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CHAPTER 1

Introducing the **CASA/GAL** Volunteer Role

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CHAPTER 1

Introducing the CASA/GAL Volunteer Role



HOMEWORK RECAP

Prior to beginning work on this chapter, you should read the Harris-Price training case. This case is not based on one particular family, but is a composite of experiences of families involved in the child protective services system. A copy of this case appears at the end of this chapter.



GOAL

In this chapter I will explore the goals of CASA/GAL volunteer training. I will learn what I can expect and what is expected of me as an active participant in this training program. Additionally, I will learn how to recognize child abuse and neglect. Finally, I will be introduced to the roles and responsibilities of a CASA/GAL volunteer.



OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, I will be able to . . .

- ✓ Describe the CASA/GAL volunteer mission of advocating for children
- ✓ Articulate what constitutes child abuse and neglect
- ✓ Explain what is meant by “best interest” and “minimum sufficient level of care”
- ✓ Define the CASA/GAL volunteer role and the parameters of the volunteer-child relationship
- ✓ Identify attitudes, values, and skills that will help me perform my CASA/GAL volunteer work
- ✓ Describe what is expected of me during the training and identify my expectations for this training course

Welcome

Welcome to CASA/GAL volunteer training. This training is designed to provide you the opportunity to acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to be a CASA/GAL volunteer—an advocate for children who find themselves involved in the court system through no fault of their own. The children with whom you will work are victims of child abuse and neglect, and many of them are in foster care. They need a “voice in court” in order to find a safe, permanent home quickly—whether that means returning to a parent or being adopted. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you will provide that voice, sharing with the court both the child’s wishes and your recommendations about what is in that child’s best interest. It is important work that requires the commitment of your time, your energy, and your heart.

The purpose of this training is to develop volunteers who are competent, reasonably autonomous, and able to exercise good judgment as CASA/GAL volunteers. It is designed to model values important to CASA/GAL volunteer work, including autonomy, responsibility, self-awareness, respect for differences, critical thinking, and collaboration.

Activity 1A: Video & Introduction

Part 1: The facilitator will show a video that gives a broad overview of the difference that CASA/GAL volunteers can make in a child’s life. As you watch the video, think about Ben, Robert, and Rose, the children in the Harris-Price training case, which you read for homework. Consider how Norma Jackson, their CASA/GAL volunteer, is making a positive difference in their lives.

Part 2: Select a partner and introduce yourself. Share your reasons for becoming a CASA/GAL volunteer and name one concern that you have about volunteering. After five minutes, return to the large group and introduce yourself to your fellow participants by sharing your name and one word that describes your reason for volunteering.

Activity 1B: The History & Mission

Read the following material about the history of the CASA/GAL volunteer role and the mission of the National CASA Association. Then listen as the facilitator presents information about the history and mission of your local CASA/GAL program. Consider whether these statements are in line with your goals for volunteering.

History of the CASA/GAL Volunteer Role

GUARDIAN AD LITEM

The term “ad litem” means “for the suit” or “for the court case.” It is an old concept—in Anglo Saxon times, at common law, the king appointed a guardian ad litem to speak on behalf of a child or incompetent person.

As part of their general powers, judges today have the discretion to appoint a guardian ad litem (GAL) in all types of court matters. Some states require that the guardian ad litem be an attorney; others do not.

In 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) mandated the appointment of a guardian ad litem in child abuse and neglect cases; it was no longer up to the judge’s discretion.

VOLUNTEER GUARDIANS AD LITEM

Judge David Soukup (Juvenile Court, King County, Seattle, Washington) was dissatisfied with the same case plans and same recommendations for child after child; he believed more individualized attention would produce better outcomes. Judge Soukup solicited ideas for system improvement from court staff. Out of these ideas evolved the idea for community volunteers to act as child advocates.

The Volunteer Guardian ad Litem Program began in King County in 1977. The guardian ad litem did not have to be an attorney. The program recruited volunteers from the community and provided training and support. Similar programs were developed in other states/localities as judges spread word of the concept.

NATIONAL CASA

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (National CASA) was created in 1982 to support volunteer child advocate programs and increase the number of volunteer child advocates nationwide.

Hallmarks of a CASA/GAL volunteer program include:

- Advocacy for abused and neglected children in court
- Volunteers who are recruited, screened, trained, supervised, and supported
- Adherence to national standards

Programs go by many names—CASA, GAL, ProKids, Voices for Children, Child Advocates—but all have this in common: volunteers who advocate for abused and neglected children in the court system.

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National CASA Mission

The National CASA Association, together with its state and local members, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so that they can thrive in safe, permanent homes.

National CASA standards describe the major criteria the CASA/GAL volunteer must meet. The following statements describe the CASA/GAL volunteer:

- An individual who has been screened and trained by the CASA/GAL program and appointed by the court to advocate for children who come into the court system primarily as a result of alleged abuse or neglect
- An individual who respects a child's inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe environment that meets that child's best interests
- An individual who assures that the child's best interests are represented in the court at every stage of the case

Understanding Child Abuse & Neglect

*Child abuse is an
act of commission.
Child neglect is an
act of omission.*



LEARN MORE!

For more information on child neglect, child physical abuse, and child sexual abuse, see the fact sheets in the Chapter 1 Resource Materials.

Did You Know That . . .

- There are more than 870,000 cases of abuse documented each year.
- More than 1,250 children will die each year as the direct result of identifiable abuse or neglect.
- The majority of child abuse and neglect deaths are children under 5 years old.
- Nine out of ten abusers are the child's own parents/guardians.
- One out of four girls and one out of five to seven boys will be sexually assaulted by the age of 18.
- Between 80% and 90% of our prison population reports being victims of abuse.

From *Child Maltreatment 2004*, Administration for Children and Families, Washington, DC, and *Talking About Touching*, Committee for Children, Seattle.

Activity 1C: Seeing the Whole Child

In order to recognize child abuse or neglect, it's important to look at all aspects of a child's life and identify what makes for a happy, well-adjusted child. On the flipchart at the front of the room you will see a circle divided into four quadrants. These quadrants represent four aspects of a child's life: the intellectual, the spiritual, the physical, and the emotional. In the large group, brainstorm ideas of what makes for a happy child in each of these areas of life.

Activity 1D: The Continuum of Abuse

Part 1: Child abuse can be seen as part of a continuum of behaviors. At the low end of the continuum are behaviors you might consider poor parenting or disrespectful behavior; at the high end are behaviors that lead directly or indirectly to the death of a child.

On the flipcharts at the front of the room, the facilitator has created continuums for physical abuse, emotional/verbal abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. In the large group, think of behaviors that you consider abusive or neglectful, and discuss where on the flipchart continuums they would fall.

Part 2: Look at the handout that contains your state statute(s) defining abuse and neglect. Still in the large group, identify which behaviors listed on the flipchart meet the legal definition of abuse or neglect and which do not. You will learn more about child abuse and neglect laws in Chapter 2.

Activity 1E: Indicators of Abuse

Read the following chart, which describes different kinds of abuse and neglect and lists indicators of each type of abuse. Share any questions you have in the large group.

Recognizing Abuse

	DESCRIPTION	INDICATORS
Physical Abuse	Intentionally harming a child, use of excessive force, reckless endangerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexplained bruises, welts, and scars • Injuries in various stages of healing • Bite marks • Unexplained burns • Fractures • Injuries not fitting explanation • Internal damage or head injury
Sexual Abuse	Engaging a child in any activity for an adult's own sexual gratification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age-inappropriate sexual knowledge • Sexual acting out • Child disclosure of abuse • Excessive masturbation • Physical injury to genital area • Pregnancy or STD at a young age • Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing • Depression, distress, or trauma • Extreme fear
Emotional Abuse	The systematic diminishment of a child. It is designed to reduce a child's self-concept to the point where the child feels unworthy of respect, unworthy of friendship, and unworthy of love and protection, the natural birthrights of all children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habit disorders (thumb sucking, biting, rocking, enuresis) • Conduct disorders (withdrawal or antisocial behavior) • Behavior extremes • Overly adaptive behavior • Lags in emotional or intellectual development • Low self-esteem • Depression, suicide attempts
Neglect	Failure of a person responsible for the child's welfare to provide necessary food, care, clothing, shelter, or medical attention. Can also be failure to act when such failure interferes with a child's health and safety.	<p>Physical Signs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malnourishment • Missed immunizations • Lack of dental care • Lack of supervision • Consistent dirtiness • Constant tiredness/listlessness <p>Material Signs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient/improper clothing • Filthy living conditions • Inadequate shelter • Insufficient food/poor nutrition

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Principles & Concepts That Guide CASA/GAL Volunteer Work

What Is “Best Interest”?

Activity 1F: Understanding “Best Interest”

Part 1: Listen as the facilitator introduces the principle of “best interest.”

THE “BEST INTEREST” PRINCIPLE—WHAT IT MEANS:

- A safe home
- A permanent home
- As quickly as possible

Parents typically decide what is best for their children and then provide it for them to the extent that they can. They are their children’s best advocates. The child protection system intervenes in families’ lives when parents cannot or will not protect, promote, and provide for their children’s basic needs. A CASA/GAL volunteer becomes the advocate when the parents cannot—or will not—fulfill this role.

Judges use the “best interest of the child” standard when making their decisions in child abuse and neglect cases. Child welfare and juvenile court practitioners and scholars have debated the meaning of “best interest of the child” for years. Books have been written on the subject; however, there is still no concise legal definition for this standard.

In cases where the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) applies, the law presumes that it is always in the best interest of an Indian child* to have the tribe determine what is best for the child’s future. You will learn more about ICWA in Chapter 2.

Part 2: Look at National CASA’s statement about the “best interest” principle. Identify key words or phrases that will be important to you in your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer.

THE “BEST INTEREST” PRINCIPLE—WHAT NATIONAL CASA SAYS:

The CASA/GAL volunteer is guided by the “best interest” principle when advocating for a child. This means that the volunteer knows the child well enough to identify the child’s needs. The volunteer makes fact-based recommendations to the court about appropriate resources to meet those needs and informs the court of the child’s wishes, whether or not those wishes are, in the opinion of the CASA/GAL volunteer, in the child’s best interest.

*This curriculum uses the terms “Indian child” and “Indian custodian” in accordance with the legal definitions set out in the Indian Child Welfare Act.

What Is “Minimum Sufficient Level of Care” (MSL)?

Activity 1G: Understanding MSL

Read the following summary describing “minimum sufficient level of care,” the bottom-line standard for a child to remain in his/her home. In your small groups, answer the following questions:

- What other issues should be considered in determining if a parent can provide a minimum sufficient level of care?
- How do you think the MSL standard benefits children?

In the large group, the facilitator will ask to hear some of your responses.

Removing a child from his/her home because of abuse and/or neglect is a drastic remedy. Because removal is so traumatic for the child, both the law and good practice require that agencies keep the child in the home when it is possible to do so and still keep the child safe. Children should be removed only when parents cannot meet the “minimum sufficient level of care.” This standard describes what must be in place for the child to remain in his/her home. The same standard is also used to determine whether or not parents have made sufficient progress so that a child can be safely returned to the family home. The minimum sufficient level of care is determined by a number of factors, each of which must be looked at specifically in relation to the case at hand.

Factors to consider include:

THE CHILD’S NEEDS

Is the parent providing for the following needs at a basic level? (We’ll address children’s needs in more depth in Chapter 6.)

- Physical (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, safety, protection)
- Emotional (attachment between parent and child)
- Developmental (education, special help for children with disabilities)

SOCIAL STANDARDS

Is the parent’s behavior within or outside commonly accepted child-rearing practices in our society?

Here are some examples: In terms of discipline, whipping a child with a belt was generally thought to be appropriate during the first half of the twentieth century but is now widely considered abusive. Contemporary families frequently use a short “time out” as a punishment for young children. In terms of school attendance, it is a widely held expectation that parents send all children to school (or homeschool them) until they reach the age limit at which attendance is no longer compulsory. Social standards also apply in medical care, where immunizations and regular medical/dental care are the standard.

WHY THE MSL STANDARD IS USED

- It maintains the child’s right to safety and permanence while not ignoring the parents’ right to their children.
- It is required by law (as a practical way to interpret the “reasonable efforts” provision of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act).
- It is possible for parents to reach.
- It provides a reference point for decision makers.
- It protects (to some degree) from individual biases and value judgments.
- It discourages unnecessary removal from the family home.
- It discourages unnecessarily long placements in foster care.
- It keeps decision makers focused on what is the least detrimental alternative for the child.
- It is sensitive across cultures.

KEY PARAMETERS OF THE MSL STANDARD

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- The standard relates to a particular child.
- It is a set of minimum conditions, not an ideal situation.
- It is a relative standard, depending on the child's needs, social standards, and community standards. It will not be the same for every family or every child in a particular family.
- It remains the same when considering removal and when considering reunification.

COMMUNITY STANDARDS

Does the parent's behavior fall within reasonable limits, given the specific community in which the family resides?

Here are some examples: The age at which a child can be safely left alone varies significantly from urban to suburban to rural communities. The age at which a child is deemed old enough to care for other children is largely determined by cultural and community norms. Even something as simple as sending a 9-year-old child to the store might fall within or outside those standards, depending on neighborhood safety, the distance and traffic patterns, the weather, the child's clothing, the time of day or night, the ability of the child, and the necessity of the purchase.

Communities can be geographical or cultural. An example of a nongeographical, cultural community is a Native American tribe in which members live in a variety of locales but still share a common child-rearing standard. According to the Indian Child Welfare Act, the minimum sufficient level of care standard must reflect the community standards of the tribe of the Indian child.

The Role of the CASA/GAL Volunteer

Activity 1H: Key Components of the Volunteer Role

Listen as the facilitator describes the four key components of the CASA/GAL volunteer role, which are listed below. In the large group, go through your local program's volunteer job description and point out examples of each type of activity.

You will explore all aspects of your role in greater depth throughout the rest of this training.

INVESTIGATION

You carry out an objective examination of the situation, including relevant history, environment, relationships, and needs of the child.

FACILITATION

You identify resources and services for the child and facilitate a collaborative relationship between all parties involved in the case, helping to create a situation in which the child's needs can be met.

ADVOCACY

You speak up for the child by making recommendations regarding the child's best interests in a written court report.

MONITORING

You keep track of whether the orders of the court and the plans of the child protective services agency are carried out, and you report to the court or collaborate with the child protective services agency when any of the parties do not follow those orders and plans.



LEARN MORE!

For a more extensive overview of CASA/GAL volunteer responsibilities, see the Chapter 1 Resource Materials.

The CASA/GAL Volunteer's Relationship with the Child

Establishing a relationship with the child is one of the most important things you do as a CASA/GAL volunteer. The ideal relationship is one that maximizes your ability to advocate successfully for the child. The following guidelines describe the parameters for your relationship and contacts with the child:

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you have direct and sufficient contact with a child to carry out an independent and valid investigation of the child's circumstances, including the child's needs and wishes, so as to be able to make sound, thorough, and objective recommendations in the child's best interest. This contact should occur in person to provide you with firsthand knowledge of the child and his/her unique personality, abilities, and needs. While social contact is permitted with the child to develop trust and a meaningful relationship, you function as an objective advocate for the child and not as the child's attorney, caseworker, counselor, mentor, or parental figure. You do not provide direct services to the child, such as supervising visitation; however, it is appropriate for you to observe visitation. Under no circumstances shall you take the child into your home, provide shelter for the child, or take the child on an overnight outing.

Activity 11: Volunteer-Child Relationship Dilemmas

The facilitator will provide CASA/GAL Volunteer-Child Relationship Dilemma cards. Select one and read the dilemma. The facilitator will ask for volunteers to read aloud the situations on their cards. In the large group, brainstorm possible solutions to each dilemma.

Looking Ahead

Activity 1j: Attitudes & Skills That Enhance CASA/GAL Volunteer Work

Much of the information explored up to this point focuses on your role or duties as a CASA/GAL volunteer. Fulfilling duties is an important part of being a successful CASA/GAL volunteer, but it is only one part. Personal attitudes and skills are also very important.

Follow along as the facilitator presents information on attributes that will help you in your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer.

PROFESSIONALISM

Ethics, accountability, confidentiality, resourcefulness, critical thinking, and good judgment

These skills/abilities can enhance your credibility and earn the respect of parties in a case. Professionalism and assertiveness can help you gain necessary information.

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE

Open-mindedness, respect, collaboration, self-awareness, and assertiveness

These attitudes will help you be more successful in working with other people, particularly in gathering accurate information and making accurate interpretations of situations. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you are expected to demonstrate respect and open-mindedness in your interactions with all parties to the case. Gathering information from children requires skills and attitudes different from those required when working with adults. Children may be frightened or healing from trauma. They are different emotionally and developmentally from adults and also from other children. Your listening and observation skills will help you gather a full picture of the child's situation.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Respect, flexibility, knowledge, self-awareness, and empathy

What you do not understand may lead to inaccurate interpretations. Understanding your own culture and the differences between cultures will allow you to best serve children and their families. Your life experience (culture, era, geography, race, education, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, family dynamics, etc.) has led you to develop a particular perspective. Your unique perspective always influences how you interpret what you observe. The more aware you become of your personal perspective, the better able you will be to understand that others have different perspectives. In observing children and families, it is important to understand that your perspective on families and parenting is likely to be different from those with whom you are working. (You will explore cultural competence in greater depth in Chapter 3.)

Adapted from materials from CASA for Children, Inc., Portland, Oregon.

Activity 1K: Expectations

Read the material that begins below, including the training overview and the chapter-by-chapter course outline. Then, divide into small groups and describe your personal expectations of this training to your group. Write each expectation on a card, initial your cards, and post your cards on the chart labeled “Expectations.” During the last training session you will return to the “Expectations” chart to see if your expectations for this training were met.

Overview

THE SITUATION THAT CALLS FOR THE TRAINING

As you have learned in this chapter, you will need specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills to advocate effectively for a child. Children who have been abused or neglected are often without a voice in the court system unless they have a CASA/GAL volunteer to advocate for their best interests. An effective advocate is able to:

1. Approach each case with a single goal: advocating for interventions and services designed to ensure that the child is in a safe, stable, and permanent home as soon as possible
2. Work within the parameters of federal and state laws governing child abuse, neglect, and dependency cases
3. Under the guidance of the CASA/GAL program staff:
 - Conduct an independent investigation to gather facts and continue researching the case to ascertain the needs and wishes of the child
 - Collaborate with the child (when possible), the child’s family, the child protective services agency, and other service providers to identify the appropriate resources for meeting the needs of the child and to determine where those resources are available
 - Consistently design and present to the court fact-based recommendations so that appropriate resources can be ordered to meet the needs of the child
 - Monitor the case until the child is in a safe, permanent home

TIME FRAME

To meet National CASA Association standards, local CASA/GAL programs will schedule at least 30 hours of pre-service training (in addition to time spent observing in court) with the goal of preparing volunteers to be thorough, effective, and autonomous child advocates.

CONTENT & OBJECTIVES

A chapter-by-chapter outline of this training appears below. Throughout the training the facilitator will address local program needs and applicable state, tribal, or local laws, standards, and/or regulations. The glossary at the end of this manual defines terms commonly used in matters of child welfare and the juvenile court system. Find the glossary and bookmark it; you will be learning a lot of new terms.

CHAPTER 1

Introducing the CASA/GAL Volunteer Role

- Unit 1 Welcome
- Unit 2 Understanding Child Abuse & Neglect
- Unit 3 Principles & Concepts That Guide CASA/GAL Volunteer Work
- Unit 4 Looking Ahead

CHAPTER 2

Introducing the Law, the Child Protection System & the Courts

- Unit 1 The Development of Child Abuse & Neglect Laws
- Unit 2 Introducing CPS & the Court Process
- Unit 3 The Roles in a Juvenile Court Case

CHAPTER 3

Developing Cultural Competence

- Unit 1 Diversity
- Unit 2 Cultural Heritage
- Unit 3 Personal Values
- Unit 4 Culturally Competent Child Advocacy
- Unit 5 Developing an Action Plan

CHAPTER 4

Understanding Families—Part 1

- Unit 1 Family Strengths
- Unit 2 Understanding Families Through Culture
- Unit 3 Stress in Families
- Unit 4 Risk Factors for Child Abuse & Neglect
- Unit 5 The Impact of Mental Illness on Children & Families
- Unit 6 The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children & Families

CHAPTER 5

Understanding Families—Part 2

- Unit 1 The Impact of Substance Abuse/Addiction on Children & Families
- Unit 2 Poverty—The Facts for Children
- Unit 3 The Importance of Family to a Child

CHAPTER 6

Understanding Children

- Unit 1 The Needs of Children
- Unit 2 How Children Grow & Develop
- Unit 3 Attachment & Resilience
- Unit 4 Separation
- Unit 5 Permanence for Children
- Unit 6 Psychological & Educational Issues for Children

CHAPTER 7

Communicating as a CASA/GAL Volunteer

- Unit 1 Developing Communication Skills
- Unit 2 Communicating with Children
- Unit 3 Dealing with Conflict
- Unit 4 Understanding Confidentiality

CHAPTER 8

Practicing the CASA/GAL Volunteer Role— Gathering Information

- Unit 1 How a CASA/GAL Volunteer Is Appointed to a Case
- Unit 2 Planning the Investigation & Gathering Information
- Unit 3 A Successful CASA/GAL Volunteer Interview
- Unit 4 Investigating a Case

CHAPTER 9

Practicing the CASA/GAL Volunteer Role— Reporting & Monitoring

- Unit 1 Community Resources
- Unit 2 Writing Court Reports &
Making Effective Recommendations
- Unit 3 Appearing in Court
- Unit 4 Monitoring a Case

CHAPTER 10

Pulling It All Together

- Unit 1 Self-Care for Volunteers
- Unit 2 Support from CASA/GAL Program Staff
- Unit 3 Focusing on the Needs of the Child
- Unit 4 Training Wrap-Up



Activity 1L: John's Story

Watch John's story from "Powerful Voices: Stories by Foster Youth," and answer the following questions in your small group:

- Who provided support to John?
- What role did John's CASA/GAL volunteer play in his life?

Share any questions you have in the large group.

Homework

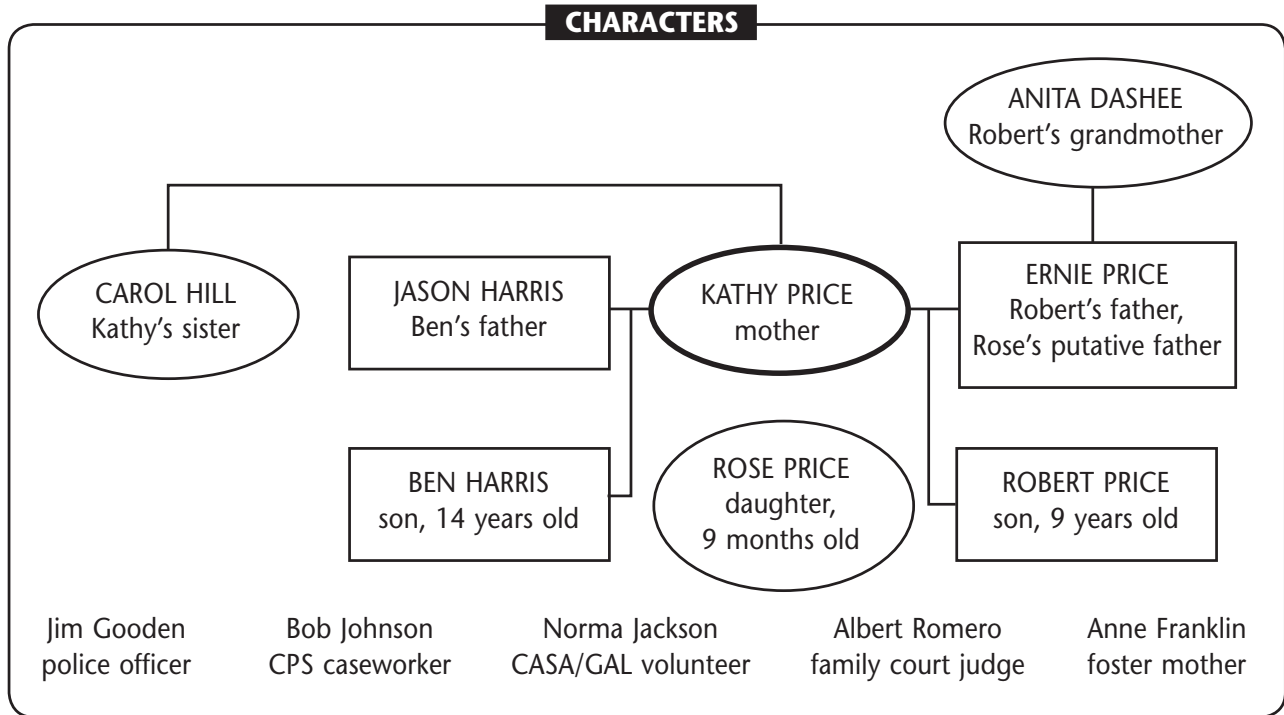
RESOURCE MATERIALS EXPLORATION

Look at the Chapter 2 Web Resources or the Chapter 2 Resource Materials. Pick at least one website or article to explore, and bring back what you learn to share with the group, the facilitator, and your local CASA/GAL program. When you come to the next training session, write up a brief description of the resource on an index card provided by the facilitator.

MEDIA REPORTS ON CHILD ABUSE

Look and listen for media reports (newspaper stories, magazine articles, TV reports, and/or radio broadcasts) regarding child abuse today. Make notes about information that you find. We will use the information that you gather to compare child abuse today with child abuse historically.

The Harris-Price Case



KATHY PRICE'S STORY

Every day I wake up at 5 a.m. so I can get Rose, my baby, dressed and fed and get Ben and Robert up and ready for school. I take Rose to daycare and make sure the boys leave for school. Ben's a big help—sometimes he has dinner ready when I get home. I work long days. I clean at a motel and I also wash dishes at the restaurant around the corner. I get minimum wage. My jobs aren't so great, but I need every penny and can't miss a day. Sometimes after the kids go to sleep I have a drink or two. It helps me sleep and is the only thing that helps my aching back—cleaning is hard work. My sister nags me about it, but it's not like alcohol is illegal or anything.

The day Child Protective Services (CPS) took my kids was awful. The night before, I had run out of formula for Rose, so after I put her to bed I went to get some. The boys were watching TV and Ben was in charge. That formula is really expensive. I was out of vodka, too, and so I stopped to buy some. After that, I didn't have enough money for the formula. So I took a can—no big deal. But the lady saw me and they called the cops. They arrested me—for a can of formula! Worst of all, I was already on probation, so I'm really afraid they're going to throw the book at me.

BEN'S STORY

That night, Mom left to go to the store and didn't come home. I didn't know why. I went to bed, but when I woke up she still wasn't there. I knew I would be in big trouble if I missed school, and Mom would be in trouble too. But I couldn't leave Rose at home alone! I called the school and pretended to be my dad and said I was sick. It was true—I

KATHY PRICE
mother

According to the 2000 US Census, more than 6.5 million families (9.2%) live below the poverty line. More than 2.5 million children (17%) under 5 years old live in poverty.

BEN HARRIS
son, 14 years old

have asthma and I was having trouble breathing. I know I'm supposed to take some stuff for it, but Mom can't pay for it. I don't think my dad helps her out at all.

Anyway, that morning Rose was crying and crying. I tried to change her diaper, but I don't think I did it right and we didn't have any formula for her. I tried giving her some of my cereal, and she ate a little. I was really scared. I didn't know where Mom was.

ROBERT'S STORY

ROBERT PRICE
son, 9 years old

I was scared that day, too. Ben was mad about missing school, but not me. The other kids tease me a lot—probably because I'm "mixed." My mom is white and my dad is black. My dad is a soldier and just got back from Iraq. I think he's living with my grandmother.

OFFICER GOODEN'S STORY

Jim Gooden
police officer

We got a call from a neighbor who said there was a lot of noise in the downstairs apartment. When I got there, it was pretty sad. Both the boys were crying and scared and the baby was hollering like crazy. She stank—her diaper was dirty. I felt sorry for those kids. I know their mom, and she just disappears sometimes. She always comes back though. There was nothing I could do for them, so I called CPS.

BOB JOHNSON'S STORY

Bob Johnson
CPS caseworker

I've been a CPS caseworker for five years. Officer Gooden called CPS because three kids were in an apartment without an adult. He told me their names, so before I left the office I checked our records. We had a file on them. Earlier in the year Kathy Price had signed an agreement that she wouldn't leave the baby without an adult present. While I was at the apartment, Carol Hill arrived. I knew from the file that she was Kathy's sister. Kathy had called her from jail and asked her to come over to get the kids. She said Kathy was still in jail because they'd also charged her with violating probation by having the vodka. Carol had a home study the last time we took the kids, so she took Ben with her.

CAROL HILL'S STORY

CAROL HILL
Kathy's sister

I was happy to be able to take Ben—he's a good kid. I couldn't take the others, though. I've got two kids of my own and we live in a small place.

Kathy's trouble. She drinks too much. I only hear from her when there's another crisis.

KATHY'S STORY

KATHY PRICE
mother

I got out of jail and found out that CPS had taken my kids. I went to the motel to report for work, but that jerk of a manager fired me for being late again. Then, the next day, I had to go to court. That judge wouldn't let my kids come home with me! I couldn't believe it. He said I could visit them. My own kids!

JASON HARRIS'S STORY

Ben is my son. He's a good kid and all, but I have a new family now—my wife and I have a new baby. I can't get involved in Ben's life and support my wife and baby. They have to come first. I know it's not Ben's fault that his mother is so messed up, but I want to steer clear of anything having to do with Kathy.

JASON HARRIS
Ben's father

ERNIE PRICE'S STORY

I just got back from being overseas. I sent money to Kathy while I was gone—to help her out with Robert. She moves so much, though, that it came back to me. I didn't know where else to send it. I've been looking for work since I got back, but it's hard to find a job. I'm living with my mother.

ERNIE PRICE
Robert's father,
Rose's putative father

I don't even know if Rose is mine. She has my name, but this is the first I've even heard about her. Kathy and I divorced a year and a half ago—about the time I left to go overseas.

I love Robert, though. He's my boy. I want him to come live with me and my mom. If Rose is mine, I'll take care of her, too.

NORMA JACKSON'S STORY

My supervisor at the CASA/GAL program called to tell me about the Harris-Price children and to ask if I could take the case. She said a hearing was coming up right away. I agreed to do it and was appointed as the CASA/GAL volunteer at the first hearing. At that same hearing Judge Romero found that reasonable efforts had been made to prevent the need to remove the children from their home and that, given Kathy Price's current circumstances and past history, there was sufficient reason to remove the children. The judge ordered a home study for Anita Dashee's home—Ms. Dashee is Ernie Price's mom, and he's currently living with her. The judge also ordered a paternity test for Rose. He left Ben in Carol Hill's home for the time being. Judge Romero also ordered that all the parents fill out forms containing their financial information and return them to the court in ten days.

Norma Jackson
CASA/GAL volunteer

After court I introduced myself to CPS caseworker Bob Johnson and the various attorneys. I got permission to meet with the children's parents, and set up a time to meet with Mr. Johnson to talk about the case.

When I approached Ben's father, Jason Harris, in the hallway after court, he didn't even want to talk to me—he said he wanted a new life. He told me he had gotten clean and didn't want anything to do with Kathy or her kids.

I set up separate times to meet with Kathy Price, Carol Hill, and Ernie Price. I also need to get in touch with Anne Franklin, the foster mother, to set up a time to talk and to meet with Robert and Rose.

When I met with Bob Johnson a few days later, he said that his first priority was trying to get Kathy Price sober. I brought up the fact that she'd been working pretty steadily and always had an appropriate apartment. Still, Bob said, her drinking was causing problems. He'd gotten police reports where she'd been arrested for public drunkenness,

The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that 21% of adults in the United States read at literacy level 1. Literacy level 1 is defined as the ability for an adult to sign his/her name, identify the name of a country in a short article, locate one piece of information in a sports article, locate the expiration date on a driver's license, and total the amounts on a bank deposit. Adults who have reading skills at level 1 usually cannot locate eligibility information on a table of employee benefits, locate an intersection on a street map, identify and enter background information on a social security card application, and calculate the total cost of purchase on an order form.

and this wasn't the first time she'd left the kids alone. The night she was arrested, she hadn't told the police the kids were at home alone—it was abandonment, he said. And he pointed out that she'd failed to get medical care for Ben's asthma. He also said that she hadn't filled out the forms to get the kids on Medicaid and to get child support from the fathers. I asked whether she was literate, and he said, "Barely."

When I met Kathy, I asked her what had happened the day CPS took her kids. I also asked her about Ben's medication. She told me that she had taken him to the clinic, but after she'd taken a whole day off work and taken two buses to get there, the people at the clinic told them they needed to change the appointment. Kathy doesn't have a phone, so the clinic couldn't reach her ahead of time. She and Ben couldn't get in to see the doctor that day or get the medicine. She said she couldn't afford to lose work time like that.

When I met Ernie, he reported that he had just received a job offer as a car mechanic. His mother said she'd help Ernie with Robert and with Rose, if she's his daughter. He expressed his excitement at getting to reconnect with Robert. The home study on Ernie Price and Anita Dashee turned out fine.

I met Robert and Rose at the home of their foster mother, Anne Franklin. When I got there, Robert was coloring at the kitchen table. He seemed nervous and wouldn't talk to me at first. I explained who I was and why I was there, and I asked him if he liked seeing his father. His face lit up and he immediately said yes. He said he missed Ben a lot. When I asked him about his visit with his mom, he said it was okay and wouldn't say anything more.

When I asked Anne Franklin how the kids were doing, she said they were doing okay. She reported that Rose had terrible diaper rash when she arrived at her home, but it's clearing up now. But Ms. Franklin is worried about Rose—she is 9 months old, but she isn't sitting up or crawling, and she never makes a sound, except when she's crying.

Next I went to see Ben at the home of his aunt, Carol Hill. I explained my role to him, and he wanted to know if I was going to make him move back with his mom. I asked him if that was what he wanted. He said he loved his mom and wanted to see her, but it was hard for her to take care of them and he liked living in the country with his aunt. Ben was afraid he wouldn't get to see Robert and Rose, so I explained that the judge said he was allowed to visit his brother and sister. Ben also said he worried about not being able to stand up for Robert when other kids picked on him at school. Then Ben said he was tired and wanted to go to his room.

I asked Ms. Hill how she thought Ben was adjusting to the new arrangement. She said he seemed to like the open space where she lived and he got along well with his cousins. She said she'd taken him to her family physician and he had started to take the medication that had been prescribed a while back. So far, it had helped his breathing but made him feel jittery. She related that Ben was going to start at a new school next week. When I asked her about Kathy, she said Kathy never contacted her unless she was in trouble.

After meeting with all these people, I called my supervisor to discuss the case, ask her a few questions, and talk about my recommendations.

My recommendations for the next hearing are as follows:

- Robert should be placed with his father and grandmother.
- Rose should be placed with her father and grandmother, if the paternity test shows that Ernie Price is the father. Otherwise, Rose should stay in her current foster placement, and CPS should attempt to identify her father.
- Ben should stay with his aunt.
- Kathy Price should undergo a substance abuse assessment and follow the recommendations made.
- Kathy Price should attend parenting classes.
- Ernie Price should attend parenting classes.
- Sibling visits should occur, at least weekly.
- CPS should arrange a developmental assessment for Rose.
- Kathy Price should have access to the children's educational records and be apprised of events, but Carol Hill should be the educational decision maker for Ben and Ernie Price should be the educational decision maker for Robert.
- Jason Harris should pay child support for Ben.

I called Bob Johnson at CPS to discuss the case again. The CPS case plan goal for Rose and Ben is reunification with Kathy Price. The concurrent plan for Ben is adoption or guardianship with his aunt. The concurrent plan for Rose is placement with Ernie Price, placement with biological paternal family member (if Ernie Price is not the father), or termination of parental rights and adoption. The case plan for Robert is placement with his father.

After the next hearing, and in preparation for the future hearings, I will continue to monitor a bunch of things in the case. I plan to call my CASA/GAL program supervisor and ask for her help in creating a list of people to talk to in order to keep track of what's happening in the case.

My current list of things to monitor in this case includes the following:

- Sibling visitation/separation issues
- Robert's placement with his father and grandmother
- Both Kathy Price's and Ernie Price's compliance with the case plan and court orders
- Results of Rose's developmental assessment
- Results of paternity test for Rose
- Ben's and Robert's educational progress

According to various studies, it has been estimated that up to 60% of children in foster care experience some type of developmental delay. Children who enter care with a developmental delay are more likely to remain in care for a longer time period than children entering care without a developmental delay.

