

State of Florida – Guardian ad Litem Program Volunteer Child Advocate Position Description

OVERVIEW

A Guardian ad Litem (GAL) volunteer child advocate is a specially trained, child advocate whose dedicated advocacy positively impacts a dependent child's safety, well-being, best interests and finding of a permanent placement. Working within a GAL team of Program staff and attorneys, and alongside community-based social workers and community service providers, a GAL volunteer serves as the "voice for the child" in judicial dependency proceedings and in helping the child navigate the child welfare system.

GUIDANCE/COACHING

Direct guidance and coaching of volunteers are provided by a GAL Child Advocate Manager (CAM) and a Child Best Interest (CBI) Attorney. All of you work together within the Program's team model of advocacy as stated in our Program's Standards. Volunteers may receive additional support through the use of local volunteer mentor programs.

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES (These are minimum, required duties and responsibilities)

- A. Complete, extensive and independent research and review of each case:
 - 1. Perform monthly child visits in accordance with Program standards and policies. This includes submitting a child visitation report to your CAM on a monthly basis.
 - 2. Speak with the child and relevant adults (parents, family members, school officials, doctors, service providers and others involved in the child's life that may have facts about the case.)
 - 3. Observe the child in interactions with parents, relatives and non-relatives.

- B. Report findings and child's wishes to the court by submitting reports prepared in accordance with Florida Statutes, Program Standards and policies for scheduled hearings:
 - 1. Provide a written report containing factual information that you have independently verified utilizing the Program's court reporting standard. This report is developed in collaboration with your CAM and CBI Attorney.

- C. Ensure representation of the child's best interests:
 - 1. Attend or participate by phone, when permitted by the court, in all court hearings.
 - 2. Attend appropriate interagency meetings, staffings and mediations pertaining to the child.

- D. Monitor the case following a court hearing or decision as designated by the court to ensure that court ordered services are provided in a timely manner for the child and family.

- E. Consult regularly with your CAM on matters pertaining to assigned case(s):
 - 1. Review case progress and discuss and identify issues concerning the child that need to be resolved.
 - 2. Immediately inform your CAM about issues that may impact the child's safety and/or well-being.

TRAINING

- A. Volunteers are required to successfully complete the Program's 30 hour pre-service training. Following their first year of certification they are required to complete 12 hours of in-service training annually.
- B. Volunteers may have access to additional training opportunities offered by other community agencies.

TIME COMMITMENT

- A. Volunteers, on average, spend 8-12 hours a month on each case.
- B. Volunteers are expected to be available for case assignment and to accept cases during the fieldwork portion of their pre-service training.
- C. Volunteers with a lapse of more than 12 months without an active case will lose their certification or may become a non-case volunteer as long as the volunteer accepts and agrees to perform another role within the Program.

QUALIFICATIONS, KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS & ABILITY

- A. Demonstrates the ability to maintain confidentiality and adhere to the Program's current Standards and Code of Conduct.
- B. Demonstrates the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing.
- C. Demonstrates basic computer skills.
- D. Demonstrates the ability to respect people from various ethnic, cultural, religious, social and economic backgrounds, as well as different sexual orientation.
- E. Demonstrates the ability to maintain objectivity in stressful or emotional situations.
- F. Exhibits good common sense
- G. Must be 21 years of age or older. If age 19-20, volunteer may be certified as a Co-GAL to work with a volunteer over the age of 21.
- H. Must successfully complete all phases of the Program application and training process including a national, criminal background check.

BENEFITS OF BECOMING A GAL VOLUNTEER

Although the Program cannot provide monetary rewards, there are many benefits to becoming a GAL volunteer. These include opportunities to:

- A. Make a positive difference in the life and future of a child who has been a victim of abuse and/or neglect and make a meaningful impact in the local community.
- B. Help a child find safety, nurturing and permanency in a loving home.
- C. Help a judge to make important decisions about the life of a child by providing factual input and best interest recommendations to the court.
- D. Gain an understanding of the legal child dependency and foster care systems.
- E. Learn a new set of life skills that can help others and provide personal life enrichment.