

CASA of the 31st Judicial District (Allen, Neosho, Wilson and Woodson counties)

“CASA is a program that helps to ensure children do not become lost in the system and that they will always have an independent advocate looking after their interests.”

--Judge C. Fred Lorentz, retired chief judge of the 31st Judicial District

The Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program began in 1977 in Seattle, Wash., and was started in Kansas in 1981 in Wichita. CASA programs are now in every state and in all but 9 of the 105 counties in Kansas. CASA of the 31st Judicial District was started in 2004.

CASA of the 31st Judicial District is a non-profit charitable corporation governed by a board of directors, which includes citizens from all four counties in the district. It is funded mainly through grants, donations and fundraisers. CASA programs in Kansas must meet standards set by the Kansas Supreme Court, the National CASA Association and the Kansas CASA Association and are annually reviewed by each agency to ensure compliance. In 2017, there were more than 219 children removed from their home due to abuse or neglect or both, who had Child in Need of Care (CINC) cases filed on their behalf in the 31st Judicial District. This includes children from all four counties, some as young as a few days to some as old as 18+.

The primary goal of CASA is to keep the abuse and neglected children and their needs at the forefront of the court's attention, to speak for those children in court so their voices are heard and to assist in reintegrating that child back to their home made safe for them again or to secure a permanent home for children who are unable to return to their homes and be safe there. The CASA Advocate is appointed by the presiding judge in a child's case so that the CASA may advocate for the best interest of the child and bring information before the court to assist the judge. The judge is the only person who can appoint a CASA volunteer, but anyone may refer a child's case to the judge or to CASA for consideration.

CASA is not a mentoring or friendship program and children are not brought into a volunteer's home. The responsibilities of the advocate are set out in Kansas Supreme Court Rule 110 and include attending court hearings pertaining to the child assigned to them, investigating and becoming familiar with circumstances affecting the welfare of the child and preparing written reports to the court regarding the case. Advocate volunteers receive 30 hours of specialized training and go through intensive background checks and fingerprinting before being assigned to a case. CASA volunteers are officers of the court when working on a child's case. In addition, volunteers engage in ongoing training each year that continues to assist the volunteer in his/her work and is provided by CASA without charge to the volunteer.

However, volunteers who do not wish to be an advocate are also needed. Other volunteer opportunities include assisting CASA with fundraising projects, helping in the office with mailings, working within one's community to promote CASA, speaking to groups about the need for CASA in this area and helping with outreach both for CASA and for child abuse awareness and prevention. We also join with other agencies to bring projects, awareness and education to the community. Fundraising assistance could include helping with our golf tournament, variety show gala and gift auction or our direct mail campaigns. It could be as simple as providing a

quilt to be auctioned off, selling raffle tickets or if you are a group or member, asking your group to make a donation to CASA. Money raised in the 31st Judicial District stays in these 4 counties to assist children in this area. Volunteers are also needed to serve on our working board and our advisory board or on committees within the board. All volunteers will be provided with the free appropriate training. Citizens from all four counties served by CASA of the 31st Judicial District are encouraged to volunteer, you must be age 21 or older.

For more information on CASA, to sign up as a volunteer, to request a speaker or to share a fund-raising idea or make a donation you can reach CASA of the 31st Judicial District at (620) 365-1448 office or fax, (620)212-4255 mobile office; casadirector31@yahoo.com by email or on line at <http://www.kscasa.com> . The address for the main CASA office is in the Allen County Courthouse at 1 North Washington, Iola, KS, 66749 and mail is also accepted at P. O. Box 433, Chanute, KS 66720.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

--Margaret Mead, anthropologist and writer