



Make a Difference

Each year, thousands of Vermont children and youth are in Family Court. Hundreds suffer abuse, neglect, or abandonment by parents or caretakers. Some are in turmoil due to parental separation or divorce. Others are exposed to domestic violence in their homes. Many more are in foster care for extended periods while waiting for a safe permanent home. Many of the nearly 2,000 youngsters in court on delinquency charges are past victims of abuse or neglect. These Vermont children and youth need an adult to advocate for their best interests during family court proceedings. They need a Guardian ad Litem (GAL).

These children and their stories may seem overwhelming. It may seem beyond the ability of any one person to make a difference. However, **one person can make a difference for one child at a time** — one child, who is not a statistic but rather a person with feelings, needs, hopes, and dreams... One child whose life may be filled with uncertainties about things most people take for granted: a safe home, a loving family, food, clothing, and friends.

In court proceedings, strangers often determine the course of the child's life. While these strangers are caring adults, each has a job and each child is but one of many cases heard by the judge, handled by the child's attorney, or assigned to a social worker. The entire court experience may be frightening, confusing, and intimidating. The courtroom setting may be unfamiliar, its language and terms not understood. Intimate and private details of the child's life may be revealed to a myriad of unknown people — people who disappear when the hearing is over, leaving the child alone again to live with decisions made by others.

No child can stand alone through such uncertainty and emotional upheaval. No child can afford to be alone in family court. You can volunteer to become a Vermont Guardian ad Litem and make certain that at least one child is not alone.