

Advocate Refresher

CASA Volunteer “Best Practices” For Effective Advocacy

Our volunteers are absolutely amazing and somehow manage to incorporate their CASA work into their already busy lives. The common thing that we hear from some of our strongest advocates is that it is stressful for them to get all of it done. We've talked with some of our CASA Volunteers that seem to manage with the least amount of stress about their strategy and have come up with some “Best Practice” tips to guide you in your advocacy:

First Week of the Month Action Steps:

- Look at your case file in Optima and review any new documents that were uploaded by your supervisor such as case plans, service provider reports, or court judgements.
- Review your Contact Logs and your Supervisor’s Contact Logs in Optima and see if there is anything that you need to conduct follow up actions for from the previous month.
- Contact the child’s caretaker and schedule your visit; if it is set early, you have plenty of time to reschedule if conflicts arise AND it is set on your calendar.
- Contact your Supervisor with any questions or concerns.
- Log all contacts for this week into Optima. Optima is designed to be a “enter as you complete the action” system. If you wait to enter contacts at the end of the month, you miss documenting the work and we miss contacts when you try to remember everything. Timely entries also allow your Supervisor to be knowledgeable about what is scheduled.
- Make sure you know when the next court date is and plan time to work on your court report.

Second Week of the Month Action Steps:

- Contact the DCFS Worker for case updates such as parental case plan compliance, visitation, etc.
- Contact any service providers (counselors, substance abuse treatment providers, parenting educators, etc.) for updates.
- Make contact, or attempt to make contact, with the parents if the case plan goal is Reunification or if the parental rights are not terminated.
- If the parents are visiting with the child, schedule a time to observe the visit.
- Check in with your child’s school for updates.
- Log all contacts and information gathered into Optima for Week Two.

Third Week of the Month Action Steps:

- If you haven't already done so, visit your CASA child.
- Follow up with DCFS or any service providers that haven't returned your calls or emails.
- Contact your Supervisor to staff the case. Make sure to let them know of any scheduling conflicts. Be sure that you discuss compliance with service providers and how the child is doing in their foster home and school setting.
- Log all of this into Optima; make sure the contacts include who you spoke to and what information you gathered.

Fourth and Last Week of the Month Actions Steps:

- If you have a court report due, finish up and submit that draft to your Supervisor.
- Follow up on any loose ends from the previous weeks.
- Log your contacts into Optima.
- If you have completed all of the actions steps in Weeks 1 – 3, you are done!!!!

We realize that everyone has their own style of "getting it all done" and the above plan is just a guide. All of the needed actions can be accomplished at your pace, but please remember that effective advocacy is more than just visiting your child and getting information from their caretaker. It is important to speak regularly to service providers and teachers. CASA Volunteers should also have regular contact with parents to evaluate their progress towards reunification.

Your CASA Supervisor is a valuable resource to you, can help guide you regarding specific information that needs to be gathered, and help you navigate through court reports and testimony. Please schedule a time for case discussion with your Supervisor. Optima is a great tool for documenting visits and contacts but does not replace direct contact with your Supervisor.