

# DEPENDENCY CASE MANAGERS AND GAL VOLUNTEERS

## A BEST INTERESTS PARTNERSHIP

# A PANEL DISCUSSION

**WHEN:** May 4, 2012

**WHY:** To Improve  
**Communication,  
Collaboration and  
Cooperation**

**WHO:** GAL Staff and Volunteers  
DCM Staff

# WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON

- **Networking**
- **Stakeholders**
- **Attending Court Hearings**
- **Becoming Overwhelmed, Emotional, Frustrated and Disappointed**

# WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON

- **Passion for Children**
- **Child Advocacy**
- **Best Interests of Children and Parents**
- **Child Visitations**

# SOME MISCONCEPTIONS

## *DCMs and GALs Are on Opposite Sides*

- DCMs:
  - Are Unapproachable
  - Have Unlimited Funding
  - Visit Once a Week
  - Do Placements
- GALs
  - Aren't Required to Do Monthly Visits

## GENERAL INFORMATION: DCMs

- Receive 8 weeks of training – class and fieldwork
- A case load of 20
- Three primary professional priorities
  1. Seeing the children every 30 days
  2. Writing Court Documents (Judicial Reviews, Case Plans, Assessments, and Family Risk Assessments for case file)
  3. Transport Children to appointments (not normalcy activities)

# GENERAL INFORMATION: GALs

- **To Become a GAL**  
Application, Personal References and Interview Process  
30 Hours of Training  
Finger Printing and Background Check  
Employment Reference Check
- Assigned to cases to which the GAL Program is court appointed
- Caseload Average of 1 to 3 Cases
- Annual Re-Certification: 12 Hours

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: GALs

- **Gathers Information from Biological Family, Foster Parents, Teachers, Therapists, Physicians, etc.**
- **Visits Monthly and Writes Visitation Reports**
- **Assures/Facilitates Receipt of Needed Support Services**
- **Monitors Case**



# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: GALs

- **Advocates for Best Interests of the Child in Court Proceedings**  
(Makes Independent Recommendations Based on Information Gathered and/or Communicates Child's Wishes)
- **Transports Child/Children for Normalcy Activities**  
(Must be Authorized by the Program)
- **Writes Judicial Review Reports for the Court**

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: GALs

## **DOES NOT**

- Provide Direct Services
- Supervise Visits

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

## Child Advocate Coordinators

- **Helps Train New Volunteers**
- **Notifies Volunteer of Hearings**
- **Attends Permanency/Independent Living Staffings**
- **Guides/Coaches Volunteers — especially newly certified volunteers**

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

## Child Advocate Coordinators

- Reviews Monthly Visitation Reports and Court Reports: Edits and Files
- Accompanies GAL in Court
- Serves as the Liaison between the GAL and GAL Attorney
- Staffs Cases with GAL Volunteer and GAL Attorney for Judicial Reviews and at other times as needed

# DCM GRIPES, WOES, AND FRUSTRATIONS

- Last minute calls for information
- Unrealistic expectations of DCM abilities, responsibilities and authority
- Not being notified of the name of the assigned GAL and being told it cannot be obtained from the GAL Office because of confidentiality issues

## DCM GRIPES, WOES, AND FRUSTRATIONS

- Not receiving GAL Reports and being surprised in court by requests for changes or information
- Less access than GALs to school, medical and other pertinent information because of the GAL court ordered access to relevant documents

## **GAL GRIPES, WOES, AND FRUSTRATIONS**

- **Frequent delays receiving return calls or responses to emails**
- **Not being notified of important changes, e.g., placement, the assignment of a new DCM, or medications**
- **Feeling of being Left Out or of being a Pest**
- **Feeling that having an opinion which differs from that of other professionals involved in the case is not acceptable**

# GAL SOLUTIONS

- Better, more frequent communications from GAL Volunteer
- Take the lead on communicating with DCM
- GAL involvement in Permanency Staffings
- Coordinating information gathering; sharing records and information
- Notify DCM of observations made during visitations



## GAL SOLUTIONS

- Address problems before court proceedings
- Communicate via email where possible
- Maintain a positive approach; do not demand
- GAL Program to provide DCMs with GAL Reports
- GAL Program to inform DCMs of GAL appointment and facilitate the connection

## DCM SOLUTIONS

- Be available for consultation
- Get to know GAL
- Include GAL in case
- Inform GAL of changes, upcoming meetings, staffings, etc.
- Keep communication open
- Accompany GAL on a visit

# GOALS

- Meet again in six (6) months to review progress
- Panel Leaders (Kim Harvey and Leigh Merritt) to disseminate information gained to panel participants and to top management
- Decide how to utilize/teach information in individual (or combined) inter-agency trainings, new GAL volunteer class trainings, continuing education workshops, etc.