

## *GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM SCORECARD*

The Guardian ad Litem Program's sole mission is to advocate for the best interests of dependent children. The goal of GAL Program staff, volunteers, non-profit organizations and community partners is two-fold: (1) to assure the positive outcome of every case to which a volunteer is assigned and (2) to assure the safety of each child for whom a volunteer is advocating. To measure the successful achievement of this goal, a **Scorecard** has been developed. This Scorecard uses quantitative data to demonstrate that GAL advocacy correlates with improved case outcomes and to guide the efficient and effective use of resources for meeting the needs of children in the dependency system

Special weight was given to the voices of children and youth in the foster care system who participated in the "A Voice Heard" Initiative. These voices confirmed the importance of the bond they develop with a GAL volunteer and the fact that this bond is built on four key elements, each of which was used in developing the Scorecard. These four elements represent the PACT which is the commitment and bond the GAL volunteers have with the children and youth they serve.

- **Personal Interest:** Caring, Concern and Emotional Support
- **Advocacy:** Judicial, Educational and Situational
- **Communication:** Talking, Listening and Understanding
- **Trust:** Responsiveness, Honesty and Reliability

The Scorecard is composed of two types of measures:

(1) Program Effectiveness - items within the control of the GAL Program staff and volunteer advocates. Found on the left side of the Scorecard, these measures have a direct impact on child representation. Some of these measures include recruitment, retention, advocacy and Program administration.

(2) Child Welfare Outcome - items that the GAL Program can influence. There are national studies which demonstrate that children are more likely to experience success when a volunteer child advocate is assigned to their case. Found on the right hand side of the Scorecard, these measures correlate with improved child well-being. Some of these measures include placement, reunification and educational stability. These outcomes are shared with Department of Children and Families (DCF) to ensure the achievement of positive outcomes for children in the dependency system.

## GAL Program Effectiveness Measures

The left side of the scorecard links GAL Circuit performance with child representation. The measures selected for this section of the Scorecard are those where the specific outcomes can be directly or indirectly influenced by GAL staff and volunteers.

1. % of Children Assigned to GAL Program: This total representation measure is designed to measure progress towards the GAL statutory mandate to represent 100% of dependent children.
2. % of Permanency Discharge: A key outcome measure for children is achievement of permanency either through adoption, reunification with family or a permanent guardianship arrangement. These are true permanency outcomes and, in each case, DCF supervision is terminated when one of these outcomes is achieved. Ideally, a GAL should not be discharged from an assigned case without the attainment of permanency although this preferred result is not always accomplished. Improvement in permanency goals over time is desired since it is considered to be in the best interests of children. This outcome measure is important for gauging the success of GAL **“Advocacy”** efforts on behalf of children who are able to be reunified with their family or placed with a permanent guardian or adopted. The hope of “going home” or finding a permanent home with people who love them is often expressed by children in conversations with their volunteer.
3. % of Appointed Children Assigned to Volunteers: This measure is designed to show how efficient the GAL Program has been in recruiting, training and supporting certified volunteers. This measure focuses on the “A Voice Heard” Initiative response elements relating to **“Personal Interest”**. Personal interest may not exist when a child does not have a volunteer child advocate assigned to him or her to care, show concern and give emotional support. This measure also closely correlates to the “A Voice Heard” Initiative element of **“Trust”** which highlights responsiveness and reliability.
4. Volunteer Management Index (Certified/Discharged): This measure demonstrates how well a Circuit Director (CD) is managing both the recruitment and retention of GAL volunteers. It is a critical component of a CD’s job and one that ultimately defines their successful alignment with the GAL mission. The measure is straightforward: it is the number of volunteers newly certified during a specific time period - divided by the number of certified volunteers discharged during the same time period.
5. % of Children Visited At Least Once Every Thirty (30) Days: This data is based on a random sampling of 300 children each month. This measure is drawn from the “A Voice Heard” Initiative response element of **“Communication”** - talking, listening and

understanding. Several children during interviews highlighted how much they enjoyed taking with their volunteer child advocates and spending time with them.

6. % of Volunteers Certified as Educational Advocates: A cornerstone belief of the GAL Program is that successful educational advocacy equates to better child outcomes. Volunteers are therefore encouraged to become trained educational advocates. By tracking the number of volunteers who are trained as educational advocates, highlights the “**Advocacy**” element of the “A Voice Heard” Initiative. Acquiring these educational advocacy skills through training allows volunteer child advocates to enhance their overall effectiveness in critical educational, judicial and best interest situations.
7. % of Volunteers Certified as Transportation Eligible: This measure addresses an area that youth brought up repeatedly in the “A Voice Heard” Initiative discussions – “**Normalcy.**” Children in foster care want to be able to take part in normal activities. In accordance with the transportation guidelines, willing volunteers are authorized to transport children for the purposes of (a) enhancing normalcy for the child, (b) establishing personal rapport and bonding and (c) increasing awareness of any safety issues in the child’s environment. Transportation is now permitted thanks to Senate Bill 1960 which was signed into law in May, 2012. This indicator will be measured as a sign of **Trust**.
8. Operational Excellence Scorecard (Aggregated Ranking): This score, the official ranking of GAL Program effectiveness, ranks all Circuits from highest performing to lowest performing based on their aggregated, individual rankings on the seven (7) operational measures.

### **GAL Child Welfare Outcome Measures**

The right side of the scorecard links GAL operational performance with child welfare outcomes. The measures selected for the Scorecard are those measures where GALs can partner with DCF staff members to achieve the specified objectives.

1. No Verified Maltreatment During In-Home Services or w/in 6 Months of Termination of Services: Assessing potential placements and/or making recommendations for supportive services are two areas where a GAL can help reduce the likelihood of continued or future abuse.
2. Children Reunited within 12 Months of Entry: A safe and timely permanent placement for a child is the responsibility of all parties to dependency proceedings. The GAL advocate consistently plays a role in permanency decisions through best interest advocacy. Historically, the GAL recommendations to the Community Based Care (CBC)

Agencies and to the Courts receive careful and weighted consideration in the permanency decision-making process.

3. Reunified Children who Re-entered Care within 12 Months: This outcome is intended to ensure that timely reunification does not result in too many children returning to care. The GAL can monitor family relationships during the initial reunification period and recommend services that will support the child's readjustment needs.
4. Median Length of Stay for Children Reunified (Quarter 3): This is a measure for which all parties share equal responsibility. The GAL can influence the length of stay either through advocacy or through court action.
5. % of Adoptions within 24 Months (Quarter 3): GALs can, and do, play a central role in the identification and selection of prospective adoptive parents. They can also be instrumental in expediting the administrative and legal adoption process.
6. Children in Care 8 Days to 12 Months with No More than 2 Placements: The impact of placement stability on the well-being of children in care has been well documented. Although safety concerns must still predominate in making placement decisions, a GAL is able to partner with other child welfare professionals to achieve this result.
7. Medical, Immunization and Dental Services: These are well-being measures designed to ensure the appropriate and timely medical and dental care. A GAL is able to resolve problems, help obtain needed services and influence desired outcomes.
8. Children Ages 5-17 Enrolled in School: Ensuring that children removed from their home are enrolled in school (preferably the school they have been attending) is the first step toward a better measure of each child's educational progress. The GAL is in a position to verify the child's enrollment and to facilitate the child's academic progress despite the trauma with which the child is trying to cope.

### **Conclusion**

The Guardian ad Litem Scorecard is designed to be an effective and "evolving" tool. It is intended to help assess the Program's overall effectiveness and to clearly define the influential role that GALs can have on achieving improved child welfare outcomes. The utilization of this Scorecard will lead to the accomplishment of two strategic objectives:

- Increased GAL Program child representation and advocacy effectiveness which directly supports comments and concerns from children who participated in the "A Voice Heard" Initiative; and

- Improved overall child welfare outcomes for dependent children.

An important benefit of the Scorecard is that it will provide the GAL Program leadership team with an effective framework for identifying and defining future GAL Program child representation and advocacy improvement opportunities. For example, the legislature has provided an additional \$1.8 million in contract funds for the GAL Program. Given the Scorecard's emphasis on Volunteer Child Advocate growth and involvement, the data and trends tracked by Scorecard results can help determine where and how to effectively spend these dollars to advance the GAL Program's mission, influence improved outcomes for children in the dependency system and overcome the obstacles they face. The children and their needs, so articulately expressed in "A Voice Heard" Initiative, will help guide the GAL Program's strategic direction.

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