**CASA for York County**

**Crisis Response Plan**

**CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM**

The members of CASA for York County’s Crisis Response Team are:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Title** | **Work** | **Cell** |
| Elizabeth Hain | Executive Director, CASA for York | 402-362-5454 | 402-641-6590 |
| Jane Jensen | President | 402-362-3339 | 402-362-7974 |
| Dale Kahla | Vice-President | N/A | 402-366-5109 |
| Barb Shelden | Board Secretary | N/A | 402-363-9500 |
| Candy Otte | Board Treasurer | 402-362-6636 | 402-710-0705 |

It is helpful to have an agreed-upon understanding and shared philosophy about working with the media during a crisis. Specifically, the media have a job to do in reporting the news, and to the extent possible it is better to work with them during a crisis and be proactive in telling your side of the story rather than being defensive, avoiding media interviews, or issuing “no comments.” The media are likely to report on the story anyway, so it is better to work with them to ensure that any stories are accurate, balanced, and fair.

The Executive Director has been designated as the spokesperson during a crisis; however, before any media interviews take place, the Crisis Response Team should be activated. The team shall meet briefly in person or via conference call to discuss the facts of the crisis and determine the appropriate response. In forming key messages and response to the scenario, the team must carefully consider whether there are any confidentiality requirements that must be abided by, since CASA members are officially considered “officers of the court.”

CASA for York County has a policy that local volunteers and board members do not speak to the media. They need to be educated as to what the appropriate protocol is in the event of a crisis. The best response would be to politely let the reporter know they must comply with CASA for York County policy, which doesn’t allow them to speak to the media, but they would be happy to provide the reporter with the Executive Director’s name and phone number who could do an interview.

If the crisis includes allegations of misconduct by any member of the Crisis Response Team, the spokesperson shall be the highest ranking member of the Crisis Response Team who is not involved in the allegation.

Within 24 hours of CASA for York County’s awareness of a crisis situation both the state and national CASA association must be contacted.

**POSSIBLE CRISIS SCENARIOS AND KEY MESSAGES**

*DEATH OF A CHILD*

Because CASA cases often deal with abused or neglected children, it is possible that a child could die at the hands of a parent, foster parent, etc., while the child is a state ward. Although others are likely to bear the brunt of this situation (whomever the child was living with, the child’s case worker, etc.), it is possible that the CASA volunteer would also be interviewed and associated with the child’s death. Key messages in this situation would include:

* The death of any child is tragic and nobody is saddened more about this child’s death than the CASA volunteer. The very reason CASA exists is to helpabused and neglected children.
* Although CASA volunteers are very active in trying to advocate for children, including attending all the court hearings, interviewing parents and teachers, and providing objective information to the judge, the CASA volunteer is not with the child 24 hours a day and could not have prevented this child’s death.
* CASA has successfully advocated for hundreds of abused and neglected children across the state of Nebraska.
* Other key messages might be created depending on the facts of this particular crisis.

*CHILD IS ABUSED BY CASA VOLUNTEER*

Because CASA volunteers spend a lot of time with children, there is potential for abuse. Key messages in this situation would include:

* CASA thoroughly screens all volunteers before they are accepted into the CASA program. Screening includes a criminal background check, a review of driver’s license records, and a review of the Nebraska Child Abuse Registry.
* In addition to screening all volunteers, CASA has an official policy discouraging volunteers from doing any sort of recreational activities with children.
* The very reason CASA exists is to help abused and neglected children. Nobody is saddened more about this situation than the hundreds of dedicated CASA volunteers across the state who have successfully advocated in our court system on behalf of abused and neglected children.
* If the volunteer is currently assigned to a case, CASA staff must notify the accused CASA volunteer in writing via first class mail that they have been suspended from working on their case and are asked to refrain from contacting any case participants. The volunteer is also asked to return all case materials to the CASA office within 5 days. In addition, CASA staff should contact the case worker and other professionals assigned to the case to inform them of the suspension. CASA staff will immediately notify the judge and file the necessary paperwork to remove the CASA volunteer from their case. The media may ask what steps have been taken in relation to the volunteer’s current assignment.
* Other key messages might be created depending on the facts of this particular crisis.

*LOCAL CHAPTER DIRECTOR EMBEZZLES FUNDS*

Key messages in this situation would include:

* CASA for York County has a Financial Procedures Policy. Its financial records are reviewed by the Board of Directors and professional accountants throughout the year. CASA for York will provide all available information requested by authorities.
* Other key messages might be created depending on the facts surrounding the specific issue.

*CASA VOLUNTEER DISCLOSES CONFIDENTIAL CASE INFORMATION TO THE MEDIA OR OTHERS.*

Key messages in this situation would include:

* CASA volunteers receive 30 hours of training before they are accepted into the CASA program, including specific training on court confidentiality requirements.
* Volunteers work closely with the children they are assigned to and because they have the best interest of a child at heart, occasionally they get frustrated with the pace or outcome of a case; however, they are still required to abide by the confidentiality requirements of the court.
* Other key messages might be created depending on the specific scenario.

*CASA volunteer witnesses an incident of abuse between a Child and adult OR is given information related to the safety and treatment of the child.*

Key messages in these situations and immediate action would include:

* Volunteers have a duty to immediately disclose instances where the volunteers suspect (1) Child abuse and/or neglect; (2) Someone may harm her/himself or others.  Such disclosure should be to the Department of Health and Human Services or the police (**Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline #1-800-652-1999**).  Volunteers that have a question about disclosure should immediately call the Director.
* No statement will be issued and all contact with the media will be referred to the Executive Director.
* The very reason CASA exists is to help abused and neglected children.  The CASA Volunteer along with program staff have taken the appropriate action and alerted the appropriate authorities.
* Other key messages might be created depending on the specific scenario.

**BOILERPLATE PRESS RELEASE AND FACT SHEETS**

In the event of a crisis, it is important to have information readily available to provide to the media. Because reporters are often working on a deadline, there will not be time for CASA to produce materials at the last minute. Although a press release cannot be written until the last minute (because it would depend on the facts of the situation), a blank release with “boilerplate” information about CASA has been prepared (attachment #1). If CASA has letterhead the release could be put on its letterhead. In addition, a CASA Fact Sheet (provided under the Collateral Materials tab) should be made available to the media.

**COMMUNICATION WITH THE CASA MEMBERSHIP**

Although it is important to respond to reporters immediately during a media crisis, there is another audience that needs to be kept informed, and that is the entire internal and external network of CASA Board members, volunteers, Nebraska CASA, and other local program directors. If time allows, they would be given information about the event that caused the crisis. Although they should not be talking to the media (The Executive Director is the designated spokesperson unless we determine otherwise during the crisis), it is helpful to provide them with some of the basic facts of the situation and some of the key messages both for their own understanding of the situation and so they are better prepared to explain the event to family, neighbors, and others in their local community. The Executive Director will be responsible for notifying all CASA for York County Board members about the crisis. The Board President has been designated as the person who may assist The Executive Director with communication to the remainder of the CASA organization.

**NEWS RELEASE Month Day, Year**

FOR RELEASE: (date)

CONTACT: Elizabeth Hain, Director of CASA for York County, 510 N. Lincoln Ave., York, NE 68467 Tel/Fax (402) 362-5454, Cell #402-641-6590

RE:

**HEADLINE HERE**

*TYPE SUBHEAD HERE*

(Lincoln)—Type body copy here.

**“*CASA for York County supports and provides volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children, enabling them to thrive in a safe, permanent home.”***

CASA, or Court Appointed Special Advocates, is a nationwide child advocacy group. CASA volunteers are trained citizens who are appointed by the judge to advocate for abused or neglected children. CASA has successfully advocated for hundreds of abused and neglected children across the state of Nebraska. CASA volunteers have been active in York County since 2000.

CASA thoroughly screens all volunteers and volunteers receive 30 hours of training before they are accepted into the CASA program. Volunteers work closely with the children they are assigned to and have the best interest of a child at heart.