

National CASA Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Program Selection

Participation and support from local CASA programs was needed to conduct a national survey of CASA consumers. Programs throughout the CASA network were solicited for voluntary participation in the study. About fifty programs came forward and expressed an interest in being part of the study. For various reasons, about half of these programs could not participate. Therefore, twenty-three programs made up the study sample.

Of the 23 programs, an equal number reported to follow a *Friend of the Court* model (39%) and *CASA is the GAL (Guardian ad Litem)* model (39%); the remainder of the programs did not report on the type of model they use.

Under the *Friend of the Court* model, the CASA volunteer conducts investigations with key people involved in the child's life and make recommendations to the court. This type of CASA volunteer may be thought of as the "eyes and ears" for the judge. Most of the children served by the *Friend of the Court* CASA will also have an attorney appointed as their GAL.

Under the *CASA is the GAL* model the CASA volunteer is appointed as the child's Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) and is the child's sole representative in judicial proceedings. These volunteers also do investigations and make recommendations to the court.

About 39% of the programs that participated in the study are considered “small” in size (less than 25 volunteers), 21% “medium”, and 26% “large”. Programs were considered “small” if they had less than 50 active volunteers; “medium” if they had between 50 and 100 active volunteers and “large” if they had over 100 active volunteers.

Surveys were mailed to all people (judges/attorneys, child welfare workers, and parents) whose names were provided by the individual programs. Some programs were not able to supply names for people in all three groups and some provided names and mailing addresses for both attorneys assisting children and attorneys assisting parents.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument began with likert-type scaled questions about CASA volunteers. This was followed by some basic demographic information and then finally open-ended questions were asked at the end of the surveys (The survey instrument is available in Appendix #3). Most of the questions were asked of all three groups so comparisons could be made across the groups.

Response Rate

Of the 2,465 surveys mailed out, 742 were returned. This resulted in an overall return rate of 34%. The lowest return rate was from the parent group

(22%) whereas the highest return rate was for the judges/attorneys at 55%.

The return rate for child welfare personnel was about 50%.

Final Sample

There were 112 judges/attorneys surveys returned, this included 48 from judges; 34 from attorneys for children; 13 from attorneys for parents; and 17 unidentified. There were 287 parents surveys returned which included 105 biological parents, relatives and grandparents; 160 from foster and adoptive parents; and 22 unidentified. The largest number of surveys returned were from child welfare personnel at 343.

Findings

The results of this study demonstrate very positive findings for volunteer CASA/GAL programs. The one survey item that consistently scored high by all three groups was *I understand the role of the CASA/GAL volunteer*. The two survey questions that consistently scored low were: *The CASA/GAL understands the court system* and *The CASA/GAL provides an objective opinion*.

Judges and attorneys expressed the highest overall satisfaction with CASA programs. Child Welfare Workers and Parents scored most items a bit lower than judges/attorneys. Child welfare workers scored the statement, *the volunteer CASA/GAL understands the child welfare system* the lowest. When examining the comments from child welfare workers on the open-ended questions, it is clear that child welfare workers had very mixed sentiments

about CASA volunteers. Two other themes that consistently emerged in the open ended responses from child welfare workers had to do with 1) improved communications and 2) the need for volunteers to formulate their own opinions versus relying on the opinion of the child welfare worker.

The ratings from parents should also be considered overall very good for CASA programs. There were not statistically significant differences between biological parents and foster parents on any of the survey items. Parents in general spoke highly of CASA volunteers and CASA programs. However, there were some negative comments regarding specific CASA volunteers from parents in the open-ended question part of the survey.

The limitations of the study are discussed in the final section of the report.

Recommendations:

- 1) continued funding for CASA programs and the need for more CASA volunteers,
- 2) improved communication among child welfare workers, court personnel and CASAs – perhaps through joint training programs,
- 3) discussion and research about what to look for when searching for the “most capable” or “effective” volunteer and an examination of the screening process used by programs,
- 4) frequent evaluation of training programs and on-going assessment of whether or

not the training is meeting the needs of the volunteers,

- 5) frequent contact between CASA volunteers and their supervisors and meaningful performance reviews,
- 6) the establishment of policies and practices that allow for the termination of “ineffective” volunteers,
- 7) CASA training and subsequent in-services and case discussions should frequently discuss the complex issues of child versus parent versus family advocacy,
- 8) the survey instrument should be refined and designed for use by local programs.
Individual programs can then administer the survey and report their results to the National CASA.

Note: Some of the comments made by participants and recommendations in this report may be against the recommended standards provided by the National CASA Association. Programs will want to consult these standards and make their own determinations regarding compliance.