

Vermont GAL Program Newsletter



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What's New?

The Juvenile Court Inventory: Positive Results for Guardians ad Litem and Some Suggestions for Improvement

A Message from Honorable Amy M. Davenport, Administrative Judge for Trial Courts

Many of you may remember meeting with me and/or Shari Young earlier this year when we came to your local court to introduce the "Juvenile Inventory." The Inventory was designed to assess juvenile court practices in each county from the perspective of all of the players. Participants included attorneys, DCF workers, judges, guardians ad litem and court staff. 204 professionals filled out the inventory statewide. 44 of the respondents were guardians ad litem.

Inventory questions covered training and education, quality of legal representation and advocacy, court practices, DCF, and more. The Inventory questions were based on the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges' Resource Guidelines for Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases. The data collected from the inventory will be used by the Justice for Children Task Force to help formulate recommendations for Juvenile Court improvement. Statewide and county inventory results will be made available to each family court to enable counties to develop local improvement plans.

Guardians ad litem play a crucial role in improving outcomes for Vermont's abused and neglected children. I am pleased to report the overall results of the Inventory with regard to the use of best practices by guardians ad litem was generally very positive.

The Inventory results indicate that guardians ad litem generally perform well in four core areas of responsibility:

- Participation in all phases of the court proceeding
- Communication with the child's attorney
- Gathering and updating information prior to each hearing
- Making independent recommendations.

The strength of these results varies of course from one county to the next. It is also important to remember that the Inventory reflects the views of the professionals who filled it out. Performance evaluation is, to some degree, a subjective process.

Statewide training for guardians ad litem also received a positive response. While those who responded to the survey generally believe that statewide training for all professionals involved in these cases is inadequate, initial training for GALs as a group received the second highest rating statewide, surpassed only by the training given to DCF social workers. This reflects the significant improvement in the court's initial training program for GALs as a result of National CASA support and the hard work of people like Sandra Seidel and Mary Hayden. Continuing education for GALs received a slightly lower rating. This is an area where we can improve.

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Juvenile Court Inventory (cont'd)

The results of the Inventory suggest two other areas in which GALs can improve their work so as to be more consistent with nationally recognized best practices. Inventory results indicate that GALs are not viewed as routinely meeting with the child before every hearing and routinely attending DCF Treatment Team meetings. Both of these practices are important and warrant attention.

Meeting with the Child before Hearings

Recommendations and decisions about children are made during court hearings. Therefore, it is important for GALs to meet with the child in advance of each hearing so updated information about the child's situation is available to the child's attorney, the Court and other parties. While attorneys for children may strive to meet with the child as well, their high caseloads often make this difficult. Even with very young children who are not yet verbal, observing the child and talking to caregivers like foster parents before each hearing is still useful. It is important for the judge to have your independent assessment of the child's well being and surroundings. Knowing that you are having regular contact with the child keeps everyone else on their toes.

It is also important for a GAL to meet with the child regularly (at least once per month is recommended) after disposition to monitor how the child is doing and whether case plan goals are being met. If parental rights are terminated, the GAL should continue to check regularly on the child until a permanent outcome is reached. Again an independent assessment by a GAL is extremely valuable to the Court particularly with respect to the following questions: Are plans for permanency proceeding as quickly as they should? Is the child experiencing any problems as a result of delay? If a child is experiencing problems, how are the problems being addressed? How should they be addressed?

Attending Treatment Team Meetings

In most cases, DCF establishes a *Treatment Team* to work towards case plan goals. The teams may

include parents, foster parents, teachers, therapists, case workers, guardians ad litem, and others as needed. At treatment team meetings, case plan goals are discussed, including whether the permanency goal should be changed. It is important that the guardian ad litem attend these meetings to monitor case plan goals and to speak up for the child if there are concerns regarding the plan or proposals to change the plan. The notice of these meetings is the responsibility of DCF. To ensure that you are included on the Treatment Team, GALs should notify the caseworker at disposition to add the GAL to the treatment team and request advance notice of all treatment team meetings.

The statewide Inventory results are now available. If you would like more information on the statewide results, please request a copy of the summary from the Guardian ad Litem Program Office in Montpelier. In upcoming months, Inventory results for each of the counties will be released and it is anticipated that local stakeholder meetings will be held to discuss the results. We hope you will be able to contribute to this process.

The Judiciary appreciates all of your hard work and dedication to Vermont's children. If you need more information about the role of the Guardian ad Litem in child abuse and neglect cases or treatment team meetings, please contact your local court contact or you may contact Mary Hayden, Guardian ad Litem Coordinator, mary.hayden@state.vt.us, or (802)828-6551.

- J. Davenport

Funding

The Children and Family Council for Prevention Programs, with funding from the Justice Department, has awarded a \$3500.00 grant to the GAL Program to contract for the creation of an information booklet for parents of juveniles serving as GALs in delinquency proceedings.

Recruitment – Year 2006

Statewide, the GAL program has received over 147 applications from interested volunteers during the calendar year 2006. 91 completed Basic CASA Pre-Service Training in 2006 and 13 are enrolled in the next training.

On average, statewide, about 52% newly trained GALs are assigned to CHINS cases in the first 6 months after training, (excluding October 2006 trainees) with 2 counties reporting 80% utilization. In 2007, we will be looking at methods for improving the numbers of newly trained GALs taking CHINS cases after training completion, including hiring more GAL Program Coordinators.

Recognition

Bennington

Bennington Family Court held its annual Guardian ad Litem Appreciation Holiday Luncheon on December 7, 2006. New Guardians ad Litem Louise Rainville and Anne Cormier were sworn in by Judge Suntag. GAL Coordinator Mary Hayden presented a gift of appreciation to Guardian ad Litem Betty Baker for her organizational contributions to the Bennington GALs. Thanks to Court Manager Mary Frost, Case Manager Adam Erskine and Bennington Family court staff for their support of the GALs (and the homemade treats were exceptional!)

Windham

On December 7, 2006, Windham Family Court hosted a holiday GAL recognition luncheon. GALs enjoyed a lovely catered lunch, and good holiday fellowship. Judge Carroll conducted a swearing in ceremony for several GALs who completed the October 2006 Basic pre-service training and several others reaffirmed their oaths. Judge Davenport also attended and spoke about the importance of GALs, which meant a lot to people. Judge Hayes, who is currently presiding in district court, also stopped in. A plaque was presented to Pat Verboom, who is retiring from the program after 15 very active years as a guardian. She is already sorely missed.

TRAINING

Pre-Service Training

The GAL Program sponsored another Basic CASA Training October 27-29, 2006. There were 22 trainees from 11 counties and certificates of completion were issued to the following new Guardians ad Litem:

Anne Asoera	Susan Bellville	Diana Colby
Anne Cormier	Maureen Gatto	Janet Goldstein
Catherine Johnson	Ann Johnston	Renee LaRue
Alan Lendway	Joyce McKeeman	Craig Nelson
Sharon Offensend	Louise Rainville	Diane Robie
Michael Stahler	Carol Toles	Jane Zera

Congratulations to all the new GALs! The newly trained guardians ad litem are shadowing experienced GALs on their first case assignments. If you are a new GAL and have not received a shadowing assignment, please contact your local court, or contact the Guardian ad Litem Program Office.

In-Service Training Attended by GALs

Thirteen GALs attended "Rethinking the Juvenile in Juvenile Justice Conference on November 16, 2006. Thanks to Anna Saxman, Esq., Deputy Defender General, for providing scholarships for GALs to attend.

Two Guardians ad Litem attended domestic violence training, the "Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help" in Fairlee, VT on December 6, 2006. Thanks to the Violence Against Women Act funding for sponsoring the GALs.

Basic CASA Pre-Service Training

The next pre-service training for new Guardians ad Litem will be May 9 – 11, 2007 in the White River Junction area.

GAL Training Conference – Save the Date

We are pleased to announce the 1st Annual GAL Training Conference sponsored by the Judiciary and the Court Improvement Program. The date will be June 22nd, 2007 in Montpelier. More details will be issued in the upcoming weeks, but please **Save the Date!**

In-Service Training Opportunities for GALs– Save the Dates

If you are interested in attending any of the following trainings, please contact the GAL Program Office.

March 23 – 25, 20th Annual VT Foster & Adoptive Association Conference, Wyndham Hotel, Burlington, contact Mary Alberty at malberty2001@excite.com

April 19, 3rd Annual Kinship Care Conference, sponsored by Vermont Kin as Parents, Sheraton Hotel, Burlington, contact Lynn Granger at imgkin@adelphia.net

May 1, Permanency Convening: Youth Voices, sponsored by Division of Family Services, Dept for Children & Families, Killington Grand Hotel, Killington, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm, contact Lynda Schoenbeck at 241-4222 or lschoenbeck@srs.state.vt.us or Janine Beaudry at 241-1052 or jbeaudry@srs.state.vt.us

May 18, 2nd Annual Conference Working with Youth, Sheraton Hotel, Burlington, contact Kreig Pinkham at 229-9151 or kpinkham@adelphia.net

May 31, If, When & How: Best Practices for Parent Child Contact in the Context of Domestic Violence, Killington, VT (contact information to be provided)

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 11, The 5th Annual Collaboration Conference, Killington Grand Hotel, Killington, contact Don at don.mandelkorn@ahs.state.vt.us or 479-7594; www.traumacenter.org

National CASA Conference

The Annual CASA Conference will be June 9 -12, 2007 in Orlando, FL. CASA encourages local volunteers to attend the conference. Unfortunately, the GAL Program cannot fund volunteer attendance. Please go to www.CASA.org if you are interested in registering to attend 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.

Invite DCF to discuss Treatment Team Meetings, including strategies for including GALs.

Invite community adolescent substance abuse treatment expert to discuss current thinking on adolescent substance abuse treatment.

Invite presiding Judge, Parent Coordinator Program Staff, and GAL Program Staff to discuss working on cases with a parent coordinator.



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Understanding Siblings' Rights in the Child Welfare System

By Elana Viner

No Ordinary Camp

To an unassuming bystander, it could have been any summer camp. But these were no ordinary campers. These campers had been separated from at least one sibling due to a foster, adoptive, or kinship care placement. They had been brought together for a week-long camp because one woman's vision and personal life experience had taught her that siblings in out-of-home care need and deserve time together to establish or nurture their sibling relationship.

Lynn Price, founder of Camp To Belong, kicked off the campfire by informing the campers that they were officially "VIPs." Laughter erupted. VIPs? As in "Very Important People?" Clearly, this was a case of mistaken identity. Important to whom?

Lynn explained to the campers that they were in fact Very Important People. Out of the 75% of youth separated from one or more siblings in out-of-home care, they had been chosen to participate in Camp To Belong.¹ For one week, they would enjoy meals together, celebrate their "birthdays" together, and perhaps even find themselves fighting over cabin cleanup duties—experiences that typical siblings often take for granted. For one week, they would be treated like VIPs—individually and as sibling groups.

Camp To Belong is one of a growing number of efforts to strengthen and preserve ties between siblings separated in out-of-home care. Legislation and courtroom advocacy around sibling placement, visitation, and associational rights are also increasingly being used. This article examines these efforts and offers suggestions for practitioners aimed at maintaining sibling relationships.

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How Strong is the Sibling Bond?

When Camp To Belong opened its doors in 1995, lawyers, judges, caseworkers, and other child-serving professionals were first starting to understand the social science implications of sibling relationships. The research is still evolving, but it is now widely recognized that:

- The sibling relationship may be longer lasting and more influential than any other, including those with parents, spouses, or children.²
- By the time children are 11, they devote about 33% of their free time to their siblings—more time than they spend with friends, parents, teachers, or by themselves.³
- Sibling bonds influence children's lifelong sense of attachment and well-being. Though this is true in all sibling relationships, the effect is heightened in dysfunctional families where children depend on and cooperate with one another from an earlier age.⁴ Attachment specialist, Vera Fahlberg, notes "Siblings may become transitional objects for one another during a placement...Separating siblings can make it more difficult for children to deal with separation and loss, begin a healing process, make attachments, and develop a healthy self-image."⁵
- Even babies experience depression when they are separated from their brothers and sisters. One study found that a 19-month-old girl was better able to cope with the separation from her parents than from her siblings. The children in this family were placed in different foster homes, resulting in the baby's loss of speech, refusal to eat, withdrawal, and inability to accept affection. This pattern persisted even after she was reunited with her parents. It was not until her brothers and sisters rejoined the family that this little girl resumed her former behavior.⁶

Transforming Knowledge into Practice

As a volunteer counselor for Camp To Belong, I have witnessed firsthand the importance of retaining sibling connections when children are involved with the child welfare system. Lessons that have forever shaped my views on the emotional, psychological, and even psychosomatic effects of sibling separation took place on the climbing wall, in the canoe, and in the dining hall. For example:

- **Children are not always removed from home at the same time.** Hannah and Jenna,⁷ seven and eight years old, jumped into their brother's arms after six years of separation, shouting, "Do you remember us? We're your sisters!" The 17-year-old shed unabashed tears and spent the next week getting to know his sisters for the first time.

Practice Tips: When a child is removed from home, always research whether there are siblings already in foster, adoptive, or kinship placements that may be willing to take in additional siblings. Though placing siblings together is more difficult when children do not enter the system concurrently, begin with the assumption that all siblings should be placed together at the first placement every time.⁸ It will never hurt your case to ask. Keep in mind as well that child welfare professionals tend to view placement of any siblings together as a success, but children and youth tend to view it as a failure unless *all* siblings are placed together.⁹

- **Camp or similar experiences are only a temporary reprieve.** Greg and Bryan, both teenage boys, were inseparable the entire week of camp. Though they lived on the same block, Greg's new adoptive mother opposed visitation because she did not believe it was in her son's best interest to remain connected to his former life. After camp, I called Greg's adoptive mother to inform her that I had been selected as Greg's life skills mentor. She nearly hung up on me, telling me that the cooperative, enthusiastic Greg I knew from camp had been seriously acting out since his return home.

Practice Tips: It is important to acknowledge that visitation (of any length or type) might be incredibly painful and confusing for some children. To minimize distress, include siblings in creating the visitation plan and keep them informed of necessary changes or alterations.¹⁰

- **Sibling rivalry sometimes serves as a defense mechanism.** Ashley and Andrew officially "hated" each other from the first day of camp. They fought over everything. Exasperated, our counselor group allowed them to sit at separate tables during meal times. The last day of camp, Ashley discovered that she had an innate knack for the climbing wall; Andrew was petrified. Ashley made it her mission to help Andrew overcome his fear. She clapped, shouted, and encouraged him until he finally made it all the way up. As they exchanged a high-five on top of the climbing wall, their defenses almost visibly melted away.

Practice Tips: Ashley and Andrew's experience is common. Many caregivers relay that the children in their care repeatedly tell them *not* to send them to camp. Fear, guilt, disappointment, anger, and shame are all emotions that separated siblings experience that might prohibit them from showing or verbalizing a desire to remain connected. Explore children's wishes in regards to their placement options, but be careful not to make any assumptions or conclusions without looking deeper into the facts of each case.¹¹

Why Are Siblings Still Separated in Care?

Despite awareness of the importance of preserving the sibling relationships during out-of-home care, agencies only succeed in keeping siblings together 25% of the time.¹² There are several reasons for separating siblings, most of which fall into two categories: practical considerations and concerns about the sibling relationship.

Practical considerations

Time, energy, resources, and space are all realities that prevent foster families from taking in larger sibling groups.¹³ Further, foster parents may not understand the importance of preserving the sibling relationship. Siblings may also be more difficult to place together if they come into care at different points in time.¹⁴

One solution is to consider kinship care first when resolving placement issues for sibling groups. Children in kinship care typically maintain closer ties with their siblings than children in non-kin foster care.¹⁵ Kinship caregivers may be able to care for larger sibling groups, especially in states with modified or waived licensing requirements for kinship foster parents. For instance, some states will place children in kin homes with less space than non-kin homes or waive other licensing requirements such as space between beds or number of children per room.¹⁶ It is also more likely that sibling groups cared for by kin will remain permanently together even if their parents' rights are terminated because relatives are usually more willing to adopt larger sibling groups than non-kin foster parents.¹⁷

Beyond kinship care, solutions to some of the more practical issues include: educating and training foster parents, social workers, and attorneys on the importance of sibling relationships; increasing recruitment of foster families willing and able to take in sibling groups; and offering stipends or tax incentives to families willing to foster or adopt siblings.

Concerns about the sibling relationship¹⁸

Other concerns about placing siblings together include physical or sexual abuse by one of the siblings, sibling rivalry, and parentification (when an older sibling takes on a caretaking role towards younger siblings) of an older sibling. While many of these justifications are worthy of consideration, the facts of each case must be evaluated independently before the life-altering decision is made to split a sibling group. For instance, abusive siblings might be modeling behavior after an abusive adult and are likely to continue acting out with other unrelated children without therapy.¹⁹ Sibling rivalry is a normal—and arguably a healthy—part of growing up with brothers and sisters. One group that advocates

for siblings' rights, Neighbor to Family, offers a team structure that enables foster parents to handle conflicts between siblings.²⁰ "If you have support...it's going to work out fine."²¹ Parentified behavior—when an older sibling takes on a caretaking role towards younger siblings—might decrease or cease altogether once an older sibling is placed in a home with actual parental role models for his or her younger siblings.²²

A Right to Be Together?

In 1999, *Child Law Practice* published an article on siblings in out-of-home care. At the time, innovative legislation protecting siblings' rights was first starting to emerge, and the Massachusetts Supreme Court had recently announced its landmark decision in *Adoption of Hugo* classifying the sibling relationship as but one factor when considering children's best interests.²³ Though some progress has been made since 1999, arguments supporting sibling placement and visitation continue to receive mixed results in court and on Capitol Hill. What does the current landscape look like?

Sibling placement and visitation

Siblings' right to be placed together in out-of-home care is not absolute. The sibling relationship is one factor—but not the determining factor—when deciding the children's best interests.²⁴ Because courts place different weight on the sibling relationship when considering best interests, it is difficult to determine how a court might rule in any given case.²⁵ However, 28 states now specifically address sibling placement in their policy.²⁶ Of these, 13 provide specific "acceptable" reasons for separating siblings, including the individual needs or special needs of one of the children (eight states); prior disrupted placement (two states); sibling violence, sexual abuse, or incest (seven states); and inability to find a placement to take in all siblings (six states).²⁷

Similarly, like placement decisions, the right to visitation is not absolute; it must be determined to be in the siblings' best interests.²⁸ Generally speaking and consistent with the social science research, courts have found that it is in the best interest of the child to maintain sibling visitation.²⁹ Courts are more inclined to recognize a right to visitation among siblings in foster care than among siblings who have been adopted.³⁰ Only 13 states have consent decrees mandating sibling visitation after adoption.³¹ Five states allow judges to order sibling visitation over the adoptive parents' objections.³²

Thirty-two states currently address sibling visitation in their policy.³³ Of these states, seven require that visits be documented; six require monthly visits; five require biweekly visits; and two states require weekly visits.³⁴ Breaking down these figures, in the two states (Montana and Utah) with the most frequent visitation, separated siblings still only see each other for 52 hours per year. For those of us who grew up with siblings, 52 hours is not a lot, especially considering that new research shows that even adolescents devote at least 10 hours per week (520 hours per year) to activities with their siblings.³⁵ Even in states with visitation policies, visitation plans are difficult to stick to and are often pushed to the side due to obstacles such as transportation, school schedules, costs, cooperation of foster parents, and selection of visitation sites.³⁶

While nearly all legislation acknowledging siblings' rights to placement together and/or visitation is commendable, Maine's Act to Support Sibling Rights in Child Welfare Custody Matters is particularly exciting. It was instigated by Kala Clark, now a senior in high school, who experienced sibling separation firsthand when she was separated from her two younger brothers at age 12.³⁷ The new law, effective in early 2007, establishes siblings' right to regularly-scheduled visits whenever "reasonable and practicable" and in the best interests of the children.³⁸ Clark began her research by

examining grandparents' rights, noting that "[i]t seemed that if grandparents had a right to visit grandchildren, then siblings should have a similar right."³⁹

Though Clark's dream for all states to pass similar legislation has not yet been realized, in 2005 alone Maryland, Nevada, and Texas passed laws protecting siblings' rights.⁴⁰ While Maryland and Nevada addressed placement and visitation, Texas's law is one of the first to address the rights of older siblings to file suit for access to a younger sibling.⁴¹

A constitutional right?

Both sibling placement and visitation are closely linked to the broader and somewhat more complicated issue of children's constitutional rights to their sibling relationships. While the Supreme Court has recognized that parents possess a constitutional right to maintain relationships with their children, it has failed to proffer this same right to association among separated siblings.⁴² It has also rejected the argument that sibling association is a fundamental liberty interest.⁴³ This is troubling since the Adoption and Safe Families Act emphasizes increased adoption out of foster care, as siblings' rights are technically terminated along with parental rights before adoption. One group of researchers noted that "[i]f sibling association is to be truly protected and promoted it must be recognized as a fundamental right, protected by the Constitution."⁴⁴

Interestingly, a few lower courts have recognized a constitutional right to maintain sibling relationships in out-of-home care.⁴⁵ As early as 1982, the Second Circuit held in *Rivera v. Marcus* that the plaintiff, an adult providing informal kinship care to two younger half-siblings, "possessed an important liberty interest in preserving the integrity and stability of her family" when the children were removed from her home without explanation.⁴⁶ Her half-siblings also possessed this important "liberty interest in maintaining, free from arbitrary state interference, the family environment that they have known since birth."⁴⁷

Seven years later, an Illinois district court held in *Aristotle P. v. Johnson* that the state could “infringe on the children’s right to associate with each other only if there was a sufficiently compelling interest which could not be achieved through means less restrictive of associational freedoms.”⁴⁸ The court, emphasizing foster children’s particular need to maintain sibling connections, allowed separated siblings in state custody to proceed with their claim that they possessed a constitutional right to visitation.⁴⁹ By using the phrase “compelling interest,” the court also implied that such right should be fundamental—in line with the judicially-created right to family privacy—whereby a state would need to show a compelling interest before interfering with siblings’ rights.⁵⁰

With their emphasis on values such as liberty, freedom, and family, these cases paved the way for future litigation protecting siblings’ rights, either by applying the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment or the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of association.⁵¹ Judges are traditionally opposed to separating siblings during divorces, with one court noting that “[y]oung brothers and sisters need each other’s strengths and association in their everyday and often common experiences.”⁵² Such reverence for the sibling connection must include siblings separated in out-of-home care.

Conclusion

My former camper, Tanya, recently told me that she hated going to court because it was “scary”—so much so that she “couldn’t talk at all” while she was there. Had she been able to talk, she confided, she would have wanted to tell her lawyer to “let at least two siblings be together.”⁵³

As advocates working on behalf of children, we carry the enormous responsibility of speaking for children—like Tanya—who cannot use their voice to advocate for their own safety, permanency, and well-being. We are charged with promoting their best interests, which means navigating a seemingly endless sea of rules and red tape. Through it all—from placement to visitation to permanency planning—sibling issues must remain on our radar screens if we are to truly have children’s best interests at heart. To deny siblings

the opportunity to grow up together, whether via placement or regular visitation, is to deprive already disadvantaged children and youth a lifetime of memories and the opportunity for meaningful, long-lasting relationships.

Elana Viner is a second-year law student at American University and a former legal intern at the ABA Center on Children in the Law.

Endnotes

¹ For more information, visit www.camptobelong.org or call 1-888-BELONG.

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- ³⁷ Philips, Susan. *Standing Up for Separated Siblings*. Washington, DC: Connect for Kids, May 15, 2006. May 27, 2006 <<http://www.connectforkids.org/node/4197>>.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ 2005 Md. Laws, HB 1336, Chap. 600; 2005 Nev. Stat., AB 42, Chap. 455, Sec. 20; 2005 Tex. Gen. Laws, HB 270, Chap. 1191.
- ⁴¹ 2005 Tex. Gen. Laws, HB 270, Chap. 1191.
- ⁴² Patton, 2001, 4-5 (discussing the implications of Adoption of Hugo).
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Kernan, Emily. "Keeping Siblings Together: Past, Present, and Future." *Youth Law News*, October-December 2005, 5.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.
- ⁴⁶ Rivera v. Marcus, 696 F.2d 1016, 1024-25 (2d Cir. 1982).
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, 1026.
- ⁴⁸ Aristotle P. v. Johnson, 721 F. Supp.1002, 1006 (N.D. Ill) (1989).
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Jones, Barbara. "Do Siblings Possess Constitutional Rights?" *Cornell Law Review*, September 1993, 1212, 1219.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 1189.
- ⁵² Ibid., 1190.
- ⁵³ E-mail from former Camp To Belong camper, received July 19, 2006.

Model Programs That Preserve Sibling Connections

- **Camp To Belong** has been actively reuniting brothers and sisters placed in separate foster, adoptive or kinship homes through summer camp programs and year-round events since 1995. For more information, visit www.camptobelong.org.
- **Camp Merry Heart**, modeled after Camp To Belong, is part of Easter Seals Disability Services in New Jersey. The week-long camp offers separated siblings, with or without disabilities, an opportunity to reunite for one week each summer. For more information, visit http://nj.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=NJDR_camping_recreation.

- **Neighbor to Neighbor**, a Jane Adams Hull House program, was specifically designed to keep large sibling groups together in Chicago's foster care system. The program professionalizes the role of foster caregivers and offers intensive services to birth parents. In one study, 71% of sibling groups working with Neighbor to Neighbor were placed together compared to 33% of sibling groups working with the child protection system. For more information, visit www.hullhouse.org/cw.
- **Neighbor to Family**, based in Florida, evolved from Neighbor to Neighbor and was officially incorporated in 2000. Neighbor to Family shares Neighbor's commitment to working with foster parents, birth parents, highly qualified program staff, and interested community agencies to maintain sibling relationships. For more information, visit www.neighbortofamily.org.
- **Project Visitation** mobilizes community volunteers to bring separated siblings together for monthly visits that last between six and eight hours. For more information, visit <http://www.vlsh.org/01/services/PV.htm>.

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Spotlight on Siblings

- Between 56-85% of children in foster care have one or more sibling.
- Approximately 75% of siblings are separated from each other once in foster care.
- Siblings are most likely to be separated when they come into care as older children, have more than one or two siblings, have developmental disabilities, come into care at different times, and change placements more quickly.
- 28 states address sibling placement in their policy, while 32 states address visitation.

Sources:

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