**VOLUNTEER**

**POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL**

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**Approved and Adopted by the Knox County Superior Court 1**

**Juvenile Judge Gara Lee**

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**Volunteer Policy and Procedure Manual**

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Dear Volunteers,

Welcome to the Knox County Court Appointed Special Advocate Program. We are glad that you chose to join our organization, and we look forward to working with you.

The Knox County CASA Program is dedicated to high quality advocacy for the abused and neglected children of Knox County. Your job is important, and the work you do will directly impact upon the lives of children. As a volunteer, you will provide these children with a strong voice in juvenile court.

To help you with your important work, we wrote this Policy and Procedures Manual. The Manual is yours to keep. We ask that you read and review it because we think this Manual will help you understand our Program and our mission. Our policies and procedures are intended to ensure the rights and identify the responsibilities of volunteers and the organization. This Procedure Manual is not a contract and does not guarantee any fixed terms and conditions of a volunteer’s participation in the program.

We want to make sure that all expectations are well defined so that we can work positively in the best interests of our children. Your job is important because the work you do will impact upon the lives of many children.

Each one of you is an asset to the CASA Program. To enhance your value, we emphasize training, supervision, and mentorship. Communication is important, confidentiality is crucial, and a firm commitment to your role and responsibilities is vital.

To facilitate those goals, we strive to promote and sustain a professional team atmosphere and we offer this Manual as a tool to assist us all in the work ahead.

Sincerely,

The Knox County CASA Program

# *Section 1: KNOX COUNTY CASA STANDARDS*

**History of National CASA/GAL Association**

In 1977, a Seattle juvenile court judge concerned about making drastic decisions with insufficient information conceived the idea of volunteers in the courtroom speaking up for the best interests of children who had experienced neglect or abuse. That judge was David W. Soukup. From the first program has grown a network of nearly 950 CASA and guardian ad litem programs that are recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers in 49 states and the District of Columbia.

**Knox County CASA Mission, Vision, and Core Values**

***Mission*:** Knox County CASA’s mission is to recruit, screen, and train community volunteers to advocate for the best interest of children in Knox County who are victims of child abuse and neglect or otherwise endangered. CASA volunteers will make recommendations to the court in the child’s best interests to ensure a safe and permanent home.

***Vision*:** Knox County CASA’s vision is to provide advocacy, consistency and quicker routes to successful permanency for all children who have entered juvenile court as a result of abuse or neglect. Knox County CASA is committed to the highest quality of advocacy through trained Court Appointed Special Advocates.

**Values:**

*Service*: We provide care and advocacy to children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

*Collaboration*: We strive to build connections and partnerships with other social service agencies.

*Integrity*: We carry out all obligations of our program and volunteers with the utmost responsibility and accountability.

*Diversity*: We seek input from others, celebrate everyone's unique backgrounds, and strive for inclusiveness to provide advocacy for the children we serve.

*Ethics*: We strive to meet the highest ethical standards with trauma informed care initiatives.

## **1.1 CASA Program**

1. Knox County CASA is a Publicly-Administered CASA Program in Knox County, Indiana.

2. Knox County CASA’s mission and values are consistent with the National CASA/GAL *Core Model* and have been approved by National CASA and the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA.

3. Knox County CASA values diversity, inclusion and equity and strives for a diverse staff and volunteer base that more accurately reflects the children served.

4. Knox County CASA administers its human resources practices without discrimination based upon age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws.

5. Knox County CASA is in compliance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Act and publicizes our equal opportunity policy on recruitment materials.

6. Knox County CASA operates with access to legal counsel.

7. Knox County CASA follows written policies and procedures regarding access to, use of, and release of information about the children it serves to ensure that the confidentiality of children and their families is maintained at all times.

8. Knox County CASA has a written policy to protect confidential information of staff, volunteers and donors.

9. The management and operation of Knox County CASA assures adequate supervision of CASA volunteers. Knox County CASA keeps written records on each applicant, volunteer, and case. The program also has written management and personnel policies and procedures, screening requirements, a comprehensive training curriculum, and keeps relevant data on the operation of the program.

10. Knox County CASA does not accept applicants if they have been convicted of, or have charges pending for, a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or to the CASA program’s credibility.

11. Knox County CASA has an established procedure to allow the immediate reporting to the court or through the appropriate agency of a situation in which a CASA volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger.

12. Knox County CASA shall be an inclusive organization whose volunteers and staff reflect the children they serve and their community in terms of gender, ethnicity, and cultural and socio-economic background.

## **1.2 CASA Volunteer**

1. Indiana law defines both a CASA and a GAL. “Court appointed special advocate,” for purposes of Child In Need of Services (hereinafter “CHINS”) and Termination of Parental Rights (hereinafter “TPR”) law, means a community volunteer who: (1) has completed the proper training; (2) has been appointed by a court to represent and protect the best interests of a child; and (3) may research, examine, advocate, facilitate, and monitor a child’s situation. This law is found at IC 31-9-2-28. “Guardian ad Litem,” for purposes of CHINS and TPR law, means an attorney, a volunteer, or an employee of a county program designated under IC 33-24-6-4 who is appointed by a court: (1) has completed the proper training; (2) has been appointed by a court to represent and protect the best interests of a child; and (3) may research, examine, advocate, facilitate, and monitor a child’s situation.

2. A CASA volunteer is an individual who is at least 21 years of age and has successfully passed the application and screening process (which includes a written application, personal interview, reference and criminal background record checks), has successfully completed the National CASA/GAL Association *Pre-Service Training*, serves under the supervision of the program, and is appointed by the court to advocate for children who are involved in the child welfare system. A volunteer reviews records; facilitates a prompt and thorough review of the case; and interviews appropriate parties in order to make recommendations on what would be in the best interest of the child.

3. A CASA volunteer has successfully completed a minimum of 30 hours of pre-service training that includes instruction on the court and child welfare system; child abuse and neglect; relevant state and federal laws; permanency planning and family preservation; cultural awareness; and the role and responsibility of a CASA volunteer.

4. A CASA volunteer obtains 12 hours of continuing education annually related to the work of best interest advocacy.

5. A CASA volunteer does not engage in activities which jeopardize the safety of the child, the integrity of the program, or the objectivity of the volunteer; or activities which are likely to result in conflict of interest or expose the program or the volunteer to criminal or civil liability.

6. A CASA volunteer respects the right to privacy by keeping information that would identify parties involved in CASA cases confidential.

***Section 2: VOLUNTEERING AT KNOX COUNTY CASA***

## **2.1 Application and Screening Process for Prospective Volunteers**

All prospective volunteers must complete a written application containing information about one’s educational background, training, employment history, and experience working with children; provide the names and addresses of three non-relative references; participate in a personal interview with CASA staff; and pass the following background checks: National Criminal Records, State Criminal Records, Local Criminal Records, National Sex Offender Registry, Social Security Number Verification, and an Indiana child abuse registry check.

If the prospective volunteer has lived in another state in the past 7 years, Knox County CASA secures criminal record checks for any county or state not covered by a national criminal background check in which the person has resided for the previous 7 years. The same requirement applies to securing a child abuse registry or child protective services check where permissible by law.

Knox County CASA does not accept applicants if they have been convicted of, or have charges pending for, a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or to the CASA program’s credibility.

Knox County CASA does not accept applicants if they refuse or fail to sign a release of information form or submit the required information necessary for any of the background checks as required by *National CASA/GAL Standards for Local Programs*.

Knox County CASA considers if an applicant is found to have committed a misdemeanor or felony that is unrelated to or would not pose a risk to children and would not negatively impact the credibility of the program, the extent of the rehabilitation since the misdemeanor or felony was committed, as well as other factors that may influence the decision, to accept the applicant as a volunteer.

It is Knox County CASA policy to verify information on applications. Acceptance or continuation as a volunteer is dependent on the application being complete and correct.

All volunteers must undergo all of the background checks initially performed at the time of application and every four years throughout the term of their service. Volunteers must immediately inform Knox County CASA if at any time they are faced with any criminal charges or child abuse/neglect investigation or charges during the time they are volunteers.

**2.2 Initial Orientation and Training of Prospective Volunteers**

Knox County CASA provides prospective volunteers with an initial 30-hour pre-service training, which is a prerequisite to being assigned a case. The purpose of training is to increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of volunteers so they can fulfill the roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer. Attendance at pre-service training is essential to your success as a CASA volunteer.

*Pre-service training topics include:*

● Roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer

● Court process

● Dynamics of families including mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and poverty

● Relevant state laws, regulations, and policies

● Relevant federal laws, regulations, and policies

● Confidentiality and record keeping practices

● Child development

● Child abuse and neglect

● Permanency planning

● Community agencies and resources available to meet the needs of children and families

● Communication and information gathering

● Effective advocacy and court report writing

● Cultural competency

● Special needs of the children served

Prospective volunteers must attend all of these training sessions. The Training Program is part of the screening process, and acceptance to participate in training does not guarantee the individual will be sworn in as a CASA volunteer.

Upon successful completion of the Pre-Service Training Program and acceptance as a volunteer by Knox County CASA, a volunteer will be sworn in as a Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer by the Juvenile Court Judge of Knox County, Indiana. Prior to being sworn in and assigned to work on a case, all volunteers must have signed and submitted to Knox County CASA the following:

● Conflict of Interest Policy

● Confidentiality Policy

● Social Media Policy

● Volunteer Policies and Procedures Manual

● All required background clearances and references (three non-relative)

## **2.3 Court Observation**

In addition to the 30-hour Training Program, the program requires each volunteer to visit the court served by Knox County CASA while court is in session to observe dependency proceedings before appearing in court or assigned a case.

## **2.4 Volunteer Evaluations/Termination of Relationship**

Knox County CASA supervisory staff will work closely with the new volunteer for the first three months. At the conclusion of three months, CASA supervisory staff will meet with the volunteer to provide feedback and elicit feedback from the volunteer to ensure their volunteer experience is successful.

Thereafter, Knox County CASA will annually evaluate volunteers. Knox County CASA expects these evaluations to be helpful in sustaining a long and mutually productive association with each of our volunteers. Volunteers are invited to use the evaluation sessions to discuss areas of concern and to make suggestions about improving the volunteer program.

Knox County CASA reserves the right, however, to determine at any time whether or not an individual’s participation continues to serve CASA’s best interests. If Knox County CASA determines that its best interests are not being served, in its sole discretion, it may work with a volunteer to develop a plan to improve their efforts or may terminate the relationship immediately. This termination will be under the discretion of Knox County CASA’s Executive Director.

Grounds for dismissal of an advocate include, but are not limited to:

● Violation of program policies and procedures, court rules or law

● Failure to effectively carry out assigned duties

● Breach of confidentiality

● Failure to visit the child regularly

● Misrepresentation of factual information to Knox County CASA staff, the Court or parties to the case

● Failure to report significant information to the Court

● Failing to disclose a conflict of interest or conflict of interest that cannot be resolved

● Initiation of ex-parte communication with the Court

● Submitting court reports to anyone except staff

● Existence of child abuse or neglect allegations

● Falsification of application materials or misrepresentation of facts during the screening process

● Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol while performing volunteer duties

● Gross misconduct or insubordination

● Mistreatment or inappropriate conduct toward clients, families, co-workers, or cooperating agency personnel

● Taking action without program or court approval that endangers the child or is outside the role or powers of the program

● Failure to complete training or obtain required 12 hours of in-service training

● Providing legal advice or therapeutic services to a party to the case

## **2.5 Volunteer Exit**

Knox County CASA strives for a volunteer experience that is enjoyable and beneficial for both the program and volunteer; however, Knox County CASA realizes that for one reason or another, sometimes the volunteer relationship must end. If a CASA is voluntarily leaving the program, the Executive Director asks for a letter of resignation at least two weeks prior to anticipated leave date, with the understanding that the more time given for the program to transition the CASA off the case, the better. Written notice shall include the reason for resignation and the last day the volunteer will work their case, along with the volunteer’s signature and the date the notice is being given.

If Knox County CASA ends the relationship, it will be Knox County CASA’s responsibility to contact all parties involved in the case and discuss the next steps to ensure the best interest of the children you were serving are met.

All records must be returned within 10 days of the last day of working the case. If files are not returned within 10 days, a second request will be made. If files are not returned within 10 days of the second request and the volunteer has not made contact with the office to schedule the return of records, a certified letter should be sent and the green card confirming receipt of the certified mail should be scanned into Optima file.

*Exit Interviews*

Upon leaving Knox County CASA’s service, the volunteer may be asked for their comments concerning their period of volunteerism. Their input helps Knox County CASA evaluate their policies, procedures, work environment, and other variables affecting volunteer experience with the program.

## **2.6 Volunteer Status**

##### *Active:*

An active volunteer is currently appointed to and working a case. Active volunteers maintain all background clearances and renew clearances every four years. Additionally, active volunteers obtain 12 hours of in-service training annually.

*Inactive participant:*

An inactive participant is a volunteer who is currently not assigned to a case but continues to meet all annual continuing training hours (12), maintains quarterly contact with their supervisor, and attends all mandatory volunteer training/in-services. Generally, inactive volunteers are available for appointment to new cases, unless alternatively agreed upon with their supervisor. Volunteers may stay inactive for a period of up to 12 months. This could be due to waiting on an available case or a deliberate decision of the volunteer/program.

*Ineligible:*

An ineligible volunteer is currently not eligible to be assigned to a case due to being out of compliance with either or both the background clearance requirements or continuing training hours requirement. If the volunteer remains ineligible for greater than 6 months, the volunteer will be asked to complete training as determined by CASA supervisory staff. If a volunteer remains ineligible for greater than 12 months, the volunteer will need to complete the initial Training Program (30 hours) before being reinstated as an active volunteer.

*Dismissed:*

A dismissed volunteer is a volunteer who has been asked to leave Knox County CASA. Any volunteers dismissed from the program will be considered ineligible for future reinstatement as a CASA volunteer.

*Leave of Absence:*

A volunteer may request a leave of absence from all duties associated with Knox County CASA at any time. The length of leave may be up to 6 months from the beginning date of leave. After 6 months, the volunteer will be requested to resume status as an inactive participant (see above).

**2.7 Transfer of Volunteers**

A qualified CASA volunteer who transfers from another CASA program must complete the full application and screening process, and at a minimum, training regarding the local court, laws, program policies and procedures, investigation and court report writing and must be sworn in by the new jurisdiction.

## **2.8 Reactivation of Volunteers**

Knox County CASA will determine training necessary for volunteers who have been either inactive for a period greater than 12 months or ineligible for a period greater than 6 months to become reactivated as a CASA volunteer.

# *Section 3: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF A COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE*

## **3.1 CASA Volunteer Job Description**

**Role of the Court Appointed Special Advocate Volunteer**

A CASA volunteer is a trained community member who is appointed by a judge to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in foster care.

Knox County CASA volunteer advocates serve as an independent, additional set of eyes and ears for the Court.

**Responsibilities of the Court Appointed Special Advocate Volunteer**

CASA volunteer best interest advocacy is driven by the guiding principle that children grow and develop best with their family of origin if that can be safely achieved. CASA volunteers serve children from birth up to 21 years of age.

CASA volunteers identify and advocate for children’s best interests through the following responsibilities, depending upon the needs of each individual case:

1. Obtain first-hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by conducting an ongoing review of all relevant documents and records and interviewing the child, parents, placement, family case manager, teachers, service providers, and other relevant persons to gather information about the child’s situation.
2. Obtain and review all documentation related to the child’s file. This includes but is not limited to the Department of Child Services’ (hereinafter “DCS”) case file, the court’s file, and service provider reports.
3. The CASA volunteer should continue to seek new information throughout the time the child is assigned to the volunteer and should have regular in-person contact with the child, once every thirty (30) days at a minimum.
   1. Any exception to monthly in-person contact may be granted at the discretion of CASA supervisory staff; however, the decision to permit less frequent in-person contact shall be documented as to the justification for and reasonableness of the exception.
   2. Exceptions to monthly visits may be permitted in the following circumstances:
      1. Concerns related to illness;
      2. Geographic distance; and
      3. Needs of the child.
   3. Visits may be conducted via video conferencing with the child if there is an exception to monthly in-person contact.
4. The CASA volunteer will need to determine if a permanent plan has been created and whether appropriate services are being provided to the child and the family.
5. The CASA volunteer will formulate recommendations in accordance with the best interest of the child. The CASA volunteer will consult with CASA supervising staff for the recommendations utilizing many factors such as the child’s:
   1. Current age;
   2. Level of maturity;
   3. Culture and ethnicity;
   4. Degree of attachment and/or bonds to family members, including siblings; and
   5. Sense of continuity, consistency, and identity.
6. Provide timely submission of Optima contact logs and confer regularly with the CASA supervisory staff to seek guidance and provide new case information. In each case, the assigned CASA Supervisor (Executive Director) and CASA volunteer will communicate at monthly to update records and contact logs and participate together in scheduled case conferences. All CASA volunteer recommendations will be discussed with the CASA Supervisor prior to submitting any reports, notices, and/or pleadings to the Court.
7. CASA volunteers prepare written court reports for all hearings. These reports are based upon the information gathered by the volunteer and makes recommendations about the child’s needs and best interests, including recommendations for services for the child and family.
8. Appear at all regularly scheduled hearings to represent the child’s best interest, ensure that all relevant facts are presented, and provide testimony when necessary.
9. Make recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child and family and recommendations concerning permanency.
10. Monitor implementation of service plans and court orders and assess whether court-ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and whether review hearings should be scheduled with the Court. The CASA volunteer will make the court aware of any failure to provide court-ordered services or of the family’s failure to participate in those services.
11. The CASA volunteer will inform the court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means such as a report, notice, or other pleading.
12. Advocate for the child’s best interests in the community, including interfacing with mental health, educational and other community systems, to assure the child’s needs are being met in all areas.
13. Collaborate and coordinate with legal, child welfare, and other partners to ensure service provision that is in the child’s best interests.
14. Participate in all scheduled case reviews with program supervisory staff.
15. Maintain complete records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child and the child’s life circumstances.
16. Report any incident of child abuse or neglect, or any situation in which the CASA volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger to the appropriate authorities and CASA supervisory staff.

## **3.2 Time Commitment**

Volunteers are expected to devote the necessary time to serve as a Court Appointed Special Advocate. While there is no minimum or maximum amount, CASA staff encourages volunteers to spend 8-10 hours per month volunteering. In an effort to assure continuity and effective advocacy for the children assigned to the volunteer, advocates are expected to commit to a minimum one case and stay committed to that case and child until permanency is achieved.

## **3.3 Casework Files and Reports**

All CASA volunteers must maintain complete and up-to-date records on each assigned case, as defined during initial volunteer training. Notes must be clear, accurate, written legibly and devoid of slang and jargon. Reports should present an unbiased, factual, and historical record and should be free of subjective editorial comments. Each CASA volunteer must keep abreast of all deadlines and timetables involved in cases. Reports must be turned in on time. If volunteers are unable to meet a deadline, they must notify the assigned CASA Advocate Coordinator immediately.

Upon case closure, or resignation or removal of a volunteer from a case, the volunteer must turn in all case files, including notes and materials to their CASA Supervising Staff.

*Case Notes and Documentation*: Volunteers are required to keep case notes and records of advocacy activities and proceedings of their assigned case. This documentation is to be inputted and updated by the 5th of each month into Optima.

*Court Reports*: Volunteers are required to submit completed court reports to their CASA Supervisor no less than 10 days prior to the court date. The CASA volunteer is responsible to discuss all recommendations concerning the case with their supervisor. CASA Supervisor may alter the report or recommendations only with knowledge of the appointed CASA volunteer. The CASA Supervisor is responsible for providing the final court report to all parties to the case. All efforts between the CASA volunteer and CASA Supervisor need to be made to come to an agreement on recommendations. If there is no agreement, the CASA Supervising Staff and CASA volunteer will work with the Executive Director to resolve differences.

## **3.4 On-Going Volunteer Training**

Knox County CASA believes that proper training is an essential ingredient for success as a volunteer. All volunteers are required to participate in 12 hours of additional in-service enrichment opportunities each year. The number of in-service training hours required of newly trained volunteers will be adjusted (or prorated) dependent on the time of the year the volunteer is trained. Knox County CASA provides a schedule of training sessions that are designed to supplement the basic training program and fulfill this mandated requirement.

Additionally, volunteers are encouraged to attend relevant workshops on their own and make use of eLearning opportunities offered by the National CASA/GAL Association.

## **3.5 Confidentiality: Responsibility as a Court Appointed Special Advocate**

Knox County CASA child advocate volunteers are committed to respecting the child’s right to privacy by maintaining confidentiality in a manner that is consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and National CASA/GAL Association Standards. All volunteers must acknowledge and comply with this Confidentiality Policy prior to taking a case and any subsequent cases.

The guidelines set out below govern circumstances in which the CASA volunteer requests or receives information. However, these guidelines cannot cover every possible situation, which may arise. Any questions and/or concerns the CASA volunteer has regarding confidentiality or the application of this policy should be discussed with CASA supervisory staff. These questions and/or concerns will be resolved on a case-by-case basis.

General responsibility to protect confidential information about the parties to a case.

Knox County CASA expects volunteers to respect children and families’ rights to privacy in regard to personal information. No information should be released to family or friends of parties involved in a case without the express consent of the person whose information will be disclosed.

CASA volunteers are responsible for maintaining confidentiality of all information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a party to their case, another program case, another volunteer, or staff member. Volunteers are not authorized to solicit other persons outside Knox County CASA to aid them with specific duties outlined in the CASA volunteer position description.

Upon being sworn in as CASA volunteer, a CASA volunteer will gain access to a case file and the confidential information contained therein. Any information pertaining to the individual families or children that CASA volunteers receive in the discharge of their duties is confidential and must not be used for any purpose other than advocating for the child(ren) in the cases to which they are assigned. This information must not be discussed with anyone except the following:

* The Court and as otherwise ordered by the Court;
* The Parties to the case;
* CASA program staff;
* The Family Case Manager and attorney representing the DCS;
* Others whose request for access to confidential information is permitted by the court and/or Indiana Law (e.g. service providers when appropriate).

If it is necessary to obtain any further privileged/confidential information about someone who is directly related to the case but is not the child, the CASA volunteer may need to obtain from that person a written release of information, which allows the professional, hospital or treatment center to discuss the matter with the CASA volunteer.

While a person may sign a release allowing the CASA volunteer to obtain confidential information, they may not authorize disclosure to other parties to the case and/or their attorneys. The CASA volunteer shall review the signed release form very carefully and if the volunteer has questions regarding the form, seek guidance from CASA supervisory staff.

Expectation of the parties’ confidentiality.

Unlike doctor-patient or lawyer-client relationships, there is no privilege of absolute confidentiality for information provided to a CASA volunteer. In fact, it is the CASA volunteer’s job to transmit the information it collects to the Court. It therefore becomes important to inform all parties and sources of information to a case of this fact. At the beginning of a case, the CASA volunteer should carefully inform all parties and sources of information regarding what records would be maintained about them and what information will be shared, with whom, and under what circumstances. CASA volunteers are required to communicate about the confidential relationship and limitations of confidentiality as it pertains to the CASA-child relationship at the beginning of their appointment to the case.

Internal safeguard of confidential information and records.

In order to ensure maintenance of confidentiality, Knox County CASA has adopted certain procedures for volunteers to follow regarding case records. In the CASA office, records are maintained exclusively in separate file cabinets. All copies of letters and reports concerning a case must be filed in the case folder and uploaded electronically into Optima.

Volunteers who keep case files outside the CASA office (either in paper or electronic format) must take the steps to ensure that the files are maintained in such a way to prevent inadvertent disclosure to persons without a right to see them. In addition, CASA volunteers must ensure that they have a private place for phone conversations about their CASA duties. CASA volunteers must return their entire case files to the program within two weeks of case closure.

No discussions of any individual or family situation of any kind are to be held in hallways, elevators, or other public places. At any group case review held for consultation or review, all parties should be referred to by first names and last initial only (e.g. Mary S., Jose R.). Full names must be used in case supervision and staff meetings in order to ensure that the staff is fully aware of all cases for which they are responsible.

Violation of confidentiality can result in the discrediting of Knox County CASA and may be cause for immediate dismissal. Volunteers must sign a statement of confidentiality upon accepting the role of volunteer.

Duty to Disclose

CASA volunteers are mandated reporters. Therefore, in some situations, CASA volunteers and staff may have a duty to immediately disclose information. This arises primarily in the areas of (1) *reason to believe of* child abuse or neglect or (2) harm to self or others.

1. Child abuse or neglect:

CASA is required to report any case of suspected child abuse or neglect to the DCS of Knox County.

Address:1050 Washington Ave, Vincennes, Indiana 47591

Phone: 1-800-800-5556

If a CASA volunteer makes a report to Knox County DCS, they are to immediately inform their CASA Supervisor and the Executive Director of the report of the suspected abuse or neglect.

2. Harm to self or others:

If a CASA learns someone may harm their self or others, they have a duty to disclose this information immediately through the following avenues:

* the police, if for instance the child indicates that they have a weapon, or access to one, and intends to use it (911);
* The DCS;
* assigned caseworker;
* CASA Supervisor and Program Executive Director.

## **3.6 Responsibility and Relationship to the Court**

Knox County CASA has a responsibility to operate with the highest standards of ethics and accountability. CASA volunteers take an oath of office upon completion of the Pre-Service Training Program and shall be held accountable to fulfill the duties of a CASA volunteer. This program has been provided a position of trust in the courtroom, therefore as appointed parties to the case, CASA volunteers must consistently demonstrate high standards in all of their conduct both in and outside of the courtroom.

In Indiana, CASA volunteers are “officers of the court.” Therefore, it is critical that the CASA volunteer formulates an independent assessment of the case through having regular contact with the child and obtaining information from the child and important players in the child’s life.

Recommendations regarding the child’s placement and needed services shall be supported by the volunteer’s research and observations or other primary source documentation the volunteer has gathered.

# *Section 4: VOLUNTEER SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES*

**4.1 On-Going Case Supervision**

Knox County CASA assigns each volunteer a CASA Supervisor (Executive Director) to provide support appropriate to the volunteer’s needs and complexity of the case assignment. The CASA Supervisor is easily accessible and provides timely and thorough guidance to the volunteer. During the first three months, the CASA Supervisor will meet with the volunteer regularly to provide enhanced guidance and support. Thereafter, the CASA Supervisor will be available to meet with the volunteer as needed, but no less than one time per month. The CASA Supervisor will ensure that case progress is reviewed on a regular basis and will verify accurate completion of all written case records. CASA volunteers are encouraged to take advantage of case supervision to ask questions, address concerns, and discuss anticipated recommendations for upcoming court hearings.

**4.2 Case Assignments**

A new CASA volunteer will be assigned to one case. However, a volunteer may be assigned an additional case if they indicate a willingness to carry multiple cases, and CASA supervisory staff feels that the CASA volunteer would be capable of managing multiple cases adequately. When assigning cases, the nature and difficulty of the tasks assigned, the work and time required to serve each child or to complete each task, past and current performance, and any additional responsibilities held by the volunteer, will be considered.

A CASA volunteer will generally not be assigned to more than two cases at a time. An exception may be granted at the discretion of the CASA Supervisor (Executive Director). However, the decision to permit a higher caseload shall be documented, with justification for and reasonableness of the exception. A volunteer may not be assigned to more than five cases for any reason or exception.

**4.3 Delaying Case Assignment**

Unless an exception is granted prior to acceptance into the Pre-Service Training Program, volunteers who successfully complete the Pre-Service Training Program are expected to accept a case assignment within three months after being sworn in if a case is assigned to Knox County CASA. Following three months, the volunteer will be considered an inactive participant (see Section 2.6 Volunteer Status).

## **4.4 Case Evaluation**

CASA Supervisors will conduct an in-person review of the volunteer’s work at case closure, or annually for cases lasting longer than 12 months. This evaluation will consider case highlights, actions taken by the volunteer, volunteer strengths, and opportunities for improvement, and will be documented in writing and kept in the volunteer’s file.

## **4.5 Case Closure**

Removal of a CASA volunteer from a case may be voluntary at the request of Knox County CASA, involuntary at the request of the Court or Knox County CASA, or a result of case closure when dependency is terminated. The Judge must sign a termination motion for a CASA volunteer to be removed from a case unless it is a result of case closure.

A CASA volunteer may be removed from the case at the discretion of Knox County CASA supervisory staff. Removal will be considered for misconduct or violations of policy and procedures. If the CASA volunteer is removed from the case, whether it be voluntary or involuntary prior to termination of dependency, the Knox County CASA will notify parties to the case, other professionals, and family members involved in the child’s life that the CASA volunteer no longer has the authority to obtain information related to the child. A copy of this letter will be retained in the case file.

After a CASA volunteer is removed from a case, Knox County CASA is no longer responsible for the volunteer’s involvement with that child and family. Further contact is at the sole discretion of the child and family. If the child and family does not want any contact with the CASA volunteer, then the volunteer should not pursue the relationship. If the volunteer chooses to remain in contact with the child and family, they do so at their own discretion and risk. Any continuation of the relationship between the volunteer and the child is not in any way endorsed or affiliated with Knox County CASA.

It is Knox County CASA’s stance that CASA volunteers have a time-limited relationship with the children they serve. As a case nears termination of dependency and court involvement, it is our suggestion that the volunteer arrange a “final goodbye visit” to communicate to the child and family that you are no longer needed since they are now cared for well enough to be out of the system. We understand that each case is unique, and every relationship is different, and will help you discuss the best way to facilitate this closure.

# *Section 5: SAFETY POLICY & PROCEDURES*

When performing your CASA volunteer duties, always use common sense. Never put yourself in a situation that feels unsafe. Please call your CASA Supervisor whenever you have questions, concerns, or need advice. Your safety is important to us, so please do not take risks.

## **5.1 Field Visits**

Volunteers are be trained to be prepared to respond to a crisis. First, consider some basic safety issues. If you are making visits, especially to homes, always tell someone approximately where you are going and when you believe you will return. If possible, take a cellular phone. Take a copy of your Order of Appointment with you.

If you have been told there may be danger in a home, you may request your supervisor to accompany you or meet with parents. You can also make a home visit with the DCS case manager when needed and appropriate.

If you ever feel threatened, do as follows:

* Leave the area.
* If you cannot leave, call 9-1-1. Explain that you are a CASA and what is occurring to threaten your safety.
* As soon as you are in a secure area, call your CASA supervisor, the Program Director.

If a child runs away, attempts suicide, or is the victim of a serious accident or injury, do as follows:

* If you are present, call 9-1-1. However, you do not have the authority to authorize medical care for the child.
* Call your CASA supervisor, the Program Director.
* Call DCS.

## **5.2 Personal Involvement with Children and Families**

Knox County CASA’s effectiveness, reputation and integrity depends on volunteers maintaining professional relationships with children and families. Volunteers and staff shall refrain from becoming personally involved with children and families. If they do become personally involved, volunteers may be removed from a case at the discretion of the CASA Supervisor and or Executive Director.

##### *Prohibited Activities:*

In addition to those actions and activities prohibited elsewhere in this manual and during training, volunteers are not allowed to engage in the following:

* Inviting the child to the volunteer’s home or any home other than the child’s;
* Taking a child to any location that is not pre-approved by the child’s guardian, custodial agency, and CASA Supervisor;
* Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling;
* Making placement arrangements for the child;
* Giving money to the child, the child’s family, or caregiver; and
* Giving expensive gifts to the child, the child’s family, or caregiver.

## **5.3 Child Safety**

Volunteers are expected not to put themselves in situations where they are completely alone with a child. If a volunteer arrives for a visit with the child and finds no caregiver present, the volunteer is not to enter the home.

When visiting with children, it is advisable that the CASA volunteer remain in visible contact with another adult, for example, if visiting with a child in their home or foster home, conversation can take place outside in the yard or in another room with the door open. Please note that Knox County CASA encourages volunteers to seek a private space to speak with the child, but that space should be in sight of a caregiver or in a public setting, such as an outdoor space.

CASA volunteers are encouraged to limit time spent in the child’s bedroom. The CASA volunteer shall ask the child’s caregiver to view their bedroom but shall not enter the bedroom alone with the child.

Whenever you are in the company of a child, ensuring their physical and emotional safety is a large part of your responsibility.

## **5.4 Recognizing Suspected Child Abuse**

Knox County CASA recognizes that mandated reporter training is necessary for volunteers to recognize child abuse and understand how to report it. Therefore, all volunteers will be required to participate in the training as part of the Pre-Service Training Program and every five years thereafter. CASA volunteers are required by law to report suspected child abuse as a mandated reporter.

If you suspect child abuse, you must immediately report it (referenced in Section 3.5). There are three things a CASA should do if they have reason to believe a child is being abused or neglected:

1. Call Knox County Children Services (phone #812-882-3920)

2. Call the assigned caseworker

3. Alert your CASA Executive Director

When making a report of suspected child abuse or general child well-being concerns, it is important to provide as much information as possible.

## **5.5 Transportation Policy**

The Knox County CASA Program prohibits their CASA volunteers to transport children or family members connected to the case in their personal vehicles.

# *Section 6: CASA RELATIONS AND AGENCY POLICIES*

Ultimate responsibility for all Knox County CASA cases rests with the Executive Director and CASA supervisory staff. As a volunteer, however, you too represent Knox County CASA, and what you do reflects on the organization. Always conduct yourself in a way that reflects favorably on Knox County CASA. Volunteers must comply with all rules and policies. Knox County CASA may change these rules and policies when warranted, at its discretion.

## **6.1 Accommodating Persons with Disabilities Policy**

Knox County CASA is committed to complying fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and ensuring equal opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities. Pre-service inquiries are made regarding only an applicant’s ability to perform the essential functions of the position. Reasonable accommodation is available to all disabled volunteers in situations in which their disability affects the performance of job functions. All selection decisions are based on the merits of the situation in accordance with defined criteria, not the disability of the individual. Knox County CASA is also committed not to discriminate against any qualified volunteers because they are related to or associated with a person with a disability. Knox County CASA will follow any state or local law that provides individuals with disabilities greater protection than the ADA.

**6.2 Equal Employment Opportunity**

It is Knox County CASA’s policy to provide Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) to all volunteers and applicants for advocacy without regard to age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws. Our EEO policy applies to all areas of advocacy, including recruitment and selection, training and development, awards and recognition, termination, and recreational and social activities.

Knox County CASA sustains these principles by ensuring decisions affecting your advocacy are made based on your individual demonstrated abilities. Effective utilization of qualified, available volunteers requires more than just a statement of policy.

All volunteer recruitment materials will state “Knox County CASA is an Equal Opportunity Employer.”

## **6.3 Working Environment and Conflict of Interest Policy**

Knox County CASA endeavors to promote a comfortable and productive working environment for all volunteers. In keeping with this policy, sexual, racial, religious, ethnic, or other kinds of harassment of, or by volunteers is a violation of Knox County CASA policy and will not be tolerated. We expect volunteers to treat each other and CASA staff with respect. Any reports of misconduct should be given to the Executive Director.

CASA volunteers are required to follow the organization's conflict of interest policy.

*Conflict of Interest:*

Each volunteer is expected to work for the best interest of Knox County CASA’s mission at all times. Each volunteer has an obligation to avoid any activity, agreement, business investment or interest, or other situation that could create the appearance of or be construed as a conflict with the agency’s best interests or as an interference with the volunteer’s duty to serve the agency and/or its clients to the best of their ability.

These actions include, but are not limited to:

● Using position for private gain.

● Giving preferential treatment to any person.

● Losing complete independence or impartiality.

● Making a Knox County CASA decision outside official channels.

● Having a direct or indirect financial or personal interest that conflicts substantially, or appears to conflict substantially, with the volunteer’s duties and responsibilities.

A CASA volunteer shall not be related to any parties involved in a specific case or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest.

*Personal Gifts, Entertainment and Favors:*

A CASA volunteer will not seek, solicit or accept, directly or indirectly for any gifts, gratuity, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value from a person(s) who:

* Has or is seeking to obtain, contractual or other business or financial relations with Knox County CASA.
* Conducts operations or activities that are regulated by Knox County CASA.
* Has interests that may be affected by the performance or nonperformance of the volunteer’s official duties.

*Disclosure of Conflict of Interest:*

Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can affect the program’s good standing in the community and the ability to fulfill its mission. Volunteers shall disclose any relationships and/or interest which may present a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest as soon as they arise to their CASA Supervisor or the Executive Director.

Should any volunteer not disclose a conflict of interest prior to the act then disciplinary action may be taken, up to and including dismissal.

## **6.4 Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policy**

Knox County CASA will not tolerate unlawful discrimination and expressly prohibits any form of unlawful harassment on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws. Knox County CASA is committed to an environment free from all forms of discrimination and harassment in which all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. Each individual has a right to work in a professional atmosphere that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits discriminating practices and conduct that can be considered harassing, coercive or disruptive, including sexual harassment. It is therefore the expectation that all relationships among individuals associated with Knox County CASA be business-like and free of bias and prejudice. Illegal harassment and improper interference with the ability of individuals to perform their duties is prohibited.

Knox County CASA policy against harassment applies to employees and non-employees, including volunteers. Each employee and non-employee is responsible for contributing to a harassment-free environment, and Knox County CASA management is strictly responsible for maintaining an atmosphere free of discrimination and harassment, sexual or otherwise. Reporting of all perceived incidents of harassment is required as outlined below.

**Retaliation against any individual who reports or participates in the investigation of a report of harassment is prohibited. Retaliation in violation of this policy is grounds for termination of the volunteer relationship.**

*Definition and Prohibited Conduct*

Sexual Harassment: While it is not easy to define precisely what types of conduct might constitute sexual harassment, examples of prohibited behavior include, without limitation, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, obscene gestures, displaying sexually graphic materials, sending sexually explicit email, voice mail or text message (this includes all forms of digital media including social media) and other unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, such as uninvited touching of a sexual nature or sexually-related comments.

Depending upon the circumstances, the conduct can also include sexual or offensive conversation or joking, commenting about a volunteer’s or another individual’s physical appearance, conversation about one’s own or someone else’s sex life, teasing or other conduct directed toward a person because of their gender which is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment.

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, physical, or visual conduct of a sexual nature may constitute sexual harassment when:

(a) Submission to or rejection of such advances, requests or conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a case assignment or as the basis for assignment decisions affecting that volunteer.

(b) Such advances, requests or conduct have the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a volunteer’s work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or sexually offensive work environment to the extent that it also affects their psychological well-being.

Other Unlawful Harassment: It is difficult to define precisely what conduct constitutes “other unlawful harassment.” However, prohibited conduct includes slurs or epithets, threats, derogatory comments, unwelcome jokes, teasing, touching, abusing and other kinds of unwelcome verbal or physical conduct that is based upon age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws.

*Mandatory Reporting of Discrimination and/or Harassment*

If you observe or experience any discrimination or harassment based on your age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or any other prohibited basis in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws, or believe that you have been treated in a discriminatory manner, promptly report the incident to the Executive Director. If you believe it would be inappropriate to discuss the matter with the Executive Director, you may bypass the Executive Director and report the concern directly to the Juvenile Judge. Your complaint will be kept confidential to the maximum extent possible, and no retaliation will be taken against you for lodging a complaint.

*Conduct by Non-Employees, Including Volunteers*

This policy extends to conduct of non-employees which affects employees and non-employees, including volunteers, while they are working. Consequently, conduct by clients, vendors, family members of clients, or any other individual, which, if conducted by an employee, would be in violation of this policy, will not be tolerated. This policy requires volunteers to immediately report such offensive conduct to the Executive Director.

##### *Confidential Complaint Investigation Procedures*

A complaint will be investigated discreetly, impartially, and promptly. It is coordinated by an appropriate administrator and will normally begin promptly after the complaint is received. The matter will be resolved in a fair and timely manner. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent permitted by the circumstances. Any volunteer who violates this policy will face termination of the volunteer relationship with Knox County CASA.

##### *Retaliation Prohibited*

Knox County CASA prohibits any form of retaliation against any volunteer for filing a bona fide complaint under this policy or for assisting in a complaint investigation. However, if, after investigating any complaint of harassment or unlawful discrimination, the Agency determines that a complaint is not bona fide, was not made in good faith or that a volunteer has provided false information regarding a complaint of harassment, the volunteer may face the possibility of termination of the volunteer relationship with Knox County CASA.

## **6.5 Policy Against Violence**

Knox County CASA prohibits any acts or threats of violence at any time against its clients, visitors, volunteers, or employees by any individuals on the premises of Knox County CASA, or while such individual is engaged in Knox County CASA business on or off Knox County CASA premises.

Volunteers are expected to warn their appropriate CASA staff member(s) of any suspicious workplace activity, situations, or incidents that they observe or know about that involve employees, other volunteers, former volunteers or employees, clients, or visitors and that appear suspicious or problematic. This would include, for example, threats of violence, aggressive conduct, offensive acts, threatening or offensive comments or remarks about firearms, weapons, or the like. Reports will be held in confidence, to the maximum extent possible. Knox County CASA will not condone any form or retaliation against any employee or volunteer for making a report in good faith under this policy. Physically hostile conduct or threats, regardless of how transmitted, towards employees, volunteers, clients, or visitors are prohibited. Such conduct should be immediately reported to a CASA supervisor or the Executive Director. Any volunteer engaged in such conduct will face termination of their volunteer relationship with Knox County CASA.

## **6.6 Substance Abuse**

Knox County CASA is a substance-free work environment. Knox County CASA prohibits the use, sale, purchase, transfer, receipt or possession of alcohol, drugs, or controlled substances on or in Knox County CASA premises and vehicles or while performing advocate duties.

## **6.7 Firearms and Weapons Safety**

The possession of firearms, dangerous weapons, or explosives on the premises of Knox County CASA or while engaged in the duties or functions as a CASA volunteer is prohibited. All weapons, firearms, and ammunition must be safely secured and locked away in the volunteer’s car when visiting with a child and remain inaccessible at all times to a child when in the CASA volunteer’s presence.

Prohibited weapons include any form of weapon or explosive restricted under local, state, or federal regulation. This includes all firearms, knives over three inches in length, or other weapons covered by law. Legal chemical dispensing devices, such as pepper spray, which are sold for personal protection shall also remain safely secured and not accessible to the child. **Volunteers who violate this policy will be subject to disciplinary actions, up to and including termination.**

## **6.8 Grievance Policy**

Misunderstandings or disagreements may arise in any organization. Knox County CASA values and wishes to promote an amiable and cooperative environment. Our open-door policy is reflective of our commitment to our values and to providing you with the best possible working conditions. Knox County CASA encourages an open and direct atmosphere where concerns, suggestions, and questions can be discussed.

When problems continue where volunteers believe action is necessary beyond open discussion, the following steps should be followed:

1. A volunteer should discuss a grievance(s) with their immediate supervisor. If the grievance is regarding the immediate supervisor, the matter shall be discussed with the Executive Director. The grievance shall be documented by the supervisor or Executive Director, including an action plan for an agreed-upon corrective action (if applicable). A copy of the plan shall be forwarded to the volunteer.

2. At this point, if the volunteer does not feel the grievance has been resolved in a satisfactory manner, the volunteer must put the grievance in writing, with the above referenced action plan attached, to the Executive Director, or if the grievance refers to the Executive Director. Depending upon the circumstances, the Executive Director, or the Juvenile Judge, will conduct an investigation and meet with the volunteer within a reasonable time thereafter. After meeting with the volunteer, the Executive Director or the Juvenile Judge will advise the volunteer of their proposed resolution of the grievance and after obtaining input, if any, from the volunteer, will issue a final resolution which will be binding on all parties concerned.

The written grievance should contain the following:

a. A description of the problem.

b. The date of the incident(s).

c. Name(s) of individual(s) involved in or witnessing the incident(s).

d. The volunteer’s suggested resolution.

e. The date the grievance is filed with the volunteer’s signature.

The volunteer who filed the grievance must be informed of the resolution in writing, and Knox County CASA will keep a written record of all grievances filed against volunteers, staff members, the Executive Director, and Juvenile Judge.

## **6.9 Whistleblower Policy**

A whistleblower is an employee, juvenile judge, or volunteer who informs a supervisor, the Executive Director, or Juvenile Judge about an activity which that person believes to be fraudulent or dishonest.

*Whistleblower Protection*

Knox County CASA will use best efforts to protect the whistleblowers against retaliation, as described below. It cannot guarantee confidentiality, however, and there is no such thing as an “unofficial” or “off the record” report.

Knox County CASA will keep the whistleblower’s identity confidential, unless:

● The person agrees to be identified;

● Identification is necessary to allow CASA or law enforcement officials to investigate or respond effectively to the report;

● Identification is required by law; or

● The person accused of violations is entitled to the information as a matter of legal right in disciplinary proceedings.

Knox County CASA employees and volunteers may not retaliate against a whistleblower with the intent or effect of adversely affecting the terms or conditions of employment. Whistleblowers who believe that they have been retaliated against may file a written complaint with the Executive Director or Board President if retaliation is from the Executive Director. A proven complaint of retaliation will result in a proper remedy for the person harmed and the initiation of disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, against the retaliating person. This protection from retaliation is not intended to prohibit supervisors from taking action, including disciplinary action, in the usual scope of their duties and based on valid performance-related factors. Whistleblowers must be cautious to avoid baseless allegations.

**6.10 Volunteer Files**

Volunteer files, which contain private information about each volunteer including, as appropriate, volunteer application, emergency contact information, signed volunteer job description, reference documentation, all necessary background clearances, training records and performance evaluations, and documentation of volunteer status are kept in private files in the Knox County CASA office and are the property of Knox County CASA. Access to volunteer files shall be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Executive Director. Volunteers who desire to review their own files should make an appointment with the Executive Director to do so. If after review of content in a volunteer’s file, said volunteer wishes to add information to the file, or make a factual correction, the volunteer may give the updated or additional information to the Executive Director who will add it to the file. CASA volunteers are encouraged to update the Executive Director immediately of any change in address, employment, or other pertinent information to ensure updated files.

**6.11 Agency Letterhead**

Volunteers act as official representatives of Knox County CASA when using CASA letterhead. Volunteers may use CASA letterhead only when corresponding about the Knox County CASA cases assigned to them and with prior approval by CASA supervisory staff. Use of letterhead is not permitted for personal correspondence or for correspondence related to the work Knox County CASA does (i.e., letters to the editor expressing personal opinions regarding proposed legislation or government policies).

**6.12 Media Communication**

Inquiries concerning Knox County CASA, its policies, practices, or clients, must be referred to the Executive Director. Volunteers are not permitted to make any statements involving CASA to the media without the consent of the Executive Director.

**6.13 Social Media Policy**

Knox County CASA recognizes and values the role of social media in our everyday lives. We encourage our staff and volunteers, to use social media platforms to highlight the important contribution of our work in the community while remaining aware of the risks and responsibilities associated with an open public forum.

When you engage in social media and online communication, you become a public figure. As a public figure who is associated with Knox County CASA, you have a responsibility to help protect this organization and our clients. The following social media policy will assist you in making responsible decisions about your use of social and online media in connection with your role with Knox County CASA.

(Social media includes all means of communicating or posting content of any sort on the Internet, including blogs, journals or diaries, personal websites, social networking or affinity sites, bulletin boards or chat rooms.)

Online Communication and Social Media Expectations:

1. ***Never reveal confidential information.*** Sharing stories that illustrate the value of CASA advocacy for children is often the most powerful way to engage the public in our cause. However, the sharing of confidential information about the children and families we serve is prohibited. This includes names, ages, case-specific details, time-specific statements, and photographs. It is acceptable to discuss general details and to use non-time-specific statements so long as it does not contain information recognizable to the family or anyone associated with the family or case.

2. **Uphold a respectable reputation.** Be fair and courteous to fellow employees and volunteers the families we serve, the stakeholders with whom we work, and the vendors we retain. If you have a complaint or criticism, you are encouraged to address it through the appropriate internal channels of communication. Additionally, do not respond to any negative comments posted online about Knox County CASA or any other CASA program including local and national organizations. We would appreciate you informing the Executive Director if you see any negative representation of the organization online so we may determine the best way to respond or not.

3. **Be considerate.** Never post discriminatory or harassing comments. Be respectful of all individuals and families served by Knox County CASA; CASA employees and volunteers any community stakeholder including individuals or organizations within or outside the judicial and child welfare systems; or any other persons associated with Knox County CASA.

4. **Maintain a high standard of professionalism.** You should maintain professional relationships at all times. Avoid connecting via social media with a child or family you know through your work with Knox County CASA or as a volunteer. If for some reason you feel you must communicate through a social network about a CASA-related matter, check first with your supervisor. You should not add children or families as friends on social media or request that they add you. Remember that your communication while on Knox County CASA business may be discoverable in court. Do not communicate with the judge or court regarding a CASA case or any other Knox County CASA matter not specific to a case via social media.

5. **Use good judgement.** Refrain from including any inappropriate content, providing links to inappropriate websites, or including any inappropriate photos in postings or comments directly or indirectly referring to Knox County CASA, any individuals associated with Knox County CASA, or your role with the organization. Inappropriate material includes depictions or descriptions of illicit substances and/or their paraphernalia; underage drinking; harassing, hostile, false, or confidential information; and any other acts that violate local, state, or federal law and/or CASA statutes, rules, and regulations. Prejudice or discriminatory content is also prohibited. When using social media in connection with your capacity as a CASA volunteer, take a moment to consider all online comments with respect to the above framework before posting. Using good judgement extends to the selection of sources of news and research. The sources you base your arguments on should be reputable and well-established, and ideally bipartisan or nonpartisan. Remember that the Internet archives almost everything, so even deleted posts can be searched!

6. **Share public content but not private content.** You are free to share content from National CASA/GAL’s public website and social media accounts with the general public. However, you may not share content from any member portal that is password protected unless it was intended specifically for sharing.

7. **Respect copyright.** Make sure facts are accurate before posting and you have permission to post any copyrighted information. When discussing others’ research or opinions, make it clear that the research or opinions are not coming directly from you by citing the source.

8. **Be transparent.** Your online comments represent only your personal opinions. Never present yourself as a spokesperson for Knox County CASA. Always be clear and open about the nature of your association with Knox County CASA and when necessary, make it clear that your views do not represent those of the organization or anyone else associated with the organization.

9. **Try to add value.** Does your post provide worthwhile information and perspective? Does it pertain to your mission and work? Does it help you, your coworkers, volunteers, and supporters better understand and feel more connected to our cause? Does it build a positive sense of community?

When using social media in connection with your capacity as a CASA volunteer, take a moment to consider all online comments with respect to the above framework before posting.

*Violation of Social Media Policy*

Online content produced by Knox County CASA volunteers in conflict with the above guidelines or including discriminatory remarks, harassment, and threats of violence or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination from your role with Knox County CASA.

Furthermore, retaliation or any negative action against any staff, volunteer, or board member for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating with an investigation will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination from your role with Knox County CASA.

**6.14** **E-mail Policy**

In many situations, e-mail communication is utilized, both internally and externally. Please be aware that all e-mail correspondence should be written in a respectful manner. An e-mail that references any part of a case becomes part of the case record and needs to be written in a professional and productive way. Please show proper consideration for others’ as if he or she is also reading that e-mail. When an issue of conflict is being handled by CASA staff, sometimes e-mail correspondence will be forwarded to other parties involved. Always write emails knowing that once it is in writing, it may be forwarded to help resolve misunderstandings and conflicts and to facilitate open communication. Further, remember that the court and potentially the media could have access to certain e-mails.

## **6.15 Photography Policy**

CASA volunteers may only take photos of children for court report purposes. Photos shall not be distributed in any manner. Photos are prohibited from being used for social media, marketing, or personal use unless written authorization is provided by the child’s legal guardian. Upon case closure, all photos shall be included in the case file that is returned to the CASA program. No copies shall be made or kept of any photos. Photos must be immediately deleted from the CASA’s personal phone and/or camera. Photos will be stored with the case file until the file is destroyed pursuant to Indiana Administrative Code.

## **6.16 Technology Responsible Use Policy**

Each CASA volunteer is expected to use Knox County CASA’s available computer technology responsibly and professionally. This policy requires all volunteers who use computers and related technology to do so prudently, legally, and for the benefit of the CASA program. Computers and email are not to be used for personal use. While serving as a volunteer, volunteers should not have any expectation of privacy with respect to the files of the Knox County CASA computers they use or the contents of email messages, either sent or received, or downloaded or uploaded files from the Internet. Knox County CASA reserves the right to access and disclose the contents of any of its computer files or any email message for any lawful purpose.

Volunteers are not to display any material on Knox County CASA computer monitors that is offensive to the staff, other volunteers or visitors to CASA’s office. Every volunteer is responsible for communicating to the appropriate CASA staff member their discomfort, if any, with material displayed on computer terminals at the office.

As a reminder, it is a violation of law and of the CASA Responsible Use Policy to download and distribute material from the Internet if such distribution would constitute a violation of copyright laws. It is also a violation of CASA Responsible Use Policy to use CASA’s computers for any activity in connection with pornography. CASA will terminate the volunteer relationship of any volunteer who violates this policy.

**6.17 Direct Service Provision**

Knox County CASA is a child advocacy organization. Advocating for the child’s best interest which may include advocating for provision of appropriate services to children. CASA volunteers are restricted from providing direct services such as: mental health services, transporting parties, intervening in domestic disputes, providing counseling, supervising visitation, offering to provide funds for food or other necessities.

**6.18 non-Partisanship**

# *Section 7: CODE OF ETHICS*

Volunteers must abide by the Code of Ethics from the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA. This Code of Ethics provides Indiana GAL/CASA programs and volunteers with guidelines for professional behavior and ethical conduct. The Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA shall not be held liable for the actions of affiliate programs or volunteers.

**CONDUCT**

1. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will abide by this Code of Ethics and all laws and regulations governing their activities. Each GAL/CASA program is expected to train their staff and volunteers on the Code of Ethics, provide them with a copy, and have them sign an acknowledgement that they have read and received the Code of Ethics and will abide by it.

2. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will uphold the credibility and dignity of the GAL/CASA concept by conducting all business in an honest, fair, professional, and humane manner.

3. Employees and volunteers of GAL/CASA programs will not use their authority inappropriately, nor condone any illegal acts or unethical practices related to their program or community.

4. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will not use their program relationship for inappropriate personal, professional, or financial gain.

5. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will avoid any action that could adversely affect the confidence of the public in the integrity of the GAL/CASA concept.

6. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will not initiate, permit or participate in any *ex parte* communications with the judge outside the presence of the parties concerning a pending or impending proceeding.

7. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will not practice, condone, facilitate or participate in any form of discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, or mental or physical handicap.

8. GAL/CASA programs will take necessary steps to avoid conflicts of interest on cases. GAL/CASA programs will ensure that each volunteer exercises independent judgment on behalf of a child and advocates solely for whatever is in the best interest of the child. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will resist influences and pressures that interfere with impartial judgment and will report honestly and impartially to the court on what is in the best interests of the child.

9. In order to avoid conflicts of interest and even the appearance of impropriety, the GAL/CASA program shall not allow employees of the Department of Child Services to serve as a volunteer. Foster parents and employees of agencies that provide services contracted through the Department of Child Services also should not serve as volunteers within the county(ies) covered by the GAL/CASA program absent special circumstances that are approved by the Director.

10. A GAL/CASA program shall not appoint any volunteer to a case when the volunteer has prior involvement with a family or with the circumstances surrounding the case unless there is full disclosure of the potential conflict to all parties and any perceived or actual conflict is waived.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

11. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will respect the right to privacy of all individuals. GAL/CASA programs will maintain strict confidentiality of all information related to a case. GAL/CASA programs will take all reasonable steps to ensure that volunteers also maintain strict confidentiality. GAL/CASA programs will provide training to volunteers about confidentiality and will have volunteers sign a confidentiality statement and/or policy. Neither a GAL/CASA program nor volunteers will disclose confidential information relating to a case to any person who is not a party to the case except in reports to the court and as provided by law or court order.

12. Persons affiliated with GAL/CASA programs will not use confidential information obtained through their work with GAL/CASA for personal benefit.

**KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**

13. Individuals working in GAL/CASA programs as staff or volunteers must be trained in the court and child welfare systems; child abuse and neglect issues; relevant state and federal laws; permanency planning and family preservation; cultural awareness; confidentiality and ethics; the roles and responsibilities of a GAL/CASA volunteer; the identification and treatment of child abuse and neglect; and early childhood, child, and adolescent development. A GAL/CASA program that appoints volunteers in divorce/custody/visitation, paternity, juvenile delinquency, adoption, or guardianship cases must provide additional training in these areas.

14. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers must respect a child’s inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe and permanent environment that meets that child’s best interests.

**STATE OFFICE CERTIFICATION**

15. GAL/CASA programs seeking certification from the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA must operate in accordance with this Code of Ethics and the Program Standards of the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA. Pursuant to I.C. 33-24-6-4, only GAL or CASA programs that are certified by the Supreme Court are eligible for funding from the State Office.

16. Affiliation with the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA may be used only for purposes in accordance with the goals and purposes of the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA.

**COMPLIANCE**

17. The Director of the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA shall monitor compliance with this Code of Ethics in conjunction with the Indiana Supreme Court Advisory Commission on GAL/CASA.

# *Section 8: ACKNOWLEDGMENT*

*Please complete this Acknowledgment page by initialing each section and signing at the bottom. Please provide this signed page to Knox County CASA.*

*I have read and understand the following sections of CASA’s Policy & Procedures Manual for Volunteers:*

*Initial Here*

*CASA STANDARDS \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*VOLUNTEERING AT CASA \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES CASA CONFIDENTIALITY \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES SAFETY POLICY & PROCEDURES \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*CASA VOLUNTEER RELATIONS AND AGENCY POLICIES \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*(Includes Conflict of Interest and social media Policy)*

*CODE OF ETHICS \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*I understand the contents of the Policy & Procedures Manual for Volunteers and agree to follow the policies and procedures as set forth in it.*

*I also consent to Knox County CASA access and disclosure at any time of computer files, internet files and email messages generated from or transmitted to Knox County CASA.*

*Print Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT**

A confidential communication is part of a professional relationship which is not made in the presence of a third party. Communications between the client and professional are considered privileged and may not be shared with a third person or entity as well as any other communication within your CASA role in any form is confidential. As a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer, you will have access to numerous documents which are confidential. You may not release this information to another without the Court directing you to do so. You must safeguard the protection of information at all times and in all locations. You must not disclose information to any person, media, web site, chat room, blog, or other form of communiqué.

**Therefore, this statement is a promise as provided in your Oath of CASA services that:**

I promise that I shall hold in strict confidence all information. I will not violate the confidential relationship between the CASA Program, its volunteers, related agencies, courts, and all parties involved and/or interviewed. I will not remove any written records from the project office without expressed permission. I will safeguard all records in my possession, both physical and in electronic form, from any outside access.

I accept full responsibility for maintaining the confidential and private nature of all records and information. I understand that I am personally responsible and liable for any violation of the confidentiality statement.

I accept full responsibility for case files and will return those files to the project office when my case involvement ends.

CASA Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

CASA Staff: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**KNOX COUNTY CASA PROGRAM**

GRIEVANCE/COMPLAINT RESOLUTION FORM

RE: , CASA Volunteer

\_\_\_\_\_ I have received the attached written grievance/complaint on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_(date).

Subsequent written grievances/complaints were received on the following dates:

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed by independent investigation of the grievance(s)/complaint(s) on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_(date).

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed the attached written report regarding my findings on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_(date).

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed a personal interview with the CASA Volunteer on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_\_(date).

\_\_\_\_\_ I took the following action as a result of the grievance/complaint, my investigation, and the personal interview with the CASA Volunteer.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**KNOX COUNTY CASA PROGRAM**

GRIEVANCE/COMPLAINT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

As a CASA Volunteer,

I have reviewed the written grievance/complaint regarding my behavior and/or actions for the case that I am assigned.

I have reviewed the written investigation report regarding the allegations as prepared by the Program Director.

I have met with the CASA Program Director in person regarding the grievance/complaint and his/her findings.

I understand that the following action(s) are to be taken in regards to this grievance/complaint:

1. I understand the grievance/complaint and agree to work with the Program Director on a plan to resolve this issue.
2. I understand that I am to be removed from the case as the assigned volunteer.
3. I understand that the grievance/complain has not been substantiated and no action will be taken at this time.

I do not agree with the grievance/complaint, the findings of the Director’s investigation, and/or the actions to be taken.

Hereby signed:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**KNOX COUNTY CASA PROGRAM**

WRITTEN WARNING FOR FAILURE TO COMPLY

CASA Volunteer, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, has failed to comply with the Program expectation of (write the issue below):

\_\_\_\_\_ I have received the written reminder (via email or text) on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(date).

\_\_\_\_\_ I have received the verbal warning (via phone call or voicemail message) on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(date).

I understand that the following action(s) are to be taken regarding this failure to comply with program expectations:

1. I understand that I have 48 hours from receiving and signing this written warning to correct the issue outlined above.
2. I understand that if I do not correct the issue within the 48 hours, I will be brought before the Director.
3. I understand that one possible outcome of further failure to comply could result in my removal from my case or discharge from the program.

I do not agree with the written warning and/or the actions to be taken.

Volunteer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Case Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Review of Volunteer Policies and Procedures

In order to ensure best kept practices and to make edits as necessary, Volunteer Policies and Procedure will be reviewed every 3 years by the Executive Director and any Executive leadership team. Policies can be edited prior to the next review by approval from the Executive Director.

**Last Revised:** **February 10,2023**

**Next Review Schedule of all documents: February 10,2026**

**Revision History: December 2015, January 23, 2019, January 9, 2020, January 1, 2021**