



COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION



Introduction

The Office of Public Advocacy (OPA) is appointed as guardian ad litem (GAL) for children in Child in Need of Aid (CINA) court proceedings. As a volunteer at OPA, the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) works in partnership with the assigned GAL to identify and advocate for the needs of children and youth, taking into account each child's age, maturity, culture and ethnicity, and the public laws and policies regarding children and families, with the goal of achieving permanency for the child as soon as possible.

Duties and Responsibilities

- A. Conduct an ongoing **independent investigation** to gather information about the case and obtain first-hand a clear understanding of the child's needs and situation:
1. Meet with the child when case is assigned; maintain regular twice monthly contact until case is resolved.
 2. Read all relevant records regarding the child and family:
 - a. Office of Public Advocacy (GAL) file.
 - b. Office of Children's Services (OCS) file.
 - c. Medical, educational, mental health, civil court records, criminal records.
 3. Identify and interview adults relevant to the child's life and who have information about the child's situation:
 - a. Family members, relatives, caregivers.
 - b. Professionals (teachers, doctors, therapists, etc.).
 - c. OCS case workers.
 4. Observe the child's interactions with parents and other caregivers or potential caregivers.
- B. **Facilitate** the progress of the case through the system:
1. Participate in the case planning process:
 - a. Make recommendations for appropriate family contact.
 - b. Make recommendations for culturally relevant services for the child and if appropriate, the parents.
 - c. Ensure case plan is updated as necessary.
 2. Advocate for early paternity determination.
 3. Identify relatives or other persons who are potential placement options, and provide information to the OCS and/or to the court for placement consideration.
 4. Advocate for early tribal identification; maintain regular contact with the tribal representative in Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) cases.
 5. Maintain regular contact with OCS case worker to discuss case progress and/or roadblocks.
 6. When appropriate, seek cooperative solutions to disputes concerning the child's situation to serve the child's best interests.
- C. **Identify and advocate** for the child's best interest through a cultural lens; ensure that all relevant information is available to the court about the child's status and needs.
1. Maintain regular in-person contact with the child and other relevant persons to ensure in-depth knowledge of the case and to make fact-based recommendations to the court.
 - a. In language and terms appropriate to the child's age and development, explain court proceedings and answer questions about the role of the GAL/CASA volunteer and the child's rights; encourage older children to participate in court hearings as appropriate, and determine whether and under what conditions younger children should attend court hearings.

- b. Observe changes in child and modify recommendations during the course of the case.
 - 2. Complete court reports as required and submit to the assigned GAL for review no later than one week prior to court due date.
 - a. Attend all court hearings and meetings related to the case.
 - b. Inform the court about how the child is doing, of important developments in the case, if services are not being offered or utilized, and of any barriers to permanency.
 - c. Advocate for culturally relevant and appropriate placement, adequate care and services (counseling, clothing, medical care, etc.) for the child and family.
 - d. Advise the court if appointment of an attorney for the child should be considered.
- D. **Monitor** the progress of the case through the system, including the provision and utilization of culturally appropriate family support services. Take appropriate and timely action when services are not being made available to the child, the family, or both; when the child or family fails to take advantage of such services; or when services are not achieving their purpose.
 - 1. Monitor services provided to the child by educational, medical, mental health, and other community systems to ensure those services are promoting the best interests of the child:
 - a. Consult with caregivers, teachers, therapists, doctors, and other service providers as needed to determine the child's best interests and whether the child's needs are being met.
 - b. Ensure child's cultural needs are addressed.
 - 2. Follow parents' progress in completing the case plan:
 - a. Maintain contact with parent(s).
 - b. Consult with parents' service providers.
 - c. Inform the assigned GAL if court orders are not being followed.
 - 3. With assistance from the assigned GAL, take appropriate action, including possible notification to the court, when informed of any violations of court orders, new developments, or material changes in the child's circumstances.
 - 4. Ensure that an appropriate permanent plan is created for the child, and ensure the case moves toward permanency for the child in a time frame consistent with the child's age and developmental needs.
 - 5. Keep assigned GAL informed of case activity and progress:
 - a. Maintain contact at least twice a month; participate as requested in all scheduled supervisory case conferences.
 - b. Consult with assigned GAL when problems arise.
 - c. Keep assigned GAL and CASA program staff informed of illnesses, emergencies, or vacations that would temporarily prevent CASA volunteer availability.
 - d. Consult with CASA program staff when assigned GAL is unavailable or if conflicts arise between CASA volunteer and assigned GAL.
- E. Keep all **case records** accurate and up to date:
 - 1. Record all case contacts and activities immediately in case file, including appointments, interviews, and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances.
 - 2. Maintain accurate records of time spent on case activity.
 - 3. Submit monthly volunteer activity logs to CASA program staff as requested.
 - 4. Return case file to OPA at close of case or when CASA volunteer involvement ends.
- F. Know and adhere to Alaska CASA **policies**:
 - 1. Maintain all case information in strict confidence.
 - 2. Follow policies and procedures as outlined in the current Alaska CASA Policy Handbook.
 - 3. Complete 12 hours of approved continuing education annually.