

Vermont GAL Program Newsletter



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Chittenden GAL wins United Way Senior Adult Hometown Hero Award

Chittenden County GAL, John Bisbee, was awarded the Senior Adult Hometown Hero Award at a United Way breakfast on September 11, 2007, with 400 people in attendance. John has served as a GAL for nearly 20 years. While John has served as a GAL in every conceivable docket, he now focuses on CHINS cases involving children ages 0-6. John, who is 80 years old, also served on the Juvenile Court Improvement Program Permanency Planning Implementation Committee from 1997-2005, is currently serving on the GAL Program Advisory Committee, and the Chittenden County Family Treatment Court team. A retired engineer, John has also researched data on children in custody in Chittenden County,

and presented his findings to Chief Justice Reiber and the Judiciary's Justice for Children Task Force.

In a moving tribute to John, adoptive parent Carol Kauffman read a letter in which she shared how much John has meant to her daughter and her family:

"Through the years we have sifted through [our daughter's] records and have found John Bisbee's strong and passionate advocacy for our daughter present throughout the pages. When she entered our home John came for visits and was present at every meeting, initiating many conversations in-between until her adoption day. He and [our daughter] have had positive connections even

after her adoption. John is tough, tenacious, open minded and compassionate. "Hometown Hero"? He is a true hero to every child in his care. Carol concluded with a heartfelt "thank you, John," on behalf of both her daughter and herself.

John commented, "I am very honored by this award, and I am especially pleased that a laptop computer and a cash gift of \$2,000 were donated in my name to Kidsafe, a wonderful organization. I am also enjoying my new teddy bear!"



We are all very proud of you, John!

Recruitment

We have received 83 new GAL applications so far in 2007, and 44 GALs have completed Basic pre-service training. While we are experiencing some limitations on our funding for marketing and public relations, we continue to attract excellent GAL applicants to the program. Thanks to all the dedicated court staff who do an excellent job interviewing and screening new applicants!

New GALs

18 new GALs completed their Basic pre-service training in September 2007. Congratulations to all the new GALs:

Susan Bitzer
Karen Browning
Susan Cartwright
Elayne Clift
Pat Deasy
Amy Dickinson
Richard Dybvig
Nancy Erickson
Sharon Gilman
Meg Hadley
Alexandra Miller
Alecia Ramsey

Dana Roth
David Weinstein
Katherine White
Judy Wilson
Elinor Yahm
Howard Yahm

The new GALs are beginning their shadowing assignments and courtroom observation in their local courts. If you are a new GAL who has completed your training and you have not been assigned to shadow a CHINS case, please contact the GAL Program Office, 800-622-6359.



"It is vital that GALs participate in these meetings in your respective counties."

Juvenile Stakeholder Inventory Meetings Coming your Way

You probably recall the Juvenile Practices Inventory conducted by Administrative Judge for Trial Courts, Amy Davenport, under the Justice of Children Task Force, which results came out in the Fall of 2006. The next step after the initial inventory is a series of stakeholder meetings to be held in individual counties. The purpose of these

meetings is for all the players to collaborate to formulate individual action plans in each county in response to the inventory performance measures such as children's time in custody, placement and educational stability, permanency outcomes, and timeliness of courtroom proceedings. It is vital that GALs

participate in these meetings in your respective counties. The GAL perspective is extremely important to this process. You should be receiving notice of the date and time for the meetings from your local court. If you do not receive notice of the meetings, please let the GAL Program Office know.

Vermont's Juvenile Statutes Proposed Revisions Project—November 2007 Legislative Symposium

In July 2006, Administrative Judge for Trial Courts Amy Davenport convened the Chapter 55 of Title 33 Statutory Revision Committee to study and recommend legislative changes to the Vermont Juvenile Proceedings

statute, as requested by the legislature. Vermont's juvenile statutes have not been comprehensively revised in 40 years. A comprehensive revision of Vermont's juvenile statutes will be proposed to the legislature in November 2007.

The purpose of the revisions is to divide the Chapter so that Delinquency and CHINS are addressed in separate sections, eliminate internal inconsistencies in the statute, make the statute easier to read, and codify some current practice.

GAL Advisory Committee busy, busy, busy.....

The GAL Advisory Committee continues to work hard to improve the GAL Program. The committee, which meets monthly, has been chaired by Judge Katherine Hayes for over 4 years, and has members who are GALs, court staff, the bar, Court Administrator's Office, and Juvenile Court Improvement Program. In 2007, the GAL Committee approved revisions to the GAL Volunteer Policies and

Procedures Manual, developed a recommendation for a 5 year strategic plan, revised the GAL Complaint Procedure, and is studying the scheduling and delivery of Basic Training. In the coming weeks, the committee will be busy formulating its next budget request to increase staff for the GAL Program. Thank you to all committee members who donate so much time:

GALs, John Bisbee and Jeannie Walker, Attorneys, Alexander Banks, Esq., Phil Danielson, Esq., and Robert Sheil, Esq., Court Staff, Theresa Davidson, Hedy Harris, and Tari Scott, and Court Administrator's Office staff, Sandra Seidel, Arlene Hanson, and Shari Young.

FCOC Sub-Committee Studies Domestic GALs

During the summer months, a sub-committee of the Family Court Oversight Committee (FCOC) comprised of GALs, attorneys, court staff, trial Judges, a legislator, and GAL Program staff, met and wrote a protocol for the utilization of volunteer GALs in domestic custody cases. The proposed protocol was presented

to the Family Court Oversight Committee in September, 2007, and will be finalized in November. Thank you to co-chairs, Judge Katherine Hayes, and Alex Banks, Esq. for organizing such a productive and interesting study! Thanks to all the committee members: along with Judge Hayes and Alex Banks,

Judge Harold Eaton, Mary Hayden, Rep. Peg Florey, Case Manager, Hedy Harris, Court Manager, Tari Scott, GALs, David Chambers and Jeanne Walker, and attorney Steve Blodgett.



National Record Checks for New GALs

Starting September 1, 2007, new applicants to the GAL Program will be fingerprinted for a national criminal record check. Please note this affects only NEW applicants after September 1!

GAL Program Revises Volunteer Policies and Procedures Manual; all GALs Sent a Copy

Recently the GAL Program Office sent out copies of the updated Volunteer Policies and Procedures Manual to all GALs. The policies and procedures were changed to include a list of "prohibited activities". (For example, transporting assigned

children or bringing children to your home are prohibited activities.) The updated manuals were sent out by email, or by regular mail. If you did not receive a copy of the updated Volunteer Policies and Procedures Manual, please let our office know

so that we can provide you with a copy as soon as possible.

GAL Coordinator to attend National CASA State Director's Meeting in October in Kansas City, MO

Mary Hayden will attend the National CASA State Director's Meeting in Kansas City, MO October 3-5.

GAL Appointment Order

GALs appointed to Juvenile cases will now receive a GAL Appointment Letter. The appointment will set forth the name and birth date of the assigned child, the name of the appointed GAL, GAL access to

records, and the GAL confidentiality obligation. We will keep you posted as GAL appointments are developed for other dockets.





The Vermont Guardian ad Litem Program wishes to thank all GALs for their hard work and continued efforts on behalf of children in Vermont's court system.

Remembering.....Jeff Shearer and Tracey Clark

We are very sad to report that 2 GALs recently passed away.

Jeff Shearer died unexpectedly on August 31, 2007. Jeff served as GAL from 1994-2006 in Chittenden County in Juvenile Court cases. Jeff was born in 1950. He worked in the automotive business before owning and operating Richmond Hardware and worked as a paraeducator at Burlington High School. In

addition to serving as a GAL, Jeff volunteered for Chittenden County Court Court Diversion, and worked with physically challenged youth at the Burlington Community Sailing Center and with the Vermont Adaptive Ski Program at Sugarbush. Jeff will be greatly missed by the GAL Program, and the Chittenden community.

Tracey Clark passed away on September 11, 2007. Tracey was born in 1959 and

resided in Barnard with her husband and two children. Tracey became a GAL in Windsor County in 2004 and was diagnosed with cancer a short time later. In spite of her diagnosis, Tracey was amazingly positive and continued to participate in many community activities, including the GAL Program, and worked at the law firm of Campbell and Saunders, P.C. in Quechee until her death. Tracey will be greatly missed.

Chittenden Pilot Ends

The pilot GAL CHINS Program in Chittenden County ended in September 2007. During the 15 month pilot, the number of GALs grew from 24 to 40, and the new GALs were integrated into their GAL work under the supervision of the coordinator. Thank you to the GALs in Chittenden County who continue to provide generous support to

the Chittenden County GAL program, including organizing monthly meetings and spending many hours mentoring and supporting new GALs and the coordinator.

Thanks and praise go out to the court staff in Chittenden Family Court, especially Chris Brock, Theresa Davidson and

Kathleen Hill for all of their support and extra work, not to mention their patience and humor! Thank you also to Judge Brian Greason for the many hours he devoted to welcoming GALs to the program and advising the coordinator. We hope to continue the success of the pilot by hiring a permanent coordinator for the Chittenden GAL Program.

Rutland Pilot Humming Along—Bennington Recruitment Project Begins

Rutland GAL Project Coordinator, Kristi Tolmer, is busy integrating 3 more new GALs after the September basic pre-service training. This brings to 9 the total number of new GALs added to Rutland County in 2007, nearly doubling the number of active GALs. The new GALs have been assigned mentors, are observing courtroom

proceedings, and working as GALs on their first cases.

All of the GALs trained in May 2007 have finished their mentoring program and the new GALs trained in September are starting to mentor. Kristi has turned her recruitment talents to Bennington County and with GAL Betty Baker is formulating a plan for increasing the number

of GALs in that county.

Recently, Kristi, Betty Baker, and GALs Doug Krause and John Levecchia, taped a television segment on the GAL Program for Bennington Public Access television. Kristi and Betty are busy brainstorming a number of recruitment ideas for Bennington County, including sponsoring an open house in the Manchester area.

GAL Program Staff, Court Staff and Volunteer attend CASA Facilitator and Supervision of Volunteers Training in Albany



Under the generous support of national CASA funding, case manager and Windham County GAL Coordinator, Hedy Harris, and Bennington GAL volunteer and local coordinator, Betty Baker, attended a three day CASA "Training of Facilitators" in Albany in August. Hedy and Betty are now

qualified to serve as co-facilitators for Basic Pre-Service GAL Training. The GAL Program now has 8 CASA trained facilitators statewide, including Sandra Seidel, Tari Scott, Mary Hayden, Elizabeth Aiken, Charles Hacker, Hedy Harris, Laura Dolgin and Betty Baker. Thank you to all our training facilitators!

Hedy Harris, Betty Baker, Kristi Tolmer and Mary Hayden attended a one-day training for "Volunteer Supervision" also in Albany in August.

GAL Program Funding

The GAL Advisory Committee will again recommend to the Family Court Oversight Committee that the Judiciary request an increase in the budget for the GAL Program, so that we can provide better recruitment, supervision, and training for GALs statewide. The Advisory Committee concludes that in order for the GAL program to remain strong and viable, and to enable GALs to fulfill their promises to represent the best interests of the children they are appointed to help, we need to have more than one full-time staff person devoted to the program, preferably several regional coordinators. The Advisory Committee will recommend hiring permanent staff people, with professional qualifications, who would

focus all of their energy on recruiting GALs and supporting the GAL program throughout the state.

The GAL budget proposal has not yet been formally requested in a legislative bill, but general information about the legislative process can be found at the legislative website:

www.leg.vt.us. The committees that are likely to play the most active role in deciding on the Judiciary's budget proposal are the House and Senate Appropriations and Judiciary Committees. Committee assignments can be found at:

House
www.leg.state.vt.us/legdir/comms.cfm?Body=H
 Senate
www.leg.state.vt.us/legdir/

We plan to keep you informed on the progress of the proposed GAL appropriation during this fall and for the term of the 2008 legislative session. Please contact Mary Hayden at 828-6514 or mary.hayden@state.vt.us if you might be interested in assisting when the GAL program proposal is before the legislature, or if you have questions or comments about any of the above information.

Thank
 You



Training News—Juvenile Delinquency

40 GALs attended Juvenile Delinquency Training in Burlington and St. Johnsbury in July and August. Thank you to our presenters, Bob Sheil, Esq., of the Defender General's Office and Kate Piper, Esq., Juvenile attorney. The Juvenile Delinquency Training for

GALs is sponsored annually in 2 locations around the state. GALs who accept Juvenile Delinquency cases are required to have this training. If you are interested in receiving this training, please check

future newsletters and other communications from the GAL Program Office so you can sign-up to attend one of the trainings in 2008.

Other 2007 Training Opportunities

October 9 & 10
VT Victim Assistance Academy – Exploring Dynamics of Interpersonal & Family Violence.
 sponsored by the VT Center for Crime Victim Services & Others, FREE, CEUs, CLEUs, academic credit available, contact Will Roberts at 241-4331 or will.roberts@ccvs.state.vt.us

Session # 3 held in February 2008 & session #4 held in May 2008

October 11 & 12
2nd Annual Conference on Addictive Disorders.
 sponsored by Valley Vista & VT Center for Addictions Research, Dr. Robert Drake, keynoter, Lake Morey Resort, \$180 for both days or \$100/per day, contact Shawna.hervey@vvista.org or call 222-

October 12
The 5th Annual Collaboration Conference on Children, Youth & Families. Killington Grand Hotel, Killington, \$75 early bird rate by 8/31/07, contact don.mandelkorn@ahs.state.vt.us or 479-7594 or go to <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/cconferences.html>

October 18
Child Traumatic Stress: Understanding & Serving Through a Cultural Lens.
 sponsored by the Georgetown University Center for Child & Human Development & the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, National Technical Assistance Conf Call, FREE, 1:00 to 2:30 pm, http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/programs/ta_center/tacals2007.html for information & to register

October 21 & 28
Understanding and Responding to Domestic Violence. sponsored by Woodbury College, Willow Wheelock, trainer, 9:00 am – 4:30 pm on two Sundays, Woodbury College, Montpelier, \$50 (scholarships available), contact the admissions office at Woodbury College at 229-0516

October 25
Got Meetings! Powerful Take Home Tools for Increasing Meeting Productivity & Satisfaction. sponsored by Upstream Educational Services, Jon Udis, trainer, 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, \$125, Baird Center for Children & Families, Burlington, contact jonudis@together.net or 229-4616

October 30
Got Meetings! Powerful Take Home Tools for Increasing Meeting Productivity & Satisfaction. sponsored by Upstream Educational Services, Jon Udis, trainer, 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, \$125, Franklin Conference Center at the Howe Center, Rutland, contact jonudis@together.net or 229-4616

November 7 & 8
 Methamphetamine & Other Substance Abuse: Building a Collaborative Vermont Child Welfare Response, sponsored by VT Family Services Division (DCF), VT Dept of Health, Cortina Inn, Killington, contact Dawn O'Toole at dawn.otoole@ahs.state.vt.us – more details will be forthcoming.

December 20
Clinical Decision-Making for Child & Adolescent Behavioral Health Care.
 sponsored by Georgetown University Center for Child & Human Dev, National Technical Assistance Conf Call, FREE, 1:00 to 2:30 pm, http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/programs/ta_center/tacals2007.html for information & to register

Please note that the GAL Program Office will request scholarships for GALs who want to attend training opportunities with fees attached. Please contact the GAL Program Office to request a scholarship. Phone: 800-622-6359 Email: jud-vermontgal@state.vt.us

Local Courts Host GAL Appreciation Events All Over the State

Rutland County

Rutland County GALs were honored at an appreciation luncheon sponsored by Rutland District and Family Court staff and Judge Thomas Devine in July. Judge Devine praised the work of GALs, and presided over a swearing in ceremony for 4 new GALs. All GALs, including many Rutland attorneys

who volunteer as GALs in domestic custody cases, were presented with Certificates of Appreciation. Chief Justice Paul Reiber made a special guest appearance and spoke in praise of the GALs, court staff and Kristi Tolmer, the GAL project coordinator.

Windsor County

Windsor County held their annual GAL appreciation barbecue in July. It was also an opportunity for GALs to bid farewell to Judge Harold Eaton, who presided over Windsor Family Court for two consecutive years. Each GAL received a flower arrangement created by the Court Manager, Tari Scott.

Orange County

Orange County sponsored a luncheon and swearing in ceremony for GALs in July.

Windham County

The annual GAL Appreciation Luncheon was held in June.

Addison County

Addison County GALs attended an appreciation dinner at Mr. Ups Restaurant in August.

Brown Bag Lunch Topics: Suggestions for Local Monthly Meetings

Juvenile Inventory Stakeholder Meetings – Review the inventory results in your county and discuss the upcoming Juvenile Inventory Stakeholder meeting in your county and formulate proposals for the individual action plans to be developed by Juvenile Court stakeholders in your county. Discuss proposals that may impact on GALs.

Prevent Child Abuse Vermont – Prevent Child Abuse Vermont is interested in meeting with GALs around the state. Invite Prevent Child Abuse Vermont in your region to present to your GALs on the subject of Child Abuse in Vermont, and programs and services for prevention and treatment for families. Contact Desirah Bennett (dbennett@pcavt.org).

Training Opportunities – Lots of GALs attend training conferences around the state. Review the list of training opportunities from this newsletter and select those that look useful to the GALs in your county. You can also make arrangements for carpooling and request financial support for payment of fees from the sponsors through the GAL Program Office.





GAL
Guardian ad Litem
FOR CHILDREN

VERMONT GUARDIAN
AD LITEM PROGRAM

CASA is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Retired Judge David W. Soukup is the founder of CASA and has the following reflections about CASAs and Guardians ad Litem volunteers

Ina Hughes wrote a wonderful poem titled, "Prayer for Children" in which she tells us of two kinds of children. First, she talks about those who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions, who sleep with the dog and bury goldfish, who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money, who cover themselves with band-aids and sing off key, who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink, who slurp their soup. Then she describes those who never get dessert, and have no safe blankets to drag behind them, who watch their parents watch them die, who can't find any bread to steal, who don't have any rooms to clean up, whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser, whose monsters are real.

Over 30 years ago, while sitting as a judge in juvenile court, I realized that there was no one in the courtroom whose only job was to provide a voice for those children. Caseworkers have obligations to their agency, the parent and others. Lawyers cannot investigate the facts and advocate for the mental health and social needs of the child. Our court was a court of general jurisdiction, so when I was not sitting at juvenile court I was trying civil cases, often involving large amounts of money or important legal issues. I

would do the best job I could in deciding those cases and leave them at the courthouse when I went home. I wouldn't wake up at 4a.m. worrying about my decision.

While sitting at juvenile court, I never got a night's sleep without waking to wonder if at least one decision I made that day had been the best for a child. It struck me that it might be possible to investigate a child's case so they could provide a voice for the child in those proceedings, proceedings which could affect their whole lives.

I had my bailiff call four or five people in the community who might be resources in recruiting volunteers to ask if they would meet for a brown bag lunch at the juvenile court to discuss the idea. There were 50 people in the room when I walked in for that lunch. I thought, "This idea is going to work." It has. Tens of thousands of people like you, speaking up for hundreds of thousands of children, have proven that it does.

After I retired from the superior court bench, I became a volunteer in our program. It was an extraordinary experience. Both the hardest—and the best—thing I've ever done. But I realized that,

although I had slept better as a judge knowing that CASA volunteers were speaking up for the children who needed their voices, the volunteers were now up at 4am worrying about those kids.

You are to be commended for your extraordinary commitment to children and for your sleepless nights. When Aaron Rubin, a dear friend and CASA volunteer in Los Angeles, received accolades for his work he would say, "I really get uncomfortable with too much praise. When people say, "Bless you for the work you're doing," I say, 'Don't bless me. Get involved yourself or write a check."

Keep passing that work on for another 30 years.

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