



The Complementary Roles of Attorneys and CASA/GAL Volunteers for Child Advocacy

Attorneys for children and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA®)/Guardian ad Litem (GAL) volunteers have distinct but complementary roles in the child welfare court system. The chart below highlights key features of their responsibilities:

Children’s Attorneys/Guardians ad Litem	CASA/GAL Volunteers
Professional lawyer, licensed by state bar following an exam and professional conduct review, working in law office or independently, sometimes using multidisciplinary teams (peer partners, social workers). Graduate of a 3-year law school who receives continuing legal education training in accordance with professional and ethical standards.	Community volunteers screened by local program and sworn in as a court officer, working under the supervision of a court-approved program, sometimes using multidisciplinary teams. 30-hour initial training requirement and continuing education requirement of at least 12 hours per year per National CASA standards.
Duty to ascertain the child’s wishes and rights, and to ensure the law is followed.	Duty to ascertain what the child needs and inform the court.
Confidential attorney–client relationship bound by longstanding legal and ethical rules (ex. privilege).	Volunteers take an oath to keep details confidential amongst all parties but are not bound by attorney–client privilege.
Typically carry a caseload of clients. Wide breadth of expertise helps child navigate the system.	Typically work with 1 child or sibling set, allowing more time for intensive attention and support.
Provide legal advice to the child about their rights and options. Conduct thorough investigation, call witnesses, subpoena records, file motions and appeals. Make legal arguments to judges and ensure child’s voice is heard.	Provide recommendations to the court so the judge can make a well-informed decision. Prepare written and oral reports to court with firsthand observations and best interest recommendations.
Both Attorneys and CASA/GAL Volunteers Should: Communicate regularly with the child, review relevant records and reports, monitor the case to ensure service delivery, thoroughly prepare for all court hearings and meetings, advocate for the child in the courtroom and community if their needs are not being met.	

Lawyers and CASA/GAL Volunteers Collaborate for Kids

Baby Jonah’s kinship placement

Baby Jonah was placed in stranger foster care shortly after he was born. His CASA/GAL volunteer successfully searched social media for extended family and provided the information to the court. Jonah’s attorney filed a motion with the court to have the kin evaluated for expedited placement. Jonah is now thriving in the home with his kin caregivers.

Keeping Ben and Sarah together

Ten-year-old twins Ben and Sarah were initially placed in separate foster homes, nearly 2 hours apart. Their attorney filed a motion with the court to have them placed in the same home. While the motion was pending, their CASA/GAL volunteer facilitated joint outings to maintain their bond and reported to the court on the frequency of the sibling visits. The judge granted the attorney’s motion and Ben and Sarah are now placed together.

Helping Lila get to college

Lila’s attorney successfully advocated for her to remain in the same school when she entered foster care during 11th grade. Her CASA/GAL volunteer helped develop a plan for her to attend college and informed the court. Lila’s attorney advised her about her rights to ETV funds and extended foster care, then filed a motion with the court to expedite funding. She’s now a college sophomore majoring in Biology.

CONTACT

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