



# **Voices for Children**

***Taking Volunteer Guardian  
Representation to the  
Next Level***

# Introduction to the Model

- ❑ *What is the model?*
- ❑ *Why do we use it?*
- ❑ *Who are the team members?*
  - *Profile of GALs*
  - *Attorney/Supervisors*
- ❑ *Selecting GALs for quality & commitment to children*



# ***What is the model?***

- ◆ Team approach: Guardian ad litem and Attorney Advocate
- ◆ Recognizes complexity of cases
- ◆ Recognizes a child's urgent need for permanency



# A Model for Representing the Child's Best Interests

## *Guardian ad litem*



- ◆ *The Guardian ad litem* is a community advocate appointed by the judge
- ◆ GAL has statutory authority and judicial order allowing broad power to investigate and represent child's best interests
- ◆ Investigates, monitors, attends all court and non-court proceedings
- ◆ Determines child's wishes and best interests

# A Model for Representing the Child's Best Interests

## *The Attorney Advocate*



- ◆ *Attorney Advocate* supervises volunteer GALs
- ◆ Manages legal issues, courtroom advocacy
- ◆ Initiates and responds to legal interests of child(ren) through filing of motions, working with agencies on systemic issues identified by case work
- ◆ Acts as legal advocate in other proceedings or courts (criminal, civil, appellate)

# *Why do we use this model?*



- ◆ Opens up a closed system by using outsiders
- ◆ Challenges the system to work for children
- ◆ Advocates become invested in the success of children
- ◆ Two voices are better than one
- ◆ Intensifies attention on the child
- ◆ Gives them an active voice in their own lives
- ◆ It works
- ◆ It's fair

# ***Selecting and training GALs for quality and commitment to children***



- ◆ Selection of GALs is a deliberate and careful process
  - Multi-state checks for criminal background and child abuse/neglect screening
  - Application, interviewing, references, minimum requirement
- ◆ Training continues the screening process and gives GALs the tools to do the work

# Training and Supervision —Keys to Quality



- ❑ *Training Curriculum*
- ❑ *Standards of Practice—Supervision*
- ❑ *Standards of Practice—Guardian ad litem*
- ❑ *Forms, Procedures, Checklists*
- ❑ *Outcome Measures--COMET*

# *Training Curriculum*



- ◆ Supreme Court standards as our guide
- ◆ 35 hours of facilitated learning
- ◆ Court observation
- ◆ GAL written reports

# ***Standards of Practice--Supervision***



- ◆ Expectations of the Attorney Advocate
  - ◆ Knowledge base is essential
  - ◆ Continuing education is a program requirement
  - ◆ Quarterly goals move the practice along
  - ◆ Caseload assures quality for kids
  - ◆ Monitoring of GAL casework identifies areas for improvement

# ***Standards of Practice—Guardian ad litem***

## **◆ Prior to the PC hearing**

- ◆ Meet with supervisor
- ◆ Visit the child in his placement
- ◆ Bring books and blanket
- ◆ Write hearing statements



## **◆ Prior to Adjudication/Disposition**

- ◆ Meet with supervisor/Contact at least once a week
- ◆ Contact team members for updates
- ◆ Monitor the court's order
- ◆ Visit child at least once a month in her placement
- ◆ Attend 30 day FSTM
- ◆ Prepare report for the court

# ***Standards of Practice—Guardian ad litem***



## **◆ Post Adjudication/Disposition**

- ◆ Attend all FSTMs, residential staffings, IEP meetings, etc.
- ◆ Contact supervisor at least monthly with update
- ◆ Visit the child monthly in his placement
- ◆ Monitor the dispositional order
- ◆ Attend all court hearings
- ◆ Work with team to establish permanent plan
- ◆ Assist supervisor in trial preparation
- ◆ Observe family visits, if appropriate

# Forms, Procedures, Checklists

- ◆ Attorney Notebook
- ◆ Trial Notebook
- ◆ Forms for Guardians ad litem
  - ◆ PC statements and recommendations
  - ◆ Pre-trial to-do list
  - ◆ Beginning a case
  - ◆ Terms and abbreviations
  - ◆ Timeline: A Child's Journey Through Foster Care



# Outcome Measures

## ◆ Outcomes for children

- ◆ Length of stay in foster care is shortened
- ◆ Foster care becomes a healing time when quality services are given promptly
- ◆ Placement with family in foster care
- ◆ Permanent placement with family when possible
- ◆ Siblings placed together

## ◆ Systemic changes

- ◆ Court Improvement Project
- ◆ Interagency meeting builds accountability
- ◆ Communication with DFS

## ◆ COMET



# Guardian ad litem Perspectives



- ◆ Guardian Perspectives
- ◆ Q & A
- ◆ For more information, please contact:
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**Each Child**



**Valued**



**As**

**Our Own**

