

CASA Volunteer Guide

Representative sample of a real Pre-Law Blueprint deliverable. Client-specific names, local institutions, faculty, and research details are generalized or shown as bracketed placeholders; the structure, reasoning, and depth here are the real thing.

What CASA Is

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a trained community volunteer, appointed by a judge, who represents the best interests of a child (or sibling group) who has been abused, neglected, or abandoned. The program runs through the dependency/juvenile court in your county, which handles thousands of children in foster care. CASA volunteers work directly inside dependency court, the exact courtroom where family systems and child welfare intersect with the justice system. For your application narrative, this is one of the most substantive advocacy experiences an undergraduate can hold.

What CASA Volunteers Do

Once sworn in and assigned to a case, you are the one consistent adult voice for that child through the life of their case. Foster children often experience multiple placements, changes in schools, and changes in social workers; the CASA volunteer remains the constant.

- Visit your child at least once a month, wherever they are placed.
- Stay in contact with teachers, parents, foster parents, service providers, therapists, social workers, and attorneys.
- Review school records, social worker reports, and other case documents.
- Write court reports (about every six months) summarizing what you have observed and recommending what is in the child's best interest.
- Attend hearings and speak for the child's interests before a judge.
- Build a real relationship with the child through simple, meaningful activities: a walk, a meal, the park, a visit to the library.

The commitment is roughly 8 to 15 hours per month, and CASA asks for a minimum two-year commitment. Whether that carries cleanly into law school depends on where you go: if you stay in the area it continues seamlessly, but if you'd be leaving the state for law school soon after being sworn in, you'd be stepping away from a case partway through, so we'll time your start with that in mind.

The Full Process

Every step must be completed before you can be assigned a case. The whole pipeline from orientation to sworn-in typically takes two to three months.

- **Step 1: Attend a virtual orientation.** Offered on a regular monthly schedule through most of the year. Register through your local CASA program. The session provides an overview of the role, requirements, application process, and training. Lasts about an hour.
- **Step 2: Complete the online volunteer application.**
- **Step 3: Complete your state's child abuse & neglect central registry clearance.** Bring this to your interview.
- **Step 4: Fingerprinting.** No cost to you.
- **Step 5: Interview.** Roughly 45-60 minutes, offered virtually or in person.

- **Step 6: Training.** Five consecutive weeks, blended format: about 3 hours of online work plus a 3-hour in-person class each week (roughly 33 hours total), covering child welfare law, child development, trauma, and courtroom advocacy.
- **Step 7: Take the CASA Oath of Office and be sworn in by a judge.**
- **Step 8: Accept a case, pick up your CASA ID badge, and begin advocating.**

Timing Around Your 21st Birthday

You must be 21 to be sworn in, and you turn 21 partway through this plan, so the plan is to enter the pipeline just before your birthday and be sworn in shortly after. Working backward:

- About two to three months before your birthday: attend virtual orientation and submit the application.
- The following weeks: fingerprinting and interview.
- Starting after your 21st birthday: training (five weeks).
- Roughly a month after training: oath, case assignment, and you're on.

Confirm the exact schedule with the program closer to the time; they run trainings on a rolling calendar and may adjust based on availability.

Ongoing Requirements Once Sworn In

- At least 12 hours of continuing training per year.
- Regular consultation with your assigned CASA Peer Coordinator (at least monthly).
- Court report review with the Peer Coordinator or CASA staff before filing.
- Annual evaluation.

Why This Matters for Your Application

CASA is the single most direct undergraduate exposure you can have to dependency court: inside the courtroom, working with the exact judges who preside over the cases at the center of your field, seeing how the system handles parental incarceration, addiction, domestic violence, and child welfare all at once. It is your research area, your professional interest, and your application narrative in a single two-year role. It also produces something few classmates will have: specific children whose cases you carried, real court reports you wrote, and judges and social workers who can speak to your judgment and follow-through, all of it personal statement material and a strong reference outside the usual academic recommenders.

Contact and Application

Register for orientation and apply through your local CASA program (run through your county's dependency/juvenile court).

In the Meantime

Keep your weekly volunteering at your current youth-service placement going. It builds the same set of skills (working with vulnerable young people, tracking their needs, maintaining consistent presence) and it fills the same slot in your application while you wait to be old enough for CASA. When we build your final application, both experiences work together: the youth-service role as the entry point, CASA as the deeper court-based advocacy that grew out of it.