

GUARDIANS AD LITEM: POSITIVE ACTION, POWERFUL RESULTS



Report to
Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter
and the 2nd Regular Session of
the 61st Idaho Legislature

IDAHO JUDICIARY

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Positive Action, Powerful Results

Guardians *ad Litem* (GALs), also known as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), provide community volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children pursuant to statute. The judge in a Child Protection Act (CPA) proceeding appoints a Guardian ad Litem volunteer to independently investigate the circumstances surrounding the child. After a thorough investigation, the GAL volunteer prepares a report outlining the history of the case, the services that are available for the child and family, and ultimately, makes a recommendation about what is in the best interests of the child. The judge uses this and other information to make an informed decision and create better outcomes for abused and/or neglected Idaho children.

Guardians *ad Litem*: Making an Impact

Since a GAL/CASA volunteer often has only a few cases, the volunteer is able to spend more time and energy on a case than other participants in the child welfare system. While the Department of Health and Welfare must coordinate efforts for parents, children, and family in a CPA proceeding, a volunteer is the only person in the courtroom solely advocating on the child's behalf. According to nationwide statistics, abused and neglected children and youth who have a caring GAL/CASA volunteer:

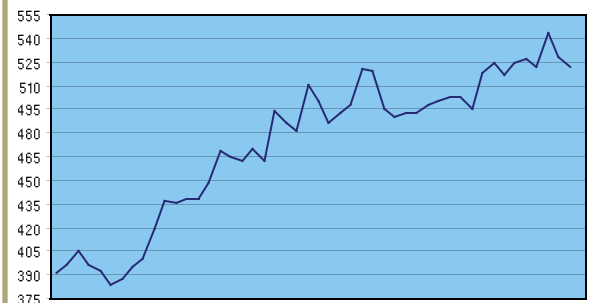
- Receive more court ordered services in the form of increased mental health services, educational outreach, and other support;
- Are half as likely to re-enter the child welfare system after reaching permanency;
- Are more likely to be adopted;
- Have improved outcomes in educational and mental health indicators; and
- Have more contact with a GAL/CASA volunteer than a child has with his/her attorney.

This Year's Accomplishments

The economic downturn has impacted everyone, but the mission and the goal of serving every abused or neglected child in Idaho with a caring GAL/CASA volunteer remains the same, despite fewer resources.

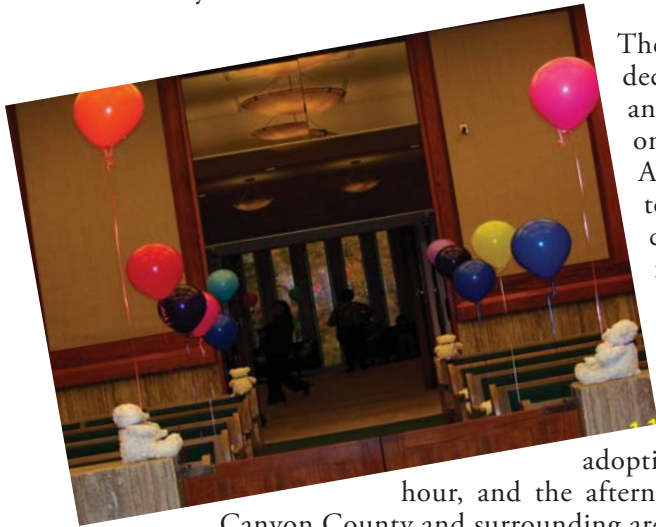
From FY2008 to FY2011, there was a 33.5% increase in the number of volunteers assigned to advocate for an abused and neglected child in foster care. The net increase in active volunteers resulted in over 323 more children served this year versus just three short years ago.

Number of Guardian ad Litem Volunteers
from
FY2008 to FY2011



In FY2011 those volunteers donated 28,140 hours to investigate, attend hearings, find community resources, meet with families, and make an impact in the lives of over 1,490 children.

Fall 2011 kicked off the ‘Raise Your Hand for a Child’ volunteer recruitment campaign. The GAL/CASA campaign was a focused media blitz over a three-month period. The campaign centered around a 30-second commercial that shares the mission and the need for more community volunteers and support. During the campaign, a TV commercial, radio spot, billboards, and bus stop placards were used to get the message out to the community.



hour, and the afternoon concluded with adoptions from Canyon County and surrounding areas.

The Idaho Supreme Court was decorated with balloons, teddy bears, and a traveling photographic exhibit on November 1, 2010 in honor of Adoption Day; a day the court set aside to recognize the importance of giving children permanent, safe and loving families through adoption. The morning kicked off with five Ada County adoptions. An open house event with a proclamation signing/reading and encouraging words from local dignitaries who support adoption efforts occurred during the lunch

The GAL/CASA programs have focused on providing community funders and stakeholders with accurate and timely data on not only aggregate biographical information, but also outcomes for the children served by a GAL/CASA volunteer. Through the previous year, data was migrated from an antiquated database that only reported basic demographic data, to a web based, secure statistical software that allows each GAL/CASA program to accurately gauge the impact of its GAL/CASA advocacy efforts through focused outcome data.

The second annual ‘No Forgotten Children’ event which honored GAL volunteers and increased community awareness was held in Pocatello on September 9, 2011. The event includes life-size cardboard cutouts of foster children which were placed along a busy downtown street in Pocatello. Each child holds a message to the community about foster care or foster youth. The event culminated in a luncheon honoring the more than 450 GAL volunteers that serve abused and neglected children in Idaho.



The Commitment of the Idaho Judiciary

As the Third Branch of Government, the Idaho Judiciary is committed to providing access to justice through the timely, fair, and impartial resolution of cases.

The Idaho Courts stand for:
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Fairness
Independence
Respect
Excellence
Innovation

The Idaho Courts strive to:

Provide Timely, Fair, Impartial Case Resolution

Ensure Access to Justice

Promote Effective, Innovative Services

Increase Public Trust and Confidence in Idaho Courts

Approved by the
 Supreme Court
 October 31, 2011