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OVERVIEW OF VOICES FOR CHILDREN (VFC)

Definition of Youth

Voices For Children, hereafter known as VFC, defines youth as any child or non-minor dependent (NMD) that is served by a CASA. All policies and procedures included in this manual, unless expressly defined herein, apply to all youth.

History, Goals and Objectives

VFC was founded in 1980 by a law school student and a social service practitioner (SSP), formerly known as social worker, who saw too many youth being lost in an overwhelmed judicial system. They decided to create a program that would give consistency and attention to each youth in a system ill equipped to do so. Originally named the Children in Placement Project, they engaged volunteers in reviewing case files of youth in foster care. While researching some of the existing resources for dependent youth, founders Kathryn Ashworth and Elizabeth Bacon learned of the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) association. Still in its infancy, the national movement was able to provide a model for using volunteer services to advocate for youth in the Juvenile Courts.

During the past 40+ years, VFC has grown from an ambitious idea to one of the oldest and largest CASA organizations in the United States.

On January 1, 2015, VFC was given approval to rebuild the CASA program in Riverside County. The Riverside County program has demonstrated a commitment to strategic and sustainable growth. The Riverside County team is committed to ensuring that youth in Riverside County receive the highest quality advocacy from their CASAs and that CASAs receive accessible, professional support.

There are three juvenile Court locations in Riverside County:

Riverside Juvenile Court
9991 County Farm Road
Riverside, CA 92503

Southwest Justice Center and Juvenile Court
30755-D Auld Road
Murrieta, CA 92563

Larson Justice Center
46-200 Oasis Street
Indio, CA 92201

VFC, a nonprofit organization, endeavors to ensure that abused, neglected and abandoned youth who have become dependents of the San Diego or Riverside County Courts will

have a safe and permanent home. Through our network of trained and educated volunteer CASAs, VFC works with key agencies, legal counsel and community resources to identify and protect the best interests of each youth inside and outside of Court.

Funding

VFC relies primarily on private funding to cover operational expenses. This funding includes monetary and in-kind donations from businesses, corporations, individuals, private and corporate foundations, grants, and special events.

Legal Authority and Definitions

VFC is Riverside County's only CASA program and is recognized by the Presiding Juvenile Court Judge and by the National CASA Association (NCASAA). As such, VFC is designated to recruit, screen, select, train, supervise and support CASA volunteers. In addition, VFC and its CASAs are given legal access to all Juvenile Court dependency and Juvenile Justice, formerly known as delinquency, records and proceedings.

A CASA volunteer is legally defined as a person who has been selected, trained, and supervised by VFC and who has been appointed by the Juvenile Court as a sworn officer of the Court. A CASA's primary responsibility is to advocate for the best interests of a youth in dependency and juvenile justice proceedings, including guardianships, actions to terminate parental rights, and adoptions.

A dependency proceeding is a legal action brought on behalf of an allegedly abused, neglected, or abandoned youth pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) section 300 et. seq. This action is designed to protect youth, preserve and reunify families, and find permanent homes for youth who cannot be returned to their parents.

Non-discrimination Policy

VFC is committed to being a diverse and inclusive organization and is proud to be an equal opportunity employer. We do not discriminate against individuals, including employees, volunteers, clients, vendors, and contractors, on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, medical condition, marital status, pregnancy, physical and mental disabilities, genetic information, veteran status, caregiver status or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local laws, or on the basis of any perception that an individual has any of these characteristics, or on the basis that an individual is associated with someone who has or is perceived to have these characteristics. We are committed to these standards in all practices including recruitment, advertising, job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, training, benefits, transfers, social and recreational programs, and any other terms, conditions, and privileges of involvement with VFC.

Organizational Structure

VFC is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors in accordance with state law. The Board of Directors is responsible for the hiring of a President/CEO who administers the program and hires all other agency staff. The Riverside County staff has staff located in Temecula, Palm Desert, and Riverside. Three major departments exist within the organization: Philanthropy, Operations, and Program.

REFERRALS AND CASE SELECTION

Case Assessment and Referrals

CASA volunteers are appointed to youth who are currently dependents of the Juvenile Court. In most cases, the primary reason for the appointment of a CASA is a need for an independent adult voice to speak for the youth's best interest.

VFC accepts referrals for CASAs from a number of different sources. In many instances, the Judge or Commissioner presiding over a case will refer the case to VFC with an explanation as to why they believe the youth would benefit from having an advocate. On other occasions, SSPs, attorneys, biological parents, probation officers, foster parents, therapists, teachers, or any other parties involved with the youth may make referrals. Youth are also able to refer themselves to be appointed a CASA. Referrals may be made any time; however, prior to the establishment of jurisdiction, only the Presiding Juvenile Court Judge or a designee may appoint a CASA and the CASA's duties must be carefully detailed.

During the initial referral contact, the referral source gives a brief, general case history, including some family background (if possible), the youth's current situation and why a CASA is being requested. The identity of the referring party, except in the case of judicial referrals, is kept confidential from all parties and participants on the case, including CASAs. The CASA will, therefore, begin their research into the case with an impartial point of view.

CASAs can also serve youth under the dual status program, which serves youth who fall under both dependency and juvenile justice jurisdiction.

Case Selection and Rejection

A number of criteria are used to determine whether a case is appropriate for the appointment of a CASA. Cases are given priority status on the matching list based on the number of risk factors identified in the case, the availability of a particular CASA to meet the specific needs of the youth, and the availability of other support persons in the youth's life. In general, cases are appropriate for CASA assignment if they involve one or more of the following issues:

- The youth is living in a temporary placement;
- The youth has been separated from their siblings;
- The youth has special medical, psychological or educational needs;
- The youth has no parent/guardian who is able or willing to monitor their development and needs during the Court process;
- The youth has no parent/guardian who is willing or able to oversee their educational needs;
- The youth has prior CWS involvement and/or a prior dependency case;
- The case is highly complex.

CASAs may be assigned to cases for which no permanent plan has been implemented. Their advocacy will focus on helping to ensure that the youth will have a safe and permanent home and that all of their needs are being met.

CASAs may also be assigned to youth who have permanent plans of long-term foster care, also known as Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). On these cases, a CASA's advocacy will focus on ensuring the youth have the services they need to become successful adults. Oftentimes, CASAs will be asked to hold the youth's educational rights. More details about the CASA holding educational rights will be discussed in the *Role of the CASA*.

The number of youth and young adults who need a CASA far exceeds the number of available CASAs. As such, a waiting list is established and ranked. Cases are given priority status on the waiting list based on the number of risk factors identified on the case, the availability of a particular CASA to meet the specific needs of the youth, and the availability of other support persons in the youth's life.

Some cases are deemed unsuitable for assignment. The President/CEO has the discretion to decline any case. If a volunteer would be in danger as the result of their assignment to the case, and this danger cannot be easily alleviated, the case will not be accepted by VFC. In addition, if the case is not active in the Riverside County Juvenile Court, VFC cannot assign a volunteer to the case. VFC does not, for example, assign CASAs to youth involved in custody issues in Family Court, or typically, cases in which a youth is a 602 ward (Juvenile Justice) only.

If a referred case is not assigned a CASA, but is active in the Riverside County Juvenile Court, it will be placed in the matching pool so that VFC may monitor the case and reassess the need for assignment.

CASE ASSIGNMENT

Case Matching

Once a referral is accepted, it is added to the CASA Manager database for VFC staff to monitor. Every effort is then made to match CASAs carefully to cases taking into consideration the needs of the youth and the specific issues involved in the case as well as any special skills, aptitudes, or interests of the available CASAs.

After the matching team identifies a case that is appropriate for a newly trained CASA, the Advocacy Supervisor will present the case to the CASA in person, typically at the final interview. Please remember that CASAs do not have to have common interests with the youth in order to be effective advocates. It should be noted that many cases on the VFC matching list involve multiple youth. In addition, CASA volunteers must be willing to drive throughout the county to see their case youth, as foster youth change placements frequently. Once a CASA is appointed to the case, they will want to make contact with their Advocacy Supervisor to discuss options for obtaining additional information about the case, including requesting information from the DPSS SSP.

Some CASAs may be assigned to a second case after being in good standing for a minimum of six months, meeting all of the requirements of their role, and at the determination of VFC. A maximum of two cases at any time can be assigned to any CASA unless the Managing Director and the Advocacy Supervisor make an exception. The exception will be clearly noted with reasoning in the volunteer's notes in the database.

Court Appointment

Once a CASA accepts a case, the Advocacy Supervisor submits the Court appointment to the Court Clerk and the Juvenile Court judge where the case is heard officially signs and confirms the CASAs appointment to the case. This generally occurs within one to two weeks of case acceptance. The CASA will then be notified of their appointment and will receive a copy of the Court-ordered assignment by e-mail.

Getting Started

After receipt of the Court order, the CASA should immediately contact the Advocacy Supervisor. After the CASA has had a chance to discuss getting started with their Advocacy Supervisor, the CASA should follow their Advocacy Supervisor's instructions as to contacting all parties involved in the case. This includes but is not limited to:

1. The youth's DPSS SSP
2. The youth's attorney
3. The youth

4. The parents' attorneys (please discuss with Advocacy Supervisor first)
5. The youth's therapist
6. Foster parents
7. Group home / foster family agency (FFA) social workers
8. Parents (please discuss contacting parents with the Advocacy Supervisor)
9. Relatives
10. School officials
11. Any other legally defined parties involved in the case

The CASA will receive the Court order from their Advocacy Supervisor after being assigned to a case and may make copies to distribute. Most therapists and teachers will not speak to the CASA until they have seen this order, so it is a good idea for the CASA to mail it or send it electronically to them before attempting to discuss the case. VFC Advocacy Supervisors have pamphlets explaining the CASA role that CASAs may give to parents, caregivers, and professionals. CASAs should provide a copy of their Court order, a letter explaining a CASA's role as an advocate, and a copy of the VFC grievance procedures to these parties for their records, other than the SSP and attorneys as the Advocacy Supervisor will have already done this.

Confidentiality is very important. VFC staff, the youth's attorney, the DPSS SSP, and the probation officer are the only individuals to whom CASAs are allowed to provide information regarding the case. Youth may also have a group home or FFA social worker; CASAs should speak to their Advocacy Supervisor about what information they may share with them. The only instance in which CASAs can provide information to the Court (or Judge) is through a formal Court report on VFC letterhead that will be routed to all parties by the Advocacy Supervisor. CASAs gather, not give, information. If the CASA is asked to give confidential information to anyone other than the aforementioned, the CASA should tactfully explain that they are not at liberty to give this information and refer that person to the youth's DPSS SSP.

Therapists or any other professionals working with the parents or adult relatives of the youth will not be able to discuss their client's case with the CASA unless the parents or other adult party signs a waiver of confidentiality.

CASAs should refrain from sharing case-related details with other CASAs, except during small groups and for the purposes of facilitating sibling visits, following approval from VFC and other appropriate parties. Such approval would be limited to only sharing the details surrounding scheduling and facilitating visitation. Other discussion, including but not limited to information regarding the case, is strictly prohibited. If a CASA learns information about a shared case, the CASA should immediately inform their Advocacy Supervisor.

CASAs should not give out their home/work phone number or address to anyone. If they do so, this information may end up in the Court record, and all parties involved may have access to it. **All mail must be routed through VFC's mailing address: VFC, P O BOX 7219, Riverside, 92513. In addition to the CASA's name, please include "VFC" in the mailing address. This will ensure that the mail is routed to VFC in a timely manner.**

THE ROLE OF COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

VFC CASAs are officers of the Court and are bound by all Court rules.

Research

A CASA's primary role is to provide accurate and detailed information about the youth to the Court. Advocates will research and evaluate the facts and circumstances of the youth's lives as objectively as possible. As officers of the Court, CASAs will have access to the youth and to the youth's records and files of the Court, the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), the Department of Probation, and any school, hospital, doctor, therapist, or other individual or agency working with the youth. CASAs should speak with their Advocacy Supervisor if they have questions about the records to which CASAs have access.

Reporting

A CASA's research on a case will be continuous, and the CASA will need to carefully document the findings of the inquiry. CASAs should record the full name of each contact made on the case, and the contact's title. The result of the CASAs research will be documented in a report for each Court hearing. The report will be distributed to the Court, the DPSS SSP, the Probation Officer, and all Attorneys. The parents' attorneys will provide a copy of the report to the parents. The youth, if over the age of 10, may receive a copy of the report from their attorney as well.

Advocating

Throughout the tenure of a case, CASAs will continuously advocate for the youth's best interests. CASAs will ensure that all relevant facts are presented to the Court and that the youth is receiving the services they need. CASAs will focus on ensuring that every effort is being made to find the youth a permanent, safe home. If the youth will remain in dependency until they reach the age of majority or end their participation in extended foster care (EFC), CASAs will concentrate on ensuring that the youth's case is stable and that the youth is prepared for adulthood. If the CASA is asked to hold education rights for the youth, the CASA will ensure that the youth's educational rights are being upheld, including being educated in the least restrictive school environment possible and ensuring that the individualized education program (IEP) is being implemented if a youth receives

special education services. **CASAs are not allowed to enroll their assigned youth in school.**

Facilitating

CASAs will facilitate and participate in the youth's case by working closely with SSPs, attorneys, and other involved parties and participants to assist the youth in obtaining a permanent home and/or appropriate services.

CASAs holding educational rights can request IEP meetings and facilitate other needed conferences with teachers, counselors, caregivers, or group home staff regarding educational issues.

Monitoring

CASAs will monitor the youth's case to make sure that all involved parties follow the Court orders. They will also call attention to any change in circumstances that may require modification of a Court order. The Advocacy Supervisor can provide the CASA with avenues to do so.

Supporting the Youth

A very important part of the service provided by a CASA includes supporting the youth through any Court proceedings, change of placements, school stability, and transitions to permanent homes. A CASA will establish a relationship with the youth to better understand the youth's needs and desires and will remain in contact with the youth throughout the duration of the case.

CASAs will also provide consistency and advocacy. Any youth in long-term foster care, who is assigned a CASA, will be followed by VFC throughout their stay in the dependency system.

It is very important for CASAs to maintain the boundaries of their roles. The youth with whom VFC works have often experienced very little consistency in their relationships with others so it is vital that they understand the CASA role, and for the CASA to remain consistent and reliable. When observing visits between youth and family, CASAs are not permitted—under any circumstance (even if requested)—to supervise visits.

It is important for CASAs to remember that they are not an SSP, therapist, lawyer, parent, caregiver, or final arbiter for the case. CASAs with experience in one of these areas should make every effort possible to separate from that profession when acting in the capacity of a CASA. In addition, CASAs should not provide direct service delivery to any parties that could cause a conflict of interest or cause the youth or family to become dependent on the CASA for services that other agencies or organizations should provide.

CASAs should not provide legal advice or therapeutic counseling to the youth or their families, nor make placement arrangements for the youth.

CASA RESPONSIBILITIES

Building Relationships

The CASA should be a member of a strong team to support the youth. Accordingly, the CASA must build positive, trusting relationships with not only the youth but all other involved parties. The CASA's approach with SSPs, attorneys, caregivers and school personnel will have a direct effect on their ability to effectively advocate. It is essential to be respectful, humble, and courteous. The CASA's Advocacy Supervisor can assist with communicating with case professionals.

Researching the Case

After parties are notified of the CASA's assignment to the case, the CASA will begin gathering facts about the case. This research should include a thorough review of the most recent SSP report and minute order shortly after they have accepted the case. These documents will be provided to the CASA by their Advocacy Supervisor. In addition to the SSP reports, CASAs may have the need to review medical and mental health records (this does not include the therapist's confidential notes).

CASAs should review the youth's cumulative file at the youth's school to ensure completeness. These records should include attendance statistics, report cards, disciplinary referrals, and high school transcripts, if appropriate. Please note: If the youth is a special education student, information such as an initial assessment plan, if the youth has been referred for special education, including an IEP, the permission of a parent for such testing, the results of any testing performed, and copies of all IEPs will typically be kept in a separate file at the special education office of the school district. If the cumulative file is incomplete or the youth is missing course credits, the CASAs Advocacy Supervisor can assist in getting this information up to date.

After reviewing the relevant written materials, the CASA should arrange a time to meet the youth and interested parties. This may include parents, relatives, therapists, and teachers, and should always include the SSP on the youth's case. At this point, the CASA will be acting as an *independent* fact finder of circumstances surrounding the case. In general, the CASA should offer no opinions or conclusions to involved parties. In addition, it is very important to remember that the CASA may NOT share information concerning the youth's dependency case with anyone other than VFC staff, the SSP, or the youth's attorney.

The circumstances surrounding a case change frequently and often unexpectedly. The CASA's responsibility to research the case will, therefore, extend beyond initial research and may continue throughout the youth's stay in the dependency system.

It is vitally important that the CASA maintain careful, written records pertaining to their research and contacts. These will be extremely helpful when writing a Court report and will provide support for recommendations should a case go to trial.

Specific questions CASAs should address during the research include:

- What brought the youth into the system? What is the history of this case?
- Are the parents involved in the youth's lives?
- What are the youth's placement histories? Why has the youth been moved?
- Who are the professionals involved in the case?
- Are the youth's immunizations up to date?
- When did the youth last receive physical and dental exams?
- Does the youth have any specialized medical needs?
- Who holds educational rights?
- Is the youth enrolled in and attending school, preschool, or Head Start? Is the youth arriving on time to school?
- Has the youth had or do they need an educational assessment?
- Does the youth receive tutoring?
- Has the youth had psychological evaluations?
- Who are the youth's counselors/therapists/psychologists/psychiatrists?
- Does the youth take psychotropic medication?
- Does the youth receive individual or group therapy?
- What interests the youth? Athletics? Art?
- Does the youth participate in extracurricular activities?
- What is the youth's cultural background?
- Does the youth have contact with any family? Siblings?
- If the youth is 16 or older, do they have a CA identification card, a copy of their birth certificate, and a Social Security card?
- If the youth is 10 or older, have they received services per SB 89 (California Foster Youth Sexual Health Education Act)?

In addition, CASAs, especially CASAs who hold educational rights, should endeavor to answer the following:

- Where is the youth attending school?
- What is the youth's school/education histories?
- Does the youth have an IEP?
- Has the youth received special education or other interventions in the past?
- Are the present levels of performance in the IEP and the goals and objectives reasonable and clearly defined?
- Does the youth have behavior intervention plans (BIPs)?

- Does the youth, if 14 years old or older, have transition plans?
- Is the existing IEP appropriate and/or is the youth progressing?
- Does the youth need a new IEP?
- What supports are in place to assist the youth's progress?

Establishing and Maintaining Contact with the Youths

An important aspect of the CASAs role is to establish a relationship with the youth involved in the case. This not only provides the youth with stability and consistency but also allows the CASA to better understand the desires and needs of the youth. The CASA should visit with the youth within two weeks of their assignment to the case. Thereafter, they should visit at least once a month to a maximum of once per week unless under extraordinary circumstances and approved by their supervisor. It is especially important for CASAs to offer support and assistance to the youth throughout the Court proceedings and to explain Court proceedings to the youth, when appropriate. When working with youth in special education, it is important to explain the IEP process to the youth and to ascertain how the youth feels about their education and the services they are receiving. CASA's serving a child as part of the remote advocacy program will be granted an exception for in-person visitation with their youth. The CASA will sign an agreement stating they will visit with their child via technological means, instead of in-person, at least twice per month. The CASA agreement will also indicate if the child moves back to the county or is close enough to the county, then in-person visitation will resume at a rate of a minimum of once per month.

Holding Educational Rights

Effective January 2003, the Juvenile Court must now name a specific person to hold educational rights at each hearing for every dependent youth and act as the "responsible person" for that youth. In the initial stages of the dependency process, the biological parents usually hold these rights. However, the juvenile Court judge may limit their educational rights at any hearing. Upon reaching 18, the youth makes their own educational decisions.

If educational rights have been limited, the first choice for an educational rights holder is usually a relative, caregiver, or CASA. Anyone with a conflict of interest may not be appointed.

When a CASA is appointed to a case, state law allows the advocate to make educational decisions for a youth when the parents' educational rights have been limited. Sometimes the Court will assign those rights to the CASA. If designated the educational rights holder by the Court, the CASA will be responsible for ensuring that the children are receiving an appropriate education. VFC asks that all CASAs serve in this capacity when asked to do so. The Advocacy Supervisor will guide and support CASAs in the education process. If the children are receiving special education and have IEPs and CASAs hold the youth's education rights, the CASA will serve as the "surrogate parent" for the IEPs.

The CASA is not permitted to sign any medical release forms, field trip permission slips, or any other forms that a caregiver would sign for liability purposes. If a CASA is asked to sign a form and they are unsure if they are permitted to do so, the CASA should contact their Advocacy Supervisor before signing. CASAs are not allowed to enroll youth in school. The caretakers or SSP will enroll the youth in school. In some instances, the CASA may be asked to accompany the professional and the youth to be enrolled. This will give the CASA the opportunity to help select the most appropriate classes for the youth. Some school districts may ask the educational rights holder to complete forms when the youth is withdrawn from a school.

A CASA is not permitted to provide a copy of the Juvenile Court minute order that assigns educational rights to the CASA to the school. The only proof that the CASA holds educational rights that can be given to the school is the JV-535 form. CASAs should contact their Advocacy Supervisor if the school asks them to show that they hold these rights.

The Riverside County Juvenile Court expects the person possessing educational rights to:

- Represent the youth in matters relating to regular and special education
- Request assessments
- Participate in the review and revision of instructional planning and development
- Participate in the review and revision of the individualized education program (IEP)
- Provide written consent for all assessments, services, and IEPs
- Meet with the youth at least one time prior to any IEP meeting
- Meet with the youth regularly
- Attend all IEP meetings
- Communicate with the SSP about the youth's educational needs
- Review all educational records
- Consult with persons involved in the youth's education
- Comply with federal and state laws pertaining to confidentiality of student records
- Notify the school upon resignation from the youth's case.

If the CASA does not hold education rights, they are still expected to be involved and up to date on their assigned youth's education progress, can still participate in school meetings, and should still communicate with the teachers and school personnel.

Monitoring and Facilitating Delivery of Services

CASAs will communicate and coordinate efforts to provide services and implement plans with the youth's SSP, attorney, and other involved parties. CASAs are prohibited from making placement arrangements for the youth; however, once the youth is placed, the CASA will inform the Court of the appropriateness of the placement at the youth's next hearing. CASAs should be notified of and attend any case conferences and treatment team meetings, such as Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM) concerning the youth. Asking when the next CFTM is set to occur should be one of the CASA's initial

questions to the SSP. CFTM meetings aim to identify the strengths and needs of the youth and the youth's family, as well as to help achieve positive outcomes for safety, permanency, and well-being. **If a CASA is asked to attend a CFTM or any other meeting, they must inform their Advocacy Supervisor. A representative from VFC will attend with the CASA. CASAs are not always notified of upcoming meetings and should ask the SSP and the caregiver to keep them up to date on any scheduled dates.**

CASAs will ensure that a permanent plan is established and achieved within the time frame mandated by the current laws of California and that reasonable efforts have been made to reunify the family. CASAs should explore resources for family reunification and for concurrent permanency planning and coordinate with the SSP for delivery of services.

CASAs holding educational rights will also focus on the delivery of educational services to the youth. If the youth is in special education, CASAs will analyze the youth's IEPs for appropriateness of goals, objectives, services offered, and placement and will then ensure that all aspects of the youth's IEPs are being implemented.

Advocating for Nonminor Dependents

In January 2012, California enacted legislation under AB12 and subsequent AB212 and AB1712, which enables foster youth turning 18 to participate in extended foster care (EFC) as a nonminor dependent (NMD) with an option to remain in this status until 21. Certain criteria are mandated.

A CASA working with a youth turning 18 may have the opportunity to remain an advocate for the NMD, who is required to sign a waiver enabling the CASA to remain on the case. The CASA's Advocacy Supervisor will assist in this process.

All policies and procedures in this manual also apply to CASAs serving young adults in the EFC program.

Writing Court Reports

It is essential that the CASA report the results of their work directly to the Court by way of a formal written report on VFC letterhead. Court reports are an integral part of the CASA role and are eagerly anticipated and read by judges. They include four major sections: history of the case, current situation, needs of the youth, and recommendations. In general, the reports are no longer than five pages, should be as concise as possible, and supported with facts. VFC uses Microsoft Office Word for Court reports.

All Court reports are due 15 business days prior to the Court hearing date, with the exception of the first report, which is due 20 business days prior to the Court hearing date. The CASA should email Court reports to rcvolunteer@speakupnow.org and cc the Advocacy Supervisor. This allows VFC to review the report, make any necessary changes, discuss changes with the CASA, prepare

the report for VFC letterhead, and route it to the appropriate parties. If the report is submitted on time, the CASA will have an opportunity to review a final version of the report before it is routed. VFC cannot guarantee that late reports will arrive in Court on time or that the CASA will have the opportunity to approve a late report before routing. The Court has the discretion not to accept late Court reports.

The absence of a report reflects poorly on the CASA and on VFC, and could be detrimental to the youth's case. VFC's President/CEO will have the final authority on what will and will not be included in the report and whether the report will be routed if it is submitted late. It is the CASA's responsibility to be aware of when Court reports are due. VFC will attempt to notify the CASA about an upcoming report approximately one month prior to the hearing date as a courtesy reminder. The CASA should not rely on VFC for this notification.

The CASA will receive minute orders from hearings and should take note of the next hearing date. VFC understands that at times, circumstances can arise that could cause a report to be late. In such circumstances, the CASA should call the Advocacy Supervisor as soon as possible.

Attending Court Hearings

Judges appreciate and value the CASA's presence in Court. CASAs are expected to attend all Court hearings and must notify their Advocacy Supervisor if they are not able to attend. CASAs should attend their hearings even if another party tells them they do not need to attend or that "nothing will happen" in Court. Exceptions are contested hearings, trials, or any other hearing that VFC staff advises the CASA not to attend.

Please remember that parking at Juvenile Court can be difficult, so the CASA should give themselves some extra time for parking and security clearance.

After the hearing, the CASA should follow up with their Advocacy Supervisor to discuss what happened at the hearing, the Court's findings and orders, the next hearing date, and any issues that they will want to address at the next hearing date.

The CASA's Advocacy Supervisor will e-mail the CASA copies of minute orders from all hearings. It is important for CASAs to review these minute orders. Hence, if the CASA has not received minute orders from the youth's hearing within a month, they should notify their Advocacy Supervisor.

Maintaining Contact with the Advocacy Supervisor

The CASA is required to call or email the Advocacy Supervisor at least once a month (weekly for the first month). If new developments arise, such as change of placement, change of school, or a youth gone AWOL, the CASA should contact the

Advocacy Supervisor as soon as possible and more frequently as determined by the Advocacy Supervisor. This ensures that the Advocacy Supervisor is familiar with what is happening on the case so they can answer questions from involved parties about the case and the CASA's activities. This also ensures that the Advocacy Supervisor will understand a case well enough to attend Court hearings or other meetings on the CASA's behalf if necessary.

If the CASA will be out of town for more than a week, the CASA must let the Advocacy Supervisor know the dates of unavailability so VFC can monitor the case while the CASA is away. The CASA should provide the youth's caregiver and SSP the name and phone number of the Advocacy Supervisor, as well as dates of unavailability. The CASA should also let the case youth know how long they will be away. **If the CASA fails to maintain contact with their Advocacy Supervisor, they may be terminated from the CASA program.**

Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect

The Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act and other applicable California laws address the mandated reporting of suspected abuse or neglect of children under the age of 18.

All CASAs are **mandated** reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect and must complete the 2-hour "general" training found at [Child Abuse Mandated Reporter Training \(mandatedreporter.ca.com\)](https://www.mandatedreporter.ca.gov/) and provide a completion certificate to their supervisor. Additionally, they must sign (at the final interview) a statement of knowledge and compliance with section 11166 of the Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Act before being assigned to a case. This requires that any CASA, in their capacity as an advocate who has knowledge of or observes a child whom they know or reasonably suspects has been the victim of child abuse, report the instance to a child protective agency immediately or as soon as practically possible by telephone. CASAs must also prepare and send a written report thereof within 36 hours of receiving the information concerning the incident. The CASA's Advocacy Supervisor will provide this form.

If a CASA has reason to suspect an incidence of child abuse has occurred:

1. Whenever possible call the Advocacy Supervisor or the after-hours VFC hotline for assistance in reporting child abuse.
2. Call the Riverside County Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-442-4918 and report the incident. It is important that the CASA make this report even if the SSP is already aware of the situation. The CASA should note the name of the person with whom they speak.
3. Contact the SSP and minor's attorney on the case immediately.
4. Within 36 hours from the time the CASA gained knowledge of the incident and reported to the hotline, they must send a written report to Children's Services. The form needed to make this report may be obtained from their Advocacy Supervisor.

If a CASA, within the course of their duties, has knowledge of, observes, or reasonably suspects abuse of an NMD, the CASA must immediately report the instance to their Advocacy Supervisor

Reporting Volunteer Hours

CASAs provide invaluable time and service to their assigned case youth, VFC, the Court, and the community. Therefore, it is imperative that they keep track and report the number of volunteer hours they complete each month. VFC understands that this can be difficult, but this information is critical to VFC for statistical reporting and fundraising purposes. Volunteer hours include all phone and travel time, visits with the Advocacy Supervisor and parties involved in the case, Court report writing, Court appearances, small group meetings, continuing education training, and any work done on special projects or events. The link to access the mileage reimbursement and hours form is included in the CASA Courier, which is sent via e-mail at the beginning of the month. CASAs may also use the timesheet included in the appendix of this manual. CASAs should submit the form to their Advocacy Supervisor. CASAs are asked to round hours to the nearest half hour.

Providing Proof of Auto Insurance and Driving Record

VFC is mandated by the California Rules of Court, Rule 5.655 to retain proof of each advocate's current auto insurance on file at the office. **Each time the CASA receive a new proof of auto insurance card, they must provide a copy to their Advocacy Supervisor.** CASAs will receive periodic notifications if their proof of insurance is out of date.

VFC is also required to keep a current Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) report on file for each advocate. During training, the CASA will be asked to submit a DMV report and to complete an *Authorization for Release of Driver Record Information* form. This form allows VFC to request the CASA's DMV record on an annual basis. If the CASA is in the military, a military spouse, or a student and possesses an out-of-state driver's license, they will be responsible for providing an annual DMV report from that state.

CASAs should have a current and valid driver's license.

Criminal Charges

If a CASA is arrested or charged with any crime, the CASA must notify the Advocacy Supervisor immediately. This includes driving violations, such as driving under the influence (DUI), traffic violations, and driver license suspensions.

Screening

All volunteers are fingerprinted and screened through Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and CACI (Child Abuse Central Index), National

Sex Offenders Database, Social Security number verification, and felony and misdemeanor county databases. VFC may conduct additional screening if required by a funder or contract. It is the volunteer's responsibility to immediately notify VFC staff within 72 hours of any known criminal charges, convictions, or investigations by any government agency or third party organization into any alleged criminal conduct or other alleged misconduct by the volunteer. Additionally, every four years volunteers are required to be re-fingerprinted. Failure to comply with any of these requirements may result in the volunteer being suspended or terminated from the CASA program.

CONTINUING EDUCATION/SMALL GROUPS

Continuing Education Hours

California Rules of Court, Rule 5.655 require each CASA to complete at least **12 hours of continuing education** for each year of service. VFC offers ongoing continuing education opportunities, announced in the CASA Courier, in which CASAs may participate to fulfill this requirement. These trainings are designed to enhance the CASAs' knowledge and skills and keep them informed of new developments in fields related to youth advocacy.

In addition to those found in the Courier, certain books, movies, outside coursework, workshops, seminars, webinars, podcasts, and conferences may also count towards continuing education hours. In order to determine whether an activity counts towards continuing education credit, the CASA should contact their Advocacy Supervisor.

Several books, movies, and webinars have already been approved by VFC. To access this list of pre-approved continuing education, the CASA should ask their supervisor to send a copy. One book is good for four hours of credit and one movie is good for two hours of credit.

Small Groups

CASAs are encouraged to attend at least one small group a year. These groups are held throughout the year at varying times and locations in order to accommodate different schedules and are facilitated by an Advocacy Supervisor or other program staff. The purpose of small groups is to give the CASA a chance to network with other CASAs, to update the CASA on any changes in legislation or county policy, to present and discuss difficult cases and to review case successes. Several small groups each year are dedicated exclusively to the discussion of specific issues, such as education, transitioning out of the system, and dual-status youth.

New CASAs will be invited to a small group after their main training where they can meet an existing CASA and ask questions while they wait for their assignment.

CASAs are encouraged to submit ideas for topics and/or guest speakers for both small groups and continuing education. If there is a speaker at a small group, the CASA will receive one small group credit and continuing education hours for the amount of time of the small group (usually 1.5 hours).

GUIDELINES AND RULES FOR CASAS

The conduct of VFC CASA volunteers is guided by the National CASA Association (NCASAA) Code of Ethics.

Anti-Harassment – Policy Prohibiting Harassment, Discrimination, and Retaliation

Objective

VFC is committed to a work environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. Every individual has the right to work in a professional atmosphere that promotes equal employment opportunities and prohibits unlawful discriminatory practices, including harassment. Therefore, VFC expects that all relationships among employees and volunteers will be conducted with professionalism and free of discrimination or harassment.

VFC has developed this policy to ensure that its employees and volunteers can work in an environment free from unlawful harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. VFC will make every reasonable effort to ensure that employees and volunteers are familiar with these policies and are aware that any complaint of a violation of such policies will be investigated and resolved appropriately. Any employee or volunteer who has questions or concerns about these policies should talk with the Director of Human Resources or any member of senior management as soon as possible.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

VFC is an inclusive organization whose employees and volunteers value, represent, and serve individuals of diverse backgrounds, identities, cultures, and abilities. We embrace the guiding principle that all children should be safe, have a permanent home, and have an opportunity to thrive. This policy supports our commitment to these guiding principles and the Organization's core values.

We are similarly committed to advancing a diverse and inclusive environment for our volunteers and employees so that we can provide high-quality advocacy and serve the best interests of children. We expect that VFC employees and volunteers hold themselves to these standards.

To that end, VFC administers its policies, practices, and services without discrimination against the children we serve, our volunteers, or our employees on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, medical condition, marital status, pregnancy, physical or mental

disability, genetic information, veteran status, caregiver status, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local laws. We celebrate and value our differences and are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment. Inclusivity and equity are essential components of the advocacy for and protection of the children and families we serve.

Definition of Harassment

Harassment based on any protected characteristic is strictly prohibited. Under this policy, harassment is verbal, written, or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, age, disability, marital status, citizenship, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law, and that:

- a) has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment, or
- b) has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance, or
- c) otherwise adversely affects an individual's employment opportunities.

Harassing conduct may include epithets, slurs, or negative stereotyping; threatening, intimidating or hostile acts; denigrating jokes; and written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group that is placed on walls or elsewhere on the employer's premises or circulated in the workplace, on VFC time or using VFC equipment by e-mail, phone (including voice messages), text messages, social networking sites or other means.

Although an individual's conduct may not rise to the level of a legally defined violation (i.e., "unlawful harassment") their conduct may still violate this policy. Any actions that are unwelcome and have the effect of creating a work environment that is hostile, offensive, intimidating, or humiliating to workers may also violate this policy and result in disciplinary action up to and including separation from VFC.

Sexual Harassment

While all forms of harassment are prohibited, sexual harassment deserves special mention. Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or visual, verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- a) submission to such conduct is made a term or condition of employment/work; or
- b) submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as basis for employment decisions or work assignments affecting the individual; or
- c) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a worker's performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

Conduct prohibited under this policy includes many forms of offensive behavior. The following is a partial list:

- Unwanted sexual advances.
- Offering employment benefits in exchange for sexual favors.
- Making or threatening reprisals after a negative response to sexual advances.
- Visual conduct: leering, making sexual gestures, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, e-mails, websites, or posters.
- Verbal and written conduct: making or using derogatory comments, e-mails, letters, epithets, slurs, sexually explicit jokes, comments about an employee or volunteer's body or dress.
- Verbal sexual advances or propositions.
- Verbal abuse of a sexual nature, graphic verbal commentary about an individual's body, sexually degrading words to describe an individual, suggestive or obscene letters, notes, or invitations.
- Physical conduct: touching, assaulting, impeding, or blocking movements.
- Inquiries into one's sexual experiences; and
- Discussion of one's sexual activities

Other sexually oriented conduct, whether intended or not, that is unwelcome and creates a work environment that is hostile, offensive, intimidating, or humiliating to workers may also constitute sexual harassment.

Individuals and Conduct Covered

This policy is applicable to all applicants, employees, and volunteers whether related to conduct engaged in by fellow employees, volunteers, or by someone not directly connected to VFC (e.g., an outside vendor, consultant, or donor).

Conduct prohibited by this policy is unacceptable in the workplace and in any work-related setting outside the workplace, such as during business trips, business meetings, and business-related social events.

Privacy & Confidentiality

All complaints and investigations are treated confidentially to the extent possible, and VFC will endeavor to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties involved to the extent possible consistent with a thorough investigation. However, VFC may disclose information to others during or following the conclusion of an investigation on a need-to-know basis.

Reporting and Complaint Procedure

Employees and volunteers who believe that they have been subjected to or witnessed any violation of this policy must provide a written or verbal report to their supervisor, Human Resources, or any member of senior management as soon as possible. If the employee

or volunteer is uncomfortable approaching their supervisor or a member of senior management, any other member of management is available to hear their concerns. VFC encourages complaints to be as specific as possible and to include the names of individuals involved, a description of the facts giving rise to the complaint, the names of any witnesses, direct quotes when relevant, dates, and any documentary evidence (notes, pictures, cartoons, etc.).

Supervisors and managers must report all harassment, discrimination, or retaliation complaints to Human Resources; failure to do so will result in discipline up to and including termination.

Investigations and Corrective Action

VFC will conduct a timely, thorough, and objective investigation of every reported complaint under this policy.

VFC expects all employees and volunteers to cooperate in investigations whether as a witness, third party, complainant, or accused. The complainant(s) and the accused(s) will be notified of the outcome of the investigation; however, in some circumstances, specific personnel actions taken in response to an investigation will not be shared in order to protect the privacy of those involved.

VFC will take appropriate corrective action based on the outcome of the investigation. The corrective action may range from verbal or written warnings up to and including separation from VFC. Appropriate action will also be taken to deter any future harassment.

Protection Against Retaliation

Applicable law also prohibits retaliation against any employee or volunteer by another employee, volunteer, or by VFC for reporting, filing, testifying, assisting, or participating in any manner in any investigation, proceeding, or hearing conducted by VFC or by a federal or state enforcement agency.

Retaliation means adverse conduct taken because an individual reported an actual or perceived violation of this policy, opposed practices prohibited by this policy, or participated in the reporting and investigation process described below.

“Adverse conduct” includes but is not limited to:

- shunning and avoiding an individual who reports harassment, discrimination, or retaliation; or
- express or implied threats or intimidation intended to prevent an individual from reporting harassment, discrimination, or retaliation; or
- denying employment benefits because an applicant or employee reported harassment, discrimination, or retaliation or participated in the reporting and investigation process; or,
- denying volunteer opportunities or work assignments because an individual

reported harassment, discrimination, or retaliation or participated in the reporting and investigation process

An employee or volunteer who believes they have been retaliated against in violation of this policy should report the alleged retaliation to their supervisor or manager, any member of senior management, or Human Resources. Any report of retaliatory conduct will be objectively, timely, and thoroughly investigated in accordance with VFC's investigation procedure outlined above. If a report of retaliation is substantiated, appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including separation from VFC, will be taken. Appropriate action will also be taken to deter any future retaliation.

Training for Employees

Employees and volunteers are expected to complete all harassment, discrimination, and retaliation prevention training that is required by VFC, including but not limited to training required by applicable law. Failure to complete this required training may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Additional Enforcement Information

Although the Organization would appreciate the opportunity to resolve any harassment, discrimination, or retaliation concerns, any employee or volunteer who believes they have been subject to unlawful discrimination, harassment, or retaliation may also raise their concerns with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or the California Department of Fair Employment & Housing (DFEH). No employee or volunteer will be retaliated against for participating in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing conducted by the EEOC or DFEH.

Appeals

CASAs should notify their Advocacy Supervisor immediately if they become aware that an appeal is filed on their case.

AWOL

If a case youth runs away and is considered absent without leave (AWOL), A CASA should follow these guidelines:

- Notify the SSP and their Advocacy Supervisor immediately if they have any contact with their youth or if they receive any information about their whereabouts.
- If a youth asks to see the CASA while AWOL, the CASA should explain that they are prohibited from doing so. It is fine to have phone contact, as the CASA may be the only one who can talk the youth into returning to placement. If the youth calls the CASA while AWOL, the CASA should let the SSP know.

- While a youth is AWOL, the CASA should maintain contact with the SSP so the CASA is aware of their return.
- If an AWOL youth has a Court hearing, the CASA is still expected to attend. Sometimes the youth will show up for their hearings.

Birth Control for Dependent Youth

A CASA is not permitted to counsel or advise their youth regarding birth control. If a CASA learns from the youth that they would like to obtain birth control or if the youth has questions regarding their sexual or reproductive health, the CASA should encourage them to reach out to their SSP or physician for advice.

Bringing Youth Home

CASAs may not bring case youth to *any* home or the CASA's place of employment for *any* reason at *any* time. This policy is in place for several reasons:

- Each VFC CASA is screened, fingerprinted, trained, and sworn in by the Judge. Family, friends, or other individuals who may be present in a private home have not been through this screening process. It is against policy to expose dependent youth to anyone outside of the professionals or parties to the youth's case.
- VFC's liability insurance will not cover CASAs if they take their case youth to their home.
- Many teens in foster care go AWOL. Some could run away to the CASA's home if given the chance.
- Youth may make accusations about a CASA (or a relative or friend of a volunteer). It becomes more difficult to contend an accusation if the youth can describe that volunteer's home, bedroom, etc.
- Taking youth home may raise false hopes: "You have room for us. Why can't we live with you?" This is unfair to the youth and the CASA. Case youth should not become involved in a CASA's personal life.

Violation of this policy is grounds for *immediate and final termination* from the case and from VFC.

Communication with other CASAs

CASAs should refrain from sharing case related details with other CASAs, except for the purposes of facilitating sibling visits following approval from VFC and other appropriate parties. Such approval would be limited to only sharing the details surrounding scheduling and facilitating visitation. Other discussion, including but not limited to information regarding the case, is strictly prohibited.

Confidentiality

In order to protect the youth and families we serve, CASAs must keep all Court and client information confidential. This means that a CASA may not reveal any names or other case-specific information to anyone other than the dependency Court, VFC staff, the SSP, and the youth's attorney. CASAs are also prohibited from sharing this information with family members or friends, as well as from sharing or displaying photographs of case youth with anyone other than the youth, VFC staff, or the Court.

A CASA should never leave youth's names or identifying information in voicemail, on answering machines, or in written correspondence. If the CASA is sure that an involved party has a private voicemail box, such as the youth's SSP or attorney, it is permissible to leave detailed information. Otherwise, the CASA should leave a message specifying the reason for the call and ask for a reply.

If a CASA has an assistant or secretary, this person should not act as a go-between for the CASA and the CASA's Advocacy Supervisor. The assistant may not type Court reports or have access to any information concerning the case.

All CASAs take an oath of confidentiality during training. Any violation of confidentiality may result in termination from the CASA program.

Conflict of Interest

A CASA should be careful to avoid any activity, agreement, business investment or interest, or other situation that could create an actual or perceived conflict of interest with the Organization's best interests or their responsibility to their assigned youth, or otherwise could call their objectivity into question.

Examples of actual or potential conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Using their role as a CASA for private financial gain.
- Having a direct or indirect financial interest in VFC's business transactions or services.
- Being related to any party involved in a case.
- Having knowledge of or a relationship with, any party to a case that may give the appearance that the CASA will not be objective and unbiased.
- Acceptance of gifts, entertainment, or anything of monetary value from parties to a case or others whose interests may be affected by the performance or non-performance of the CASA's responsibilities.
- Working with dependent or justice-involved youth in any other capacity during their service as a CASA, including becoming a resource parent or adoptive parent.
- Holding an active license as a resource parent/resource family (even if no children are currently placed in the home).
- Becoming an adoptive parent through the County of San Diego or the County of Riverside.

- Current or past involvement with Child Welfare Services (CWS), also known as Child Protective Services.
- Being a relative of (and therefore a potential placement for) a youth in foster care in San Diego County or Riverside County.
- Being a member of VFC's staff or Board of Directors.
- Being a dependency social worker/SSP with the County of San Diego or County of Riverside.
- Working, volunteering, serving on a board, or interning with any agency that serves dependent or justice-involved youth or their families. For more information about specific organizations or activities that may create a conflict of interest, CASAs should contact their Advocacy Supervisor.

All CASAs are responsible for notifying their Advocacy Supervisor of an actual or potential conflict of interest at the earliest practicable time. Doubts about whether a situation warrants disclosure under this policy should be resolved in favor of disclosure.

All disclosed conflicts of interest would be reviewed and managed by VFC. A CASA is expected to fully cooperate in the review and management of conflicts of interest. The President & CEO has the discretion to make the final determination as to whether a conflict of interest exists and whether and how it will be managed.

Failure to disclose or cooperate in the review and management of a conflict of interest under this policy may result in appropriate corrective action, up to and including removal from a case and termination from service as a CASA.

Correspondence with the Court

The only correspondence a CASA may have with a Juvenile Court Judge about a case is through their Court report or during Court hearings. Other communication with the Court is a violation of the Rules of Court and will result in termination from the program.

Courtroom Procedures for CASAs

Appearing for Court hearings can be intimidating. The following Courtroom procedures should help the CASA feel comfortable in Court. If a CASA has any questions concerning these guidelines, they should contact their Advocacy Supervisor.

Introduce themselves. If a youth has a hearing when a CASA is first assigned to a case and they are not able to write a complete Court report, they should attend the hearing anyway. This will allow them to meet all the involved parties.

Arrive on time. It is important to be prompt to Court hearings. If the CASA's case is called and they are not there, their absence will be noted. This reflects poorly on VFC and could be detrimental to the case. Court sessions begin at 8:30 a.m. CASAs should allow extra time for parking and security clearance.

In addition, if the Court is aware of the presence of a CASA and the need to expedite a hearing, the Judge may try to accommodate the CASA by moving the hearing ahead of other cases if all parties involved in the hearing are present. However, there is no guarantee that this will occur. CASAs should always plan to spend at least three hours at the Courthouse.

Check in with the deputy. Upon arriving in the Courtroom, CASAs should identify themselves to the deputy and tell them which case they are representing.

Dressing professionally. A CASA's appearance in Court counts! CASAs should dress professionally out of respect for the Court. Appropriate dress includes suits, skirts, conservative blouses or pants, or coats and ties. Jeans, shorts, or other casual pants and casual shoes, including UGGs, sandals, and flip-flops, are not suitable for Court. CASAs appearing for their cases should project a professional appearance and attitude. Dressing inappropriately for a Court hearing will affect the CASA's credibility. If the CASA is dressed inappropriately, they may not be allowed to appear in Court. Chewing gum, eating, and drinking are not allowed in the Courtrooms. **All phones should be turned off before entering the Courtroom.** Phones should not be set to vibrate as it will be heard in the Courtroom.

Waiting for the case to be called. CASAs may choose to sit outside the Courtroom with family members for a while, especially if the youth is present. It is important for CASAs to speak to all involved parties before the hearing. While interacting with others outside of the Courtroom, CASAs should not give preferential treatment to any particular person or party on their case. It is essential to maintain the appearance of objectivity and impartiality. It is recommended that, after speaking to the involved parties, CASAs wait inside the Courtroom for their hearing. By doing so, the CASA's presence will remind the judge and the Court officer that a CASA is on the case so that they might hear it sooner. There may be times when the Court is overcrowded, and a CASA must wait outside the Courtroom. In that case, the CASA should sit outside the Courtroom so they can hear when their case is called.

Sitting in the appropriate location. Customs vary from Courtroom to Courtroom. CASAs should speak with their Advocacy Supervisor to find out where to sit in the Courtroom where the youth's case is heard. Once the case is called, CASAs should stand so the Judge is aware of their presence in the Courtroom and to make it easier for the Court reporter to know who is speaking.

Addressing the Court. CASAs are allowed and are encouraged to address the Court. This adds conviction to the CASAs recommendations. CASAs wishing to speak to the Court, should wait until they are addressed by the judge. A CASA may also ask the Judge for permission to speak and address the Court. CASAs should remember to always stand when addressing the Court and address the Judge as "Your Honor" (never Sir or Madam). The more respectful CASAs are, the more successful they will be in advocating in Court for their case youth. All comments and questions should be directed to the Judge and not the others in the Courtroom unless otherwise requested.

Being sensitive. CASAs should remember to be sensitive to all parties involved in the hearing. This is especially important when a CASA's recommendations contradict the parents' wishes. A CASA should be sensitive to the feelings of others, say hello, and be polite. CASAs should make sure to acknowledge parents' presence and offer support for their positive actions. CASAs will find that this will make things go smoother for everyone.

Keeping feelings and frustrations in check. The Courtroom is NOT the place to openly express feelings about the case. VFC realizes that a CASA role can often be extremely frustrating and emotionally draining, but these feelings should be discussed with the CASA's Advocacy Supervisor outside of the Courtroom. In addition, CASAs should always be aware of and monitor their body language while in Court.

Submitting an Additional Information Report if there is new information. Because a CASA turns in their Court report 15-20 business days before the hearing, it is possible that the facts of the case will change during that time. If this occurs, CASAs should contact their Advocacy Supervisor, and they will help the CASA decide if submitting an *Additional Information Report* to the Court is necessary. If the CASA's report is still being edited, new information can be added during this process.

Driver's Education

CASAs are prohibited from teaching case youth how to drive. Case youth are not allowed to drive their CASA's vehicle at any time, and CASAs cannot be a passenger in their case youth's vehicle, even if the youth is a licensed driver. Free programs for behind-the-wheel lessons are available to youth who have turned 18 years old.

E-mail and Other Written Correspondence

CASAs must take extra caution with confidentiality when putting anything into writing, whether via email or text. CASAs should keep in mind that all written correspondence could be viewed by someone other than the intended recipient, included in an SSP's report, or be discoverable by the Court. CASAs should carefully proofread all emails and texts prior to sending them to ensure professionalism and accuracy. Inappropriate emails or texts may result in removal from a case or termination from the program. VFC reserves the right to modify or rescind this policy at any time. CASAs should see below for specific guidelines:

Emails

- The Advocacy Supervisor must be copied/cc'ed on **all** email.
- CASAs should use only their case youth's initials. Do not use their full names.
- Before sending any emails about contentious or sensitive issues, CASAs must consult with their Advocacy Supervisor. CASAs should keep in mind that Advocacy Supervisors have encrypted emails with SSPs and minors' attorneys

and are able to send email on the CASA's behalf with more information. CASAs should rely on their Advocacy Supervisor for guidance.

Texts

If communication by phone is not feasible, text messages are permitted to:

- Schedule meetings.
- Coordinate outings
- Provide logistical, time-sensitive updates (e.g., "running late," "meeting canceled")
- Confirm a meeting location or address
- Communicate with the case youth, if appropriate

Texts should be brief and not include confidential information or any information the CASA would not want all parties to the case to view. No confidential information that would disclose specifics about a youth's identity or the case should be discussed. Texting should be limited and during reasonable hours. Text conversations should not be deleted until after the case is closed.

Emergency Procedures

VFC is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. If a CASA has an urgent issue or situation during office hours, they should call their Advocacy Supervisor. If after hours, the CASA should call the VFC emergency line (858) 336-0609. CASAs must remember they are NOT allowed to bring youth to their home for any reason. If an urgent situation arises with a CASA's youth, they should contact a VFC Advocacy Supervisor and the youth's SSP. The youth's SSP or a duty worker can be paged by calling the Riverside County Child Abuse Hotline at 1 (800) 442-4918.

Juvenile Justice/Juvenile Hall

Advocating for youth detained in Juvenile Hall:

- When a youth is admitted into Juvenile Hall, the probation officer has authority over the case.
- CASAs should contact their Advocacy Supervisor to identify the probation officer on the case. Calling the probation officer and introducing themselves as the youth's CASA is required. The CASA should leave a message with the CASA's contact information if it goes to voicemail. CASA's may be asked to provide a copy of their Court order to the probation officer before they will speak with a CASA about a youth's pending charges.
- The SSP and probation officer will also be in close communication throughout this process. It is important CASAs remain in contact with both of them as much as possible to weigh in on decisions and ask how they can help.

- CASAs should plan to visit their youth in Juvenile Hall as often as they can. CASAs will not be able to talk to their youth on the phone unless the youth earns enough points to make calls and call the CASA.
- When visiting youth in Juvenile Hall, CASAs should not discuss—under any circumstances—the incident that led to their arrest or anything regarding the incident. If a youth wants to talk about the incident, the CASA should direct them to their public defender.
- Youth may have questions about future Court proceedings, next steps, or the differences of dependency and juvenile justice. If so, a CASA should make note of the questions and ask the public defender to speak about it during their next meeting with the youth. In addition, CASAs should encourage the youth to write down their questions so they can ask their public defender.
- Youth should attend school while they are detained in Juvenile Hall. If a youth has an IEP, the CASA should contact the Juvenile Hall school.
- CASAs can contact Juvenile Hall and ask to be transferred to the nurses' station to request that the nurse verify whether any psychotropic medication has been prescribed to the youth. All youth have a physical exam when they are admitted to Juvenile Hall.

Rules of Juvenile Hall:

- CASAs should call ahead to check on the facility's visiting hours for CASAs and other professionals.
- CASAs should be sure to have their name placed on the visitation list. CASAs must contact the probation officer to have this done.
- CASAs may not bring anything into the facility (including food, purses, cell phones, etc.).
- When visiting, CASAs must be dressed appropriately and professionally, and wear no revealing shirts or blouses, no shorts or short skirts, and no open-toed sandals.
- CASAs should be sure to bring their VFC badge and a copy of their Court order. CASAs may be asked to trade their VFC badge for a visitor badge when they check in at the main desk.
- CASAs must not give any money to the youth.
- CASAs can bring one paperback book (no magazines) to the youth, which will remain at the facility's library when the youth is discharged. This should not be a religious book.
- During the visit, a CASA may not have any physical contact with the youth, including hugs or any other types of embrace.

Court Reports for Dual Status Hearings:

- Court reports will be submitted for dual status hearings.
- CASAs should get a copy of the Juvenile Justice minute order from their Advocacy Supervisor and use the WIC 600 number and appropriate hearing.

- CASAs should not include anything about the incident that brought the youth under the supervision of probation.
- CASAs should be sure to highlight positive behaviors.
- CASAs should talk to their youth and find out if they have earned any special privileges in their custodial placement and include this in the CASA Court report.

Grievances against Department of Public Social Services (DPSS)

If a CASA experiences any problems with the SSP on their case or with any other DPSS worker, they should discuss the situation with their Advocacy Supervisor. CASAs may **NOT** contact a DPSS supervisor without explicit permission from their Advocacy Supervisor.

Leaves of Absence

Occasionally after all their hard work, some CASAs feel that, although they would like to continue to volunteer with VFC, they also need to take some time off before being assigned another case. If a CASA needs to take a leave of absence from their volunteer responsibilities, they should discuss the circumstances with their Advocacy Supervisor. **If a CASA has not been in contact with VFC for more than six months, they will automatically be resigned in good standing.** In that instance, if they would like to return as a CASA, they may be required to attend refresher training classes. They may be required to be fingerprinted again and be cleared before reviewing another case.

Liability Waivers

If a CASA is on an outing with their case youth that requires a liability waiver to be signed, they are not allowed to sign these forms. Only caregivers or the judge can sign. In addition, CASAs are prohibited from signing any paperwork regarding the case youth's medical care.

Mileage Reimbursement

CASAs are highly encouraged to turn in their hours and mileage report forms for reimbursement for miles traveled, or talk to their accountant about keeping track of their miles for tax deduction purposes. Reporting volunteer hours and mileage is a helpful way for VFC to tell the story of CASAs hard work. Forms must be filled out completely and accurately in order to receive reimbursements. Mileage reimbursement forms are due to their Advocacy Supervisor by the 7th of the month.

Movies, Music, and Video Games

Movie rating policies for PG13 are often inconsistent and subject matter and content may include situations such as substance abuse, criminal activity and sexual situations that can trigger a negative or emotional response for the youth that the CASA may not be prepared or equipped to handle. CASAs may only take their case youth to see "G" and

“PG” rated movies; however, the CASA will want to further review the content of “G” and “PG” movies to ensure appropriate subject matter. Regardless of the youth’s age, “PG-13” and “R” rated movies are prohibited.

CASAs may not purchase or allow their case youth to listen to music that has a parental advisory sticker warning about profane language or adult content.

Any games rated mature and above are inappropriate for all case youth. A CASA should exercise caution when allowing a case youth to play games in an arcade and should check with the Advocacy Supervisor and youth’s caregiver before allowing a youth to purchase any games.

Non-CASA Involvement with the Youth

CASAs may not, under any circumstances, involve friends or family in their outings with case youth. It is important to keep in mind that one-on-one contact with the youth and personal attention are critical to the establishment of their relationship with the youth, and the CASA’s attention should not be divided among other people. In addition, although the CASA is a volunteer, their role with the youth is professional. CASAs are officers of the Court, and it is inappropriate to involve the youth in their personal lives. VFC CASAs are carefully screened and trained, and VFC cannot accept the liability of exposing youth to someone who has not been screened and trained. Doing so compromises the youth’s safety and the integrity of VFC.

VFC understands that if a CASA is working with a large family or with youth who are difficult to supervise that they may need help on their outings. In this situation, CASAs should contact their Advocacy Supervisor to discuss options.

Outings with Youth

A CASA is not permitted to transport youth under the age of 5 without approval from the SSP, Advocacy Supervisor, and caregiver. A CASA may take youth 5 years and older on outings when appropriate. It is important that the youth are kept safe. A CASA should be aware of the youth’s background, behavioral problems, and emotional issues. If, for instance, the youth has a history of gang involvement, the CASA should not take them on an outing to their old neighborhood. If the youth has set fires in the past, the youth should not have access to matches and lighters. If, for any reason, the CASA feels uncomfortable taking their case youth on an outing or does not yet feel there is enough trust to do so, they can continue to visit at their youth’s placement.

A CASA must ensure that youth in their care follow all laws. Youth under the age of 8 must be secured in a car seat or booster seat in the back seat of the vehicle. Youth under the age of 8 who are 4’ 9” or taller may be secured by a safety belt in the back seat. Youth who are 8 years and older shall be properly secured in an appropriate youth passenger restraint system or safety belt. Passengers who are 16 years of age and older are subject to California’s mandatory Seat Belt Law. A CASA assigned to a parenting

youth may transport the youth's nondependent child with the consent of the parenting youth and Advocacy Supervisor provided all safety laws are followed. Youth under 2 years of age shall ride in a rear-facing car seat unless the youth weighs 40 or more pounds, or is 40 or more inches tall. The youth shall be secured in a manner that complies with the height and weight limits specified by the manufacturer of the car seat.

A CASA must closely supervise the youth at all times. The CASA should set expectations for the youth's behavior on the first visit, review rules with them, and outline how they will need to behave. The CASA should not allow the youth to make phone calls while on outings.

A CASA is not permitted to change their case youth's diapers or administer medication, nor to alter the case youth's appearance (e.g., tattoos, piercings, hair cut/color).

Outings with other CASAs and their case youth are typically not permissible. The rare exception requires prior approval from both Advocacy Supervisors.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Marijuana

A CASA may not consume any alcoholic beverages or cannabinoids, including THC, CBD, and other marijuana products, directly before or during outings with case youth or while working in the capacity of a CASA. Smoking cigarettes, including e-cigarettes, when with case youth is not permitted.

Violation of this policy is grounds for immediate termination from VFC.

Spending Limit

VFC does not reimburse for outing expenses and encourages free or inexpensive activities. Such activities should lend themselves to establishing rapport, enriching the youth's life, and/or identifying the youth's interests and needs.

A CASA must limit money spent on outings to a value of \$25 or less per youth, to a maximum of \$50 per sibling set. This limit does not include money spent on the CASA. The spending limit provided for activities and outings should not be used to purchase tangible gift items. Gifts are permissible for special occasions and circumstances after receiving approval from the Advocacy Supervisor. See the policy on Gifts for more information.

There are places within Riverside County that VFC has fostered partnerships with to allow CASAs and their case youth to enter free or at a reduced rate. CASAs should talk to their Advocacy Supervisor for more information.

Gifts

Gifts are permissible for special occasions and circumstances after receiving approval from the Advocacy Supervisor.

VFC sometimes receives donations of toys, clothes, and tickets to special events. CASAs are notified of these donations in the CASA Courier newsletter or from the Advocacy Supervisor. The CASA should present such gifts as coming from VFC, rather than from the CASA personally. This is to help ensure that the youth does not view the CASA as a gift giver, to respect the caregivers and families of youth who may not condone or be able to afford such gifts, and to avoid other youth in the same placement from feeling excluded. The spending limit permissible for outings and activities should not be used to purchase gifts. For more information on the spending limit see policy on Spending Limit. If a youth is in need of material items, the CASA should discuss appropriate resources with the Advocacy Supervisor.

Examples of prohibited gifts include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Cell phones (including pre-paid or disposable)
- Computers/tablets
- Bus Passes
- Trolley/Train Passes
- Cars
- Pets
- iPods/Streaming Music Devices
- Cameras
- Money (including payment of bills or other debt)

A CASA is prohibited from creating a trust or opening a checking or savings account for their case youth. A CASA is also prohibited from giving financial gifts of any kind, at any time, to case youth, their families, or their caregivers. If a case youth has a dire financial need or needs help opening their own checking account, the CASA should contact the Advocacy Supervisor.

Pets

A CASA who would like to involve pets on outings should first discuss this with the Advocacy Supervisor, the youth's caregiver, and the SSP. In most instances, pets are welcome on outings, but not all youth have had positive experiences with animals, even if they say otherwise. Some youth have witnessed the maltreatment of animals and/or do not understand how to care for them.

Photographs and Videos of Youth

A CASA may take a photograph or video of their assigned case youth for the following purposes:

- For inclusion in a Court report or the youth's case file maintained by VFC, or
- For the personal use by the youth, or
- When otherwise requested or required by the Court or the custodial agency

Photographs and videos of youth are confidential information. A photograph or video that includes any personally-identifiable features of or information about a youth shall not be used for social media or marketing purposes nor for the personal purposes of the CASA,

a VFC staff member, or any person other than the youth, unless advance written authorization is provided by the Court.

Upon case closure, a CASA must provide to their Advocacy Supervisor all photographs and videos of their assigned youth either for destruction or for inclusion in the youth's case file maintained by VFC. In addition, the CASA shall delete all photographs and videos of their youth from their phones, computers, tablets, or any other electronic devices. Upon case closure, a CASA may provide to the youth copies of any and all such photographs and videos for the personal use by the youth.

Reporting Injury

CASAs should inform their Advocacy Supervisor as soon as possible of any accidents or injuries to themselves, their case youth, or anyone else that occur when on a visit with youth or performing any CASA-related responsibilities. If the CASA was the injured party, please include the date they were injured, the nature of the injury, and a description of how and where the injury occurred. If the CASA requires immediate support or guidance outside of business hours, please reach out to the Advocacy Supervisor on duty by calling the VFC emergency cell phone at 858-336-0609.

Overnight Passes

A CASA is not allowed, at any time, to take case youth on an overnight outing. Hence, camping trips and other vacations are strictly prohibited.

Personal Gain

A CASA may not use this volunteer experience for personal gain or profit during or after service to VFC. This includes writing books about the youth or memoirs about CASA experiences.

Recommendation Letters

A VFC staff member may provide a CASA with a letter of recommendation for school applications after at least one year of service. In general, writing a letter of recommendation and/or serving as a reference, for any purpose, is at the discretion of the staff member being asked. Requests to confirm dates of service can be directed to our main line at 951-472-9301. With an individual's consent, requests for additional information may be released.

Religion, Politics, and Personal Beliefs

A CASA may not, at any time, discuss religious, political, or other personal beliefs (or lack thereof) with case youth, their families, or other parties to the case. It is important that the CASA be open and objective about the beliefs of others. A CASA may not distribute any materials pertaining to personal beliefs.

A CASA may not transport or accompany case youth to any place of worship or attempt to persuade youth to change their beliefs. Attempts to do so may result in termination from the CASA program. If a case youth expresses interest in attending worship services, the CASA should contact the SSP who will make arrangements for the youth to attend services. Transportation to secular activities (e.g., Girl Scout events, community fairs, AA/AI-Anon meetings) hosted at places of worship should be discussed with the CASA's Advocacy Supervisor.

Restriction

A case youth may be "on restriction" the day of a planned outing. This often occurs in short-term residential therapeutic programs (STRTPs). In such circumstances, the CASA should respect the imposed restriction, and limit visits to on grounds. However, STRTPs cannot restrict CASA visits as a form of punishment. If a CASA feels a case youth has been unfairly restricted or that CASA visits are restricted as a form of punishment, the CASA should contact the Advocacy Supervisor.

Reviewing Volunteer Records

All VFC volunteer records are confidential. No one has access to these records except the volunteer, VFC staff, and the Presiding Judge of Juvenile Court. If a volunteer would like to view their file or make changes to it, the volunteer should contact the Advocacy Supervisor, who will inform the Managing Director.

Safety

If at any time a CASA has concern for their own safety, the CASA should notify the Advocacy Supervisor immediately. The CASA may also ask the SSP when they are planning a home visit, and ask to attend that visit. It is permissible for a CASA to arrange to meet people at one of the VFC offices.

School Credit for Volunteers

A CASA seeking school credit for their service must discuss this during the application process, and with the Advocacy Supervisor during training, so VFC is aware of the school's requirements, including paperwork VFC needs to complete. The Vice President of programs will determine whether the CASA position satisfies the requirements.

Sex Education

A CASA is not permitted to discuss sex or sexual relationships or provide case youth with any materials related to sex education. A CASA who feels a youth is in need of sex education should encourage the youth to reach out to the SSP or medical provider. Any concerns for the youth's safety should be addressed with the Advocacy Supervisor.

Sexual and Reproductive Health Privacy of Dependent Youth

Pursuant to California law, youth in foster care have the right to privacy when accessing and receiving medical care regarding their sexual and reproductive health. Any and all information regarding a foster youth's sexual and reproductive health must remain confidential. If a foster youth discloses reproductive and/or sexual health information to their CASA, the CASA may not disclose this information to any party, including the SSP or minor's attorney, or in a CASA report. Disclosing such information may only occur with the youth's consent, preferably in writing. Without the youth's explicit consent, the CASA can only encourage youth to reach out to their SSP or medical professional.

CASAs may not counsel or advise youth on sexual and/or reproductive health matters. However, CASAs may transport youth to any and all medical appointments as needed, including appointments related to the youth's sexual and reproductive health. Prior to transportation to any medical appointment, talk with your Advocacy Supervisor so you can be best prepared for any issues that may arise. While at the medical appointment, remember that CASAs may not sign anything.

Confidentiality regarding a youth's sexual and reproductive health does not include when a youth is a victim of a crime, such as a youth being sexually assaulted or commercially sexually exploited.

Sexual/Romantic Relationships

A CASA is not allowed to form relationships of a sexual/romantic nature with anyone involved in the case youth's life or case.

Sharing Personal History

Some CASAs have personal experience with issues such as abuse, neglect, substance abuse, or domestic violence. In general, a CASA should not share their personal history with case youth or other involved parties without first consulting the Advocacy Supervisor.

Social Networking Sites

A CASA who has a profile on a social networking site, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc., should set settings to private, as case youth and their families might search for the CASA online. A CASA who states on their profile an affiliation with VFC must never make or share posts or comments that could be used to undermine the CASA's credibility in Court. It could also reflect poorly on VFC. A CASA should not add case youth or anyone related to the case to their list of friends or contacts.

Testifying in Court

Although most CASAs are not required to testify in trials pertaining to their cases, occasionally a CASA will be asked to testify during a trial. Upon request to testify, the

CASA should immediately contact the Advocacy Supervisor and notify the requesting party that VFC policy requires a subpoena through VFC. The CASA, the Advocacy Supervisor, and a senior manager will meet prior to the trial to review the status of the case and the process of testifying. Under no circumstances should a current or former CASA share records, provide any information, or testify without notice to, and concurrence of, VFC management.

A CASA who is not formally subpoenaed may not attend a trial, as the CASA can and likely will be called to testify.

When testifying in Court, the CASA should remember that appearance and testimony can greatly affect the outcome of the case, as well as the reputation of VFC. A CASA who is subpoenaed for a trial must do the following:

- Dress in professional attire.
- Arrive on time.
- Check in with the Court officer.
- Remain professional and neutral while in the Courtroom.

If a CASA is subpoenaed to testify regarding their case in any Court besides dependency or delinquency, the CASA must notify the Advocacy Supervisor prior to contacting the subpoenaing party.

Transporting Youth

CASAs are permitted to transport youth on outings and to VFC events. Contact with the youth outside of their living environment, when possible, is considered crucial to the formulation of recommendations to the Court. All CASAs will visit with their youth at least once a month. For most youth (depending upon age, handicapping conditions, and issues concerning safety), some of these visits will occur outside of the placement. While CASAs are also permitted to transport youth to appointments (e.g. a therapy appointment), transportation to appointments is the responsibility of DPSS and the caregivers, and may be provided by the CASA only with permission from the CASA's Advocacy Supervisor. The following guidelines regulate the transportation of youth:

- Upon acceptance into training, the CASA will provide VFC with a copy of their DMV record and proof of auto insurance. An annual DMV report will also be requested of the DMV by VFC, and the CASA will provide current proof of auto insurance throughout the duration of their volunteer service to VFC.
- Upon assignment to the case, the CASA will work with the SSP, any residential SSP, and the caregivers to determine whether or not outings are appropriate for the youth.
- CASAs may only transport youth in an automobile with required seatbelts and DMV-approved and age-weight appropriate car seats or booster seats

(see section Outings with Youth for specifics). NO motorcycles, off-road vehicles, motorized cycles, boats, or other watercraft are allowed.

- Outings will be scheduled ahead of time with the caregivers.
- CASAs will inform the caregivers of the length of the outing and will return the youth on time. If the CASA is running late, they will immediately notify the caregivers.
- CASAs will not take the youth on outings if CASA has been informed that the youth is on suicide or AWOL watch and will not take youth on outings when the youth is detained at a psychiatric hospital.
- CASAs will supervise youth at all times during outings, including during VFC events. Youth may not be left unsupervised for any amount of time on any outing.
- **CASAs are not allowed to transport youth out of county unless they have received the permission of their Advocacy Supervisor and a Court order or written permission on DPSS letterhead. However, if the youth is placed out of the county, the CASA can transport the youth within the county in which the youth resides.**
- CASAs may not transport youth to whom they are not assigned unless they have received permission from their Advocacy Supervisor and the SSP.
- In keeping with VFC policy, CASAs will not bring any unauthorized persons along on outings with the youth, nor will they bring the youth to any private residence other than the youth's own home.
- If CASAs have an urgent issue/situation during an outing, CASAs are required to call the youth's caregivers, their assigned Advocacy Supervisor during business hours, or the VFC Emergency Cell or Child Abuse Hotline after work hours.

CASAs must agree to the following conditions to transport youth:

- CASAs shall not consume any alcoholic beverages on the day that they will be transporting their assigned youth.
- In order to protect the youth we serve, VFC prohibits the use of illegal substances, including prescription drugs for which the CASA does not have a prescription, and recreational drugs.
- CASAs must be knowledgeable about the potential impact of any prescribed or over-the-counter medication on their ability to drive safely. If they have any questions about the impact of the medications, they must immediately notify their Advocacy Supervisor and consult with their prescribing physician.
- If a CASA is taking a medication that lists impairment in the ability to operate machinery as a potential side effect, they must immediately notify their Advocacy Supervisor and consult with their prescribing physician to determine the length of time the medication may impair their ability. CASAs shall not transport their case youth for the length of time that the medications may impair their ability to drive.

Remote Advocacy Program

Existing CASAs who are in good standing on their case, may request a second case under the *remote advocacy program*. Many youths who have been referred for a CASA, live far out of county, but are still in need of a CASA. Contact with the youth is through technological means and is to occur at least twice per month. All other requirements of a CASA apply. Should the youth return to Riverside County, visits in person once per month would begin.

Water Activities for CASAs and Case Children

As CASAs engage their assigned case youth in a variety of enriching and fun activities in Riverside County, exposure to water and watercraft is somewhat likely. Playing in knee-deep water, such as at Lake Elsinore, is permitted with appropriate supervision. While it is important for our youth to experience a variety of different opportunities, the safety of our CASAs and case youth is paramount. Whenever a case youth is near a body of water, CASAs should consider several safety factors, including the youth's age, sunscreen application, appropriate attire, and supervision while the youth is in knee-deep water. Remember that youth cannot go any deeper in water than knee-deep.

Our policy is:

- CASAs may not take their case youth to swimming pools or water parks. However, outings to splash parks with only knee-deep water are permitted with appropriate supervision.
- Any activity involving the use of boats, paddleboards, surfboards, or other watercraft is prohibited. Remember, VFC does not permit any activity requiring a signed waiver.

Weapons/Firearms

Under no circumstances may a CASA purchase, show or share any weapons with their case youth. CASAs may not take their youth to any shooting range, including paint ball games. If a CASA is a law enforcement officer and is required to carry a weapon, they should discuss this issue with their Advocacy Supervisor.

Whistleblower Policy

VFC is committed to upholding the highest standards of honest behavior, ethical conduct, and fiduciary responsibility with respect to its business practices, funds, resources, and property. VFC also expects its employees, volunteers, and Board members to comply with all state and federal statutes, rules and regulations when engaging in their VFC-related responsibilities.

To that end, VFC prohibits and does not tolerate illegal, dishonest, or fraudulent conduct of any nature when the matter involves VFC-related activities or business. VFC also

prohibits and will not tolerate retaliation against any individual who in good faith makes a complaint under this policy (referred to as a “whistleblower”).

Conduct prohibited by this policy includes, but is not limited to:

- Forgery or alteration of VFC documents or records
- Unauthorized alteration, manipulation or transfer of computer files or records
- Fraudulent or dishonest financial reporting
- Bribery, unlawful rebates, or kickbacks
- Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information, including but not limited to case records, case records or private personnel or donor information
- Destruction of VFC property, records, or other assets, if the person knew the destruction to be unauthorized or acted with reckless disregard as to whether the destruction was authorized
- Theft of VFC information, property, records, or assets
- Misappropriation or misuse of VFC resources, including but not limited to funds, supplies or other property
- Authorizing, claiming, or receiving payment of VFC funds for goods not received, for services not performed, or for non-VFC related matters
- Intentionally claiming or receiving reimbursement from VFC for moneys not expended, or for moneys expended for non-VFC-related matters
- Violation of an applicable federal, state, or local law

VFC employees, volunteers, and Board members are expected to uphold this policy. Violation of this policy will result in appropriate corrective action, up to and including separation from VFC.

Complaint Procedure

VFC encourages any person who believes that an incident of illegal, dishonest, or fraudulent conduct has been committed to report the incident immediately so that it can be investigated by or under the direction of the appropriate official, as described below. The individual reporting the conduct is not responsible for investigating the activity or for determining responsibility or corrective measures.

Complaints against employees or volunteers (other than Board members) may be made to any of the following: the reporting party’s VFC supervisor, Human Resources, the President & CEO, any member of the senior leadership team, the Board Chair, or the Chair of the Audit Committee of the Board of Directors. Any such person who receives a complaint will promptly inform the President & CEO so that an investigation can be initiated.

Investigation and Corrective Action

The President & CEO is responsible for initiating and overseeing the investigation of a reported complaint of illegal, dishonest, or fraudulent conduct. The President & CEO

may assign responsibility to Human Resources or another individual to investigate a complaint.

The investigation will be conducted in a thorough, prompt, and professional manner. All individuals involved in an investigation are expected to provide information as requested and fully participate in the investigation. Individuals involved in an investigation must cooperate and not interfere with investigation proceedings. Failure to cooperate or taking actions which interfere with investigation proceedings will result in corrective action, up to and including separation from VFC.

The individual who raised the complaint will have the opportunity to present information to the investigator before the investigation is concluded. Before the investigation is concluded, the individual who is accused will be given the opportunity to present information to the investigator and to respond to evidence that supports the complaint. The results of the investigation will be provided to the President & CEO and to others who have a legitimate business reason to be apprised of the results of the investigation to perform their job responsibilities. Results of the investigation also may be provided to the Board Chair or other members of the Board of Directors.

For complaints against employees or volunteers (other than Board members), the President & CEO will be responsible for determining the corrective action imposed on a based upon the results of the investigation. For complaints against Board members or the President & CEO, the Board Chair will be responsible for determining the corrective action imposed on a based upon the results of the investigation. Corrective action may range from verbal or written warnings up to and including separation from VFC.

Confidentiality

The identity of the whistleblower and others involved in the investigation process will be handled with as much confidentiality as practicable under the circumstances. However, the identity of the whistleblower and witnesses or participants in the complaint or investigation process may need to be disclosed in some circumstances, including, for example, to conduct a thorough investigation, to provide accused individuals the opportunity to respond to the allegations, to enable others to perform their job responsibilities, or to comply with applicable law.

Retaliation Prohibited

VFC prohibits and does not tolerate retaliation against any individual who files a complaint of illegal, dishonest, or fraudulent conduct; is involved as a witness or participant in the complaint or investigation process; or refuses to engage in illegal, dishonest, or fraudulent conduct. Engaging in unlawful retaliation can result in corrective action, up to and including separation from VFC. An individual who files a complaint that the individual knows or believes to be false is not protected by this provision against retaliation and may be subject to corrective action up to and including separation from VFC. The right of a whistleblower for protection against retaliation does not include

immunity for any personal wrongdoing that is alleged, investigated, and found to have occurred.

VFC encourages any person who believes they have been subject to unlawful retaliation or observes or is otherwise aware of an incident of unlawful retaliation in violation of this policy, to report the incident promptly pursuant to the complaint procedure identified above. The investigation and corrective action procedures set forth above will similarly apply in the case of a complaint of unlawful retaliation in violation of this policy.

Youth's Personal Appearance

CASAs are not permitted to alter the youth's appearance in any way. For example, CASAs are not permitted to take the youth to get a haircut or style or to receive a tattoo or piercing. It is also important to remember that different households have different rules and norms for personal appearance. Before taking a youth to purchase make-up, hair dye, nail polish, or other items that may change the youth's appearance, a CASA should speak with the caregiver in order to ensure that they are helping the youth follow the rules of their home. Every case is different. If a CASA believes that an exception is warranted, CASAs must talk to their Advocacy Supervisor first.

CASA SUPERVISION

Advocacy Supervisors

A professional supervisor from the VFC staff will be assigned to each CASA. These Advocacy Supervisors are responsible for the support and guidance, evaluation, and supervision of CASAs in the exercise of their duties. CASAs may reach their Advocacy Supervisor during regular office hours, Monday through Friday. It is important that the CASA and their Advocacy Supervisor remain in close contact while the CASA is working on their case. It is important that the CASA contact their Advocacy Supervisor once a month, at a minimum, to discuss the developments in their case. Advocacy Supervisors can best support CASAs in their role based on their regular communication.

Legal Advice

At times, CASAs may feel that they need legal advice on their case. If this occurs, CASAs should contact their Advocacy Supervisor to discuss the relevant issues. Advocacy Supervisors ensure that CASAs are given access to an attorney knowledgeable in Juvenile Court law for direction on non-routine legal issues.

Annual Achievements

Advocacy Supervisors are required to meet with CASAs annually in-person to formally review their case(s) and their role as a CASA. This review is a time to reflect on their role as a CASA, the successes and challenges, and can include discussion with the Advocacy Supervisor about any additional supports and/or resources the CASA needs.

Advocacy Supervisors may also review policies and procedures that are a concern for the CASA. CASAs are encouraged, at the time of their review and throughout their service to provide feedback to their Advocacy Supervisor regarding improvements they would like to see in the supervision they receive or with the agency as a whole. It is strongly encouraged as part of their commitment as a CASA that they will enrich and enhance their knowledge by completing at least 12 hours of continuing education including one small group each year. A written record of this review will be maintained in the CASAs volunteer file.

Grievance Procedures

If a CASA has a grievance against a VFC staff member or a VFC policy or procedure, they should bring it to the attention of their Advocacy Supervisor, who will also include the Program Manager. If a CASA and their Advocacy Supervisor and the Program Manager do not agree on the handling of a case, reporting of information, or the recommendations to be made to the Court and cannot resolve the issue, the CASA should contact Managing Director Sharon Morris at SharonM@speakupnow.org or (951) 534-1043. Official grievances should be handled in writing and should be directed to Ms. Morris.

VFC may, at times, receive grievances against CASAs by other people involved in the case. It is VFC's policy to support its CASAs. In order to do so, however, it is imperative that the CASA has maintained contact with their Advocacy Supervisor and has made the Advocacy Supervisor aware of any potential problems with other individuals on the case. If this is done, Advocacy Supervisors will be able to readily answer any complaints. The Court allows for any interested parties to petition the Court for removal of a CASA or clarification of the CASA's role. This is highly unusual, but CASAs may be removed from a case by a Court order from a judge or commissioner.

Any person with a complaint against a volunteer or staff member shall follow the prescribed grievance procedure. The complaint shall be made in writing to the individual's immediate supervisor and shall contain the following:

1. The name of the individual involved;
2. A specific description of the alleged inappropriate or improper conduct;
3. The date or dates the conduct occurred;
4. The name and petition number of the case involved;
5. The actions taken to address the complaint directly with the individual involved by the complainant and
6. The desired outcome of the complainant.

Within ten business days of the receipt of a complaint, the immediate supervisor of the individual shall mail a response to the complainant that should include the nature of the supervisor's investigation and any action taken.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the written response or action of the individual's immediate supervisor, then the complainant may forward the complaint to the Managing Director. This document shall include the foregoing written complaint, as well as additional information as to the reasons the complainant is dissatisfied with the initial response. The Managing Director will then respond in writing within ten business days upon receipt of the complaint.

In the event that the matter is not resolved with the Managing Director, a complainant may request that the President/CEO become involved. The President/CEO must receive written notice of the complainant's dissatisfaction with the handling of the matter by the Managing Director within ten business days. Only after exhaustion of the above administrative remedies may the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court become involved in complaints. The complainant shall forward a written complaint to the Judge outlining the reasons additional relief is requested. A copy of this document must also be sent to the President/CEO. The Juvenile Court Presiding Judge has the discretion to intervene if so desired. If not, the decision of the President/CEO will be final. Under no circumstances shall the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court have jurisdiction to intervene in any matter regarding an employee of VFC. Correspondence should be directed to: VFC, Inc., P O Box 7219, Riverside, CA, 92513.

RESIGNATION, REMOVAL AND TERMINATION OF CASAs

Case Closings

When jurisdiction is terminated on a youth's case, VFC will close that case, and the CASA will no longer serve as an advocate for the youth.

CASAs should gradually decrease their contact with the youth when a case is nearing completion and should explain to the youth why they will no longer be in contact. Any contact with the youth after the case is closed must be discussed with the Advocacy Supervisor. If a CASA chooses to remain in contact, this becomes a personal issue, and they no longer represent VFC or the Court. As such, they will no longer have access to the youth's records, to VFC supervision, or to any resources available through VFC and will not be covered under VFC insurance. If the youth is still a dependent of the Court when a CASA stops serving as an advocate, the CASA must obtain the permission of the youth's SSP to remain in contact with the youth. If the youth is no longer a dependent, the CASA must obtain the permission of the youth's parents or guardians, if they are still minors. If a CASA maintains contact with the youth after the case has closed, it is strongly suggested that they continue to follow VFC policies and procedures.

Upon case closure, CASAs will turn in all of their notes, photographs, and files on the case to their Advocacy Supervisor. These confidential documents will be destroyed by VFC staff. CASAs may not share any contents of their file with youth who have aged out of the system; however, they may provide them with a copy of their birth certificate and social security card if they have those documents in the file.

Continued Contact with Formerly Dependent (or Extended Foster Care) Youth

If a CASA intends to remain as a CASA with VFC (whether with a sibling to the former case youth OR on unrelated cases), the CASA is required to continue to follow all policies and procedures with formerly dependent youth, or youth who are in Extended Foster Care, that were required during their assignment on the case. These policies include but are not limited to:

- CASAs may not engage in a romantic or sexual relationship with the youth or any friends or relatives of the former case youth.
- CASAs may not bring former case youth to their homes or the homes of friends, relatives, or neighbors.
- If the former case youth is now living in their own apartment or an independent living facility, CASAs may pick the youth up from there but may not have extended visits in the youth's home.
- CASAs may not employ their former case youth.
- CASAs may not introduce former case youth to their friends, relatives, co-workers or others.
- CASAs may not use alcohol, tobacco or drugs while with the former case youth.
- CASAs may not lend or give money to former foster case youth, nor can they co-sign on loans.
- CASAs must limit expenses and gifts to \$25 per outing per former case youth.
- CASAs may not travel out of the county with the former case youth.
- CASAs may not take overnight trips with their former case youth.
- CASAs continue to be bound by confidentiality relating to the youth's cases.

Resignations

CASAs are expected to complete a 12-month commitment to a case. A CASA, however, may resign from an individual case at any time by an order of the Court. For this to occur, the CASA must discuss the situation with their Advocacy Supervisor and must submit written notice to the President/CEO of VFC through their Advocacy Supervisor. Upon resignation, the CASA should also complete an exit interview survey that documents their reasons for leaving and any suggestions they have for improvements to the program.

Removals

A CASA may be removed from an individual case at any time by the order of the Juvenile Court Presiding Judge or a designee. A CASA may also be involuntarily removed from the VFC program by their immediate Advocacy Supervisor, Managing Director, or the President/CEO of VFC at any time, including prior to a CASA's completion of their 12-month commitment. VFC can terminate a volunteer at any time for any reason. VFC is not contractually bound to have any person remain as a CASA volunteer. Grounds for involuntary termination from a case or from the program include, but are not limited to:

1. Breaking a policy of the VFC program, Court rule or law;
2. Taking a youth to their home;
3. Applying to become a foster parent, adoptive parent, or to work in another capacity with youth who are dependents of the Court;
4. Breaking confidentiality;
5. Conviction of a felony, sex crime, or crime against a youth;
6. Dependency declaration on the youth or a youth of their immediate family members or an allegation of abuse against the CASA;
7. Conviction of Driving Under the Influence during the course of service;
8. Department of Motor Vehicles point violation of three or more;
9. Negligence to the youth or the case;
10. Falsified application materials;
11. Compromise of the program;
12. Misrepresentation of the CASA role;
13. Imposition of religious or political views upon a youth or a family;
14. Action taken without program or Court approval which endangers the youth;
15. Failure to complete initial and continuing education;
16. Failure to demonstrate ability to effectively carry out duties;
17. Not following the direction(s) of their Advocacy Supervisor;
18. Communicating with the Court outside of Court hearings;
19. **Failure to maintain contact with their Advocacy Supervisor at least once a month (this is the most common reason for which CASA are involuntarily terminated);**
20. Failure to write Court reports for hearings;
21. Leaving a youth unsupervised;
22. Bringing along an unauthorized individual on an outing with a youth;.
23. A conflict of interest occurs that cannot be resolved.

A CASA who has been removed from a case or from the program may appeal the decision to the President & CEO. The appeal must be made in writing within 10 calendar days of notification of the removal. The appeal should describe with specificity why the CASA believes the decision was improperly made. Within 15 calendar days of receipt of the written appeal, the President & CEO will notify the CASA in writing of the decision. The decision made by the President & CEO is final.

APPENDIX

Sample Court Order of Appointment for CASA
Sample Continuing Education Summary
Sample Volunteer Time Sheet
National CASA Code of Ethics

<p style="text-align: center;">SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE JUVENILE DIVISION</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JUVENILE COURT, 9991 COUNTY FARM ROAD, RIVERSIDE, CA 92503 <input type="checkbox"/> JUVENILE COURT, 30755-D AULD ROAD, MURRIETA, CA 92563 <input type="checkbox"/> JUVENILE COURT, 47-671 OASIS STREET, INDIO, CA 92201</p>	<p>COURT USE ONLY</p>
<p>IN THE MATTER OF:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Child's Name Here</u></p>	<p>CASE NUMBER</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Case Number Here</u></p>

<p>ORDER OF APPOINTMENT OF CASA (COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE/EDUCATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Proposed Order <input type="checkbox"/> Order after Hearing <input type="checkbox"/></p>

HAVING CONSIDERED the facts presented and good cause appearing, THE COURT HEREBY ORDERS that the above-named minor be referred to Voices for Children for the appointment of a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED THAT: CASAs Name Here

1. Is appointed as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) for the above named children;
2. said CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) will have access to the child and to the records and files of the Court, of the Department of Public Social Services, the Department of Probation, the Regional Center, of any school or licensed group home or FFA placement and a copy of this order will be the only authorization necessary for such purpose;
3. after appointment of said CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate), and not in violation of the physician-patient, or therapist-patient privileges, any agency, hospital, school, organization, division or department of state, physician and surgeon, nurse, other health care provider, psychologist, psychiatrist, police department, or mental health clinic shall permit the CASA to inspect and copy any records, relating to the child involved in the case of appointment without the consent of the child or parents;
4. said CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) will not disclose the confidential information received to anyone other than the assigned probation officer, social worker, attorney(s), or the Court unless specifically authorized by the Court;
5. said CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) will not investigate jurisdictional issues;
6. said CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) will receive notice of, and be authorized to attend all conferences and/or Court hearings regarding this child;
7. said CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) will receive all reports from the Department of Public Social Services and/or the Department of Probation at least 48 hours prior to court hearings;
8. said CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) will, in coordination with the other parties, support the child, advocate for needed services, and investigate and report to the Court such information as will assist this child in obtaining a permanent home;
9. said CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) may, upon suspension of parents' educational rights, if CASA is willing and able, hold educational rights pursuant to California Government Code 7579.5;
10. all of the above work will be under the general supervisor of Voices for Children, Inc;
11. this appointment will be in full force and effect until further order of the Court.

_____ Date

_____ Judicial Officer



Continuing Education Summary

CASA NAME: _____

SUPERVISOR NAME: _____

TYPE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

BOOK MOVIE WEBINAR OTHER

BOOK TITLE, AUTHOR & NUMBER OF PAGES: _____

MOVIE TITLE: _____

WEBINAR TITLE, DATE & LENGTH: _____

OTHER, DATE & LENGTH: _____

Please provide a brief description including how the information pertains to your role as a CASA.

- Please send to your Advocacy Supervisor in order to receive CE credit. Books receive three hours, movies two, and all others receive length of presentation.

Note: This is only a sample. An electronic version is available in the CASA Courier.



MILEAGE TRACKING SHEET

NAME	
ADDRESSES	
CITY	
ZIP	

TOTAL HOURS	0
REIMBURSEMENT RATE	\$0.35
TOTAL MILES	0
TOTAL REIMBURSEMENT	\$0.00

FOR VFC USE ONLY	
RCTC ELIGIBLE TRIP LEGS:	0
RCTC ELIGIBLE MILES:	0
RCTC REIMBURSEMENT TOTAL:	\$0.00

DATE OF TRAVEL	PASSENGER including driver	STARTING POINT			DESTINATION			ODOMETER		TOTAL MILES	VOL HRS	PURPOSE OF TRAVEL/ ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
		ADDRESS	CITY	ZIP	ADDRESS	CITY	ZIP	START	END			
14										0		
15										0		
16										0		
17										0		
18										0		
19										0		
#										0		
21										0		
#										0		
#										0		
#										0		
#										0		

X _____ Signature Date	X _____ Approved Date
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Note: This is only a sample. An electronic version is available in the CASA Courier.

CODE OF ETHICS FOR MEMBERS

This Code of Ethics provides National CASA Association members with guidelines for professional behavior and ethical conduct. The Association may not, however, be held liable for the actions of its members.

CONDUCT

1. Members of the National CASA Association will abide by the NCASAA Code of Ethics and all laws and regulations governing their activities.
2. Members of the National CASA Association will uphold the credibility and dignity of the CASA concept by conducting all business in an honest, fair, professional, humane manner.
3. Employees of CASA programs and CASA volunteers will not use their authority inappropriately, nor condone any illegal act of unethical practices related to their program or community.
4. CASA programs and individuals who are members of the National CASA Association may not use CASA to promote personal gain.
5. Members of the National CASA Association will avoid any action which could adversely affect the confidence of the public in the integrity of the Association.
6. National CASA and its member programs will serve and respond to requests without bias because of race, religion, sex, age, national origin or handicap.

CONFIDENTIALITY

7. CASA programs and CASAs will respect the right to privacy of all individuals, and will keep information about CASA cases confidential.
8. Persons affiliated with CASA will not use confidential information obtained through their work with CASA for personal benefit.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

9. Individuals working in CASA programs as staff and/or CASAs must be trained in the operations of the Court and child welfare systems, and in the nature of child abuse and neglect.
10. CASA programs and CASAs must respect a child's inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe environment that meets that child's best interest.

NATIONAL AFFILIATION

11. CASA programs which are members of the National CASA Association must operate in accordance with the NCASAA Code of Ethics, goals and purposes.
12. Official CASA designation may be used only for purposes in accordance with the goals and purposes of the National CASA Association.

COMPLIANCE

13. The Standards Committee shall monitor compliance with the Code of Ethics in accordance with the bylaws of the National CASA Association.