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Program Evaluation of Virginia Beach Court Appointed Special Advocates

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Introduction: Virginia Beach Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) is a nonprofit, private organization that recruits volunteers that are passionate about the advocacy of protecting children from neglect and abuse. Volunteers make up the majority and are a vital tool to the organization. The CASA agency trains and supervises these volunteers to construct thorough home visits, written court reports, and attend court hearings. According to the main CASA website, in regards to the children affected by abuse and neglect, members and volunteers of the CASA community work together to help, “promote safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible.”

Evaluation: An impact model was used to conduct the evaluation of the CASA program on, “How efficient is CASA at advocating for neglected and abused children?” This type of evaluation is used to measure the efficiency and accountability of the organization’s mission statement. This shows what goals are set for the program, what they output to make those goals, and what their immediate and final results and if the agency is preventing a particular outcome.

Methods: I used both qualitative and quantitative methods and data collections that which included an interview with a CASA case manager, impact reports of CASA from 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, and a survey filled out by willing volunteers anonymously within the CASA program.

Recommendations: Based off the results of the evaluation there are suggestions to the organization for them to implement. One recommendation suggested to CASA is to provide additional thorough training that can be accessed to more than the weekdays. This will allow more volunteers to participate in the organization and provide them with the flexibility to gain knowledge and preparation to advocate. An additional recommendation to be considered is to hire one other full time staff advocate manager. This will increase the volume of volunteers within the program and spread out the workload between advocate managers. If another advocate manager was to join the agency less volunteers would be assigned to each manager, which will increase communication and access between advocate managers and their volunteers.

Results: Based off the numerous findings there were some significant inferences made about the advocacy efforts of CASA. The CASA agency conducts thorough protocols in order to achieve these efforts of advocating for neglected and abused children. It appears that CASA volunteers and staff members, for the most part, have the same mindset and goals, which is to serve the best interest of the child. There is also an emphasis of need for this service from volunteers, staff, court system, and research. Literature reviews confirm the need of youth services in order to have a substantial impact on children (Scott, Deschenes, Hopkins, Newman, & McLaughlin, 2006). Results show that some volunteers work more than others therefore the various hours worked is based upon the case and the demand of services needed, but that active volunteers slightly declined for the 2016-17 fiscal year. Within the survey, interview, and impact reports it is clear that there is an effort to keep the family together, limit the duration of children in the judicial system, and placement of foster care. Research has shown that other problematic behaviors arise and unnecessary placement can negatively influence a child’s life rather than improve it (Tyuse, Hong, & Strech, 2010).

Other findings showed that there was a necessity for understanding the collaboration of other service departments and volunteers wanting the improvement of communication with their case managers. Volunteers want to have the knowledge and resources to several training sessions that can be accessed all times of the week and learn more about the various systems that partake in a CASA case. This concludes volunteers’ desire to have as much preparation as possible in order to advocate for children. In this peer review the study emphasizes the importance of collaborating with other services, understanding what each program has to offer, and how they intertwine within the case (Sedlak, Schultz, Wells, Lyons, Doueck, & Gragg, 2006). The survey discloses the want for more guidance and support from advocate managers. Within the interview the desire to handle all cases of child abuse and neglect aligns with the need for more trainings and possible fulltime case managers. Some odd findings such as the want for contact with families after a case is over and not having a clue what would happen if the CASA program didn’t exist divulges that a small number of volunteers are having unhealthy attachments to families, and other’s may not understand the impact of their role on a child’s life within the judicial system. The findings impact the program in that it confirms the CASA agency strives to advocate efficiently. It reveals that the organization works to meet the necessities of the children in a timely manner, with intensive training and protocols supplied. The influence of this evaluation is positive, despite the fact that there is a need to increase communication and contact with advocate managers, and to have additional access to trainings and class times. The constructive work efforts of Virginia Beach CASA show their potential to overcome lack of communication and workload access.

Goals and Objectives:

Goal One: Develop an increase of access to trainings and class times for volunteers by the end of December 2018.

Objectives: Identify how much of CASA’s budget can allow an increase of access to training and times by February 2018. Promote a massive critical need for volunteers within the local community of Virginia Beach by March 2018. Plan to develop a project to raise money to cover lacking expenses by July 2018.

Goal Two: Construct a plan to budget an additional fulltime advocate manager by January 2020.

Objectives: Discuss the need to add one fulltime staff member with volunteers, board of directors, and DCJS by May 2018. Prepare a grant proposal to a previous well-known donor by October 2019. Develop and plan to raise funds to contribute to the time and effort of building up the agency by January 2020.



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates

FOR CHILDREN

VIRGINIA BEACH

