

# CHAPTER 1: The CASA Volunteer Role

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PLEASE READ THE MATERIAL PRIOR TO ATTENDING THE SESSION.

### Homework for Session:

Read chapter 1; answer and submit chapter 1 review questions.

### Class Objectives:

- Define the vision of ProKids
- Understand the basic principles that guide CASA Volunteer work
- Be familiar with the Volunteer Policy & Procedure Manual
- Understand the responsibilities of a CASA Volunteer

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## UNIT 1: CASA Volunteer Training

CASA volunteer training is designed to provide you with the opportunity to learn the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to be a CASA volunteer (Court Appointed Special Advocate) for children who find themselves involved in the court system through no fault of their own. The children with whom you will work have been abused and neglected. Many of these children are in foster care. They need a “voice in court” in order to find a safe, permanent and nurturing home quickly – whether that means returning to a parent, relative or family friend, or being adopted. The CASA volunteer provides that voice, sharing with the court both what the child wants, and recommendations about what is in that child’s best interest. It is important work that requires the commitment of your time, your energy, and your heart.

The purpose of this training is to develop volunteers who are competent, reasonably autonomous, and able to exercise good judgment in their role as CASA volunteers. It is designed to model values important to CASA volunteer work, including responsibility, self-awareness, respect for differences, critical thinking, and collaboration. Much of this training curriculum was developed by the National CASA/GAL Association in 2007. Although this curriculum is rooted in the National CASA Curriculum, it has undergone major revisions to accommodate CASA University, Hamilton County, and ProKids policies.



In 1999 ProKids developed CASA University to respond to the training needs of our volunteers. CASA University provides volunteers access to year-round CASA training. Classes do not have to be taken in a particular order and volunteers can tailor training to fit around their lives. ProKids presented this unique and innovative training tool at The National CASA Conferences in 2000 and 2001. The Ohio Attorney General presented ProKids with the 2003 Promising Practice Award for CASA University at the annual Attorney General’s Victims of Crime Conference.

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## Training to be an Effective Advocate

A CASA volunteer needs specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills to effectively advocate for a child. Children who have been abused or neglected need a voice in the court to advocate for their best interests. An effective advocate is able to:

1. Approach each case with the goal of advocating for interventions and services designed to ensure that the child is in a safe, permanent, and nurturing home as soon as possible;
2. Work within the parameters of laws governing child abuse, neglect, and dependency cases; and
3. Under the guidance of ProKids staff:
  - Conduct an independent **investigation** to gather facts, and research the case to ascertain the needs and wishes of the child;
  - **Collaborate** with the child (when possible), the child's family, the child protective services agency (Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services - HCJFS), and other service providers to identify the appropriate resources for meeting the needs of the child and his/her family and to determine where those resources are available;
  - Consistently **present to the court** fact-based recommendations so that appropriate resources can be ordered to meet the needs of the child; and
  - **Monitor** the case until the child is in a safe, permanent, and nurturing home and the case has been closed.

**ad·vo·cate** *n* [ME *advocat*, fr. MF, fr. L *advocatus*, fr. pp. of *advocare* to summon, fr. *ad-* + *vocare* to call -- more at VOICE] **1.** one that pleads the cause of another; *specif*; one that pleads the cause of another before a tribunal or judicial court **2:** one that defends or maintains a cause or proposal.

**ad-vo-cate** *vt* -**cat-ed**; -**cat-ing**: to plead in favor of, *syn* see SUPPORT

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed., Merriam-Webster, Inc. May 2014

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## PROKIDS VISION STATEMENT

A safe, permanent, and nurturing home for every child.

## PROKIDS MISSION STATEMENT

**WHAT:** ProKids mobilizes our community to break the vicious cycle of child abuse and neglect.

**HOW:** ProKids helps our community discover the power of investing in the promise of our children. We recruit, train, and support community volunteers to speak up for children who have been abused and neglected and help guide them into safe environments where they can thrive. ProKids creates alliances within the child protection system to maximize outcomes for our children.

**WHY:** Creating a new cycle of growing up safe and secure, fundamentally changes the future for our children and our entire community.

## UNIT 2: ProKids Vision & Mission

Since 1981, ProKids has provided an exceptionally high quality of advocacy for the children we represent. ProKids' history is outlined in detail in the resource section of this chapter. Understanding our history will help you understand the direction of our future. National CASA/GAL Association Standards describe the major criteria a CASA program must meet for each volunteer. Since monitoring began in 2000, ProKids has been in 100% compliance with all minimum standards set by National CASA. The following statements describe a CASA volunteer using those standards:

- A CASA volunteer is an individual who is at least 21 years of age and has successfully passed the application and screening process, been trained by and serves under the supervision of the CASA/GAL program and is appointed by the court to advocate for children who come into the court system as a result of abuse or neglect as defined by the state child welfare laws.
- A CASA volunteer is an individual who respects a child's inherent right to be safe, establish permanence and have the opportunity to thrive.
- The CASA/GAL volunteer is an individual who advocates for the child's best interests in the court at every stage of the case once appointed by the court.

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To help meet our mission ProKids is governed by a Board of Trustees. ProKids Board members are volunteers who share their talents and skills to oversee the health and continued growth of ProKids. One focus of their responsibility is the oversight of ProKids' annual budget. ProKids' funding is met through a mix of donations from individuals, businesses and foundations. Each May ProKids hosts our Friends of Children Breakfast. This event features the swearing in of our newest CASA volunteers and a testimonial of one of the families we have impacted. As our only fundraiser of the year, we encourage you to attend, share the opportunity with your friends and family, and be inspired.

**A full listing of our current Board members and a graph of ProKids sources of income are in the Annual Report or at [www.prokids.org](http://www.prokids.org).**



"I believe that every child deserves a safe, permanent and nurturing home. A growing number of people in the Greater Cincinnati community not only share this belief, but also have taken action. Child abuse and neglect is tough to face, but headlines put it in front of us every day. Instead of giving in to feeling overwhelmed and turning away, ProKids volunteers, donors, supporters, and staff understand that each one of us can help, one child at a time."

*-- Tracy Cook, ProKids Executive Director*

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## UNIT 3: Principles & Concepts That Guide CASA Volunteer Work

### What is “Best Interest”?

Introducing the “Best Interest” Principle -- What It Means:

- **A safe home**
- **A permanent home**
- **As quickly as possible**

Parents typically decide what is best for their children and then provide it for them to the extent that they can. They are usually their children’s best advocates. The court intervenes in families’ lives when parents cannot or will not protect, promote, and provide for their children’s basic needs. A CASA volunteer becomes the advocate when the parent cannot -- or will not—fulfill this role.

Juvenile court judges and magistrates use the “best interest of the **child**” standard when making their decisions in child abuse and neglect cases. Child welfare and juvenile court practitioners and scholars have debated the meaning of “best interest of the child” for years. Books have been written on the subject; however, there is still no concise legal definition for this standard.

National CASA interprets the “best interest of the child” standard to mean that to determine the best interest of the child, the CASA volunteer should **know** the child they are appointed to advocate for well enough to form **fact-based** recommendations to the court that address the child’s **needs**, and know appropriate **resources** to meet those needs. The CASA volunteer also informs the court of the child’s wishes, whether or not those **wishes** are, in the opinion of the CASA volunteer, in the child’s best interest.

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## The Role of the CASA Volunteer

### The Key Components of the CASA Volunteer Role

As a CASA volunteer, your role consists of carrying out the following activities, which will be explored at length throughout training:

- **Investigation**

You carry out an objective, systematic examination of the situation, including relevant history, environment, relationships, and needs of the child.

- **Facilitation**

You identify resources and services for the child and facilitate a collaborative relationship between all parties on the case, helping to create a situation in which the child's needs can be met.

- **Advocacy**

You speak up for and plead the case of the child for whom you are appointed.

- **Monitoring**

You keep track of whether the orders of the court, as well as the plans of the treatment team are carried out, and you report to the court and work with the treatment team when any of the parties do not follow those orders and plans.



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## The Responsibility of the CASA Volunteer

**What Are the Responsibilities of the Job?**  
Review the responsibilities of the CASA volunteer as outlined in the CASA Volunteer Position Description (Volunteer Policy & Procedure Manual (VPPM), Page 26).

Following the completion of training, CASA volunteers are assigned by ProKids staff, and appointed by the court, to a child's case. This appointment requires them to fulfill the role that is assigned to them and to do so while respecting the confidentiality of all information or reports revealed to them.

The National CASA Association sets Standards for CASA volunteer work. The following is a summary of those standards:

- Reviewing records;
- Interviewing appropriate parties involved in the case, including the child;
- Determining whether a permanent plan has been created for the child and whether appropriate services, including reasonable efforts, are being provided to the child and family;
- Submitting a signed written report with recommendations to the court on what placement, visitation plan, services, and plan are in the best interest of the child;
- Attending court hearings;
- Maintaining complete records about the case, including appointments scheduled, interviews held, and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances; and
- Returning all case records and notes to ProKids when the case is closed or when the CASA volunteer leaves the case.

### **National CASA Standards regarding confidentiality include the following:**

- CASA volunteers respect the child's right to privacy by maintaining confidentiality;
- The CASA volunteer complies with all applicable statutory requirements pertaining to confidentiality of client information;
- Access to confidential records obtained by CASA volunteers is limited to the court, authorized agency personnel, and others outside the agency whose request for access to confidential information is permitted; and
- All records are safely and securely maintained.

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*The CASA volunteer has direct and sufficient contact with his or her client to carry out an independent and valid investigation of the child's circumstances, including the child's needs and wants, so as to be able to make sound, thorough, and objective recommendations in the child's best interest. This contact should occur in person to provide the CASA volunteer with firsthand knowledge of the child and his or her unique personality, abilities, and needs. While social contact is permitted with the child to develop trust and a meaningful relationship, the CASA volunteer functions as an objective advocate for the child and not as the child's attorney, caseworker, counselor, or parental figure. The CASA volunteer does not provide direct services to the child, such as supervising visitation; however, it is appropriate for the volunteer to observe visitation. Under no circumstances shall the CASA volunteer take the child into the CASA volunteer's home, allow contact between the child and the CASA volunteer's family, or take the child on an overnight outing.*

## Building Blocks CASA Volunteer Program

In 2000 ProKids recognized an increasing need for specialized advocacy for a group of our children. In response ProKids developed the **Building Blocks** Birth to Five Program. **Building Blocks** CASA volunteers advocate for children ages birth to five. They are required to complete additional training and have additional responsibilities. The Ohio Attorney General presented ProKids, for a second consecutive year, with the 2004 Promising Practices Award for **Building Blocks** at the annual Attorney General's Victims of Crime Conference.

### What are the responsibilities associated with a Building Blocks case?

See **VPPM**, Page 29, for the **Building Blocks** CASA Volunteer Position Description.

## LAUNCH CASA Volunteer Program

ProKids recognized an increasing need for specialized advocacy for a group of our children that were getting ready to transition out of the system. In response ProKids developed the **LAUNCH** Program for CASA children who are 14 or older. The **LAUNCH** program corresponds with an on-line Fostering Future training from National CASA. Both are designed to help you understand how to be a better advocate for children 14 and older. CASA volunteers who have cases with children 14 and older are required to complete 4 hours of additional **LAUNCH** training within the first year of being assigned a **LAUNCH** case. The E-Learning called Fostering Futures can be found at: <http://nc.casaforchildren.org/elearn2/default.aspx>

### What are the responsibilities associated with a LAUNCH case?

See **VPPM**, Page 31, for the **LAUNCH** CASA Volunteer Position Description.

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## ProKids Outcome Measures

ProKids has received United Way funding since 1984. United Way and other funders have provided ProKids support based on our ability to demonstrate our effectiveness in advocating for children. ProKids became one of the first CASA programs in the country to develop Outcome Measures in 1996. We have embraced outcome measures wholeheartedly to determine our effectiveness. ProKids has provided statewide and national training on Outcome Measures, presenting the value of Outcome Measures in 1997 at the Ohio CASA/GAL State Conference, in 1998 at the Attorney General's Victims of Crime Conference, and in 2002 at the National CASA/GAL Conference. ProKids continually evaluates our outcomes to ensure our effectiveness in serving children. ***The annual outcome measures can be reviewed in ProKids Annual Report or [www.prokids.org](http://www.prokids.org).***

### The CASA Volunteer's Relationship With the Child

Establishing a relationship with the child is *one of the most important things a CASA volunteer does*. The ideal relationship is one that maximizes the CASA volunteer's ability to advocate successfully for the child. The guidelines in Volunteer Policy & Procedure Manual page 19, section 4.7 describe the parameters for the CASA's relationship and contact with the child.

### Relationship Boundaries With Children and Families

There is a fine line between developing a caring relationship with a child and becoming emmeshed with the child and/or the child's family. The relationship between the CASA volunteer and the child and his or her family requires a balance between involvement and objectivity.



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## Personal vs. Professional Boundaries

Personal Relationships	Professional Relationships
Limitless	Has limits and boundaries
Equals	Power differential
Does not require formal knowledge and preparation	Requires formal knowledge and preparation
No fee/money	Typically money, fees, funding, etc.
Mutual gain	For purpose of client gain
Mutually agreed upon levels of intimacy	No physical intimacy or emotional intimacy
Mutually agreed upon confidentiality with no legal bounds	Rules of confidentiality/Carries a fiduciary responsibility
Unlimited time frame	Scheduled interaction, time limit
Anywhere, anytime	Place designated, time limited
Not goal oriented	Well-defined focus/goals
Not documented	Documented
No defined roles/no code of ethics	Defined roles, licenses, codes of ethics

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## Warning Signs of Boundary Crossings!

- Spending extra time with child beyond his/her needs
- Favoring one child at the expense of others
- Giving special attention/treatment that differs from that given to other cases
- Feeling colleagues do not understand the child as well as you do
- Acting/feeling possessive about the child
- Being guarded or defensive when questioned about interactions
- Ignoring policies when working with a specific child
- Keeping secrets with a child apart from the team
- Selectively reporting of behavior (negative or positive behavior)
- Unable or uncomfortable documenting interactions
- Child starts talking to only one professional
- You start to take on the roll of parent, friend, sex object
- Disclosing personal problems
- Sharing work concerns with child
- Role reversal
- Spending off-time with a child
- Giving home/cell phone and address when inappropriate
- Giving/receiving gifts
- Continued contact/communication after case closure
- Denying the fact that the child is a client
- Denying the fact that you have crossed the boundary from professional to non-professional relationship
- Needs of the professional being met over the needs of the client

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## Relationship Boundaries With the Family and Child

It is helpful at the very beginning of your relationship with a family to be clear about what you can help with and what you can't. Although every family situation requires some flexibility, it helps to tell families about ProKids's guidelines in the beginning and to follow them. Some families have several agency workers involved with them and get confused when one worker is able to help them with a task, while another can't or won't. The degree of emotional involvement that CASA volunteers have with children and their families is likely to be significant. This requires some boundary setting—defining what you can and will do and what is outside of your role.

This level of involvement is even more significant when, as so often happens, the CASA volunteer becomes the one person who has remained constant for the duration of the case. Your goal as a CASA volunteer is to remain empathetic to the family while remembering that the child is your focus. It is important to be objective, to remain detached enough to clearly see the child's and family's situation and needs. To be successful as a CASA volunteer, you must care about the families of the children, but you cannot live their lives for them. It is important to have a full personal life of your own.

*Adapted from **Empowerment Skills for Family Workers**, Christiann Dean, Cornell Empowering Families Project, 2003-2013. Used with permission.*

## Relationship Boundaries With the Child

Perhaps the most difficult boundaries to set and maintain are those between you and the child or children in the case. There is a fine line between what is part of your role and what is outside of it. It is natural to care about a child who has been hurt and who relies on you to keep his or her best interest at the forefront. If you didn't care, you wouldn't work so hard to see that his or her needs are met. However, if you get too personally involved, it is hard to maintain the objective perspective that is required for this powerful advocacy work. Our goal is to be part of a temporary intervention in a child's life -- to assist in a time of need and then to leave and let the child continue along his or her way. When the child is in a safe, permanent and nurturing home, your work as a CASA volunteer is done. It is time to move forward and help another child.

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## INFORMATION FOR PARENTS & CHILDREN The HCJFS Caseworker and the CASA®/Guardian ad Litem

We want you to have a clear understanding of the roles of two people who will be working with you while your family is involved with the Court and Children Services. These people are your Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian ad Litem (CASA®/GAL) and your Hamilton County Job and Family Services caseworker. The CASA®/GAL has the responsibility to advocate for your child's best interest. The HCJFS caseworker has the primary responsibility for management of your family's case. It is your responsibility to cooperate with both your caseworker and the CASA®/GAL. The descriptions below are general. They are not meant to be the only things that the CASA®/GAL and/or the caseworker might do on your child's case.

### The CASA®/GAL will:

- . Conduct a thorough, independent, on-going investigation and submit written findings and recommendations to the Court.
- . Represent your child's best interest when the case comes before the Court..
- . Visit your child wherever he/she is placed.
- . Meet with the parent(s) to discuss your concerns and plans.
- . Communicate with the HCJFS caseworker regarding any changes in the family's circumstances.
- . Observe visits between parents and child.
- . Maintain contact with those caring for your child.
- . Contact service providers for feedback on your family's progress in services.
- . Maintain contact with your child's attorney, should one be appointed.
- . Attend Court hearings and other meetings as an advocate for your child.
- . Visit your child on a regular basis and be available to the child when needed.

### The HCJFS Caseworker will:

- . Continue to assess the family situation and recommend services to help the family.
- . Prepare a case plan and monitor its progress.
- . Provide a suitable relative placement or foster home for your children.
- . Per Court order, arrange visits between your child and you, if your child is out of your home.
- . Offer constructive feedback to parent(s).
- . Maintain communication with the CA®A /GAL regarding any changes in the family's circumstances.
- . Help the family to maintain independence and to become self-sufficient.
- . Assist family with obtaining needed community resources.
- . Communicate with your service providers regarding your participation and progress.
- . Attend Court hearings, HCJFS Semi-Annual Reviews (SAR) regarding your family's case.

### Your Child(ren)'s CASA® /GAL is:

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### CASA® /GAL's Telephone:

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**Questions:** Contact ProKids  
CASA®/GAL Department  
2605 Burnet Avenue  
513-281-2000



### Your Caseworker is:

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### His/Her Telephone:

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**Questions:** Contact Hamilton County  
Job & Family Services  
222 Central Parkway  
513-946-1000

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## UNIT 4: Attitudes, Values & Skills That Enhance CASA Volunteer Work

Much of the information explored to this point focuses on the role or duties of the CASA volunteer. Fulfilling duties is an important part of being a successful CASA volunteer, but it is only one part. Personal attitudes, values, and skills are also very important.

- **Professionalism**

Ethics, accountability, confidentiality, resourcefulness, critical thinking, and good judgment. These skills/abilities can enhance a CASA volunteer's credibility and earn the respect of others in the case. Professionalism and assertiveness can help CASA volunteers gain necessary information.

- **Interpersonal Competence**

Non-judgmental, respectful, collaborative, self-aware, and assertive. These attitudes will help the CASA volunteer be more successful in working with other people, particularly in gathering accurate information and making accurate interpretations of situations. CASA volunteers are expected to demonstrate respect and open-mindedness in their interactions with all parties to the case. Gathering information from children requires different skills and attitudes than working with adults. Children may be frightened or healing from trauma. They are different emotionally and developmentally from adults and also from other children. Your listening and observation skills will help you gather a full picture of the child's situation.

- **Cultural Sensitivity**

Cultural sensitivity is vital in working effectively with children and families. What a CASA volunteer does not understand may lead to inaccurate interpretations. Understanding your own culture and the differences between cultures will allow you to best serve children and their families. You must also be prepared to manage distrust and hostility from members of communities who have felt left out or wronged by the majority culture.

Your life experience (culture, era, geography, race, education, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, family dynamics, etc.) has led you to develop a particular perspective. Your unique perspective always influences how you interpret what you observe. The more aware you become of your personal perspective, the better able you will be to understand that others have a different perspective. In observing children and families, it is important to understand that your perspective on families and parenting is likely to be different from those with whom you are working. Additionally, you will work with people

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who will talk with you about important and often painful experiences in their lives. To avoid being judgmental, it is important to be aware of the influence of your personal perspective.

To some families, components of the CASA volunteer role may seem threatening. Be clear about your CASA volunteer role and adapt your behavior to the comfort of the family you are working with while remaining true to the basic role and relationship. Much of your time and energy will be spent monitoring the progress of the family as they work toward **reunification** with their child. Keep in mind the societal barriers certain groups of people face, and adjust your expectations without putting the child at risk.

A key part of your role is to recognize the **strengths** of different cultural perspectives. Something that is not a personal value for you may be a strength within another person's or family's cultural group. In advocating for permanent placements/homes, keep in mind the interest of children to have access to their cultural communities in order to maintain their cultural heritage and sense of identity.

*Adapted from materials from Portland CASA Association, Portland, OR.*

## **The Influence of Personal Perspective**

*The influence of your own culture on your personal perspective about the situations of others is a critical area for exploration as you prepare for this role. How has your life experience influenced your personal perspective?*

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## RESOURCE MATERIALS

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## CURRICULUM ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### **National CASA Association Curriculum Advisory Committee:**

**Judith Adams**, Program Director, Multnomah County CASA, Portland, OR; **Joan Jenkins**, Executive Director, CIP/Connecticut CASA, New Haven, CT; **Rosemary Bates**, State Coordinator, Tennessee CASA Association, Gallatin, TN; **Diane Robinson**, State Director, Arkansas State CASA, Little Rock, AR; **Cindy Bizzell**, Assistant Administrator, NC GAL Program, Raleigh, NC; **Marion Hallum**, Alaska CASA, Anchorage, AK; **Susanne Smith**, Program Coordinator, Hennepin County GAL Program, Minneapolis, MN; **Sally Wilson Erny**, Program Specialist, National CASA Association, Louisville, KY; **Mary Gratch**, Training Administrator, North Carolina GAL Program, Carrboro, NC; **Tracy Flynn**, Curriculum Specialist, National CASA Association, Seattle, WA; **Merilee Clunis**, Consultant, Seattle, WA

### **ProKids CASA University Training Revision 2016**

Jennifer McKettrick, Community Director  
Tracy Cook, Executive Director

Special thanks to Charlotte Caples, Kathy King, Brenda Gray–Johnson, Peggy Sweeney and Glenna Miller.

Since 2001 we have continually revised, practiced, and refined this curriculum on our volunteers. We thank each of them for their infinite patience and comments.

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## ProKids History

ProKids has served thousands of abused and neglected children in Hamilton County since its founding in 1981, thanks to a passionate staff, energetic volunteers and a committed community.

In the years since ProKids began, we have focused on a simple and profound goal: to move children to safe, permanent and nurturing homes where they can thrive. In the child protection system, these children – who have been removed from their homes – are likely to be harmed by further abuse. They are less likely to get what they need in school or from medical or therapeutic services. And they are often placed in homes without their siblings.

ProKids identified these challenges and works every day to change these realities of foster care. With clear outcome measures, comprehensive training efforts and an ongoing commitment to these children, ProKids has exceeded its founders' expectations.

## In the Beginning

In the mid-1970s a national movement began in Washington D.C. Seeking intensive monitoring of the child welfare system, it grew from the realization that some children who had been removed from their homes because of abuse and neglect were ill-treated, or ignored, by the very institutions created to care for them.

A number of laws were enacted. The federal government established a requirement for Guardian Ad Litem (GALs) to represent children in the child protection systems and in juvenile court proceedings. In some communities GALs were paid, while in others they were volunteers. Rarely, however, were they trained to act as advocates in and out of the courtroom for the children they were appointed to represent.

The idea of training lay advocates for these children began with Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington. Judge Soukup recruited and trained community volunteers called Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to serve as voices for children involved in abuse and neglect court actions. In addition to appearing at hearings, these CASA volunteers talked to teachers, caregivers, and relatives to ensure that the children received all needed services. In 1977 the first volunteer CASA/GAL program was started in Seattle.

ProKids was founded a few years later, in 1981, through the joint efforts of the Junior League of Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Bar Association and Hamilton County Juvenile Court. There were 25 CASA programs nationwide and ProKids was the third in Ohio.

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In its first year, ProKids established a 12-member board and a staff of three. ProKids served over 100 children during its first year of existence.

In 1984, ProKids joined the newly formed National Court Appointed Special Advocates Association and gained recognition as one of the first CASA programs to receive United Way funding.

## Expansion Within County Role

From 1985 to 1990, ProKids continued to expand. ProKids focused on securing permanency for children who were available for adoption thanks to funding from the Junior League.

In 1991, as a reaction to a newly passed law requiring abused & neglected children have GAL representation, Hamilton County contracted with ProKids to provide the service. ProKids began operating a GAL division in addition to the CASA program and expanded its staff to 23.

During the period from 1992 to 1995, ProKids continued to serve almost all of the children who were subjects of abuse and neglect proceedings in Hamilton County Juvenile Court. The vast majority of children were served by staff social workers and attorneys. ProKids continued its CASA Volunteer program, serving about 40 children a year with these trained community members.

In 1996, Hamilton County Public Defender's Commission transferred the GAL program to its own Public Defender office. ProKids renewed its focus on the role of the CASA Volunteer and the CASA Volunteer program.

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## ProKids as an Independent Entity

Since 1996, this focus has led to tremendous growth and innovation.

Hamilton County Juvenile Court appoints ProKids CASA Volunteers to cases, expressing a desire to have a CASA Volunteer for every child. By 1998 and 1999, ProKids served 20% of children who were subjects of abuse and neglect proceedings in Hamilton County Juvenile Court. This proportion has continued to increase, although the number of children who need a CASA Volunteer continues to increase as well.

By 2011, ProKids CASA Volunteers served more than 500 children. At that time, Hamilton County Job and Family Services had more than 2,700 children in the child protection system.

As of 2016, The Hamilton County Public Defender's Office continues to receive government funds for its work. ProKids depends on donations by individuals and grants from local and national organizations.

## Growth and Change

ProKids had been located downtown on Melrose Place and on Kemper Lane. But years of growth and continued community support meant that ProKids needed an expanded space. In 2009, thanks to the generosity of the Manuel D. & Rhoda Mayerson Foundation, ProKids moved into a larger facility at Burnet Avenue and William Howard Taft Road. A former law office, this move enabled ProKids to expand its staff to support an increasing number of cases and a growing number of CASA Volunteers.

In 1996, ProKids went beyond simply measuring its activities in assessing what it does for children. By developing a strategic plan and expanding its Outcome Measures, ProKids demonstrated to volunteers and donors the impact of its work. These Outcome Measures have been used as examples by the United Way and have been presented at the state and national level to others in the child protection system.

The Outcome Measures have increased in number over time, identifying specific outcomes which demonstrate how a child can be safe, secure and thrive. ProKids has maintained throughout this time a 98% or better outcome in keeping ProKids children safe from abuse.

The current measures can be found on [www.prokids.org](http://www.prokids.org) and are updated publically each spring.

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## Cultivating Volunteers

The greater need for CASA Volunteers led ProKids to redesign the CASA training program in 1999. CASA University allowed volunteers to access training year round. In its first year, CASA University graduated more than twice the number of CASA Volunteers than in 1998. ProKids staff members presented CASA University at the 2000 and 2001 National CASA Association Conference.

In 2003, The State of Ohio Attorney General recognized CASA University with its Promising Practice Award.

In 2016, CASA University was refined further to enable volunteers to spend less time in the classroom, more time preparing outside of class for discussion, and to take classes not only on weekdays but in the evening and on Saturdays.

CASA Volunteers also take advantage of an expanding menu of continuing education opportunities including targeted sessions on urgent issues such as mental health, the heroin epidemic and changes in the law.

Over the years, ProKids refined its support of CASA Volunteers, expanding the number of CASA Managers and staff attorneys to advocate alongside the volunteers in court. This partnership of passionate staff and committed volunteers means that ProKids' children have the best possible advocacy in the child protection system.

### Points of Pride

- ProKids was founded before the National and State Organizations.
- ProKids was one of the first CASA programs in the nation to become a United Way program.
- ProKids has presented more times at the National CASA Association Conference than any other of the 1,000+ CASA programs.
- ProKids has received the Ohio Attorney General's Promising Practice Award more times than any other non-profit agency in the state.
- ProKids was instrumental in the development of the CASA Program Standards now in place for all CASA programs nationwide.
- ProKids was one of the first CASA programs to develop Outcome Measures to show the direct benefit of our advocacy on the long term outcomes for children.

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## Innovative Programs for Specific Groups of Children

Recognizing the greater knowledge and understanding of the effects of trauma on young children, in 2000 ProKids created Building Blocks to better serve children age birth to age 3 (later increased to age 5). Building Blocks provides additional continuing education annually to CASA Volunteers to better advocate for these young children. The program received the Ohio State Attorney General's Promising Practice Award in 2004.

Since 2005, ProKids has emphasized the impact of domestic violence on children by offering targeted training called Steps to Peace. This ongoing effort, recognized in 2008 with the Ohio State Attorney General's Promising Practice Award, provides additional continuing education annually to CASA Volunteers to recognize the signs of domestic violence in a home and educates them about the impact on children when they witness domestic violence.

In 2010, as the National CASA Association created Fostering Futures for older youth, ProKids designed the Launch program to support CASA Volunteers who serve children who may be aging out of the child protection system without a permanent home and need support as they become adults. The National CASA Association named ProKids as one of the 16 pilot sites nationwide to support these children.

ProKids continues to find ways to innovate. We are developing Framing Futures, to support CASA Volunteers who work with young teens, and a virtual academy, as a one-stop training and resource center for child protection professionals.

### Specialized ProKids Programs

- **Building Blocks** supports CASA Volunteers who serve children from birth to age 6. Training equips volunteers to recognize the impact of trauma on growing brains, on attachment to caregivers and overall development.
- **Steps to Peace** supports CASA Volunteers to recognize signs of domestic violence in families and particularly in children.
- **LAUNCH** educates CASA Volunteers who work with older teenagers who are becoming adults and often have no support system.

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## Committed Community Involvement

A growing need for community support has drawn many donors and supporters to ProKids. In addition to providing funding, community members share the story of ProKids children and provide for many of their individual needs. For example:

- Since 2008, Project Embrace has created hand-made blankets, caps, gloves and scarves for ProKids children.
- Community volunteers provide books and birthday gifts throughout the year.
- ProKids Resource Team provides for immediate needs of families and ProKids children, finding needed beds, baby equipment and other items on an ongoing basis.
- At the holidays, the Cincinnati Bar Association and other community groups fill a “holiday shop” for volunteers to personally select gifts for their individual child.
- Since 2009, ProKids has hosted a Friends of Children breakfast event that draws more than 600 supporters to learn about the organization’s mission and to make financial donations to continue its work.
- In 2011, the ProKids Young Professionals (PKYP) began to mobilize community members who wanted to learn about ProKids and share its mission while raising funds for specific efforts like back-to-school supplies.
- Since 1996, The Run for Kids, re-christened in 2013 as the Superhero Run for Kids, raises thousands of dollars each year thanks to the leadership of the Cincinnati Bar Association’s Young Lawyers Section.
- In 2012, ProKids received a grant enabling it to begin developing a virtual academy to assist child protection professionals and volunteers to learn about best practices and to have real-time access to information they need.
- In 2015, ProKids received its first endowment, a financial gift which allows the agency to focus on growing a sustainable future.

### About ProKids Staff

- ProKids staff members have a remarkably long tenure and put their experience to work every day in supporting CASA Volunteers and serving the children of Hamilton County.
- ProKids staff members are nationally regarded experts in child protection and often speak at state and national events.

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## The National CASA Association

The mission of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association, together with its state and local members, is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children, establish permanence and have an opportunity to thrive.

National CASA and the network of over 900+ local community programs support volunteers serving children. The goal of the local CASA programs is to recruit, train and support volunteers in their work with abused and neglected children.

Role of National CASA: National CASA offers critical leadership and support to provide quality advocacy and lead the continued growth of the CASA network.

You can join the National CASA Association in its mission to make sure every child in need has a voice. A child should have a childhood and a safe, permanent home.

More Information:

**National CASA Association** • 100 W. Harrison - North Tower Suite 500  
Seattle WA 98119 • 1.800.628.3233 •

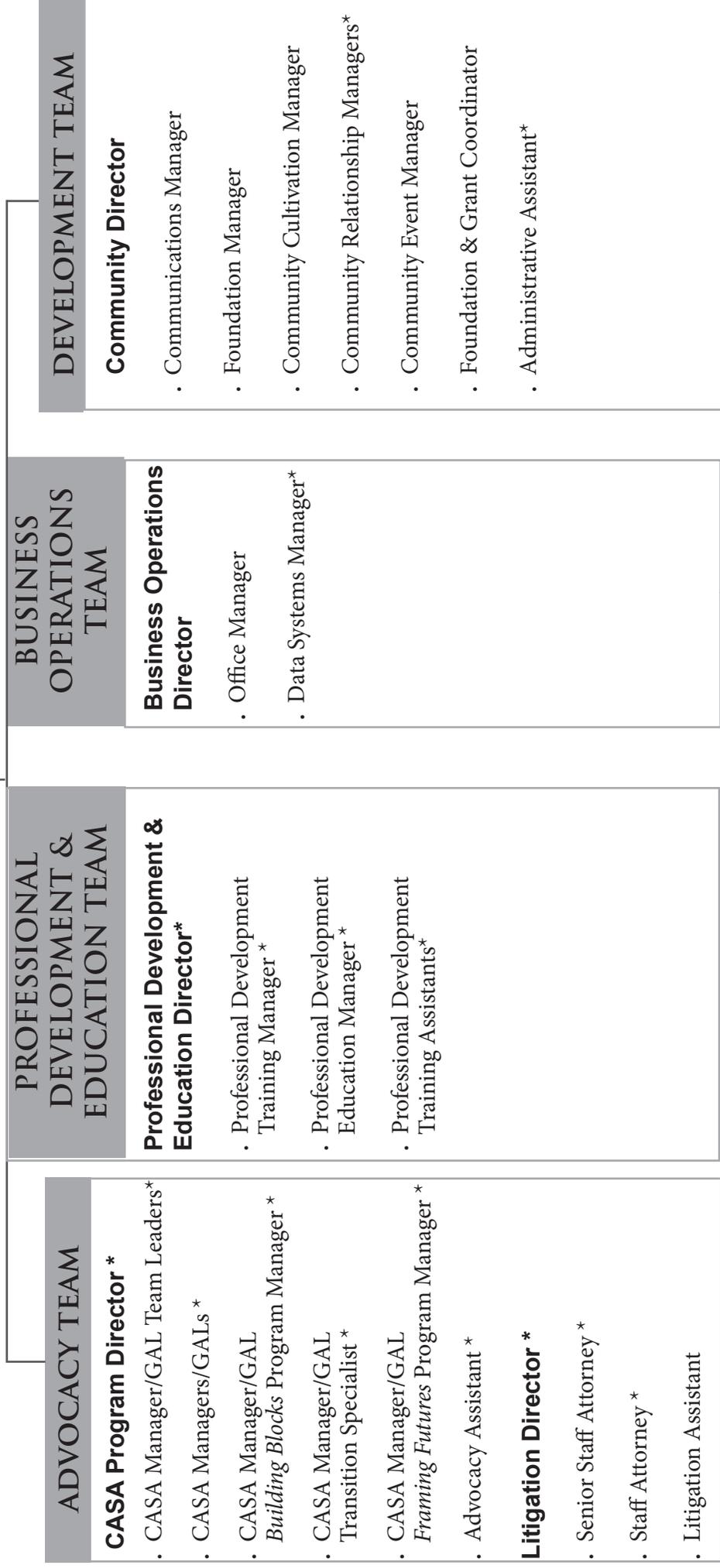
[www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org)



# PROKIDS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

## CHILDREN

### COMMITTED COMMUNITY (CASAS, VOLUNTEERS & DONORS)



**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

\* Direct Service to Children

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## ProKids' Rule 48 Checklist

**(Please review regularly and when preparing court reports)**

With my CASA Manager, I have made reasonable efforts to become informed about the facts of the case and to contact all parties. In order to provide the court with relevant information and an informed recommendation as to the child's best interest, my CASA Manager and I have done the following at a minimum, unless impracticable or inadvisable because of the age of the child or the specific circumstances of a particular case:

- Met with and interviewed the child and observed the child with each parent, foster parent, guardian or physical custodian and conducted at least one interview with the child where none of these individuals is present;
- Visited the child at his or her residence in accordance with any standards established by the court in which the guardian ad litem is appointed;
- Ascertained the wishes of the child;
- Met with and interviewed the parties, foster parents and other significant individuals who may have relevant knowledge regarding the issues of the case;
- Reviewed pleadings and other relevant court documents in the case in which the guardian ad litem is appointed;
- Reviewed criminal, civil, educational and administrative records pertaining to the child and, if appropriate, to the child's family or to other parties in the case;
- Interviewed school personnel, medical and mental health providers, child protective services workers and relevant court personnel and obtained copies of relevant records;
- Recommended that the court order psychological evaluations, mental health and/or substance abuse assessments, or other evaluations or tests of the parties as the guardian ad litem deems necessary or helpful to the court; and
- Performed any other investigation necessary to make an informed recommendation regarding the best interest of the child.

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## **im·prac·ti·ca·ble from dictionary.com**

-adjective

1. not practicable; incapable of being put into practice with the available means; an impracticable plan.
2. unsuitable for practical use or purposes, as a device or material.
3. (of ground, places, etc.) impassable.
4. (of persons) hard to deal with because of stubbornness, stupidity, etc.

## **im·prac·ti·ca·ble from Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary**

Function: adjective

1. impassable <an impracticable road>
2. not practicable; incapable of being performed or accomplished by the means employed or at command <an impracticable proposal>

## **in·ad·vis·able from dictionary.com**

-adjective

not advisable; inexpedient; unwise.

## **in·ad·vis·able from Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary**

Function: adjective

not advisable; not wise or prudent <inadvisable haste>