

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE COURT REPORT

OJJDP

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***This session is being recorded**

CASA  GAL
Court Appointed Special Advocates
Guardians ad Litem
FOR CHILDREN

Welcome

Panelists:

Honorable Lisa R. Harris, Referee Supervisor, 6th Circuit Court – Juvenile Division, Pontiac, Michigan

Honorable William Owens, Senior Judge, Juvenile Court, 8th Judicial District, Ottumwa, Iowa

Diane Nunn, J.D., Judicial Liaison, National CASA/GAL Association for Children





AGENDA

- **CASA/GAL Court Reports:
Common Elements**
- **Facts, Opinions and
Observations**
- **CASA/GAL Volunteer
Preparation Worksheet**

A young girl with long dark hair, wearing a purple hoodie, is smiling and looking towards a woman. The woman has long brown hair and is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt. They are sitting at a table outdoors, with a multi-story building and trees in the background. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime.

CASA/GAL Court Reports: Common Elements

CASA/GAL Volunteer Court Reports

May include:

- CASA Volunteer Name / Date Submitted / Docket Number
- Children and Date of Birth
- Recent photograph of child
- Short Case Summary
- Summary of Contacts Made by the CASA/GAL Volunteer
- Records Reviewed (date title and source)



CASA/GAL Volunteer Court Reports

May include:

- Case Summary Since Last Hearing or Review
- Areas of Concern/Assessment (organized by child) to include permanency goal
- Recommendations to the Court (simple numbered list)
- CASA/GAL Volunteer Name and Signature
- CASA/GAL Program Contact Information
- Sources of information



CASA/GAL Volunteer Court Reports

Ensure recommendations:

- Clear and concise
- Detailed and specific
- Something the court can order
- Include the needs of the child
- Report court orders that have not been completed
- Include possible solutions when barriers are identified



Facts, Opinions and Observations



CASA/GAL Tasks

CASA/GAL Volunteers Relay Facts. The CASA/GAL Volunteer tells the court what they saw, did, and heard. This is why it is so important that the CASA/GAL Volunteer hears and sees things, such as visits between parents and children (observation).

Recommendation Maker. The CASA/GAL Volunteer makes recommendations to the court regarding what is in the best interest of the child/youth. Based on facts and observations.

The CASA/GAL Volunteer gathers information and advocates to the court what is in the youth/child's best interest.



FACT

- **A fact is a statement that can be tested by experimentation, observation, or research and shown to be true or untrue.**
- **Examples**
 - **In 1988, a scientist found two identical snow crystals. They came from a storm in Wisconsin.**
 - **The largest snowball fight on record took place in Seattle.**

OPINION

- **An opinion is a person's belief, feeling, or judgment about something. It is a subjective or value judgment, and it cannot be proven.**
- **Examples**
 - **It's never too early to teach children how to behave.**
 - **Winter is cold in Wisconsin.**

OPINION

Look for words like:

- perhaps
- sometimes
- probably
- often
- I feel
- I think
- I believe

Subjective Opinion

The father's house is so dirty that no child could possibly live in it.

The father did not care about the children – he is a terrible man that barely even talks to the kids.

The mother is great. She really cares for the kids.

Factual Observation

The father's house was filled with trash, open food containers and dog feces.

When the children visited father on 4/1/2024, he did not talk to the children. The father talked on his cellphone during the entire visitation time.

The mother has attended all the family counseling sessions. She has transported the children to every session and has ensured they are able to go to all of the appointments they have.



Fact or Opinion?

- The kids were playing in the street.
- The mean kids were playing in the street.
- The parents attended all their visits.
- The parents, even though they had a lot of tattoos and piercings and sometimes were dressed in ratty clothes, attended all the visits.
- The foster parents live in a 6,000 square foot mansion with a pool. It is so pretty. The mother and father are working toward reunification, but they will never have a pool. The children love the pool.



CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet

CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet



- The worksheet is intended to provide structure to the various topical areas important to best interest advocacy of children.
- The worksheet is a tool that may be utilized by CASA/GAL volunteers and programs as they deem appropriate.

The CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet is not a required document and is intended to support CASA/GAL volunteers in developing recommendations regarding the children they serve. Be sure to adhere to the CASA/GAL Volunteer Report format used by your court or program.

CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet



Includes General Information / Contact Information

- Children, Birth Date, Placement & Permanency Goal
- Original Reason Child(ren) Brought Into Care
- **Important Events Since Last Hearing**
- **Child's Wishes**
- Contacts
- Court Orders
- Contacts Made Since Last Hearing



CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet

ISSUE GROUP



- Questions
- Facts & Observations
- Recommendations
- Potential Barriers
- Solutions

CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet



Issue Specific Information

- Permanency Goal
- Medical Health
- Mental Health
- Education
- Placement
- Services for the Child

CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet



Issue Specific Information

- Services for the Parents
- Visitation
- Normalcy
- Transition Planning and Independent Living
- Youth Self Identity
- Other



CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet



CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet

THIS WORKSHEET IS INTENDED TO BE USED AS A TOOL FOR CASA/GAL VOLUNTEERS

CASA/GAL VOLUNTEER NAME

HEARING DATE

CASA/GAL PROGRAM NAME

TYPE OF HEARING

DATE

SHELTER DATE

CHILDREN, PLACEMENT & PERMANENCY GOAL

Child's Name	Date of Birth	Placement	Contact Information	Permanency Goal	Number of Placements	Goal Change this Hearing?
Child 1						
Child 2						
Child 3						
Child 4						
Child 5						
Child 6						

ISSUES THAT MIGHT REQUIRE FURTHER ATTENTION

Does ICWA apply in this case? Yes No Have steps been taken to ensure adherence? Yes No

Is the child from a military family? Yes No

Does this case involve ICPC? Yes No Have steps been taken to ensure adherence? Yes No



CHILD'S WISHES

What does the child want to tell the court? In the child's opinion, what would make things easier for them? Where do they see themselves in 1 months? 3 months? Permanent placement? How do they feel about services they are receiving? Any additional resources they need or want?

PERMANENCY GOAL

What is the current goal – Reunification, Adoption, Permanent Guardianship, Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative, APPLA/OPPLA (for children over 16 years)? Is concurrent planning being implemented, if appropriate? Do you agree with the goal? Why should it change? Why should it remain the same?

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

SOLUTIONS

MEDICAL HEALTH

Does the child have any medical needs and are they being met? Is the child currently taking any medications? What effects has the medication had on the child? (note both behavioral effects and side effects) What is the monitoring plan for the child's medication? (include date of last evaluation/next medication management date) Does the child currently receive any type of social security benefit? Regular well child visits? Any specialized medical care? Are there any medically appropriate reproductive health concerns? Has the child received dental care?

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

SOLUTIONS

MENTAL HEALTH

Does the child have a mental health diagnosis and if so, what is it? Is the child participating in therapy or any other services related to this mental health diagnosis? Is the child currently on any psychotropic medications? What effects has the psychotropic medication had on the child (note both behavioral effects and side effects)? What is the monitoring plan for the child's psychotropic medication (include date of last evaluation/next medication management date)? Does the child have any medical needs as a result of medications and are they being met? Does the child currently receive any type of social security benefit?

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

SOLUTIONS

EDUCATION

How is the child doing in school and or daycare/preschool? Is the child performing at grade level (grades and any change in grades)? Are the child's educational needs being met? Are there any additional services needed? Tutoring? Has there been an Independent Educational Plan (IEP), 504 Plan? Attendance? Are there any additional evaluations needed? If the child has transferred schools are there any issues that need to be addressed regarding: child's records; transportation; registration for school; transfer of services from previous school to new school (i.e. IEP / 504 Plan)? What are the child's college or other higher education plans? Standardized testing / tutoring?

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

SOLUTIONS

PLACEMENT

Child interaction/bonding with caregiver. Does it appear that the child is thriving in this placement and does it appear to meet all the child's needs? Implementation of a safety plan? Are conditions being met? How long has child been in current placement? How is the child adjusting to his/her current placement? Has the child had multiple placements and if so, is there a common reason for the breakdown of these placements? What services would help remedy the reason for placement breakdown? Have siblings been placed together? If not, why?

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

SOLUTIONS



SERVICES FOR THE CHILD

Has the child progressed since the first observation? If not, what services would help that child? Have there been any changes in demeanor/behavior? What about child's behavior with caregiver? Progress in school, report card performance? Any evaluations needed – mental health, medical, disabilities?

PROGRESS

RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

SOLUTIONS

SERVICES FOR THE PARENTS

Have the parents/caregivers progressed in the services that have been ordered by the court or are in their family service plan? What additional services should be ordered for the parents/caregivers? Have there been any changes to warrant more services? Any evaluations needed? If the parent is incarcerated/detained (or in an institutional/residential setting), does the facility have services required in family service plan?

PROGRESS

RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

SOLUTIONS



VISITATION

What is the current visitation schedule with parents? Do visits need to occur separately? With siblings? Grandparents? How are those visits progressing? Any concerning behavior? Any changes that would warrant more or less visitation? Has something happened that would require supervised visits with parents? Are there visits with mentors? If a parent is incarcerated/detained (or in an institutional/residential setting) is there a visitation schedule? Regular phone calls (payment)? Is skype an option?

Visitation Schedule (Supervised/Unsupervised) with Parents/Siblings/Others:

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
POTENTIAL BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS

NORMALCY

What activities does the child want to participate in that they are currently unable to do? Extra-curricular activities? Other planned activities? Cultural issues? What is needed to ensure child can participate in activities? Are there summer activities available? Driver's education? Driver's license?

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
POTENTIAL BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS



TRANSITION PLANNING & INDEPENDENT LIVING

Have the following issues been discussed: housing, health insurance, education, emergency contact person, SSI, financial literacy, employment and employment services, accommodations for those with disabilities, banking? Does the young adult have or have access to the following: birth certificate, social security card, medical and educational records, mental health records, Medicaid card (or information to apply)? Does the young adult have a clear understanding of where they will be living, what educational program will be enrolled in and how expenses will be paid? College and higher education plans? Vocational training? Trade School? ACT/ SAT preparation? Does youth have mentor or support system in place?

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
POTENTIAL BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS

YOUTH SELF-IDENTITY

Best interest advocacy includes respecting, supporting, and nurturing the healthy development of every child's self-identity, including the child's racial, ethnic, language, religious, cultural, sexual orientation and gender identity. It is essential to ensure children have ample and quality opportunities for exploring and defining these important aspects of who they are. Have the following issues been considered – is the placement or circumstance supportive of child's self-identity? If not, should an alternative placement be recommended? Are there trainings or interventions to educate the persons involved including the child, the parents, the placement, foster parents?

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
POTENTIAL BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS



OTHER

For example, immigration issues and progress (necessary documentation); guardianships for youth with disabilities; clothing allowance or other financial support required; removal of disability of non-age (if applicable) for banking, leases etc.; credit protection for children in foster care

FACTS & OBSERVATIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS

CONTACTS

Role	Name	Phone/Email
Child's Caseworker		
Child's Attorney		
Child's Custodian (Placement)		
School or Daycare		
CASA/GAL Volunteer Supervisor		
Service Provider - Therapist		
Service Provider -		



COURT ORDERS						
Date	Service Ordered	Service Provider	Provider Contact	Date Referral Made	Expected Completion Date	Completed
						Yes No Date
						Yes No Date
						Yes No Date
						Yes No Date
						Yes No Date
						Yes No Date
						Yes No Date
CONTACTS MADE SINCE LAST HEARING						
Date	Service Provider	Provider Contact	Notes:			

The CASA/GAL Volunteer Preparation Worksheet is not a required document and is intended to support CASA/GAL volunteers in developing recommendations regarding the children they serve. **Be sure to adhere to the CASA/GAL Volunteer Report format used by your court.**

Any questions?



Summary and Wrap-up

Location of on Member Portal

<https://member.nationalcasagal.org/?s=volunteer+preparation+worksheet>



Thank You