

Vermont GAL Program Newsletter



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What's New?

June 22 GAL/Court Staff Conference Update

Register now for the first ever GAL Conference for GALs and the Court Staff who support them on June 22, 2007 at the Capitol Plaza in Montpelier.

You may register online through our website at www.vermontjudiciary.org/GAL. Or, the GAL Program Office will be glad to register you if you do not have online access. Please call the GAL Program Office at 800-622-6359 if you need any registration assistance. There is no fee for the conference.

The conference, which is being sponsored by the Juvenile Court Improvement Program, will include 2 sessions: "Permanency Planning: The Heart of Advocacy for Children", including current and new DCF thinking and practices around case plans and permanency planning, and new initiatives in Juvenile Justice and older youth. The second session concerns the intersection of child welfare and domestic violence, and will feature Lundy Bancroft, a nationally renowned speaker and author. There will be an opportunity to connect with GALs from other counties, court staff, Judges, advocates, mediators, and parent coordinators.

Recruitment and Public Awareness

For the first quarter of 2007, we ran both a VPR ad and a public service announcement on the radio. On February 21, 2007, the Rutland Herald ran a story about the Rutland County recruitment drive. The article was carried in a number of newspapers across the state. In the first quarter of 2007, we have received 50 new applicants to the GAL Program, and 32 were referred to the basic training held in May.

Rutland Pilot Update

Kristi Tolmer, our project coordinator in Rutland County has been working very hard to improve recruitment in Rutland County. Her efforts have paid off and we have received 12 new qualified applicants from Rutland County in the first quarter of 2007. After new GALs were trained in May, Kristi is working closely with experienced GALs and Court Staff to orient the new GALs in child abuse and neglect cases. We recently received notice of renewal of the grant for this project is described in more detail below. The GAL Program wishes to thank Kristi for all her hard work!

GAL Program Funding

As most of you know from previous communications, the GAL Program continues to seek funding from the state legislature to hire new program staff dedicated to recruitment, training and support of the GALs throughout the state. At present, the GAL Program continues to operate with only one and a half positions, must rely on grant funds to support initial training of new GALs, and has no funding to support in-service training. In 2007, the Supreme Court requested another GAL coordinator position, but the legislature has not supported that yet.

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GAL Program Funding (cont'd)

We will continue to seek the additional funding for the program in the 2008 budget. We have secured another grant under the Children's Justice Act to continue supporting the Rutland County Guardian ad Litem Project through the end of the next fiscal year. We thank of all of you for your support of our funding requests for the GAL Program!

Legislative Bills of Interest

Except for H.148, Child Abuse Registry, and H.449, Foster Care Services and Support, the other bills listed below have not passed. These bills could still be passed during the 2008 Legislative Session.

H. 148 An Act Related to the Child Abuse Registry** enacted certain changes to the administration of the child abuse registry, including providing an appeal process prior to inclusion on the Child Abuse Registry, allowing for expungement of substantiations made 7 or more years ago under certain conditions, and removal of children placed on the registry before the age of 10 at age 18 if no further substantiated acts have occurred. This bill also requires Department of Children and Families to conduct a study and make recommendations related to treatment of young abusers, criminal records checks for foster parents, and options for a tiered system of substantiation. ***This bill passed.

H.278 Regulation of Child Care Facilities proposes to provide specific protection for good faith reports of consumer concerns related to child care facilities, clarify access to certain child care facility licensing information and records, provide criminal sanctions for the knowing operation of a child care facility without a license or registration or other legal authority, and align the current authority for seeking civil enforcement against illegal child care facilities and their operators with other regulated professions.

H.370 School Enrollment of State-Placed Children proposes to authorize the commissioner for children and families to require that a state-placed child finish the school year in the district he or she was most recently enrolled, even if the student's foster placement changes during the school year.

H.449 Foster Care Services and Supports** proposes to increase from 18 to 21 the maximum age at which a child may receive child welfare services. ***This bill passed.

H.457 Foster Care Parents' Bill of Rights proposes to establish a foster care parents' bill of rights.

H.486 Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Discrimination in Schools proposes to establish bullying of students by students as a civil violation; grant the human rights commission authority to ensure that educational institutions are complying with state antiharassment laws; and clarify the legal standard required to prove harassment in an educational institution under the public accommodations statute.

H.500 Child Support for Education proposes to permit the family court to extend child support for a child up to the age of 22 if the child is attending college full time and allow the court to specify the child support payments be paid to the child directly.

H.506 Child Neglect and Abuse Investigation Oversight Panel proposes to require the Department for Children and Families to establish a review panel consisting of the commissioner and two additional department officials for the purpose of personally reviewing any investigator's recommendation to remove a child from the home and personally to conduct its own investigation into the allegations of neglect or abuse in accordance with current guidelines prior to any nonemergency removal from the home.

S.73 Shared Custody of Children in a Divorce Proceeding proposes to provide a rebuttable presumption of shared custody of children in a divorce proceeding and to define repeated and intentional violations of a visitation order by a custodial parent as a criminal act of unnecessary cruelty.

Legislative Bills of Interest (cont'd)

S.101 School Enrollment of State-Placed Children proposes to provide the commissioner for children and families with the discretion to require that a state-placed child finish the school year in the district he or she was most recently enrolled, even if the student's foster placement changes during the school year, if the commissioner determines that staying in the district would be in the best interest of the student.

If you want more information on bills pending in the legislature, you may go to their website at www.leg.state.vt.us

Legislative Federal Bills of Interest

A new report, "Time for Reform: Support relatives in providing foster care and permanent families for children," by Generations United and the *Kids are Waiting: Fix Foster Care Now* campaign highlights how federal support for subsidized guardianship could help move some children, for whom reunification or adoption is not possible, from foster care to safe, permanent families. The study indicates that children in relative foster care tend to be just as safe as, or safer than, children placed with non-relative foster families. Relative foster placements also tend to be more stable with children more likely to remain in familiar neighborhoods and schools and to live with their siblings. Senators Hillary Clinton (NY) and Olympia Snowe (ME) recently reintroduced the Kinship Caregiver Support Act, which would support these children and relatives and reduce the reliance on foster care services.

TRAINING

Basic CASA Pre-Service Training

May 9, 10, and 11 --- Statewide pre-service training for GALs was held on May 9, 10, and 11. There were 20 new trainees from Bennington, Caledonia, Franklin, Orange, Rutland, Windham, and Windsor counties.

Basic CASA Pre-Service Training (cont'd)

Congratulations to all of the following new GALs:

Roni Coleman	Metta Elizabeth Motycka
Linda Dragon	Elizabeth Mumford
Anne Gallagher	Robert Nutting
Dean Goulet	Terry Parker
Lynn Gutches	Leslie Rimmer
Donna Harley	Jane Sharaf
Elizabeth Jones	Susan Taggart
Anthony Krulikowski	Lynne Washburn
Mary Anne Lantagne	Jody Whitaker
Rebecca Martin	

Fall 2007

BASIC Pre-Service Statewide Training—September 5th, 6th and 7th, location TBA.

BASIC Delinquency Training—There are two basic delinquency trainings being offered this summer: July 20th in Burlington and August 22nd in St. Johnsbury. Further information about the trainings will be forthcoming.

Other Training Opportunities

June 14 Hunger in Barre - A Forum for Barre Area Service Providers & Advocates, sponsored by The VT Campaign to End Childhood Hunger & the Northfield Savings Bank, 6:30 to 8:00 pm, Hedding United Methodist Church, FREE, refreshments/child care available, contact vtcech@vtnohunger.org or 865-0255

June 18 An Evening with James Garbarino, Growing Up in Today's World, sponsored by Burlington Partnership for a Healthy Community & Centerpoint Adolescent Treatment Services, First Congregational Church, South Winooski Ave, Burlington, 7:00 pm, FREE, contact Paula Gile at pgile@bsdvt.com or 316-2079

June 22 1st Annual VT Guardian ad Litem Training Conference, sponsored by the Judiciary Court Improvement Program, Capitol Plaza Hotel, Montpelier (see pg 1 for details)

Other Training Opportunities(cont'd)

June 25 Bullying, Cyberbullying & Teen Depression, sponsored by VT Parent Information Center (VPIC) & the BEST Summer Institute, John Halligan, speaker, Killington Grand Hotel, 3:30 to 5:00 pm, FREE, contact 876-5315 or vpic@vtpic.com

June 27 Addressing Emotional & Learning Problems in Children – The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness, sponsored by the Stern Center for Language & Learning, presentations by Edward Hallowell, MD, and David Rettew, MD, Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center, Burlington, 8:00 am to 3:30 pm, contact Sara Altieri at 878-2332 or saltieri@sterncenter.org

June 29 Domestic Violence: Children and the Law, Mt. Snow Resort, West Dover, VT Sponsored by Have Justice will Travel

July 10 – 13 VT Institute of Corrections Training Conference, sponsored by the VT Dept of Corrections (open to all), College of St. Joseph's, Rutland, Free for DOC staff & \$50/day/person for all others, CEUs available. Topics will include addiction, group skills, co-occurring disorders, impact of trauma, and many other subjects. Contact Richard Powell at 241-2398 or richard.powell2@ahs.state.vt.us

August 8 & 9 Supporting Children of the National Guard & Reserve Institute, sponsored by the Military Child Education Coalition, Doubletree Hotel, South Burlington, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, pre-registration required, contact Linda Neault at 254-953-1923 or linda.Neault@MilitaryChild.org or go to www.militarychild.org (CEUs available)

September 24 Children with a Parent in Prison Conference, sponsored by Kids-A-Part, Killington Grand Hotel, contact Tara Graham, 802-655-0006 x107, tgraham@vtcsa.org or Diane Robie, 802-948-2435, drobie@shoreham.net

October 1 & 2, 10th Annual New England Conference on Child Sexual Abuse, sponsored by OUR House of Central Vermont, Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center, contact Priscilla White at 476-8825 or Priscilla@OurHouseCAC.com

October 12 The 5th Annual Collaboration Conference, Killington Grand Hotel, Killington, contact Don Mandelkorn at don.mandelkorn@ahs.state.vt.us or 479-7594

October 18 19th Annual Brain Injury Conference, sponsored by VT Dept of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living and the Brain Injury Association, Sheraton Hotel, Burlington, contact 241-3624 or 877-856-1772

October 19 & 20 VT Association for the Education of Young Children 35th Annual Conference, Killington Grand Hotel, Killington, go to www.vaeyc.org

November 2 Developmental Disabilities & Mental Health, sponsored by the VT Council of Developmental & Mental Health Services, Holiday Inn, Rutland, 9:00 am to 3:30 pm, contact VCDMS at 223-1773

November 7 & 8 Methamphetamine & Other Substance of Abuse: Building a Collaborative Vermont Child Welfare Response, sponsored by VT Family Services Division (DCF), VT Dept of Health, Cortina Inn, Killington, contact Dawn O'Toole at Dawn.Otoole@ahs.state.vt.us – more details will be forthcoming

November 16-17 Advanced Learning Design: Taking Learning to Task, sponsored by Five Dimensions & Global Learning Partners, Stowehof Inn, Stowe, Peter Perkins, instructor, contact Peter at peterp@globalearning.com or 223-3664

If you are interested in attending any of the above trainings, please contact the GAL Program Office at 800-622-6359 or email jud-vermontgal@state.vt.us.

National CASA Conference

The Annual National CASA Conference will be June 9 -12, 2007 in Orlando, FL. GAL Program Coordinator, Mary Hayden will be attending the conference.

Brown Bag Lunch In-Service Training Topics

It is suggested that each Court hold regular monthly brown bag meetings for GALs to meet for support, information, or in-service training on a particular topic. Here are some suggested topics for your local Court brown bag lunches.

Substance Abuse: review of new treatments for adults and adolescents, particularly drug therapy.

Educational: what special ed services are schools required to deliver to special needs students? What do GALs need to know?

Case Presentation: while respecting confidentiality, have one of your GALs present a particularly problematic or complex case to the group. Solicit ideas, options and suggestions from the big group. Or just vent!

Remembering.....

Guardian ad Litem, Charles O. "Chas" Baker, 77, of Norwich, died on Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2007.

Chas taught mathematics at Hartford High School and in Gouverneur, N.Y., and Richmond, Calif. He later became a partner in Montshire Properties and, since 1990, was co-owner and sugar maker at Vermont Syrupworks.

During the 80's and 90's, Chas, along with his wife Susan, served as a guardian ad litem for children in Vermont Family and District Courts and, for 12 years, was a licensed foster parent. He was a founder of Emerge Family Advocates, a supervised visitation center in Hartford, VT, and, at the time of his death, he was serving on its board of directors.

The GAL Program is grateful to Chas for his many years of service to the children of Vermont. He will be greatly missed.



GAL
Guardian ad Litem
FOR CHILDREN

VERMONT GUARDIAN
AD LITEM PROGRAM

Wellness Tips for GALS

Six Ways to Maintain Balance, by Gwen Wesley, Board Member, CASA of St. Louis County, Inc. St. Louis, MO; Member, National CASA Curriculum Advisory Committee

As we advocate for our children, it is important that we balance demands and values in our personal lives against demands and values in our advocacy roles. I was challenged all six years as a volunteer advocate to maintain healthy relationships with my family and friends while I worked to establish effective relationships with the children, GAL Program Staff and other service providers. It can be done. And when done well, all aspects for our lives are enriched and our children are best served. Here are a few of the lessons I learned along the way.

1. Establish boundaries

Being on call 24/7 for a child for whom you are advocating is noble and heroic. However, for your own sake, there needs to be some time that belongs to you and your family. It is not in the child's best interest-nor yours-for the child to become so totally dependant on his or her Guardian ad Litem volunteer that you attempt to fulfill roles beyond the scope of advocacy. We are not to be the parent or legal guardian. In addition, sacrificing your own physical safety is not heroic; it is dangerous. Contact your supervisor, or your GAL Program contact, to get help fast. Know your limits and honor them.

2. Facilitate Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

As you interact with all parties supporting your case, try to see each person as a contributing member of the team with individual responsibilities. Stay focused on the ultimate goal of getting a child out of foster care and into a permanent, safe, loving home. Objectivity is extremely important and requires that we balance our desire for personal wins against ultimate wins for our GAL kids. We must

do our part and facilitate others doing theirs.

3. Organize and Prioritize

We all get the same number of hours in each day. How we choose to use those hours is left up to us. Everything that comes our way is not necessarily ours to do. It is OK to say "no." As we manage our cases and the rest of our lives, it is important that we prioritize and then release ourselves from guilt over not doing everything. By organizing and prioritizing, we gain better control of how we use our time. When I accepted the responsibility of advocacy of my cases, my family took on more responsibilities in our home. Somewhat surprisingly, things went well. Tasks that I thought only I could handle were handled quite nicely—albeit differently.

4. Utilize Resources

We are not meant to be everything to everybody-or to know everything there is to know about everything! There are resources that can better our lives and the lives of the children we serve. These include service providers, community groups, religious or other spiritual organizations, family and friends. Pay attention to the total you-mind, body and spirit. Your whole person is affected by your advocacy role. Using available resources can help balance our workload and provide needed support.

5. Appreciate all Successes

During the journey to permanency for your child, take time to see successes. Sometimes, we miss opportunities to celebrate because the ultimate goal has not been achieved. Small successes give us encouragement to continue work.

Wellness Tips for GALS (Cont'd)

There will definitely be challenges along the way, but look for what went right or what lesson was learned even in disappointments.

6. Allow Mental Health Breaks

With all of the demands on our time and energy, it is important to take mental health breaks. Set aside some time for yourself to do what you want to do even if it is nothing more than sitting, thinking, or just watching grass grow. Every minute of every day should not be jam packed. That leads to burnout. An article by Henry Neils (assessment.com/mappmembers/avoidingburnout.asp) lists 13 signs as burnout indicators, including chronic fatigue; cynicism, negativity and irritability; sleeplessness and depression; feelings of helplessness; and increased risk-taking. It is your time; use it wisely to benefit all aspects of your life.

The Guardian ad Litem Program is grateful for all of your hard work and dedication to the children in Vermont.

We look forward to seeing you on June 22, 2007 at the GAL Conference!