Advocate Refresher

Some Things That All CASA's Should Know About Their CASA Case

We are always amazed at the great things that our CASA Volunteers do for children and the information that you know about your child. Sometimes we get so caught up in being there for the kids and enjoying the visits that we forget our role of gathering fact based information to provide to the court. Below are some basic things that we should always know about our children and the overall case:

Regarding The Child:

- We should always have fact based observations recorded detailing how the children interact with their current caretakers. Some examples would be: "*I have observed the child and his foster parent hugging each other and that the child appears very comfortable when speaking to his foster parent"; "The child is very respectful when speaking to his foster parent and is obedient regarding household rules"; "This CASA has observed the foster parent helping the child with his homework".* Volunteers should also know the relationship between the child and the foster parent; is the foster parent a relative, a certified DCFS Foster Parent, a family friend, an adult sibling, etc.

- We should have documentation regarding the environment that the child is living in. Our court reports and Optima Logs should indicate the size of the home, who lives there, what the child's sleeping arrangement is, does the child have toys in the home, how the child interacts with foster children and others in the home, and the condition of the home. If the child is in a relative placement, we'll need to know if the home is certified.

- Our records and reports should reflect whether or not the current caretaker is committed to providing a permanent home to the child and how the child feels about being in that home. We should also make sure that we know if the caretaker's age, health, work schedule, financial status, etc. are conducive to them being able to care for the child until their 18th birthday.

- CASA Volunteers should always know where their CASA child goes to school or daycare and have reports from that facility on how the child is doing. We should obtain grades and attendance reports if the children are in school.

- We should also know what our CASA children's interests are. Find out if they like baseball, football, dance, art, music, etc. We need to know this so we can advocate for them to be able to participate in things that matter to them.

- CASA Volunteers advocate for what is in a child's best interest, but it is very important to know what their wishes are regarding permanency. We don't have to advocate for that, but it needs to be considered in evaluating best interest.

- We need to know if the child has special needs or needs any services. If the child is receiving any special services, we need to know if they are participating regularly and how they are progressing.

Regarding The Parents:

- We should always know what the parents are required to do regarding Reunification with their children. This information can be obtained by reviewing the DCFS Case Plan that is uploaded in Optima or from speaking with the DCFS Worker.

- CASA Volunteers should know what the parents have completed on their case plan.

- It is important to know where parents are working and where they are living.

- Our records should reflect how often the parents are visiting with their children. If they are visiting, we need to observe the parent/child interaction during visits. CASA Volunteers should also know where the visits take place and how much time they are allotted for visitation.

Please remember to document all of the information that you gather in Optima. National CASA Standard 7-E mandates that CASA Volunteers keep written records of all information gathered. Your Optima Contact Logs are how we accomplish that. It is not only a Standard, but your detailed logs also assist us in providing better advocacy to the children we serve. Logs are reviewed prior to writing court reports and in monitoring the child's progress.

Your advocate supervisor is available to assist you in making a plan to gather information and if you need guidance regarding your Contact Logs.