



Court Appointed Special Advocates of Vermilion County
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CASA of Vermilion County Fact Sheet

CASA's History

The CASA program was started by Seattle Superior Court Judge David Soukup in 1977. It uses community volunteers, trained to report to the court on the well-being of children living under the judge's orders. Because it has been so helpful, the program has steadily worked its way across the United States, where over half a million children reside in foster care due to abuse and neglect.

CASA's Mission

The mission of CASA of Vermilion County is to advocate for abused and neglected children within the Juvenile Court System, by training and managing volunteer to represent those children's best interest to the Court.

CASA's primary role is to advocate for the best interests of children involved in abuse and neglect cases in court. CASA agencies advocate through the services of intensively trained volunteers known as CASA's or Court Appointed Special Advocates. These volunteers, trained by their agencies and sworn to confidentiality by the judge, gather objective information and report to the court regularly on the status of the child or children involved in the cases they serve on. The CASA advocate is a team member working with the Guardian *ad litem* attorney, the case worker, and other representatives in the case to provide the Court with the best possible information and recommendations for the child. Volunteers must successfully pass an interview and background checks, and complete a 30-hour training using a curriculum approved by National CASA. Volunteers are supervised and supported by a professional in the CASA office.

Why do we need a CASA in Vermilion County?

The Vermilion County Court deals with a great number of abused and neglected juveniles each year. In 2005, 1,662 calls were made to the Child Abuse Hotline from Vermilion County. Sadly, 1,373 of those reports proved valid. In May of 2006, 320 children were wards in Vermilion County, 37% of which were under the age of 5. It is estimated that children who suffer abuse and neglect are 53% more likely to become delinquents, 38% more likely to become violent criminals as adults. Locally, wards of the court spend an average of 29 months in the system with an average of three placements.

With the full support of Presiding Judge Michael Clary, our group is striving to help the Court deal more effectively with the children it serves. The large caseloads of the Public Defender and two private attorneys hired to be guardian *ad litem* (GAL) greatly limit the amount of personal attention each child can receive. DCFS case workers are also managing large caseloads of children and face similar limitations on their time and resources. A CASA volunteer, assigned to only one child or sibling group, is able to provide more individual attention resulting in a more thorough account of the child's status being available to the Court.

