Our Mission
In 1983, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Office of Guardian ad Litem Services as a division of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts. Pursuant to G.S. 7B-601, when a petition alleging abuse or neglect of a juvenile is filed in district court, the judge appoints a volunteer GAL advocate and an attorney advocate to provide team representation to the child, who has full party status in trial and appellate proceedings. All GAL child advocates are trained, supervised, and supported by program staff in each county of the state. The collaborative model of GAL attorney advocates, volunteers, and staff ensures that all North Carolina children who are alleged by the Department of Social Services to have been abused or neglected receive GAL legal advocacy services.

The program recruits, screen, train and equips community volunteers to serve abused and neglected children by advocating for their best interests in court.

The role of Guardian ad Litem advocates is to:

- Fulfill state and federal statutory mandates to protect and promote the best interests of juveniles in abuse and neglect court proceedings
- Help the courts work efficiently toward safety and permanence for children
- Conduct independent investigations to determine the facts, needs of the child, and the resources appropriate to meet those needs
- Determine the wishes or expressed preferences of the child and report those to the court
- Provide a voice for abused and neglected children in every county of the state

Why Use Volunteers?
Guardian ad Litem volunteers provide an independent, unbiased voice for abused and neglected children. They are effective. Because they are unpaid, but focus on the child’s best interests, their position in court is unique. The model of co-appointing volunteers and attorneys to speak for abused and neglected children in court provides strong, competent advocacy for the children who need it.

PARTNERS
National CASA Association
N.C. Bar Association – Juvenile Justice and Children’s Rights Section
N.C. Child Fatality Prevention Team
N.C. Child Fatality Task Force
N.C. Collaborative for Children, Youth, and Families
N.C. Department of Health and Human Services
N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
N.C. Department of Public Instruction
N.C. Governor’s Crime Commission
N.C. Office of Indigent Defense Services
Strong Able Youth Speaking Out Inc. (SaySo)

PARTNER QUOTE
National CASA/GAL Association For Children
- Sally Erny, Deputy CEO
"The North Carolina GAL Program is certainly a network leader in programming, model and leadership for child advocacy programs across this country."
### OUR TEAM APPROACH

**Components**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>GAL staff recruit, train, and supervise volunteers. These roles, along with thorough screening and criminal record checks, help ensure the safety and best interests of child clients. Staff duties include ensuring quality representation for children and promoting positive community relationships to foster commitment to the program, while educating the public, maintaining a record keeping case management system, and developing and providing appropriate in-service training opportunities. Staff must have knowledge of volunteer administration, child development, juvenile court, applicable laws and statutes, program development, and evaluation techniques. They often serve on local interdisciplinary task forces and committees that affect the availability of services for GAL child clients.</td>
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<td>Attorneys</td>
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<td>GAL attorney advocates assure that abused and neglected children’s legal rights and best interests are protected in juvenile and neglected children's legal proceedings. These skilled attorneys collaborate with trained GAL volunteers and staff to ensure that the court has the needed facts and information to make decisions about children’s best interests and well-being. — Reginald O’Rourke, GAL Associate Counsel</td>
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<td>Volunteer Advocates</td>
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<td>Volunteer advocates are recruited, screened, interviewed, and provided 30 hours of initial training. At least twelve hours of in-service training are offered each year to maintain the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for the best interests of child clients. The state’s advocate volunteers are adults who come from diverse communities, cultures, and life and work experiences. It is estimated that on average, the volunteer advocates donated eight hours each month to perform their statutorily mandated duties. They visit child clients, conduct interviews, read reports, monitor court orders, collaborate with service providers, formulate fact-based, child-focused court reports with recommendations, and testify in court hearings. During COVID the in-person meetings shifted to virtual means to comply with CDC guidance. While GAL volunteer advocates are appointed to every case, the program does not yet have a volunteer advocate for every child. In those instances where no volunteer advocate is available, GAL staff are required to perform the volunteer advocate’s duties, limiting their ability to focus on their primary duties of recruitment, training, and supervision. Currently, 2,069 children need the services of a volunteer advocate.</td>
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**Be a voice for the children in our community**

- Volunteers are trained as child advocates for abused and neglected children
- Child advocates and attorneys work together to champion children’s needs in court
- Child advocates promote a safe and permanent home for children