

FAQ's for the GAL Program

Q. What kinds of court cases are GALs assigned to?

- A. The program mission covers several different kinds of cases. GALs are primarily assigned to advocate for abused and neglected children who have been temporarily removed from their parents and are typically living in foster or residential homes.

Q. What other kinds of cases are assigned to GALs?

- A. Judges sometimes appoint GALs for children charged with delinquent and criminal acts, for children whose parents are having custody disputes, and for some vulnerable adults who may not understand a court proceeding brought against them.

Q. What is the time commitment?

- A. You can expect to spend on average 5-10 hours per month, assuming you maintain a manageable caseload. Note that early stages of a case can consume more of your time than the later stages of a case because early on you are gathering facts about your assigned child, their family, and others and a case plan is still being developed.

Q. How long a commitment does the GAL Program expect from GALs?

- A. This is a longer term volunteer commitment as some court cases involving children may take up to two years.

Q. What kind of training is provided?

- A. There is a 3 day initial training program you will be required to complete. After successful completion, your name will be added to the approved GAL roster. Your local court will assign you a mentor whom you will shadow on actual case assignments. When you, your mentor, and program staff agree you are ready, you will be assigned your own cases. There are many on-going training opportunities once you are in the GAL Program.

Q. What is the screening process for the GAL Program?

- A. You will be required to submit an application and have an in-depth interview. Because this is a program dealing with children and vulnerable adults, you will need to consent to be fingerprinted for a background check.

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Q. What kind of support is there for GALs after training?

A. Most courts hold monthly meetings for GALs. These provide opportunities for in-service training and peer support. At the conclusion of your initial training, you will be provided with your local court contacts and the statewide program coordinator and administrative assistant contact information. There is a statewide email listserve, a quarterly newsletter and other regular communications from the program office in Montpelier. Other experienced GALs are a great source of advice and support. GALs can always reach out for help when they need it. Our program is advocating for more staff dedicated to the support and supervision of our dedicated GALs.

Q. I am currently employed. Am I still allowed to join the GAL Program?

A. Yes. Our program is open to adults who meet our application, screening, and training requirements. If you are employed, you will likely want to maintain a low caseload so that you can fulfill your GAL role. You should also note that hearings are held during regular business hours. The program can verify your volunteer hours if your employer sponsors a community service program.

Q. Do GALs receive compensation?

A. This is a volunteer program. We reimburse expenses for mileage and for long distance phone calls directly related to GAL case assignments.

Q. What kinds of people are suitable for the GAL Program?

A. There are no academic or professional credentials required. In general, we are seeking adult citizen volunteers who care immensely about children, are non-judgmental, are good communicators, organized, objective, willing to continue to learn, and who can be assertive without being confrontational.

Q. What is the legal definition of “Guardian ad Litem”?

A. In Latin it means, "guardian at law"—the person appointed by the court to look out for the best interests of the child during the course of legal proceedings.