



# GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM

## STATEWIDE PROGRAM DATA Fiscal Year 2013 – 14

### Staff

3 regional administrator positions  
137 field staff working in 69 offices  
8 administrative, training, legal staff positions  
(1 grant-funded)

### Attorneys

73 paid attorneys  
108 pro bono attorneys  
9 staff attorney advocate positions  
95 conflict attorneys

### Volunteers

4,770 volunteer advocates  
457,920 hours of service  
\$10.3 million saved due to volunteer efforts  
*Volunteers donate on average 8 hours of service monthly. Independent Sector valued volunteer time during 2013 at \$22.55 per hour.*

### Program statistics

59,972 child abuse and neglect hearings  
16,281 abused and neglected children received legal representation  
195 juvenile appellate cases filed

## PARTNER QUOTE

### National Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association Michael Piraino, CEO

Whether you measure it by its fiscal efficiency or its effectiveness in improving children's lives, this program has long been a trend setter in the nation.

## PARTNERS

National CASA Association  
N.C. Bar Association – Juvenile Justice and Children's Rights Section  
N.C. Child Fatality Prevention Team  
N.C. Child Fatality Task Force  
N.C. Collaborative for Children, Youth and Families  
N.C. Department of Health and Human Services  
N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
N.C. Department of Public Instruction  
N.C. Governor's Crime Commission  
N.C. Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office  
N.C. Office of Indigent Defense Services  
Strong Able Youth Speaking Out Inc. (SaySo)



In 1983, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Office of Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Services as a division of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts. Pursuant to G.S. 7B-601, when a petition alleging abuse or neglect of a juvenile is filed in district court, the judge appoints a volunteer Guardian ad Litem advocate and an attorney advocate to provide team representation to the child, who has full party status in trial and appellate proceedings. All Guardian ad Litem advocates are trained, supervised, and supported by program staff in each county of the state. The collaborative model of GAL attorney advocates, volunteers, and staff ensures that all North Carolina children who are alleged by the Department of Social Services to have been abused or neglected receive GAL legal advocacy services.

The role of Guardian ad Litem advocates is to:

- Fulfill state and federal statutory mandates to protect and promote the best interests of juveniles in abuse and neglect court proceedings
- Help the courts work efficiently toward safety and permanence for children
- Conduct independent investigations to determine the facts, needs of the child, and the resources appropriate to meet those needs
- Determine the wishes or expressed preferences of the child and report those to the court
- Provide a voice for abused and neglected children in every county of the state

## OUR TEAM APPROACH

A volunteer Guardian ad Litem advocate and an attorney advocate are jointly appointed by a judge. This team works with a member of the program's staff to protect the child's legal rights and to promote the best interests of the child. Volunteers are located in every county throughout the state and have diverse educational, economic, and ethnic backgrounds.



*See reverse side for more information about our team approach.*





## OUR TEAM APPROACH

COMPONENTS	BRIEF DESCRIPTION AND SITUATION
<p><b>Staff</b></p> <p><b>For over three decades, GAL staff have equipped citizen volunteers to advocate in court for the state's abused and neglected children. The powerful ripple effect of each staff member's knowledge, experience, and support is evident as thousands of GALs ensure timely permanent outcomes for tens of thousands of children.</b></p> <p>Cindy Bizzell, GAL Administrator</p>	<p>GAL staff recruit, train, and supervise volunteers. These roles, along with thorough screening and criminal record checks, help ensure the safety and best interests of child-clients.</p> <p>Staff duties include assuring quality representation for children, promoting positive community relations to foster commitment to the program while educating the public, maintaining a recordkeeping case management system, and developing and providing appropriate in-service training opportunities.</p> <p>Staff must have knowledge of volunteer administration, child development, juvenile court, applicable laws and statutes, program development, and evaluation techniques. They often serve on local interdisciplinary task forces and committees that affect the availability of services for GAL child-clients.</p>
<p><b>Attorneys</b></p> <p><b>GAL attorney advocates are skilled litigators who have a sincere interest in juvenile law and strive to protect the legal rights of abused and neglected children in juvenile court. Through collaboration with volunteer advocates, GAL attorneys ensure that juvenile court judges have the proper evidence and information needed to make decisions in the best interest of children.</b></p> <p>Deana Fleming, GAL Associate Counsel</p>	<p>GAL attorneys represent children's best interests in more than 59,000 court hearings, including non-secure custody hearings, adjudicatory proceedings, dispositional proceedings, review hearings, permanency planning hearings, proceedings to terminate parental rights, and post termination of parental rights hearings. In addition, they often participate in team meetings and any court ordered pre-trial conferences.</p> <p>Although juvenile appeals are expedited, the number of appeals is rising. Attorneys from law firms across the state contribute pro bono time and expertise to handle more than 75 percent of all GAL appeals.</p>
<p><b>Volunteer advocates</b></p> <p><b>The most rewarding thing about being a GAL is thinking that my time, effort and commitment could make a difference for a child.</b></p> <p>Wanda C., GAL Volunteer Advocate</p> <p><b>My GAL gave me the drive to keep going in life and I hope that my success gives her the drive to keep doing the wonderful job she does for future children.</b></p> <p>Kendra G., Student and Former GAL Client</p>	<p>Volunteer advocates are screened, interviewed, and receive 30 hours of initial training. At least six in-service trainings are offered each year to maintain the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for child-clients' best interest.</p> <p>The state's GALs are adults who come from diverse communities, cultures, and life and work experiences. On average, advocates donate eight hours each month to perform their statutorily mandated duties. They visit child-clients, conduct interviews, read reports, monitor court orders, collaborate with service providers, formulate fact-based child-focused court reports with recommendations, and testify in court hearings.</p> <p>While GAL attorney advocates are appointed to every case, the program does not yet have a volunteer advocate for every child. In those instances where no volunteer advocate is available, GAL staff are required to perform the volunteer advocate's duties, limiting their ability to focus on their primary duties of recruitment, training, and supervision. Currently, 1,900 children need the services of a volunteer advocate.</p>