

Vermont GAL Program Newsletter



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What's New

25 GALs attend Juvenile Conference at Lake Morey Inn

The Justice for Children Task Force sponsored a conference for *Learning Together: Creating Meaningful Change for Children and Families* at the Lake Morey Inn in Fairlee. GALs attending include the following: Susan Beriau, John Bisbee, Floreen Bishop, Susan Bitzer, Maureen Bogosian, Adam Bortz, Nancy Chase, Mary Lou Cummings, Erin Donahue, Richard Dybvig, Dana Goss, Alan Held, Douglas Krause, Mary Ann Lantagne, George Long, Edie Miller, Sharon Offensend, Peter Reitzas, Clara Robinson, Kenn Stransky, Margaret Uebelacker, Ernst Zisselberger, Carolyn Lyster, Lynn Gutches, Scott Labun. Participants heard presentations on the effects of trauma and loss on children and model court collaborations and attended workshops. The day ended with a panel discussion with members of the Youth Development Committee.

Vermont GAL Program Awarded CASA Certificate of Compliance

The GAL Program has been awarded certification by the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association for program operations and management. For the first time since becoming a national CASA member in 2000, our GAL Program underwent a quality assurance audit in 2007. The certification shows we are demonstrating a strong capacity for supporting the work of the GAL Program in

Thank You GALs!

The Justice for Children Task Force and the Court Improvement Program would like to express their appreciation and gratitude to all the GALs from around the state who are participating in the Juvenile Inventory stakeholder meetings. At these meetings, held in each of the Family Courts, juvenile court stakeholders discuss and develop local action plans for making tangible and realistic steps to improve local practices in child abuse and neglect cases. GALs from around the state have been active participants in all the meetings, contributing their ideas and insights for improvement. It seems our GAL volunteers just keep on giving!

Recruitment

There are 20 new applications pending and there are 11 new applicants referred for training. Recruitment for new GALs in 2008 is underway. First, there will be a Vermont Public Radio ad running from January- July. The GAL Program will also be running free Public Service Announcements on radio and television. If you know any individuals in your community who would make wonderful GALs, please contact the Montpelier office or let your local court staff know.



GAL Program Advisory Committee

Vermont in advocating for abused and neglected children. Some areas cited for improvement as a result of the audit: (1) improving the staff to volunteer ratio; and (2) reducing the number of case assignments per volunteer. The next CASA review is scheduled for 2011.

The committee is pleased to announce GAL Maureen Bogosian, Windsor County, is joining the committee. Maureen has served as a GAL for seven years in CHINS, delinquency and some domestic custody cases. She serves as a GAL panel member for basic training for new GALs. The committee bids farewell to GAL Jeannie Walker, Windham County. Thank you, Jeannie. We will miss you!



Training

GAL Program Training Schedule 2008

The Basic CASA training schedule will be:

	Dates	Location
Day 1	March 28	Central VT
Day 2	April 25	Central VT
Day 3	May 16	Central VT
Day 1	June 20	WRJ area
Day 2	July 25	WRJ area
Day 3	August 22	WRJ area

Depending on the applicant pool and financial resources, a third training may be scheduled for the fall. We expect to hold this training in the southern part of the state.

Basic Juvenile Delinquency and Juveniles in District Court Training

October 17, 2008
(tentative)

In-Service Training and Appreciation Events around the State

Bennington County

At the November monthly GAL meeting in Bennington County, GALs hosted a luncheon meeting with local legislators to discuss the critical role of the legislature in providing support for the GAL statewide program.

Legislators were very interested in learning more about the role of GALs and GAL views on the child advocacy system.

Windham County

The court hosted its annual holiday appreciation lunch for GALs in December.

Windsor County

To relieve some of the holiday stress, the Windsor Court will hold a "Ring in the New Year Lunch" for GALs on Monday January 28th.

Franklin County: GALs attend In-service Training

The Franklin County GALs participated in a number of in-service training meetings in October and November organized by Deputy Court Manager, Edie Rillo:

Educational Advocacy— Individual Educational Programs attended by GALs, Will Boyd, Mary Connor, Pat Deasy, Linda Dragon, Butch LeClair, Bruce Scott, Jacqueline Thibert and Judy Wechsler

Child Lures Prevention Safety Seminar: *How to identify the lures used in predatory crimes against kids* presented by Ken Wooden, Vermont State Police, attended by GALs Mary Connor, Pat Deasy, Jackie Thibert and Deputy Court Manager Edith Rillo

GALs have been attending a Domestic Violence Awareness brown bag lunch series at DCF in St.

Albans, including Stalking and Technology attended by GALs, Linda Dragon and Judy Wechsler, and Deputy Court Manager, Edith Rillo;

Panel: Systems Response to Domestic Violence attended by GALs Mary Connor, Linda Dragon, Judy Wechsler, Pat Deasy and Deputy Court Manager, Edith Rillo; and "Coercive Control"

attended by GALs, Pat Deasy, Mary Connor and Deputy Court Manager, Edith Rillo

GAL, Linda Dragon made a presentation at a GAL monthly brown bag meeting on the conference she attended in Killington: Coming Together for Kids-A-Part: A Summit on Children with a Parent in Prison" for GALs unable to attend that conference.

Other Training Opportunities *(Please note there may be fees for the following training opportunities. If you wish to request a fee waiver or scholarship to attend any of the trainings, please contact the GAL Program Office.)*

January 7

Domestic Violence/Child Abuse & Neglect, sponsored by Central Vt Community Action Council Head Start, Capitol Plaza, Montpelier, FREE, 9:30 am to 12:00 noon, contact Sally Hafer at shafer@cvcac.org or 479-1053 x 253

February 8

A Day with Dan Hughes for Parents & Professionals, sponsored by the VT Adoption Consortium, Lake Morey Inn, Fairlee, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, varying rates, contact Kristi Lenart at 985-0158 or vtadoption@eastersealsvt.org

April 24

4th Annual Kinship Care Conference – “Parenting Revisited: Promise, Potential & Permanence”, Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center, Burlington, for information contact heathers@lundfamilycenter.org

January 25

Addressing Substance Abuse Across the System: From Principles to Practice, sponsored by the Behavioral Network of VT, John Challis, keynoter, Capitol Plaza Hotel, Montpelier, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, for information contact Traci Sawyers at 343-1553 or tracisawyers@bhnvt.org or Diane Robie at 948-2435 or drobie@shoreham.net

March 10

Diversity: Acceptance of Differences, sponsored by Central VT Community Action Council Head Start, Capitol Plaza, Montpelier, FREE, 9:30 am to 12:00 noon, contact Sally Hafer at shafer@cvcac.org or 479-1053 x 253

May (TBD)

Criminal Justice System, Mental Health & Substance Abuse, sponsored by the VT Victim Assistance Academy, FREE, contact Will Roberts at willroberts@ccvs.state.vt.us or call 241-4331 for exact dates, times & location

Feb 5, 6 & 12, 13

Diverse Victims & Crime, sponsored by the VT Victim Assistance Academy, FREE, contact Will Roberts at willroberts@ccvs.stat.vt.us or call 241-4331 for times & location

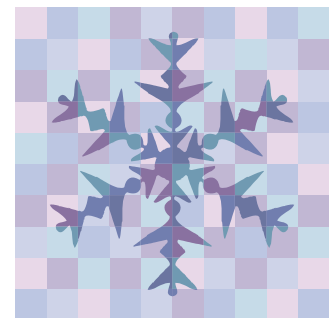
April 11 – 13

21st Annual VT Foster/Adoptive Family Association (VFAFA) Spring Conference, Hilton Hotel, Burlington, contact Diane Robie at drobie@shoreham.net or 948-2435 for information or to receive the “call for workshops”



Brown Bag Lunch Ideas

- GALs who have attended in-service training(s) discuss the information at a monthly meeting
- Presenter and/or discussion on how to have difficult conversations
- Difficult case: respecting confidentiality, discuss and exchange ideas about a challenging case





VERMONT GUARDIAN
AD LITEM PROGRAM

Articles of Interest:

New Report from Annie E. Casey Foundation on Juvenile Detention Reform

A new report published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation finds that juvenile detention reform strategies associated with overall improvements to juvenile justice systems: more youth safely kept at home and in the community, increased focus on youth and families, and reduced racial disparities:

The report shows that reducing the use of pretrial juvenile detention, the jailing of youth not yet found delinquent, resulted in system-wide juvenile justice improvements. In three model sites that have followed key detention reform strategies, communities reduced racial disparities, sent fewer youth to state youth prisons, increased the involvement of families and youth in their rehabilitation, and improved the juvenile justice systems' ability to make appropriate decisions about where youth should be supervised to protect public safety and receive services.

The report, *Beyond Detention: System Transformation through Juvenile Detention Reform*, documents the reforms inspired by the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), a nationally-renowned data driven and outcome-based collaborative effort aimed at ensuring that detention is used only when appropriate. The initiative safely diverts young people to other forms of supervision. Research has shown that inappropriately detaining youth can contribute to

future reoffending, jeopardize public safety, and reduce positive outcomes for young people.

Beyond Detention shows that in JDAI's model sites—which include Cook County, Illinois (Chicago), Multnomah County, Oregon, (Portland), and Santa Cruz, California—the initiatives strategies and approach have been a catalyst for system-wide reform, including:

- Keeping More Youth at Home and In the Community:** The sites reduced the number of young people in out-of-home placements, reduced the number of youth sent to youth prisons, and increased reliance on community-based programs. The three model sites *reduced the number of young people sentenced to youth prisons* run by the state by between 44 and 74 percent.
- Promoting Racial Justice:** While youth of color engage in delinquent behavior at rates similar to white youth, nearly two thirds of the youth detained in country are youth of color. In Multnomah County, JDAI's efforts to reduce racial disparities produced *the nation's first empirical evidence that racial disparities in juvenile justice could be reduced.*
- Increasing the Focus on Youth and their Families in Rehabilitation:** Whereas in many systems, youth and their families are frequently an afterthought in juvenile court processes, JDAI sites involve young people and their parents in their rehabilitation. Young people on probation in Cook County now attend an orientation session led by the advisory council of former and current wards—a reform shown to reduce the probation violation rates of these youth.
- Helping Systems Make Better Decisions:** JDAI's reliance on data collection and the adoption of objective decision-making tools helped ensure that youth were treated equally and received appropriate treatment and services. Sites have improved their ability to collect and analyze data, to monitor outcomes and improve programming.

"Beyond Detention: System Transformation through Juvenile Detention Reform" is the 14th monograph in the series, "Pathway's to Juvenile Detention Reform," published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and is available on the JDAI Help Desk website at <http://www.jdaihelpdesk.org>

The Vermont Guardian ad Litem Program wishes to thank all GALs for their hard work and continued efforts on behalf of children in Vermont's court system.

“Judge Bear and Judge Bunny Enter the World of the Child in Windsor Family Court”

By Lorrie R. Wilkes, Esq.

Judge Harold E. Eaton, Jr., presiding family court judge in Windsor County, has introduced Judge Bear and Judge Bunny to the children of the family court. Judge Bear and Judge Bunny came to the mind of Judge Eaton one day in court as he realized that the court was always talking *about* the children and not ever talking *to* the children. The court, even with the children present, was all about grown-up things. Judge Eaton was seeking a way for the children to know that we understand that they are children—that we are paying attention to them. And thus, out of the mind of Judge Eaton, came Judge Bear and Judge Bunny.

Judge Bear and Judge Bunny sit on the bench with Judge Eaton during an emergency detention hearing, when children approximately six years old and younger are present. Judge Eaton tells the children that sometimes he needs special help on a very special case, that he has helpers for the day if the children would like to meet them, and of course they always do. Judge Eaton then sits Judge Bear and Judge Bunny, two large stuffed animals, about two feet high, sit sitting on their own handmade bench (made by court maintenance director, Dana Cantara, with tiny black robes made by court manager, Tari Scott) on the top of his bench, on either side of him.

The response from the children is nothing short of wonderful. The children begin to relax and smile. Judge Eaton says that there is

nothing more rewarding in his work as a family court judge then to see a very frightened, uncertain, and timid child smile. It is his greatest pleasure. Children don't understand what is happening to them and they have no ability to affect the outcome of the day. The children are the victims and they don't know why. They are without anyone to help what is happening fit into their child world. They are suddenly in our world of attorneys, judges, and courtrooms. With Judge Bear and Judge Bunny, Judge Eaton is trying to reach across the bench into the child's world.

And reach into the child's world he has. Judges Bear and Bunny are introduced, and as they speak through Judge Eaton, they tell the children they are glad to see them and want to help. Judge Bunny also holds a green egg, which is called the “egg of good ideas and happy thoughts.” Judge Bunny says he will go into that egg and get good ideas and happy thoughts whenever they need some. After the hearing the children are invited up behind the bench to meet Judge Bear and Judge Bunny and have a one-on-one personal conversation and touch hands with their new friends.

The juvenile docket attorneys are now so familiar with Judge Bear and Judge Bunny that sometimes before an emergency detention hearing begins they whisper into the ear of Charlie Stephens, the juvenile court officer, to request Judge Eaton to have Judge Bear and Judge Bunny present. From

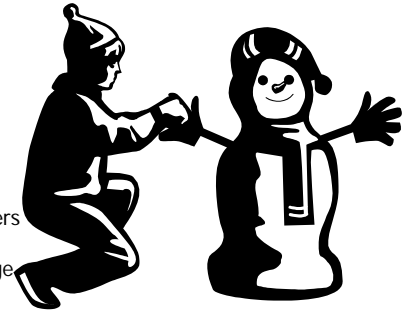
the court clerks and court officers to all of the juvenile docket attorneys, Judge Bear and Judge Bunny have become an integral part of the Windsor Family Court during Judge Eaton's rotation. They help Judge Eaton to see how children are really doing. It is hard to know what children are thinking as they sit there. Letting children interact with Judge Bear and Judge Bunny gives them a chance to relax, and gives Judge Eaton a little opportunity to see them as children, rather than the subject of another report. Judge Bear and Judge Bunny reach across the barriers of fear and apprehension and transform a child's day in court to an environment with a little less fear and perhaps a place with the smile of a child.

Judge Bear and Judge Bunny will rotate with Judge Eaton when the time comes. Judge Eaton said, “Unfortunately, I'm going to have to do all the driving because neither of them has a license right now.”

Lorrie R. Wilkes, Esq. received her RN from Boston Children's Hospital, her BSN and MS from the University of North Florida, and her JD from the University of Idaho. She was a pediatric clinical nurse specialist and, since receiving her law degree, has been practicing for eight years with the law firm of Griffin, Marsicovetere & Wilkes in White River Junction. Her practice focuses on juvenile and family law, and she is a VFCMP mediator. She was a foster child for the first thirteen years of her life in Massachusetts.

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