Each individual has a right to work in a professional atmosphere that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits discriminating practices and conduct that can be considered harassing, coercive or disruptive, including sexual harassment. It is therefore the expectation that all relationships among individuals associated with CASA be business-like and free of bias and prejudice. Illegal harassment and improper interference with the ability of individuals to perform their duties is prohibited.

CASA's policy against harassment applies to employees and non-employees, including volunteers. Each employee and non-employee is responsible for contributing to a harassment-free environment, and CASA management is strictly responsible for maintaining an atmosphere free of discrimination and harassment, sexual or otherwise. Reporting of all perceived incidents of harassment is required as outlined below.

Retaliation against any individual who reports or participates in the investigation of a report of harassment is prohibited. Retaliation in violation of this policy is grounds for termination of the volunteer relationship.

### ***Definition and Prohibited Conduct***

**Sexual Harassment:** While it is not easy to define precisely what types of conduct might constitute sexual harassment, examples of prohibited behavior include, without limitation, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, obscene gestures, displaying sexually graphic materials, sending sexually explicit email or voice mail, and other unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, such as uninvited touching of a sexual nature or sexually-related comments.

Depending upon the circumstances, the conduct can also include sexual or offensive conversation or joking, commenting about a volunteer's or another individual's physical appearance, conversation about one's own or someone else's sex life, teasing or other conduct directed toward a person because of their gender which is sufficiently severe or pervasive to

create a hostile work environment.

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, physical, or visual conduct of a sexual nature may constitute sexual harassment when:

Submission to or rejection of such advances, requests or conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a case assignment or as the basis for assignment decisions affecting that volunteer.

- (a) Such advances, requests or conduct have the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a volunteer's work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or sexually offensive work environment to the extent that it also affects their psychological well-being.

Other Unlawful Harassment: It is difficult to define precisely what conduct constitutes "other unlawful harassment." However, prohibited conduct includes slurs or epithets, threats, derogatory comments, unwelcome jokes, teasing, touching, abusing and other kinds of unwelcome verbal or physical conduct that is based upon age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws.

### ***Mandatory Reporting of Discrimination and/or Harassment***

If you observe or experience any discrimination or harassment based on your age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws, or believe that you have been treated in a discriminatory manner, promptly report the incident to the Executive Director. If you believe it would be inappropriate to discuss the matter with the Executive Director, you may bypass the Executive Director and report the concern directly to the President of the Board. Your complaint will be kept confidential to the maximum extent possible and no retaliation will be taken against you for lodging a complaint.

### ***Conduct by Non-Employees, Including Volunteers***

This policy extends to conduct of non-employees which affects employees and non-employees, including volunteers, while they are working. Consequently, conduct by clients, vendors, family members of clients, or any other individual, which, if conducted by an employee, would be in violation of this policy, will not be tolerated. This policy requires volunteers to immediately report such offensive conduct to the Executive Director or to the President of the Board.

### ***Confidential Complaint Investigation Procedures***

A complaint will be investigated discreetly, impartially, and promptly. It is coordinated by an appropriate administrator, and will normally begin promptly after the complaint is received. The matter will be resolved in a fair and timely manner. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent permitted by the circumstances. Any volunteer who violates this policy will face termination of the volunteer relationship with CASA.

Refer to Section 6.3 for the process to file complaints of unlawful discrimination with the Office of Civil Rights.

### ***Retaliation Prohibited***

CASA prohibits any form of retaliation against any volunteer for filing a bona fide complaint under this policy or for assisting in a complaint investigation. However, if, after investigating any complaint of harassment or unlawful discrimination, the Agency determines that a complaint is not bona fide, was not made in good faith or that a volunteer has provided false information regarding a complaint of harassment, the volunteer may face the possibility of termination of the volunteer relationship with CASA.

### **Policy Against Violence**

CASA prohibits any acts or threats of violence at any time against its clients, visitors, volunteers or employees by any individuals on the premises of CASA, or while such individual is engaged in CASA's business on or off CASA's premises.

Volunteers are expected to warn their appropriate CASA staff member(s) of any suspicious workplace activity, situations, or incidents that they observe or know about that involve employees, other volunteers, former volunteers or employees, clients, or visitors and that appear suspicious or problematic. This would include, for example, threats of violence, aggressive conduct, offensive acts, threatening or offensive comments or remarks about firearms, weapons or the like. Reports will be held in confidence, to the maximum extent possible. CASA will not condone any form of retaliation against any employee or volunteer for making a report in good faith under this policy. Physically hostile conduct or threats, regardless of how transmitted, towards employees, volunteers, clients or visitors are prohibited. Such conduct should be immediately reported to a supervisor or the Executive Director. Any volunteer engaged in such conduct will face termination of their volunteer relationship with CASA.

## **6.6 Substance Abuse**

Warrick County CASA is a substance-free work environment. Warrick County CASA prohibits the use, sale, purchase, transfer, receipt or possession of alcohol, drugs, or controlled substances on or in CASA premises and vehicles or while performing advocate duties.

## **6.7 Firearms and Weapons Safety**

The possession of firearms, dangerous weapons or explosives on the premises of CASA or while engaged in the duties or functions as a CASA volunteer is prohibited. All weapons, firearms, and ammunition must be safely secured and locked away in the volunteer's car when visiting with a child and remain inaccessible at all times to a child when in the CASA volunteer's presence.

Prohibited weapons include any form of weapon or explosive restricted under local, state, or federal regulation. This includes all firearms, knives over three inches in length, or other weapons covered by law. Legal chemical dispensing devices, such as pepper spray, which are sold for personal protection shall also remain safely secured and not accessible to the child.

**Volunteers who violate this policy will be subject to disciplinary actions, up to and including termination.**

## **6.8 Grievance Policy**

Misunderstandings or disagreements may arise in any organization. Warrick County CASA values and wishes to promote an amiable and cooperative environment. Our open door policy is reflective of our commitment to our values and to providing you with the best possible working conditions. Warrick County CASA encourages an open and direct atmosphere where concerns, suggestions, and questions can be discussed.

When problems continue where volunteers believe action is necessary beyond open discussion, the following steps should be followed:

1. A volunteer should discuss a grievance(s) with their immediate supervisor. If the grievance is regarding the immediate supervisor, the matter shall be discussed with the Executive Director. The grievance shall be documented by the supervisor or Executive Director,
2. including an action plan for an agreed-upon corrective action (if applicable). A copy of the plan shall be forwarded to the volunteer.
3. At this point, if the volunteer does not feel the grievance has been resolved in a satisfactory manner, the volunteer must put the grievance in writing, with the above referenced action plan attached, to the Executive Director, or if the grievance refers to the Executive Director, to the President of the Board of Directors. Depending upon the circumstances, the Executive Director, or the President of the Board of Directors, will conduct an investigation and meet with the volunteer within a reasonable time thereafter. After meeting with the volunteer, the Executive Director, or the Board President, will advise the volunteer of their proposed resolution of the grievance and after obtaining input, if any, from the volunteer, will issue a final resolution which will be binding on all parties concerned.

The written grievance should contain the following:

- a. A description of the problem.
- b. The date of the incident(s).
- c. Name(s) of individual(s) involved in or witnessing the incident(s).
- d. The volunteer's suggested resolution.
- e. The date the grievance is filed with the volunteer's signature.

The volunteer who filed the grievance must be informed of the resolution in writing, and Warrick County CASA, Inc. will keep a written record of all grievances filed against volunteers, staff members, the Executive Director, and board members.

## **6.9 Whistleblower Policy**

A whistleblower is an employee, board member, or volunteer who informs a supervisor, the Executive Director or Board President about an activity which that person believes to be fraudulent or dishonest.

### **Whistleblower Protection**

Warrick County CASA, Inc. will use best efforts to protect the whistleblowers against retaliation, as described below. It cannot guarantee confidentiality, however, and there is no such thing as an “unofficial” or “off the record” report.

CASA will keep the whistleblower’s identity confidential, unless:

- The person agrees to be identified;
- Identification is necessary to allow CASA or law enforcement officials to investigate or respond effectively to the report;
- Identification is required by law; or
- The person accused of violations is entitled to the information as a matter of legal right in disciplinary proceedings.

Warrick County CASA employees and volunteers may not retaliate against a whistleblower with the intent or effect of adversely affecting the terms or conditions of employment. Whistleblowers who believe that they have been retaliated against may file a written complaint with the Executive Director or Board President, if retaliation is from the Executive Director. A proven complaint of retaliation will result in a proper remedy for the person harmed and the initiation of disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, against the retaliating person. This protection from retaliation is not intended to prohibit supervisors from taking action, including disciplinary action, in the usual scope of their duties and based on valid performance-related factors. Whistleblowers must be cautious to avoid baseless allegations.

### **6.10 Volunteer Files**

Volunteer files, which contain private information about each volunteer including, as appropriate, volunteer application, emergency contact information, signed volunteer job description, reference documentation, all necessary background clearances, training records and performance evaluations, and documentation of volunteer status are kept in private files in the CASA office and are the property of Warrick County CASA. Access to volunteer files shall be determined on a case by case basis by the Executive Director. Volunteers who desire to review their own files should make an appointment with the Executive Director to do so. If after review of content in a volunteer’s file, said volunteer wishes to add information to the file, or make a factual correction, the volunteer may give the updated or additional information to the Executive Director who will add it to the file. Warrick County CASA volunteers are encouraged to update the Executive Director immediately of any change in address, employment, or other pertinent information to ensure updated files.

### **6.11 Agency Letterhead**

Volunteers act as official representatives of Warrick County CASA when using CASA letterhead. Volunteers may use CASA letterhead only when corresponding about the CASA cases assigned to them and with prior approval by the Executive Director. Use of letterhead is not permitted for personal correspondence or for correspondence related to the work CASA does (i.e., letters to the editor expressing personal opinions regarding proposed legislation or government policies).

## 6.12 Media Communication

Inquiries concerning Warrick County CASA, its policies, practices, or clients, must be referred to the Executive Director. Volunteers are not permitted to make any statements involving Warrick County CASA to the media without the consent of the Executive Director.

## 6.13 Social Media Policy

Our CASA program recognizes and values the role of social media in our everyday lives. We encourage our staff, volunteers, and board to use social media platforms to highlight the important contribution of our CASA work in the community while remaining aware of the risks and responsibilities associated with an open public forum.

When you engage in social media and online communication, you become a public figure. As a public figure who is associated with Warrick County CASA, you have a responsibility to help protect this organization and our clients. The following social media policy will assist you in making responsible decisions about your use of social and online media in connection with your role with CASA.

(Social media includes all means of communicating or posting content of any sort on the Internet, including blogs, journals or diaries, personal websites, social networking or affinity sites, bulletin boards or chat rooms.)

### Online Communication and Social Media Expectations:

1. **Never reveal confidential information.** Sharing stories that illustrate the value of CASA advocacy for children is often the most powerful way to engage the public in our cause. However, the sharing of confidential information about the children and families we serve is prohibited. This includes names, ages, case-specific details, time-specific statements, and photographs. It is acceptable to discuss general details and to use non-time-specific statements so long as it does not contain information recognizable to the family or anyone associated with the family or case.

For example, use general terms such as “youth” instead of “13-year-old-girl.” You must be careful to protect the dignity of families, children and social agencies, even if they are not named.

NO: “My 18-year old CASA kid just graduated from Lincoln

High...Congratulations!” YES: “Congratulations to my CASA youth for

graduating high school today!”

2. **Uphold a respectable reputation.** Be fair and courteous to fellow employees, volunteers, or board members, the families we serve, the stakeholders with whom we work, and the vendors we retain. If you have a complaint or criticism, you are encouraged to address it through the appropriate internal channels of communication. Additionally, do not respond to any negative comments posted online about Warrick County CASA, Inc.. or any other CASA program including local and national

organizations. We would appreciate you informing the Executive Director if you see any negative representation of the organization online so we may determine the best way to respond or not.

3. **Be considerate.** Never post discriminatory or harassing comments. Be respectful of all individuals and families served by CASA; CASA employees, volunteers, or board members; any community stakeholder including individuals or organizations within or outside the judicial and child welfare systems; or any other persons associated with CASA.

NO: "Great day as a CASA volunteer! The Judge finally made the right decision in our favor." YES: "Great day as a CASA volunteer! Can't believe what a difference one person can make."

4. **Maintain a high standard of professionalism.** You should maintain professional relationships at all times. Avoid connecting via social media with a child or family you know through your work with CASA or as a volunteer. If for some reason you feel you must communicate through a social network about a CASA-related matter, check first with your supervisor. You should not add children or families as friends on social media or request that they add you. Remember that your communication while on CASA business may be discoverable in court. Do not communicate with the judge or court regarding a CASA case or any other CASA matter not specific to a case via social media.
5. **Use good judgement.** Refrain from including any inappropriate content, providing links to inappropriate websites, or including any inappropriate photos in postings or comments directly or indirectly referring to CASA, any individuals associated with CASA, or your role with the organization. Inappropriate material includes depictions or descriptions of illicit substances and/or their paraphernalia; underage drinking; harassing, hostile, false, or confidential information; and any other acts that violate local, state, or federal law and/or CASA statutes, rules, and regulations. Prejudice or discriminatory content is also prohibited. When using social media in connection with your capacity as a CASA volunteer, take a moment to consider all online comments with respect to the above framework before posting. Using good judgement extends to the selection of sources of news and research. The sources you base your arguments on should be reputable and well-established, and ideally bipartisan or nonpartisan. Remember that the Internet archives almost everything, so even deleted posts can be searched!
6. **Share public content but not private content.** You are free to share content from National CASA/GAL's public website and Warrick County CASA, Inc. public website and social media accounts with the general public. However, you may not share content from any member portal that is password protected unless it was intended specifically for sharing.

7. **Respect copyright.** Make sure facts are accurate before posting and you have permission to post any copyrighted information. When discussing others' research or opinions, make it clear that the research or opinions are not coming directly from you by citing the source.
8. **Be transparent.** Your online comments represent only your personal opinions. Never present yourself as a spokesperson for Warrick County CASA, Inc.. Always be clear and open about the nature of your association with CASA and when necessary make it clear that your views do not represent those of the organization or anyone else associated with the organization.
9. **Try to add value.** Does your post provide worthwhile information and perspective? Does it pertain to your mission and work? Does it help you, your coworkers, volunteers, and supporters better understand and feel more connected to our cause? Does it build a positive sense of community?

When using social media in connection with your capacity as a CASA volunteer, take a moment to consider all online comments with respect to the above framework before posting.

#### ***Violation of Social Media Policy***

Online content produced by Warrick County CASA, Inc. volunteers in conflict with the above guidelines or including discriminatory remarks, harassment, and threats of violence or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination from your role with Warrick County CASA, Inc..

Furthermore, retaliation or any negative action against any staff, volunteer, or board member for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating with an investigation will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination from your role with Warrick County CASA, Inc..

### **6.14 Technology Responsible Use Policy**

Each CASA volunteer is expected to use CASA's available computer technology responsibly and professionally. This policy requires all volunteers who use computers and related technology to do so prudently, legally, and for the benefit of the CASA program. Computers and email are not to be used for personal use. While serving as a volunteer, volunteers should not have any expectation of privacy with respect to the files of the CASA computers they use or the contents of email messages, either sent or received, or downloaded or uploaded files from the Internet. Warrick County CASA reserves the right to access and disclose the contents of any of its computer files or any email message for any lawful purpose.

Volunteers are not to display any material on CASA computer monitors that is offensive to the CASA staff, other volunteers or visitors to CASA's office. Every volunteer is responsible for communicating to the appropriate CASA staff member their discomfort, if any, with material displayed on computer terminals at the office.



As a reminder, it is a violation of law and of the CASA Responsible Use Policy to download and distribute material from the Internet if such distribution would constitute a violation of copyright laws. It is also a violation of CASA Responsible Use Policy to use CASA's computers for any activity in connection with pornography. CASA will terminate the volunteer relationship of any volunteer who violates this policy.

### **6.15 Direct Service Provision**

Warrick County CASA is not a "direct service" agency. We are a child advocacy organization. We advocate for direct service agencies to provide appropriate services to clients. Therefore, volunteers are restricted from providing direct services such as: mental health services, transporting parties, intervening in domestic disputes, providing counseling, supervising visitation, offering to provide funds for food or other necessities. CASA is a facilitator; it is our job to advocate for the direct service agencies to provide these vital services to clients or for the Court to issue a court order for service provision.

### **6.16 Non-Partisanship**

Volunteers are reminded that, as a tax-exempt organization, Warrick County CASA is restricted in its ability to engage in activity which would influence legislation, and that it is inappropriate for the CASA program to support or oppose any candidate for public office. Consequently, when volunteers engage in activity which supports or opposes a candidate for public office, such activity is personal in nature and is outside of the scope of the individual's relationship with the CASA program. Volunteers are expected to avoid the appearance that their personal political activity is authorized by or on behalf of CASA.

Volunteers are expected to refrain from any activity which would constitute either support for, or opposition to, candidates for public office when such conduct could be construed as activity on behalf of CASA. For example, volunteers may not use CASA letterhead or wear items with CASA's logo when promoting political activity or support for a candidate or legislation. Such activity must be conducted on the volunteer's personal rather than professional time.

## **Section 7: CASA CODE OF ETHICS POLICY AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

National CASA/GAL Association's Guiding Principles which include family preservation, diversity, equity and inclusion, and collaboration have been integrated into the Code of Ethics which provides board, staff, and volunteers a set of guidelines for professional behavior and ethical conduct.

### **A. Conduct**

CASA volunteers shall abide by the National CASA/GAL Association Local Program Standards, the PA CASA statute, 42 Pa.C.S. 6342 and the Standards Governing the Qualifications and Training of Court Appointed Special Advocates adopted by the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission in 1999 ( 29 PA.B 3633)

1. CASA staff, board members, and volunteers shall uphold the credibility and dignity of the CASA model by conducting all business in an honest, fair, professional, and humane manner.
2. CASA staff, board members, and volunteers will not use their authority inappropriately, nor condone any illegal act or unethical practices related to their program or community.
3. CASA staff, board members, and volunteers will not use CASA to promote personal gain.
4. CASA staff, board members, and volunteers will avoid any action which could adversely affect the confidence of the Indiana Courts or the public in the integrity of the CASA program at the local, state, and national level.
5. A CASA volunteer shall not be related to any parties involved in a specific case, or be employed or involved in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict. Upon application, exceptions may be made by the Judiciary.
6. CASA programs in Indiana shall serve and respond to requests by the Family Court without bias based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, national origin, sexual orientation, marital status or disability.
7. The program commits to diversity, equity, and inclusion and demonstrates these qualities in its own operations, governance, management and quality advocacy for children. *(Standard 3)*

### **B. Knowledge and Understanding**

*CASA provides best-interest advocacy for children as reflected in these guiding principles which recognize the importance of family preservation and reunification, equity, diversity, inclusion and collaboration. (National CASA/GAL Standard 2)*

1. Recognizes the importance of family preservation and/or reunification
  - a. It is in a child's best interest to remain with their family of origin whenever safely possible.
  - b. The program acknowledges that children experience trauma when separated from their family of origin.
  - c. If a child is removed from their family of origin, it is in the child's best interest to be reunified with their family of origin as soon as safely

- possible.
  - d. If a child is removed from their family of origin, it is in the child's best interest to be placed with a relative as the next best option whenever safely possible.
  - e. Strengthening families, through recommendations for services, supports, visitation and communications, is in the child's best interest to achieve stability and/or reunification.
  - f. The program requires and demonstrates respect for the parents and all parties associated with the case.
  - g. The program ensures that information regarding the family's strengths is incorporated into reports to the court.
  - h. The program ensures that information regarding the child's wishes is incorporated into reports to the court.
  - i. Only when a court determines a child cannot be safely reunified with their family of origin in a reasonable timeframe, another permanent placement is in a child's best interest.
2. Recognizes the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion
    - a. All children regardless of age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge should be safe, have a permanent home and an opportunity to thrive.
    - b. The program acknowledges the existence of implicit bias and takes steps to minimize and/or eliminate implicit bias.
    - c. Demonstrates an understanding of disproportionality impacting children who have experienced abuse or neglect.
  3. Recognizes the importance of collaboration
    - a. Board members and the program director, along with program staff and volunteers, will cooperate and coordinate with other volunteer and public service agencies, the courts, community groups, families and individuals to:
      - i. Improve services for individual children and their families.
      - ii. Advocate for needed change in the conditions which adversely affect the children served.

**C. Confidentiality** (*National CASA/GAL Standard 4.B.*)

1. CASA programs will follow written policies and procedures regarding access to, use of, and release of information about the children it serves to ensure that the confidentiality of children and their families is maintained at all times. (See 42 Pa C.S. 6342 and standards)
2. Staff and volunteers will respect the child's right to privacy by maintaining confidentiality.
3. Persons affiliated with CASA will not use confidential information obtained through their work with CASA for personal benefit.

#### **D. Duty of Disclosure**

1. Information about a CASA case must be safeguarded from disclosure to unauthorized persons; however, there is no privilege of absolute confidentiality for CASA. It is the CASA's duty to transmit the information it collects to the Court. CASA volunteers shall make clear to children to whose cases they are assigned that communications are not confidential insofar as they are subject to disclosure to the court and the parties in the case.
2. Safety of the child is of paramount concern. CASA is required by law to report any case of suspected child abuse or neglect to CYS. In addition, if it is suspected that a child or someone involved in the case may harm himself or others, there is a duty to report this information immediately to CYS or to other relevant authorities. Volunteers are required to complete Mandated Reporter Training prior to being assigned a case.

#### **E. Compliance**

1. Operates in alignment with the mission of the National CASA/GAL Association and adheres to the Core Model of providing screened, trained, and qualified community court appointed volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children and youth who are before the court as a result of abuse or neglect as defined by the state child welfare laws, living at home or in out-of-home care. *(National CASA/GAL Standard 1)*
2. Maintains membership with the National CASA/GAL Association and meets the standards, requirements, and policies. *(National CASA/GAL Standard 11)*



## **Section 8: ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Please complete this Acknowledgment page by initialing each section and signing at the bottom. Please provide this signed page to Warrick County CASA, Inc.

I have read and understand the following sections of CASA's Policy & Procedures Manual for Volunteers:

Initial Here:

CASA STANDARDS

VOLUNTEERING AT CASA ROLES

& RESPONSIBILITIES CASA

CONFIDENTIALITY SUPERVISOR

RESPONSIBILITIES SAFETY

POLICY & PROCEDURES

CASA VOLUNTEER RELATIONS AND AGENCY POLICIES

(Includes Conflict of Interest and Social Media Policy)

CASA CODE OF ETHICS & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

I understand the contents of the Policy & Procedures Manual for Volunteers and agree to follow the policies and procedures as set forth in it.

I also consent to CASA's access and disclosure at any time of computer files, internet files and email messages generated from or transmitted to CASA's computers.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date