

Juvenile Court of Geauga County, Ohio
Judge Timothy J. Grendell

CASA for KIDS of Geauga County

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CASA for KIDS of Geauga County is a Juvenile Court program. Serious issues of substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health in families often result in child abuse and neglect. When the Court must intervene to help a child, Ohio law requires that a Guardian ad litem (GAL) be appointed to represent the child's "best interest". CASAs are volunteers who perform this role. They become very involved in the process and have an opportunity to make a difference. The children served are more likely than others to face addiction, mental health problems, unemployment and prison as adults. CASAs tell the child's story, make recommendations and inform the Court of the child's "wishes".

CASA is a national and state network of volunteer advocate programs. There are 35 programs in the State of Ohio and 950 in the nation. CASA for KIDS has been providing the GAL services in Geauga County since 1997. Judge Charles Henry initiated the program. The CASA/GAL is officially appointed by the Judge.

R.C. 2151.81 defines the role of the GAL and also states that the court "shall appoint a qualified volunteer or court appointed special advocate whenever one is available and the appointment is appropriate." Counties that do not have a CASA program generally use attorneys to perform this role.

Volunteers from all cultures, professions, ethnic and educational backgrounds are welcome, however, certain qualities are necessary to perform this role well. Advocates are selected through application, interview, references and criminal background check. They receive 37 hours of training in such areas as courtroom procedure, the laws that affect the decisions, social services and the special needs of abused and neglected children. CASAs receive support and supervision from knowledgeable staff. Ongoing training is provided.

Advocates are only asked to take one case at a time. A two-year commitment is required, since many cases remain open for this amount of time. Volunteer time averages 8 to 10 hours per month. The program maintains an average of 55 volunteers.

To learn more about CASA go to: <http://www.nationalcasa.org/>, or <http://www.ohiocasa.org/>, or visit us at Geauga CASA's NEW website at <http://www.geaugacasa.org>.

We Believe in the Power of Volunteers to Change the Lives of Children