

Executive Summary

Judges' Guide to CASA/GAL Program Development

Judges have always been essential to the success of the court appointed special advocate (CASA) concept of volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children. From Judge David Soukup's founding idea in 1977, through the creation in 1982 of the National CASA Association with the assistance of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), to the thousands of judges today who have replicated the model in their courts—CASA and volunteer guardian ad litem programs have benefited from the support of countless judicial leaders across the country.

This partnership between the judiciary and community volunteers has helped over a million children who are in court because they were abused or neglected. Today, both the NCJFCJ and National CASA continue to work closely on behalf of these children, with the ultimate goal of assuring that each of them is placed in a safe, permanent, nurturing home.

Because of the unique role of the judiciary in creating and maintaining CASA programs, this ***Judges' Guide to CASA/GAL Program Development*** was created to help courts expand volunteer advocacy in a manner that is consistent with national standards and best practices. The goal of the publication is to guide judges in ways to help create a CASA or GAL program of which their court can be proud.

The ***Judges' Guide to CASA/GAL Program Development*** includes a chapter on the role of the judge, written by Judge Leonard P. Edwards of Santa Clara County, California. Judge Edwards makes an effective statement regarding the judge's role in creating and maintaining a CASA/GAL program and the importance of the court's leadership and active involvement.

The manual also includes guidance in determining whether a CASA/GAL program is right for your court, clear expectations about what CASA volunteers do and how they help, and how the court can play an appropriate role in planning, building, and maintaining a quality program.

The final chapter of the ***Judges' Guide*** focuses on ethical considerations. Retired Judge and Professor Thomas Hornsby of Jacksonville, Florida and Judge Douglas Johnson of Douglas County, Nebraska provide guidance to judges as to the ethical issues when exercising a leadership role in working with a CASA program.

The ***Judges' Guide to CASA/GAL Program Development*** also includes a thorough appendix of program development information and sample documents.

In addition to this manual, both National CASA and the NCJFCJ have a variety of other resources to assist you. Staff members are available to provide technical assistance and training, and either organization can put you in touch with other judges who have successfully replicated the CASA model. In addition, state CASA organizations in most states can provide judges with community-specific information and assistance. Contact information for these organizations is listed in the ***Judges' Guide***.

After 25 years and almost 1,000 programs, it is no longer a question of whether CASA/GAL programs work. The CASA model improves outcomes for children and helps judges fulfill their responsibilities towards the dependent children of the juvenile court.

The question is how new CASA/GAL programs can be started and how existing programs can be maintained and expanded. It is the juvenile court judge who must take a leadership role in accomplishing these goals. It is the judge who convenes the community, educates them about the value of CASA/GAL and provides the commitment and leadership to ensure that the program will thrive.

This is a natural role for the juvenile court judge. As Judge Edwards asks, “Who else speaks on behalf of abused and neglected children in the community? Who else has the legal duty to see that their best interests are addressed? Who is in a better position to know what these children need?” For a juvenile court judge to provide the best results for the children of his or her juvenile court, a CASA/GAL program is a necessary part. This ***Judges’ Guide to CASA/GAL Program Development*** will provide the guidance and information necessary to develop and maintain a high quality, effective CASA/GAL program for a willing court.

To order the *Judges’ Guide* for \$10 plus shipping, please look for item #5504 at shopcasa.org.

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