



*North Carolina*

# **GUARDIAN AD LITEM**

## **A CHILD'S ADVOCATE IN COURT**

### **Job Description**

#### **SUMMARY**

A Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is a trained community member appointed by a district court judge to investigate and determine the needs of abused and neglected children and youth petitioned into the court system by the Department of Social Services. The GAL is paired with an Attorney Advocate to represent the child's best interest in court.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **Digging for Details**

- Gather and assess independent information about the child's situation and needs by
  - Getting to know the child
  - Interviewing parents, caretakers, social workers, teachers, service providers
  - Reading records related to the child and family

##### **Collaborating**

- Seek cooperative solutions with other participants in the child's case
- Communicate with the GAL Attorney Advocate to develop legal strategies and prepare for court
- Attend court hearings and other meetings

##### **Recommending the Best**

- Write child-focused reports for court hearings
- Make recommendations in the child's best interest
- Testify, when needed, to support recommendations or inform the court of changes in the child's situation

##### **Empowering the Child's Voice**

- Ensure that the court knows the child's wishes
- Keep the child informed about the court proceedings
- Facilitate the child's participation in court hearings as appropriate

##### **Staying Vigilant**

- Monitor the situation on an on-going basis
- Consult with local program staff for support and guidance

##### **Confidentiality is Key**

- Keep all records and information confidential

#### **QUALIFICATIONS**

##### **A Guardian ad Litem possesses:**

- A sincere concern for the well-being of children
- A commitment to advocate for a child until a safe and permanent home is established and court involvement is no longer required
- The ability to be objective and non-judgmental
- The ability to interact respectfully with people from diverse economic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds
- Good verbal and written communication skills

#### **REQUIREMENTS**

Guardian ad Litem advocates commit to at least four hours per month on a case, and they are encouraged to serve until the case is completed, which usually takes at least a year.

In order to become a GAL, you will need to complete:

- an application
- a screening interview with program staff
- a criminal record check

After acceptance into the program, GALs complete 25-30 hours of training before being sworn in by a judge and appointed to advocate on behalf of a child. In addition to advocating for the child, GALs will attend continuing education trainings on advocacy issues.

#### **SUPERVISION**

Guardians ad Litem are supervised by program staff.