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**Safe Harbor Children’s Advocacy Center, CASA of the Harbor**

**Court Appointed Special Advocate Volunteer Description**

CASAs are ordinary people doing extraordinary work. Court Appointed Special Advocates are volunteers appointed by a judge and assigned to one child or sibling group within the child welfare and family court systems due to abuse or neglect. They conduct thorough research, review documentation included in the case file, interview any individuals privy to case information, and advocate for the child(ren)’s best interests. CASAs submit written reports to the court including recommendations for what they believe is best for the child(ren). Court Appointed Special Advocates are instrumental in assuring the child(ren) and/or family receive needed services.

Below is what you can expect when applying to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate:

HOW TO BECOME A COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE

* Complete an online application at <http://www.mi-allegan.evintosolutions.com/VolunteerApplication>
* Complete the provided background check forms
* Set up and attend an in-person interview
* Participate in CASA Training
* Attend Swearing-In

YOUR FIRST CASE ASSIGNMENT

* Collaborate with your CASA Supervisor to choose your first case assignment
* You’ll be appointed to a case by the Court
* Your CASA Supervisor will assist you with initial team communication and attend meetings and court hearings with you to get you acclimated
* Your CASA Supervisor will continue to guide and support you throughout the entirety of the case and be able to help you answer any questions that may arise

JOB TITLE

Court Appointed Special Advocate

SUPERVISORS

Court Appointed Special Advocates report to the CASA Manager and/or the Executive Director of Safe Harbor Children’s Advocacy Center.

QUALIFICATIONS

* Must be at least 21 years of age
* Have a high school diploma or equivalent
* Complete an application, interview, background screenings
* Must have a clean criminal history with no criminal history or child abuse and/or neglect history
* A desire to support abused and neglected children maintain stability and permanency
* Ability to maintain objectivity when gathering information
* Effective communication skills
* Excellent writing skills for the preparation of CASA Court Reports
* Ability to work independently

COMMITMENT

* Must commit to at least one case through completion

DUTIES

* Gather facts, including review of all records related to an assigned case
* Communicate with the parties; establish and maintain contact with the child(ren), family, caseworkers, attorneys, or other individuals involved within the child(ren)’s case
* Submit CASA Court Reports to the CASA Program to be submitted to the Court which summarize the facts including relevant information and specific recommendations in the child(ren)’s best interests
* Appear at scheduled court hearings
* Monitor the Case Service Plan to ensure compliance by all parties

TIME COMMITMENT

* Court Appointed Special Advocates meet with the assigned child(ren) every seven to 10 days.
* Time necessary to complete duties on an individual case may vary, on average a volunteer spends 10 to 20 hours a month on case related duties.
* A Court Appointed Special Advocate commits to advocating for the child(ren) until permanency is achieved. On average, this process takes about 18 months, but can last several years.
* Although most scheduling is flexible and arranged by the CASA at his or her convenience, the CASA must be available to confer with the Department of Health and Human Services and other professionals involved in the case during workday hours. Additionally, the Court Appointed Special Advocate must be respectful of the child(ren)’s placement and their schedule and must make visits with the child during a time that best works for the family you are serving.
* The Court Appointed Special Advocate should attend daytime court hearings which occur approximately once every three months or arrange to have their CASA Supervisor cover the hearing.

TRAINING

* Each prospective CASA is required to successfully complete 30 hours of training and observe at least one court hearing during the course of training.
* Court Appointed Special Advocates must complete 12 hours of continuing education, or inservice training, each calendar year to remain active.