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An Evaluation of the North Dakota Guardian ad Litem Project

Prepared for
The Decision-Making Leaders of the
The North Dakota Guardian ad Litem Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The North Dakota Guardian ad Litem Project

An early form of the North Dakota Guardian ad Litem (NDGAL) Project came into existence in 1986. However, during the initial 14 years, organizer Tara Muhlhauser, now Deputy Director of the Children and Family Services Division and Program Administrator for Child Protective Services, North Dakota Department of Human Services, worked informally with the North Dakota Supreme Court in envisioning a system for involving guardians ad litem (GALs) in child deprivation cases. By 2000 the groundwork had been laid for securing core funding to begin the NDGAL Project formally. Ms. Muhlhauser served as the first project director until January 2003. During her tenure the NDGAL infrastructure was formed based on pilot projects in Fargo and Grand

Forks; guardians ad litem were encoded in the North Dakota Century Code (Chapter 28-03); and the first staff was hired. Subsequently, the project expanded throughout the state.

Presently, under the direction of Mr. Brad Swenson with coordination of the GALs by Mr. Lanny Serrano, the Project lists 45 GALs across the state with representation in all Juvenile Court regions. The project is now funded with Federal Court Improvement grant money administered through the North Dakota Court Administrators Office.^(u)

North Dakota GALs are paid independent contractors working at an hourly rate. GALs have not been trained in law. They represent many professions. However, GALs do receive an initial 18-hour training and ongoing training is available.

The last initial training for new GALs occurred in Fall 2006. According to the "Training Agenda," the topics covered included: 1) history of the project; 2) duties of a GAL; 3) role/responsibilities of a GAL; 4) professionalism; 5) limits; 6) confidentiality; 7) skills, values, and attitudes; 8) child protection; 9) foster care; 10) introduction to the Juvenile Court; 11) the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA); 12) the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA); 12) domestic violence; and 13) substance abuse. Each GAL also received additional printed resources in the form of outlines, articles, and papers in a large ring-bound notebook. These materials addressed such topics as 1) "Guidelines for Being an Effective Witness"; 2) "Principles & Concepts that Guide CASA/GAL Volunteer Work"; and 3) "Confidentiality"; as well as issues involved in specific types of cases such as cultural competence and dealing with differences including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in foster care.

Ongoing GAL training takes the form of monthly regional meetings. At these sessions the GALs receive updates, discuss cases, and hear presentations from community representatives.

Historically, there have been no general conferences for this program, although some GALs have attended what they perceived to be GAL-relevant conferences at their own expense. The first statewide meeting for GALs is currently being planned for July 2007.

The NDGAL Project has undergone previous evaluation and study [a 2000 evaluation by the Child Welfare Research Bureau at the University

of North Dakota (UND) and a 2006 graduate student thesis by Dana L. Doan]. However, the UND Department of Social Work, which headquarters and administers the NDGAL Project, proposed additional evaluation in the *2006-2007 Statewide Guardian ad Litem Project Proposal for the North Dakota Supreme Court*. As stated in that proposal, "After the dramatic growth of the program, it is felt it would be appropriate to undergo the process of evaluation again" (p. 5). The proposal also reports that

The focus of the evaluation will be on the stakeholders' perceptions of the services provided by the independently contracted guardians ad litem. This will include both qualitative and quantitative data to assess general perceptions. A final document will be provided to appropriate stakeholders with suggestions for improvement noted (p. 8).

Purpose of this Evaluation

In planning meetings with evaluation team members, GAL Project administrators defined the purpose of this evaluation:

Based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative stakeholders' perception data, determine the 1) value and 2) effectiveness of the GAL Project and 3) the levels of stakeholder satisfaction with the project.

The core evaluation question posed informally by administrative stakeholders was "How are we doing, and what can we do better?"

METHODS

Evaluation Design

To guide this study, the evaluation team selected a standard formative, decision-oriented evaluation design, the CIPP Model (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985). This design focuses on gathering information for use by decision makers seeking to improve their established program. The components of interest in the CIPP Model are these:

Context evaluation which serves planning decisions addressing issues such as need for the program; mission and goals of the program; and policies, guidelines, and strategic plans of the program.

Input evaluation which serves structuring decisions addressing issues such as social, fiscal, and institutional support for the program; infrastructure; personnel; and other resources.

Process evaluation which serves implementing decisions addressing issues such as program procedures, program activities, and personnel training.

Product evaluation which serves recycling decisions addressing issues such as program attainments relative to need, mission, goals, and plans; program sustainability; program continuance with expansion or contraction; and program discontinuance with dissolution decisions.

Although the CIPP components will be referred to throughout the remaining sections of this report, the findings and recommendations are organized below according to the purposes of this evaluation: to determine value, effectiveness, and satisfaction.

Participants

This evaluation was based on survey research. Both quantitative and qualitative perception data were obtained via printed questionnaires and telephone interviews. Six groups of stakeholders participated in this evaluation:

- 6) Fifteen judges and judicial referees--often referred to as "judges" throughout the remainder of this report;
- 7) Eleven state's and defense attorneys--grouped together as "attorneys" throughout this report;
- 8) Sixty-five child welfare workers consisting primarily of county social workers but also including two foster care workers and one Social Services supervisor--collectively referred to hereafter as "child welfare workers" (CWWs);
- 9) Twenty-seven guardians ad litem--referred to as GALs;
- 10) Three current or former GAL Project administrators; and 6) two Supreme Court administrators--referred to hereafter collectively as "Project administrators."

Printed questionnaires were sent to and returned by the numbers and percentages of stakeholders in the four participant groups identified in Table 1.

Table 1. Numbers Of Questionnaires Sent and Returned with the Percentage Return Rate per Respondent Group.

Group	Questionnaires Sent (#)	Questionnaires Returned (#)	Return Rate (%)
CWWs	167	65	38.9
GALs	45	27	60.0
Judges	30	15	50.0
Attorneys	30	11	36.7
Totals	272	118	43.4

A few returned questionnaires were missing responses to some items. The data provided by these respondents were included. Six individuals returned questionnaires devoid of data. These individuals were not counted as respondents in Table 1.

One type of questionnaire response option was *Not applicable (N/A)*. The numbers of these responses were not reported; N/A responses were treated as missing data. Missing data and N/A responses explain the unequal numbers of respondents sometimes reported for successive items in the tables and figures.

The evaluators conducted telephone interviews with 32 stakeholders representing the six respondent groups including: three judges, four attorneys, ten CWWs; ten GALs; three project administrators, and two court administrators.

Both the questionnaire respondents and telephone interviewees were well-distributed across the state. Based on their demographic information, these participants represented jurisdictions ranging from 1) relatively large to small child deprivation caseloads, 2) large to small populations, and 3) large to small geographical areas. The tenure of the participants within their various professions also ranged from short durations of one to five years to long durations of more than 25 years. Overall, the evaluators were satisfied that the participants in this study

were appropriately representative of their respective professional peers.

Instruments

Two types of instruments were used in this evaluation. Written questionnaires were sent to participants via the postal service. A telephone protocol was administered orally by the evaluators.

Written Questionnaires

The evaluators developed a core questionnaire adapted from an instrument pilot-tested and administered by the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association in a 2003 study of "the impact of Court Appointed Special Advocates/ Guardians ad litem (CASA/GAL) volunteers and program activities on judicial decision-making, court processes and case outcomes" (<http://www.casanet.org/download/casa-surveys/CS-survey-final-report-09-03.pdf> accessed on February 20, 2007). For the present North Dakota study, the evaluators subsequently adapted their core questionnaire to create four forms that were each appropriate in content and wording for one of the four questionnaire respondent groups. The questionnaires addressed the following topics through a series of closed-ended and open-ended questions:

Demographic factors of respondents regarding their length of service in Juvenile or Family Court deprivation/abuse and neglect cases and the numbers of their recent and current cases;

The usefulness of the NDGAL Project;

Roles of GALs in supporting judicial decision-making and court processes;

Effectiveness of the NDGAL Project and GALs;

Satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and GALs; and

Suggestions for improving GALs' service to children and court decision-making.

The questionnaire sent to judges and judicial referees is provided in Appendix A. Its content is similar to that of the questionnaires sent to

attorneys and CWWs. The questionnaire for the GALs was worded for the GALs' perspective and included somewhat different demographic items (see Appendix B).

Telephone Interview Protocol

The interview protocol consisted, in part, of the following four guide questions:

How do GALs contribute to the welfare of the children they serve?

What are the greatest strengths of the GALs?

What could be changed to improve the NDGAL Project?

What else do you want to tell us about the NDGAL Project or GALs?

The evaluators also asked additional probe questions formulated to elicit either clarifications or expansions on the interviewee's feedback to open-ended questionnaire items or to their interview responses. Although the interview protocols were individualized, they elicited information directly relevant to the purpose of this evaluation.

Procedures

Data Collection

Prior to the data collection phase of this evaluation, NDGAL Project Director Brad Swenson contacted key representatives of the various respondent groups to inform them of the upcoming evaluation and to request maximum participation by their groups. Subsequently, Mr. Swenson provided the evaluators with contact information leading to the identification of names and mailing addresses of potential survey respondents. The survey mailings included a cover letter explaining the project, a copy of the questionnaire, and a postage-paid return envelope.

Procedurally, only individuals who agreed to be contacted were interviewed by telephone. These respondents identified themselves and provided contact information at the end of their written questionnaires. Not all individuals who agreed to be contacted were actually interviewed. The evaluators conducted interviews in the approximate order of the return of questionnaires. Interviewing continued until no new

themes were emerging in the participant feedback, and the categories of data supporting those themes were "saturated, that is so well defined that there was no point in adding further exemplars" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 343-344). Saturation was reached when "additional information was consistently redundant" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 62).

Data and Data Analyses

The quantitative data in this evaluation consisted of the respondents' ratings of the variables included in the closed-ended questionnaire items. The ratings were elicited by the following five-point scales anchored at points 1,3, and 5:

1 = Not very useful, 3 = Somewhat useful, 5 = Very useful;

1 = Not very much, 3 = Somewhat, 5 = A great deal;

1 = Almost never, 3 = Sometimes, 5 = Almost always;

1 = Strongly disagree, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Strongly agree;

1 = Not effective, 3 = Somewhat effective, 5 = Very effective; and

1 = Not satisfied, 3 = Somewhat satisfied, 5 = Very satisfied.

The quantitative data were analyzed for percentage of respondents selecting each numerical rating 1-5 and for mean ratings by all respondents combined for each item. In order to provide easily read and interpreted findings, only numbers and percentages of respondents and mean ratings by various respondent groups are provided in the results below. Additional statistics (e.g., standard deviations, ranges, confidence intervals, and tests of significant differences with associated degrees of freedom) are available upon request to an evaluation team member.

Qualitative data were obtained from two sources: telephone interviews and open-ended questionnaire items. There was a high level of overlap in the respondent feedback obtained by these two procedures. Therefore, the qualitative data from the two sources were combined for analysis and interpretation, and the evaluators conducted content analysis by employing a constant-comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 336-351).

Qualitative data are provided in this report as bulleted statements. In some cases to improve interpretation and readability, the evaluators have inserted bracketed phrases into quotations. In order to provide a document of reasonable length, the evaluators did not include all of the raw qualitative data in this report. The participant quotes chosen for inclusion met one of the following selection criteria: 1) represented frequently-provided stakeholder input; 2) provided a completely novel point of view; or 3) offered insights to inform administrative decision-making, that is, advanced a potential recommendation or solution.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Value of the NDGAL Project

One way of determining the value of a program is to establish its usefulness in actually meeting the needs it was designed to address. Hence, *value* is equated with level of *needs fulfillment*. In CASA's 2003 national study of the impact of court-appointed advocates and GALs, that association identified both stakeholder-related and court-related needs that also apply appropriately to the NDGAL Project. Therefore, the current evaluation included stakeholder appraisal of the usefulness of the NDGAL Project and the GALs themselves relative to needs associated with 1) different types and issues of deprivation/abuse and neglect cases and 2) various court processes and judicial decisions.

Value in Various Deprivation/Abuse and Neglect Cases

Using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = *Not very useful* through 3 = *Somewhat useful* to 5 = *Very useful*, the four questionnaire respondent groups rated the extent to which the NDGAL Project is useful for cases involving sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect. As shown in Table 2, approximately 90% of the respondents rated the GAL Project as being from *Somewhat useful* to *Very useful* (ratings = 3-5) with only one or two individuals of the approximate 100 respondents to these three items perceiving that the Project is *Not very useful* (rating = 1). About 25% of the respondents rated the NDGAL Project as *Somewhat useful* (rating = 3).

Table 3 below provides the mean ratings of the four stakeholder groups for the data shown in Table 2. The means ranged from 3.4-3.6 for the Child Welfare Workers (CWWs) to 4.3-4.4 for the GALs. On the average, all four groups of stakeholders perceived the project to be from

somewhat to very useful for child deprivation cases.

Figure 1 displays the mean data from Table 3 in graphic form for ease of visual comparison of the stakeholder groups' evaluation of NDGAL usefulness in three kinds of cases. That figure shows approximately a one-scale point differential (4.4 vs. 3.5) between the GALs' and the CWWs' mean ratings with judges' and attorneys' ratings falling about midway between.

Table 2. Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating Levels of Usefulness of the GAL Project for Child Abuse or Neglect Cases (1 = *Not very useful*; 3 = *Somewhat useful*; 5 = *Very useful*).

To what extent do you consider the NDGAL Project useful for child abuse or	1	2	3	4	5
Sexual abuse					
# of Respondents (N = 96)	1	10	27	32	26
% of Respondents	1.0	10.4	28.1	33.3	27
Physical abuse					
# of Respondents (N = 104)	2	9	24	39	30
% of Respondents	1.9	8.7	23.1	37.5	28
Neglect					
# of Respondents (N= 105)	1	10	24	35	35
% of Respondents	1.0	9.5	22.9	33.3	33.3

Table 3. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Usefulness of the GAL Project for Child Abuse or Neglect Cases (1 = *Not very useful*; 3 = *Somewhat useful*; 5 = *Very useful*).

To what extent do you consider the NDGAL Project useful for child abuse or	Judges	Attorneys	CWWs	GALs
Sexual abuse	3.8	3.8	3.4	4.3
Physical abuse	3.9	3.8	3.6	4.4
Neglect	4.0	4.0	3.6	4.4

Overall, the data in Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 1 support the following finding:

Finding #1

Each of the four groups of stakeholders perceived the NDGAL Project to be of value for child deprivation cases involving abuse and neglect with the level of perceived value being greatest for GALs and least for CWWs.

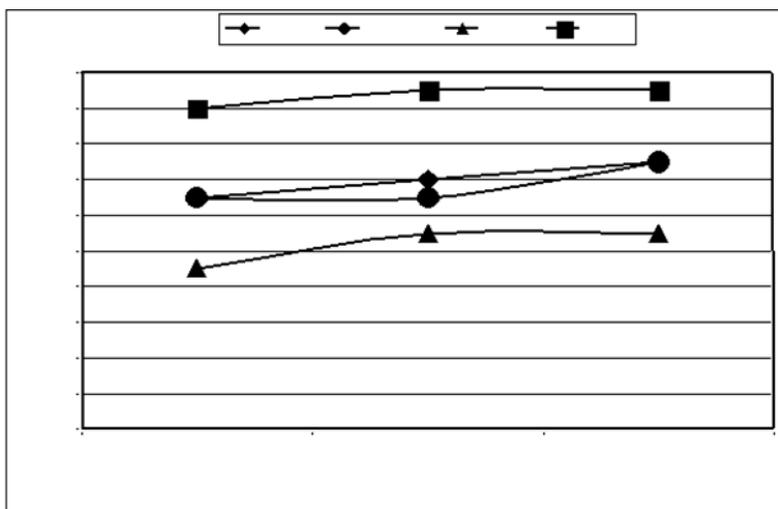


Figure 1. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Usefulness of the GAL Project for Child Abuse or Neglect Cases (1 = *Not very useful*; 3 = *Somewhat useful*; 5 = *Very useful*).

Value in Cases Involving Specific Issues

Using the same 5-point scale of *usefulness*, the respondents rated the value of the NDGAL Project relative to cases involving 1) conflicting case information/highly adversarial parties; 2) the status of a case in relation to ASFA; 3) issues related to reunification plans (e.g., disruption of plan, extra monitoring needed for reunification); and 4) concerns about the implementation of services. Approximately 80-90% of 102-105 respondents rated the NDGAL Project as being *Somewhat useful* to *Very useful* for cases involving these four issues. Tables 4 and 5 and Figure 2 show that the variable receiving the lowest (*Not very useful* = 1 and 2) ratings by 22% of the respondents was Project usefulness to the

status of a case in relation to ASFA. About 15-16% of the respondents rated Project usefulness as a 1 or 2 for issues related to reunification plans and concerns about the implementation of services.

Table 4. Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating Levels of Usefulness of

the GAL Project for Cases Involving Specific Issues (1 = *Not very useful*; 3 = *Somewhat useful*; 5 = *Very useful*).

To what extent do you consider the NDGAL Project useful to a case involving:	1	2	3	4	5
Conflicting case information/ highly adversarial parties					
# of Respondents (N = 105)	3	8	23	35	36
% of Respondents	2.9	7.6	21.9	33.3	34.3
The status of a case in relation to ASFA					
# of Respondents (N = 102)	5	17	36	24	20
% of Respondents	4.9	16.7	35.3	23.5	19.6
Issues related to reunification plans (e.g., disruption of plan, extra					
# of Respondents (N = 104)	5	11	23	34	31
% of Respondents	4.8	10.6	22.1	32.7	29.8
Concerns about the implementation of services					
# of Respondents (N = 104)	2	15	25	48	14
% of Respondents	1.9	14.4	24.0	46.2	13.5

Table 5. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Usefulness of the GAL Project for Cases Involving Specific Issues (1 = *Not very useful*; 3 = *Somewhat useful*; 5 = *Very useful*).

To what extent do you consider the NDGAL Project useful to a case involving:	Judges	Attorneys	CWWs	GALs

Conflicting case information/ highly adversarial parties	4.3	3.6	3.6	4.3
The status of a case in relation to ASFA	3.6	3.3	3.1	3.8
Issues related to reunification	4.2	3.5	3.4	4.3
Concerns about the implementation of services	4.4	3.3	3.2	3.9

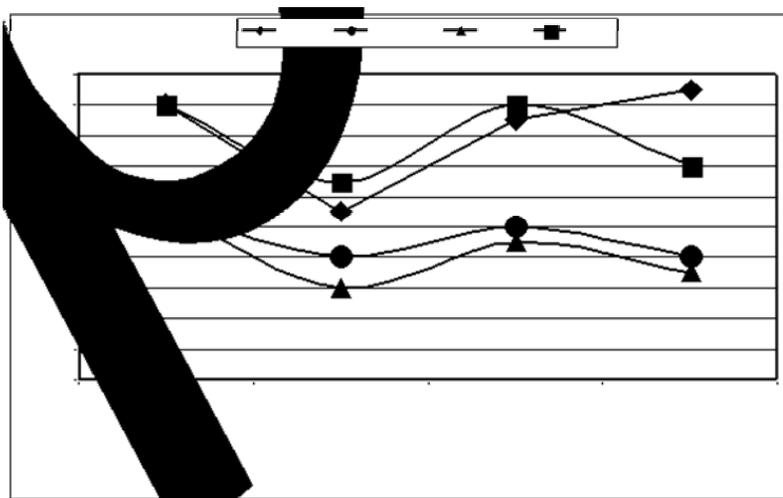


Figure 2. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Usefulness of the GAL Project for Cases Involving Specific Issues (1 = *Not very useful*; 3 = *Somewhat useful*; 5 = *Very useful*).

For cases with these specific issues, Table 5 and Figure 2 show higher mean ratings of usefulness by judges/judicial referees and GALs than by attorneys and CWWs. However, overall, the quantitative data in Tables 4 and 5 and Figure 2 support the following finding:

Finding #2

Each of the four groups of stakeholders perceived the NDGAL project to be of value in cases involving: 1) conflicting case information/highly adversarial parties; 2) the status of a case in relation to ASFA; 3) issues related to reunification plans; and 4) concerns about the implementation of services. Judges/judicial referees and GALs provided somewhat

higher ratings of usefulness than those offered by attorneys and CWWs

There was very little qualitative information addressing the usefulness of the Gal Project in cases involving these four issues. However, a CWW and a GAL provided their perceptions regarding cases involving adversarial parties and reunification plans. Their feedback is supportive of finding #2.

Parents often see the GAL as a "neutral" in an adversarial system, so they are less defensive and more open to discussion regarding case plans, role of a social worker, court procedure, etc.

The county is not ordered to do follow-up services, but being a GAL, I have been able to bring cases back to court and prevent the kids from being returned to the parents in dangerous situations.

Value of GALs' Input to Court Decisions

Using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = *Not very much* through 3 = *Somewhat* to 5 = *A great deal*, 97-104 respondents rated the extent to which input from GALs informs court processes and judicial decision-making in cases that involve the seven placement, service provision, visitation, and safety issues identified in Table 6. Approximately 75-95% of the respondents rated the extent of the impact of GALs' input as being *Somewhat* to *A great deal* for cases involving these seven issues. From Table 6 it appears that the issues on which GALs have relatively less impact (ratings = 1 or 2 by greater percentages of the respondents) include: location of placement rated low by 26%, frequency of visitation by family of origin (21%), safety of children/youth while in placement and after court dismissal (19%), restrictiveness of placement (15%), and service provision (15%).

It is noteworthy that the low ratings by 15% of the respondents evaluating the value of GAL input in informing the court on service provision is consistent with the finding in Table 5 of 15% of the respondents offering the same ratings for the usefulness of the NDGAL Project relative to concerns about the implementation of services.

Table 7 and Figure 3 reveal comparatively higher mean judges' ratings (Means = 3.8 to 4.2) of the value of GALs' input on these issues relative to the ratings of the other three groups (except for input on service provision).

The judge/judicial referee questionnaire included an item not asked of the other stakeholders; "How often do GAL recommendations become incorporated into the hearing's court order?" Using a scale ranging from 1 = *Almost never*; through 3 = *Sometimes* to 5 = *Almost always* to answer the question, the 15 respondents' generated a mean rating of 4.0. This finding again shows that the judges/judicial referees value the GAL Project and the GAL input for contributions that inform and impact court decisions.

Table 6. Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating the Extent to Which Input from GALs Informs Court Decisions on Issues of Placement, Service Provision, Visitation, And Safety (1 = *Not very much*; 3 = *Somewhat*; 5 = *A great deal*).

To what extent does input from GALs on the following issues inform Court	1	2	3	4	5
Placement stability and permanence					
# of Respondents (N = 104)	2	4	25	42	31
% of Respondents	1.9	3.8	24.0	40.4	29.8
Concurrent placement with other minor siblings					
# of Respondents (N = 100)	1	8	34	38	19
% of Respondents	1	8.0	34.0	38.0	19.0
Restrictiveness of placement					
# of Respondents (N = 98)	4	11	39	30	14
% of Respondents	4.1	11.2	39.8	30.6	14.3
Location of placement					
# of Respondents (N = 97)	8	17	35	26	11
% of Respondents	8.2	17.5	36.1	26.8	11.3
Service provision (e.g., physical health,					
# of Respondents (N = 102)	6	9	30	40	17
% of Respondents	5.9	8.8	29.4	39.2	16.7

Frequency of visitation by family of origin

of Respondents (N = 7 13 27 39 11
97)

% of Respondents 7.2 13.4 27.8 40.2 11.3

Safety of children/youth while in placement and after Court dismissal

of Respondents (N = 7 12 30 36 17
102)

% of Respondents 6.9 11.8 29.4 35.3 16.7

The qualitative data provide insight into the reasons for the participant ratings on these items evaluating the value of GALs' input to court decisions. For example, one attorney stated:

Their neutral investigation and recommendations give perspective and affirmation (at times) to petitioners and respondents.

Table 7. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating the Extent to Which Input from GALs Informs Court Decisions on Issues of Placement, Service Provision, Visitation, and Safety (1 = *Not very much*; 3 = *Somewhat*; 5 = *A great deal*).

To what extent does input Judges Attorneys CWWs GALs from GALs on the following issues inform Court

	Judges	Attorneys	CWWs	GALs
Placement stability and permanence	4.2	3.7	3.9	3.9
Concurrent placement with other minor siblings	4.1	3.6	3.5	3.8
Restrictiveness of placement	4.0	3.4	3.2	3.6
Location of placement	4.0	3.3	2.9	3.3
Service provision (e.g., physical health,	4.0	4.0	3.2	3.9
Frequency of visitation by family of origin	3.8	3.7	3.1	3.6
Safety of children/youth while in placement and after Court	4.0	3.7	3.2	3.7

Typical GAL comments supporting their positive impact on court decisions included:

The Court listens to our recommendations.

We provide information with regard to services that are available to the family that the court may not be aware of resulting in the possibility of services being court-ordered in the disposition.

GALs often can bring to the hearing concerns that have been expressed outside of court.

[GALs assure] that the Century Code is followed, especially if the attorney or judge is unfamiliar with Juvenile Law.

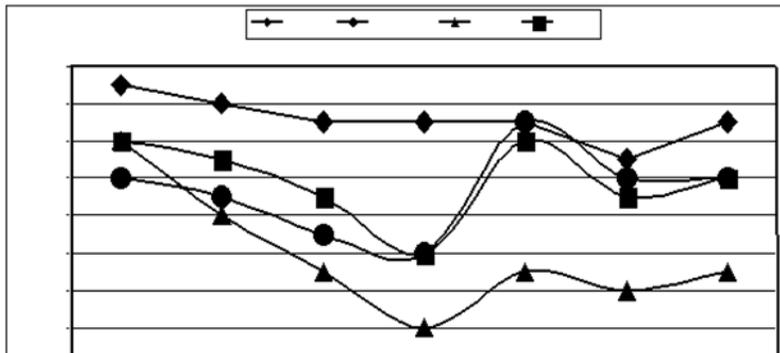
Checking to see if petitions are filed on time is part of it, too.

However, the following contrasting GAL statements illustrate the diversity of perceptions across the GALs:

I don't feel I ever have "a great deal" of influence on court decisions. Sometimes I feel neither the courts nor the social workers hold the GALs in very high esteem, some less than others, of course.

Sometimes we contribute minimally; Social Services and the court have made their decisions before we are able to provide recommendations. In other cases, we have a major impact.

The court listens to the GAL, but it is not always carried out by Social Services.



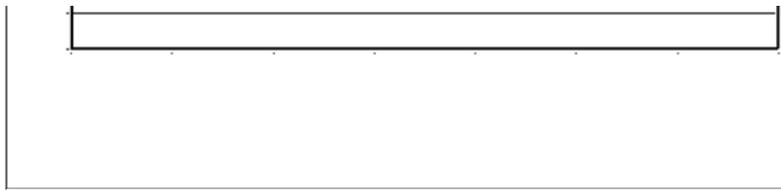


Figure 3. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating the Extent to Which Input from GALs Informs Court Decisions on Issues of Placement, Service Provision, Visitation, And Safety (1 = *Not very much*; 3 = *Somewhat*; 5 = *A great deal*).

Finding #2

Each of the four groups of stakeholders perceived the NDGAL project to be of value in cases involving: 1) conflicting case information/highly adversarial parties; 2) the status of a case in relation to ASFA; 3) issues related to reunification plans; and 4) concerns about the implementation of services. Judges/judicial referees and GALs provided somewhat higher ratings of usefulness than those offered by attorneys and CWWs

Finding #4

According to 20% or more of the respondents, the GALs have relatively less impact on decisions about 1) location of placement, 2) frequency of visitation by family of origin, and 3) safety of children/youth while in placement and after court dismissal.

Recommendation #1

That NDGAL Project decision makers explore this finding further to determine 1) the reasons for it, 2) the practical importance of it, and 3) any course of action to be taken.

Value of GALs' Knowledge, Information, and Service

Using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* through 3 = *Neutral* to 5 = *Strongly agree*, 115 respondents rated their levels of agreement with positive statements about GALs' knowledge, information, and service as shown in Tables 8 and 9 and Figure 4. Table 8 shows that about 70-85% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements with an additional 12-25% indicating their neutrality on these items. There were only three responses of *Strongly disagree* among the

345 ratings. To the more global third item, 85% of the respondents indicated their agreement (ratings = 4 or 5) that children and families are better served because of GALs' involvement.

Table 8. Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating Levels of Agreement with Selected Statements (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Neutral*; 5 = *Strongly agree*).

To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	1	2	3	4	5
The personal knowledge that GALs have about the children/youth in their					
# of Respondents (N= 115)	2	5	27	46	35
% of Respondents	1.7	4.3	23.5	40.0	30.4
The type and quality of information that GALs provide me is beneficial to					
# of Respondents (N = 115)	1	8	23	47	36
% of Respondents	.9	7.0	20.0	40.9	31.3
Children and families are better served because of GAL's involvement.					
# of Respondents (N = 115)	0	3	14	50	48
% of Respondents	0	2.6	12.2	43.5	41.7

Table 9. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Agreement with Selected Statements (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Neutral*; 5 = *Strongly agree*).

To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Judges	Attorneys	CWWs	GALs
The personal knowledge that GALs have about the children/				
children/	4.3	3.6	3.6	4.3
The type and quality of information that GALs provide	4.3	3.7	3.6	4.7

Children and families are better served because of GALs

4.7

4.1

4.0

4.6

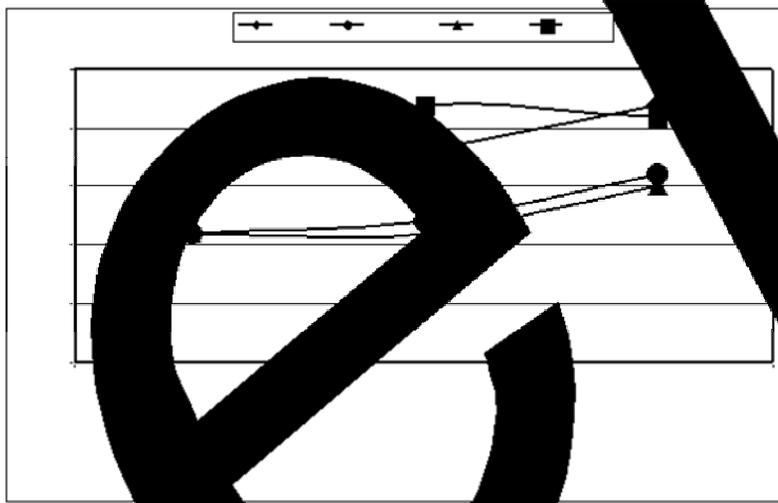


Figure 4. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Agreement with Selected Statements (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Neutral*; 5 = *Strongly agree*).

Table 9 and Figure 4 show that the judges'/judicial referees' and GALs' mean ratings of these three types of GAL contributions were consistently higher than the ratings of the attorneys and CWWs.

In summary, about 70% of the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the personal knowledge that GALs have about the children and youth and quality of information that GALs provide are beneficial to court-related decision-making. Further, 85% of participants indicated that children and families are better served because of GALs' involvement. Judges/judicial referees and GALs tended to be more in agreement with these statements than were attorneys and CWWs.

Judges/judicial referees and attorneys addressed the value of the GALs' knowledge, information, and service in such comments as these:

GALs have provided information that would otherwise probably not have been available.

Much depends on the individual GAL; some are clearly thorough and involved while others have a more perfunctory view of their role

involved, while GALs have a more perfunctory view of their role.

Independent investigation is very helpful.

Basically, a good GAL is indispensable in many ways; a poor one is an impediment.

The GALs' perceptions of the value of their personal knowledge about children/youth and about the type and quality of information that they provide was embodied in such comments as:

GALs provide extensive history of a family, such as if they have been in the system and through the court process before.

Our written reports for pre-trial are often used by attorneys for their cases.

GALs find out information not obtained by the county like finding children that could not be found by the county and following a child not having follow-up through County Social Services.

CWWs expressed widely differing perceptions of the GALs' contributions of knowledge and information:

I feel they do a great job. However, our court doesn't let the GALs talk much in court.

The GALs I've worked with gave clear, concise presentations on why a child should not return home. They had facts to support their recommendations.

GALs that are more educated could have more weight in court.

A GAL Project administrator summarized well the perceptions that children and families are better served because of the involvement of GALs:

I think it's good for the child or youth himself. GALs provide emotional support, and then the child knows somebody is there for him--assigned to him. It gives them the sense someone's looking out for them. It brings stability to the child emotionally. It's good for the rest of the family, too. It provides assurance that the right things are being done.

In summary, based on the data reported in this subsection on the value of

GALs' knowledge, information, and service to the decision-making of the four stakeholder groups, the evaluators found that:

Finding #5

There was a high level of stakeholder agreement that the personal knowledge that GALs have about children and youth and the quality of information that GALs provide are beneficial to court-related decision-making.

Finding #6

There was a high level of stakeholder agreement that children and families are better served because of GALs' involvement.

Finding #7

The levels of agreement of the judges'/judicial referees' and GALs' relative to the three types of GAL contributions in Findings #5 & #6 were consistently higher than the levels indicated by the attorneys and CWWs.

Summary and Conclusion

In this evaluation, the value of the NDGAL Project was equated with its usefulness in actually meeting the needs it was designed to address. CASA has identified both stakeholder-related and court-related needs associated with 1) different types and issues of deprivation/abuse and neglect cases and 2) various court processes and judicial decisions. In this study stakeholders evaluated the usefulness of the NDGAL Project and the GALs themselves relative to these stakeholder-related and court-related needs. Based on the evidence reported in this section on the value of the NDGAL Project, the evaluation team has concluded:

Conclusion #1

As measured against a criterion of needs fulfillment, the NDGAL Project and the GALs are making valuable contributions to meeting the needs associated with 1) different types and issues of deprivation/abuse and neglect cases and 2) various court processes and judicial decisions.

Effectiveness of the NDGAL Project

In accordance with the design selected for this evaluation, three components of the CIPP Model were applied to the following study of the effectiveness of the NDGAL Project: context evaluation, input (resource) evaluation, and process valuation (see p. 3 for definitions of these components).

One group of criteria commonly used in evaluating the context of a program is the extent to which the program 1) is meeting an identified need; 2) is pursuing a stated mission; and 3) is achieving needs-based, mission-driven goals. Further, the effectiveness of many programs is determined relative to the accomplishment of measurable objectives and the level of success in implementing objectives-oriented strategic and/or annual action plans. Finally, context evaluation appraises program implementation relative to policies and rules or guidelines that were formulated, adopted, and subsequently updated, as deemed appropriate, by the program's decision makers.

Need for Documentation of Project Contexts

Mission, Goals, and Related Contexts

Apparently, the NDGAL Project does not have a written statement of its mission and goals. Further, the Project does not operate on the basis of written objectives, a strategic plan (except within the 1996 proposal seeking funding), or policies and guidelines. There are apparently no procedures in place for ongoing personnel evaluation of the Project director, Project coordinator, or the GALs. These types of contextual infrastructure have two crucial functions: 1) they provide benchmarks against which to evaluate a project to generate evidence-based support for funding, publicity, advertising, and other purposes; and 2) they serve as the basis for planning decisions, structuring decisions, implementing decisions, and recycling decisions.

From a review of training materials and analyses of stakeholders' perceptions, the present evaluators have determined that the Project functions, in general, in accordance with the mission and goals of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA), together with its state and local members. The CASA mission is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so that they can thrive in safe, permanent homes. As stated by CASA,

child outcome goals reflect what the program ultimately hopes to achieve for the children they are serving. These goals are considered, in general, to be what is in 'the best interest of the child.' Child outcome goals focus on the placement of children in safe, permanent family homes. Outcome goals are written based on the following beliefs:

Children should be safe while in placement and after court dismissal.

Children should live in permanent, safe, family homes.

Children should spend the least amount of time under court jurisdiction as possible ([Http://www.Casanet.Org/Program-Management/Evaluation/Casa-Eff-Manual-1.Htm](http://www.Casanet.Org/Program-Management/Evaluation/Casa-Eff-Manual-1.Htm) accessed on February 20, 2007).

Policies and Guidelines

Participant feedback included evidence of the need for formalized NDGAL Project policies and guidelines. Administrators and GALs stated:

There isn't a court rule for guardians, there should be something that sets out responsibilities, on-going training, requirements for formal training. Should be more structured, and more consistent. Rules change; they need to stay current.

Minnesota has a contract with the GALs that spells out expectations. It is formalized. The contract firms up the rules.

We have a well-prepared cadre, I feel good about their skills and experience. They are handicapped administratively in how we've allowed them to work. We need to do a lot of work with infrastructure development--formalizing rules and policies.

The Supreme Court should set policies, procedures, and expectations. The NDGAL Project was a pilot project, now it's statewide, but the formalization hasn't been done.

We need to issue reports to the public so they appreciate what GALs do. Talk about the role GALs have, helping the Child Welfare System accomplish goals. GALs need support and encouragement from the

accomplish goals. GALs need support and encouragement from the public.

Each judicial district is different in terms of policies and even terminology. I would like to have more training, communication, or something to "get us all on the same page."

Roles and Expectations for GALs

This evaluation has revealed among all participant stakeholder groups differences in perceptions of the roles and non-roles of GALs. These perceptions have resulted in discrepant expectations for the GALs and some depreciation, especially among the attorneys and CWWs, of the value and effectiveness of the NDGAL Project and of the GALs. Such stakeholder perceptions are evidenced in the following data.

Relative to the roles of the GALs, one administrator succinctly summarized stating:

GALs speak as an impartial person without the bias or agency policy or agency dictates. They are to come to the case as neutral, detached, and independent. It is their responsibility to give the court their expertise, based on their knowledge of child development and child welfare, but also on their knowledge of the individual child's need for safety, permanency, and well-being. Their role is to speak as an advocate for the child to the court.

However, the following feedback illustrates the varying roles and expectations that stakeholders perceive as the work of the GALs. Project administrators stated:

They have multiple roles: 1) being a voice for the child, speaking as an advocate; 2) being a facilitator, gathering agencies together, facilitating dialog so that as families work with multiple systems everyone is on the same page, and everyone is moving; 3) being a monitor of both parents and agencies; 4) speaking in court, in meetings, at planning sessions, at times that treatment plans are put together, visitations, any time the children's issues are being heard and addressed. Overall, their role is to be vocal in all these different kinds of areas.

Last year there was a change in Termination of Parental Rights. Guardians were not trained or involved in those termination cases previously, because attorneys handled those situations. Last year the

previously, because attorneys handled those situations. Last year the guardians were charged with being involved in those situations. This is a very crucial time for the child's advocate to be absolutely clear in their role, to have the "moxie" to carry it out skillfully, and to assure that children receive a timely, permanent relationship.

One expectation of a judge/judicial referee was stated in this way:

My main complaint is that the guardians see the lack of compliance with a court order FIRST. They do minimal to bring it back to court's attention. Any party can return the case to court for non-compliance; the GALs have a responsibility to return a case. They worry about damaging their relationship with the other parties, but their priority is to the child. I learn about the non-compliance months later; I should have heard right away.

The following attorney and CWW statements reveal directly or indirectly these respondents' expectations of GALs:

The most valued traits a guardian can have are:

1. Speak with authority during court proceedings.
2. Convey an air of professionalism.
3. Don't interact with child in an all "warm and fuzzy" attitude.
4. Don't make false promises as to what is going to happen in court.

The worst shortcomings are:

1. GALs can be too entwined with the larger family--parents, aunts, extended family to the point that they lose perspective of serving the child. They make judgments in the family's interest rather than an independent, objective personally-based statement of what the child needs. (Not what the child wants, but that which is in the child's best interest)
2. Sometimes they get to looking out for the family, and that's not the role of the GAL. That's the role of their informal support system. The GAL should be providing a formal support primarily for the child, only secondarily for the family.

3. When GALs haven't clarified for the family what they [the GAL] do. The guardian must clarify to parents and family the guardian's role. In my experience the family and child confuse the guardians with the social workers in terms of their roles. The family and child confuse the guardian's role as being a FAMILY advocate. Guardians are losing sight of the child's best interest.

4. That guardians don't come to court with written information for the family. It should include the name and contact info for the GAL and the role, duty, and responsibility of a GAL. Clarify an additional note to the parents what they can expect from the GAL in the future. There should be two copies; one copy to the family, one copy retained by the guardian as a record.

Independent decisions are extremely important. It is very important that the GAL state clearly that their first obligation is to the child. If there is conflict between that obligation and the family's wishes, they will fulfill their obligation to the child.

At times the GALs trust Social Services records that are not always accurate. Whenever I have pointed out a concern with Social Services, the GAL has always done more investigation on the issue to be certain of the actual situation. Social services has a tendency to think opinion is fact, and the GALs need to watch for that.

Ensure that attorneys and judges recognize the importance of their [the GALs'] role in the process and routinely ask for input.

[GALs] Get your facts straight, be more appropriate at meetings (i.e., act professional), less judgmental and less "case managing." Be more aware of your role; you're not the social worker.

GALs need to remember they are not the child's social worker nor the family's social worker.

Stakeholders even suggested that the role of the GALs could be expanded:

I believe GALs could be useful in custody cases not involved with Social Services. Judges have expressed a desire to have us help them with cases, much as we do in deprivation cases and as of now, there is nothing in the Century Code to allow this.

I think the family courts could use something like the GALs. They have custody investigators or attorney GALs. Sometimes a family having a dispute doesn't need a full investigation at \$2000. A GAL could do some of these cases for much less money. Judges are seeing what the GALs can do with our current cases, and they want it in other cases.

There may be other matters the GALs could handle.

As a result of this context evaluation, the evaluators have advanced the following finding and recommendation:

Finding #8

Apparently, the NDGAL Project does not have written statements of mission, goals, objectives, a strategic plan, policies and guidelines, and procedures for ongoing personnel evaluation.

Recommendation #2

That the NDGAL decision-making leaders formulate, document, and disseminate among stakeholders the following infrastructure as a context for project management and evaluation:

- An NDGAL Project mission statement;
- Lists of Project goals and measurable objectives with an associated strategic plan;
- A policy manual and associated guidelines that address, but are not limited to: 1) the roles and expectations for GALs, 2) the non-roles and non-expectations for GALs, 3) ongoing personnel and project evaluation, and 4) periodic assessment of these contextual components for their relevance and currency.

To study further the effectiveness of the NDGAL Project, the evaluators applied input evaluation to serve structuring decisions. In the following sections the evaluators report 1) their own feedback regarding the identity of the NDGAL decision-making leadership and 2) stakeholders' appraisal of Project resources including personnel, finances, GAL training, and project recordkeeping.

Need to Identify the Project Decision-Making Leadership

The evaluators have not found Project documentation nor other formal

statements that identify the Project's primary decision-making leadership or the existence of an advisory or oversight committee or board. The decision-making roles of the Project Director, Project Coordinator, UND Department of Social Work Chairperson, and Officials in the Court Administrators Office are unclear and seemingly unspecified. Therefore, we offer the following finding and recommendation:

Finding #9

There is apparently no Project documentation that identifies the existence or identity of the Project's decision-making or advisory individual or group.

Recommendation #3

That the individuals or groups currently responsible for Project decision-making, advisement, and/or oversight take action to formalize, document, and appropriately disseminate their identity, the nature and extent of their Project responsibilities, operational procedures, and contact information.

This recommendation has implications not only for the operation of the Project but also for the purposes of public access to the formally-designated representation of the Project.

Personnel Resources

Although personnel evaluation was not an intended or implied part of this study, some stakeholders offered input that they asked be conveyed in this report:

Things are much better now than three years ago when I got here. I think that's largely due to the communication and capabilities of the new director. Brad is very available and wants to do a good job.

Brad does a very good job. He, like the rest of us, needs positive reinforcement. Can you put this in your evaluation?

Stakeholder satisfaction and appreciation for the performance of Project administrators was embodied in feedback such as the following provided by the GALs:

I enjoy that Brad [Swenson] and Lanny [Serrano] don't micromanage us.

They're there, but they're not interfering. I really enjoy working with them.

Brad is doing a great job so my comments about weaknesses are not a reflection on him.

Brad is helping us move forward, but we have a ways to go.

Attorneys and CWWs did not seem to have an experiential base from which to provide feedback about the Project leadership. However, other administrators and judges/judicial referees stated:

Right now, they [Brad Swenson and Lanny Serrano] do good work, and everybody acknowledges that. But there needs to be

I think everybody's satisfied with the leaders, but I know there is interest in expanding the leadership role of the director.

Brad does good work, but my concerns are about

Project Directorship

The issue that emerged about the Project directorship was expansion of the director's roles to include: 1) representation and promotion of the Project with other organizations and state agencies; 2) data analysis and research on GAL Project effectiveness and impact; and 3) fund raising for special projects. Stakeholders from the "administrator group" provided the input on this issue:

The director needs to be a player in the state child welfare circles. Brad needs to be more available and have time to be front and center at every meeting and roundtable within the child welfare system and within the ND Supreme Court administrative community. The NDGAL Project is seen as secondary, mostly because they're off doing their good work. So nobody thinks about them during policy making and planning at the state level.

The director needs to be looking at all the data that the Project is producing to show outcomes of the GAL Project and compare them to the data outcomes needed in the Child Welfare world.

The Project has no data infrastructure to show whether it is actually

effective or not. What are we doing well? How do we get better outcomes for kids? I know anecdotally that the guardians have a huge role, but I want to see the data.

The Director should have the support to go out and be looking for additional funding for special projects, special training sessions, and special pilot studies.

Based on the foregoing input evaluation, the evaluators offer the following finding and recommendation:

Finding #10

Relative to administrative Project personnel, there is a high level of satisfaction with the performance of individuals. However, there are concerns that to strengthen and improve the Project leadership, roles of the director need to expand in the following areas: 1) representation and promotion of the Project with other organizations and state agencies; 2) data analysis and research on GAL Project effectiveness and impact; and 3) fund raising for special projects.

Recommendation #4

That NDGAL Project decision makers 1) establish the desired target roles and responsibilities of the Project director; 2) determine the nature of the director's current workload; 3) analyze and resolve discrepancies, as reasonable within the limits of actual and potential Project resources; and 4) establish evaluation procedures for the directorship.

Number of GALs

The stakeholders raised two issues involving the GALs as a Project resource: the number of Gals and the length of their service on individual cases.

The judges/judicial referees were asked to indicate the level of their agreement with an item, "There are sufficient GALs to meet my caseload." Only 13 individuals responded to this item. None strongly disagreed, but two disagreed. Two indicated their neutrality; seven agreed; and two strongly agreed. The two judicial respondents and a CWW who wrote about a need for additional GALs stated:

There is no recruiting of new GALs, though I've had lip service about recruiting more. There isn't one in my county. The closest one is approximately 30 miles away. Most of them have to travel a long way to get to my court. They get paid travel time so it would cost less to have some locally, even if occasionally there is a conflict of interest.

We also need more GALs to reduce travel time and expenses. Too few are used too frequently.

We need more GALs! We only have one in our area, and I believe he occasionally can be overwhelmed and confused when multiple referrals come at once.

Addressing an ethnicity/cultural concern, two judicial officers stated that:

We need Native American GALs who are familiar with active efforts to serve Native children and who have cultural sensitivity to our North Dakota Tribes.

We need Native American guardians. There is little or no effort to recruit them. Native American guardians would be useful across the state. Guardians with cultural sensitivity could be utilized across the state.

Two CWWs also addressed this need:

About 25% of the kids are from minority groups. We need some minority GALs!

I think GALs are culturally sensitive, but it would be good to recruit Native GALs, and I even have a name that I'll pass on to Lanny.

Duration of GAL Appointments

Participants expressed much interest in and concern about the duration of the GALs' services on cases. For some respondents the issue is a question of whether some cases are being appropriately monitored. The data reveal inconsistent preferences, expectations, and practices across the Project. Only representative quotes are provided below because of the extensiveness and the redundancy in the feedback.

GALs are appointed initially for adjudication and disposition of the initial full hearing of the child. After that point in time, the Guardian is taken off

the case, but somewhere 9-10 months later, if the child is still in foster care, that guardian or another is assigned to the child's case for the next court hearing. There is a gap there. While the child is in foster care, during that gap, it is absolutely essential that we have a GAL to speak for the child's best interest. We need the GALs to monitor, to facilitate, to advocate for the safety, permanency, and well being of that child. In the best and ideal world, we've got case managers that would do this. For a lot of reasons, the case managers don't recognize the need, or don't have the time, whatever it might be. The GAL is our assurance that those best interest needs are being addressed.

We can't afford to monitor all cases. We have to decide which cases the extended monitoring would be best used on. Primarily it is a financial dilemma. It's not that we don't want them to do follow-up; we just can't afford it.

Guardians should stay on the case. The court case comes up a year later, and you have to backtrack and re-research the case. They aren't saving money by taking the GAL off of the case, and the kids could use the advocacy in the meantime. I ask to stay on the case and monitor it. One judge wouldn't approve it, unless there are extraordinary circumstances, but other judges approve extra time.

When the guardians do not continue with the case, then when I want to consult with them to get their opinions, I have to break confidentiality if they aren't in that official role of GAL.

The judge assigns the guardian for a certain period. After the hearing, my job is done. No monitoring. Different judges define that term of service differently. I want more long-term contact to ascertain progress--to make sure things are going the way they should be. In some cases long term monitoring isn't needed. Here, we ask the State's Attorney to request a longer term of service.

I have a difficult case that hasn't even gotten to court yet, and I've got nearly 15 hours already. We should have the freedom to invest the time we feel is needed. I think the GAL should stay involved until the GAL decides involvement isn't needed any more. The decision to continue monitoring should be made by the GAL not the judge.

The Judge appoints me and tells me "I'm on the case until it's resolved." I know in six months or a year later, I won't have to spend a bunch of

nours getting up to speed. It's a matter of cost effectiveness.

Monitoring after the court decision is case-by-case--depending on whether the case is likely to continue. It's more cost effective to let us monitor than to play catch-up later.

I think that we could better serve children by staying involved in the cases past disposition. We often get re-assigned to a case weeks/months later, and it takes a lot of time and effort to update information and re-assess the status of a case.

I feel it is more effective to stay on cases after the county gets custody to monitor and advocate for permanency for the children.

Used to be a GAL was appointed once a kid was in the system. Then when the court order came down, the GAL was done. Now GALs can continue to monitor at the discretion of the judge, but here we aren't doing this. It costs too much. If a guardian stays involved to monitor, even if they just check on things one-two hours a month, is that more cost effective than to be re-assigned during a permanency hearing? Is it in the child's best interest to have them stay involved?

Stakeholder feedback supports the following findings and recommendation:

Finding #11

The data do not clearly support the need for additional GALs except for the concern that Native American GALs are needed in some areas of the State.

Finding #12

The data reveal inconsistent preferences, expectations, and practices across the Project relative to the duration of the GALs' service on cases raising concerns about whether cases are being consistently, appropriately, and economically monitored.

Recommendation #5

That the NDGAL decision-making leaders 1) formulate, document, and disseminate a Project policy regarding duration of GALs' service on cases including procedures for appeal and/or evaluation; and 2) adopt

cases including procedures for appeal and/or exclusion, and 2) adopt procedures for determining the impact of the policy on "children's best interests" and Project funding.

Fiscal Resources

Relative to the fiscal resources of the NDGAL Project, the key stakeholder concerns were 1) funding for the project; 2) administrative costs of the Project; 3) the limit on the number of billable hours; and 4) reimbursement for work-related expenses incurred by the GALs.

Administrators and a judge addressed project funding and administrative costs:

Systemically we have a couple of challenges. The Project is greatly under-funded and understaffed. It's run on a shoestring.

I'm concerned about the cost of administration. The grant money hasn't increased, but salaries and everything else have. It's already costing more than what the grant money provided. It's being supplemented by the general fund, but this needs to be looked at. The money has to come from somewhere.

I'm concerned about the financial aspect. This is all funded by a Federal Court Improvement Grant. But they spend 130% just to administer the program. That doesn't include the pay of the guardians, which comes out of the General Fund. They get \$100,000, and we still have to go to the legislature to get General Fund money for the remaining 30%.

GALs and CWWs advanced their concerns about the limit on the number of billable hours and unreimbursed expenses for GALs:

I would never be able to bill for all the clock hours I devote to each case. As it is, I seem to almost always exceed the number allotted for each case.

Regarding the clock hours allowed per case, that's a problem. It varies so much as to number of hearings involved, number of children in the family, geographic area and distances. The system really needs to be more flexible.

GALs need to be paid more. There is one raise after three years, and then no more. There are many things you don't bill for--phone calls, mail

things more. There are many things you don't bill for -- phone calls, mail and, travel--but they all add up.

One of our GAL's complaints is that she doesn't get reimbursed for travel to see the people involved in the case--the children, parents, etc.

Recordkeeping

Although there was little discussion of recordkeeping, the following input offered by administrators merits consideration.

Another thing is just the way we keep records. A lot of it is handwritten in 3-ring binders. It's cumbersome. Timesheets and other administrative statistical data gathering have gotten better, but there's still room for improvement.

The way we get information from the guardians is very time consuming. If it were done as part of a software program, it would be easier to develop the statistics that the Administration Office needs.

Technologically, the Project is way behind. If the data could be recorded and accessed better electronically, it could be better used to determine project effectiveness to support grant requests.

Finding #13

Non-personnel resource issues addressed by stakeholders included: 1) funding for the project; 2) administrative costs of the Project; 3) the limit on the number of billable hours; 4) reimbursement for work-related expenses incurred by the GALs; and 4) non-electronic data recording and analysis.

Recommendation #6

That the NDGAL Project decision-making leaders continue to seek increasing fiscal support for the Project from both traditional sources as well as new sources to supplement the traditional sources (e.g., benefactors, sale of educational services, and interagency cost-sharing).

Effectiveness of the GALs

In general, process evaluation addresses issues such as program procedures, program activities, and personnel training. In this study the

processes, program activities, and personnel training in the study, the two main process-related topics were effectiveness of the GALs and the GAL training. In this section on the effectiveness of the GALs, three areas of GAL performance and activity are evaluated: 1) GALs' understandings and work performance; 2) GALs' contacting and interviewing various parties; and 3) GALs' case-related activities.

GALs' Understandings and Work Performance

The four questionnaire respondent groups used a Likert scale-- 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Agree*, 5 = *Strongly agree* to indicate their level of agreement with statements about the six types of GAL understanding and work performance presented in Table 10. From 77-88% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that GALs understand the Court and Child Welfare Systems, carry out their work professionally and objectively, ask pertinent questions, and make appropriate recommendations. The highest percentages of disagreement plus neutrality ratings combined were 23% on the items about GALs' understanding of the Child Welfare System and their objectivity in carrying out their work.

Table 10. Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating Levels of Agreement with Selected Statements about the Understanding and Activities of GALs (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Neutral*; 5 = *Strongly agree*).

To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the	1	2	3	4	5
GALs understand the court system.					
# of Respondents (N = 116)	0	3	15	71	27
% of Respondents	0	2.6	12.9	61.2	23.3
GALs understand the child welfare system.					
# of Respondents (N = 115)	0	4	22	63	26
% of Respondents	0	3.5	19.1	54.8	22.6
GALs carry out their work professionally.					
# of Respondents (N = 116)	0	5	8	58	45

% of Respondents	0	4.3	6.9	50.0	38.8
GALs carry out their work objectively.					
# of Respondents (N = 115)	0	10	17	54	34
% of Respondents	0	8.7	14.8	47.0	29.6
GALs ask pertinent questions.					
# of Respondents (N = 116)	0	3	12	61	40
% of Respondents	0	2.6	10.3	52.6	34.5
GALs make appropriate recommendations.					
# of Respondents (N = 113)	0	1	18	55	39
% of Respondents	0	.9	15.9	48.7	34.5

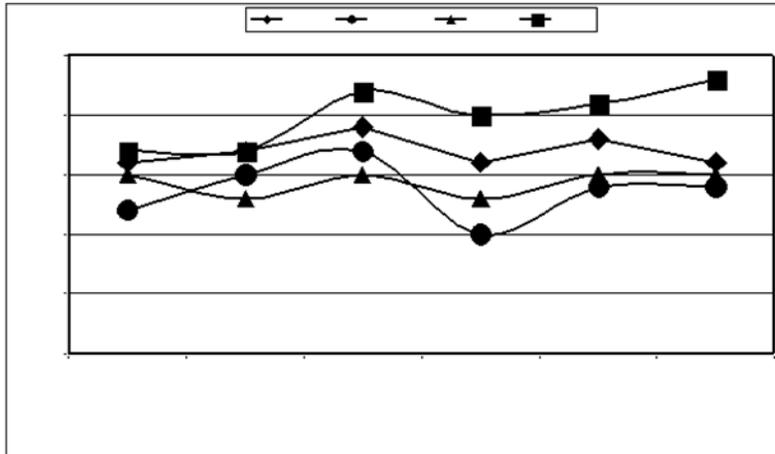
In Table 11 a mean of 3.5 or higher is a measure of agreement with an item. The mean ratings for all groups ranged from 3.5 to 4.0. As shown in Figure 5, the attorney's and CWW's mean ratings were relatively lower than those of the GALs and judges.

The content of the stakeholder feedback quoted in this section was generally reported by only one to three individuals about one or two GALs. However, the data address issues and concerns of importance to the long-term quality and effectiveness of the NDGAL Project. Further, appropriate administrative actions may be elicited by such findings (e.g., topics may be noted for future training sessions or the bases for routine personnel performance evaluation may be discovered).

Table 11. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Agreement with Selected Statements about the Understanding and Activities of GALs (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Neutral*; 5 = *Strongly agree*).

To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the	Judges	Attorneys	CWWs	GALs
GALs understand the court	4.1	3.7	4.0	4.2
GALs understand the child	4.2	4.0	3.8	4.2

GALs carry out their work	4.4	4.2	4.0	4.7
GALs carry out their work	4.1	3.5	3.8	4.5
GALs ask pertinent questions.	4.3	3.9	4.0	4.6
GALs make appropriate	4.1	3.9	4.0	4.8



Figure

5. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Agreement with Selected Statements about the Understanding and Activities of GALs

(1 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Neutral*; 5 = *Strongly agree*).

Some respondents highlighted the difficulty of providing perception data that could be generalized to an entire group:

This survey was difficult to complete as the capabilities and areas of strength vary greatly from one GAL to the next. We have a few GALs that are not practicing healthy boundaries with families, are not presenting themselves professionally, and are simply regurgitating the information they read from the CPS and wrap around files. Other GALs are very professional, maintain appropriate boundaries, and meet with family members and collaterals extensively and, therefore, provide additional information that helps in providing services to the families.

Have sometimes found GALs (not all) to be very direct to the point of upsetting a child/family, making the process difficult, almost to the point of antagonism

It varies greatly depending on which GAL is assigned to the case. I enjoy working with many of the GALs who come prepared knowing the case. Some GALs appear to be unprepared and not having met the child. Due to my job roles and responsibilities, I rarely see a GAL report.

Some GALs are over-involved, others are scattered and under-involved.

Our main GAL has a great relationship with all parties. Another GAL kind of makes up her mind before she has any input, before she talks with the kids... We actually had a difficult case where we had to ask her to defer to the other GAL.

Nonetheless, the qualitative data offered insight into some of the participant's reasons for their ratings. Regarding the GALs' understanding of the court system, CWWs offered their perceptions:

[GALs need to] learn the Child Welfare System better. One GAL always gives me the same statement each time she's assigned to a foster care child: "This child can never go home." This statement tells me the GAL does not understand the reunification process. GALs need to understand "reasonable efforts" and not offer TPR right away.

One GAL in particular does not understand the Child Welfare System and the role and responsibilities of Social Services. Before she's even met with any of the family, she says that parental rights need to be terminated. This is not helpful to anyone and is surely a very serious judgment to make about a child/family you've just been assigned to.

Respondents offered the following feedback relative to GALs' carrying out their work professionally.

I take confidentiality seriously. Living in the community, I hear things. Things get "chatty," and people know too much that they shouldn't know. Perhaps the GALs are leaking info; perhaps it's someone else. We have to be more careful about what is said, and where it's said. Don't do business at a ball game or cafeteria.

Not be so gossipy; stick to just the case.

Respondent reactions to "GALs carry out their work objectively" included the following comments by attorneys:

included the following comments by attorneys.

I feel that on some occasions, the GAL appears to be just an extension of Social Services and may be too influenced by the Social Services case worker. Maintaining an objective point of view is important in every case.

They always seem to be aligned with social services. They need to be more neutral in the process. Their reports often parrot the Social Services report and don't include a lot of independent thought or investigation. I never look at them as a potential source of information for me as the defense attorney.

Their initial thought is always removal. Perhaps a more open-minded approach should be championed.

On rare occasions a very few GALs have become "vested" in the outcome, thereby being an impediment, or (even worse) becoming still another adversary.

Most GALs in our area of the state are very judgmental against parents.

CWWs added:

They need to gather objective information from many sources in contact with the child.

Not to get emotionally involved. Sometimes it seems they are wanting the kids to remain with the foster parents because they have a close relationship with those foster parents. We have to go by minimal standards when reuniting a child with their parents.

Some GALs seem to favor or be more involved in one case over another--there is more contact, stronger advocacy, more recommendations.

Although feedback already discussed in other topical areas of this report addresses the issue of the appropriateness of GALs' recommendations, the following statements by CWWs and GALs merit attention because of additional issues related to GAL recommendations:

Be able to provide strong testimony regarding their contacts on a case and the recommendations to the court.

GALs have, at times, made recommendations based on attending a single meeting.

All GALs should interview the children prior to reports being written and recommendations being made. Comments/recommendations should not be made without their direct knowledge of a case/child's situation. For example, recently a GAL stated in a family meeting that a child was doing extremely well in a foster home when, in fact, the child wasn't, and we were trying very hard to get him out of the foster home.

GAL recommendations need to be presented to the courts just like Social Services' case plans are.

[I wish] That the decisions made in SPOC (perm plans) would be upheld by the courts and not undermined and a secondary decision passed on to the court.

Here in [larger city] we have these meetings--Child and Family Team meetings. Everyone is involved--parents, foster parents, the caseworker, the GAL, etc. And we decide on recommendations. The next day Social Services has a "staffing meeting" and changes the recommendation. People who aren't even on the team for the child make the secondary decisions.

GALs' Contacting and Interviewing Various Parties

Using a scale ranging from 1 = *Not effective*; through 3 = *Somewhat effective*; to 5 = *Very effective*, the four groups evaluated the effectiveness of GALs in contacting and interviewing various parties. As shown in Table 12, from 83-94% of 104 or more respondents provided ratings of *somewhat effective* to *very effective*. The highest percentage of low (1 or 2) ratings were directed at GALs' contacting and interviewing other relatives. The mean responses reported in Table 13 and displayed in Figure 6 show the lowest mean ratings to be those of the CWWs.

Table 12. Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating Levels of Effectiveness of GALs in Contacting and Interviewing Various Parties (1 = *Not effective*; 3 = *Somewhat effective*; 5 = *Very effective*).

How effective are GALs in contacting and	1	2	3	4	5
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in contacting and interviewing various parties in support of					
Children/youth					
# of Respondents (N = 113)	1	3	24	35	50
% of Respondents	.9	2.7	21.2	31.0	44.2
Biological parents					
# of Respondents (N = 113)	1	3	26	39	44
% of Respondents	.9	2.7	23.0	34.5	38.9
Foster parents					
# of Respondents (N = 107)	1	9	25	40	32
% of Respondents	.9	8.4	23.4	37.4	29.9
Other relatives					
# of Respondents (N = 104)	3	14	31	36	20
% of Respondents	2.9	13.5	29.8	34.6	19.2
Collaterals (e.g., teachers, doctors, neighbors)					
# of Respondents (N = 110)	2	14	30	35	29
% of Respondents	1.8	12.7	27.3	31.8	26.4

Table 13. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Effectiveness of GALs in Contacting and Interviewing Various Parties (1 = *Not effective*; 3 = *Somewhat effective*; 5 = *Very effective*).

How effective are GALs in contacting and interviewing various parties in support of	Judges	Attorneys	CWWs	GALs
Children/youth	4.5	4.4	3.9	4.4
Biological parents	4.2	4.2	4.0	4.3
Foster parents	4.0	4.0	3.7	4.2
Other relatives	3.7	4.0	3.3	3.8
Collaterals (e.g.,	3.9	4.3	3.3	4.2

teachers,

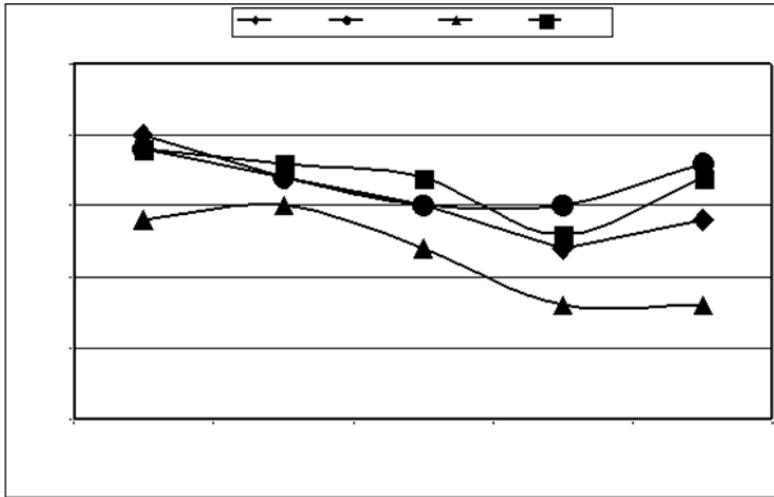


Figure 6. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Effectiveness of GALs in Contacting and Interviewing Various Parties (1 = *Not effective*; 3 = *Somewhat effective*; 5 = *Very effective*).

This topic generated an abundance of qualitative data. Relative to GALs' contacting and interviewing children and youth, the following feedback is representative of many comments by CWWs and GALs:

More face-to-face contact with children.

Have more contact with kids.

Monitor the case better, not just right before hearings.

It would help if GALs met the children before the day of court. Also if they observed them with parents and foster parents.

To spend more time with children and their families--get involved more quickly/actively. Increased involvement during entire placement and not just with court hearings and special circumstances,

Meet with the children more frequently. Many times they attend meetings and court hearings and have never met the children but try to give them advice or tell them what to be doing. The kids lose respect for their GAL and make comments like "She doesn't even know me."

and make comments like, SHE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW ME.

Have more contact with the children not in foster care placements. I have worked with the program through foster care and family preservation, and the amount of contact with the family preservation cases is not comparable.

GALs are at a disadvantage when there is a shelter care situation. Often they have not met with child/parents due to the short notice of the hearing and their appointment. It would be nice if they had the ability to meet with clients sooner.

GALs attend supervised visits with the child and family. It really shows them how these families interact, and I feel like they've made an effort to know the family and children they are working with.

I feel bad for them; they get called in on a moment's notice. It's a pretty tough position to be in.

Our court won't establish a shelter care hearing until the GAL is assigned. The guardians have to drop everything to get to the hearing. They're certainly dedicated to their jobs.

GALs should be allowed more time with children. The courts could designate that more time be spent by GALs with children.

[GALs see] the condition of the home, interaction between parent and child; such as checking to see if child evades parent or guardian.

Maybe remember to contact child periodically between children and family team meeting.

A judge, CWW, and GAL offered additional general comments addressing GALs' interview/contact-related activities:

It's useful in court when GALs have talked to extended family to have them help with children; visited the at-risk family in the home and made observations; and have spoken with a neighbor and with the children's teachers for additional fact-finding.

Encourage them to have more contact with the parties involved in the case. Perhaps they need more training on how important that contact is.

If Social Services has an adversarial relationship with the family, sometimes we can run interference with the family--tell parent's "it's in your best interest to do this" Sometimes Social Services would want us assigned longer. Social Services can play the role of "Bad Cop," and we play "Good Cop".

GALs' Case-Related Activities

Using the same five-point effectiveness scale, 104 or more respondents rated GAL effectiveness with eight case-related activities. As shown in Table 14, from 90-97% of the ratings were *Somewhat effective* to *Very effective* (ratings = 3-5) with 7-27% of the respondents' ratings *Somewhat effective*. It is reassuring to note that 101 of 113 (approximately 90%) of the respondents rated the GALs' "considering the best interests of children (e.g., advocacy)" as a 4 or 5--in the very effective range. The item receiving the greatest percentage (approximately 40%) low ratings (1-3) was "assisting with permanent placement for the child/youth." However, as shown in Table 15 and Figure 7 the mean ratings of GALs' effectiveness on all eight case-related activities were 3.5 or higher on evaluation of effectiveness provided by all four respondent groups.

An extensive amount of qualitative data addressed these eight GAL case-related activities. Again, this type of data provides a view into the reasoning underlying the quantitative ratings. Regarding the researching of case facts, attorneys, CWWs, and GALs provided the following perceptions:

I have found that the GALs rely on the information generated/compiled by Social Services which can lead to parents believing that the GAL is just another social worker there to take their kids away.

The GALs are just a parroting of what Social Services says. They look at a Social Services' report and just back it up. There has to be some way to make the program more independent. My clients--the parents--just think the GAL is part of Social Services, and they're not getting a fair shake. I'm sure part of it is time. The GALs don't always have time to do the investigation that should be done. I also think it's training.

The GALs that I have worked with tend to do reports last minute and rely on county information more than information/contacts from families and children. I have not known a GAL to contact schools, therapists.

etc.

There needs to be a change. At the time of initial placement, GALs have a very limited time frame to interview parents and children (sometimes less than 24 hours).

Table 14. Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating Levels of GAL Effectiveness with Case-Related Activities (1 = *Not effective*; 3 = *Somewhat effective*; 5 = *Very effective*).

How effective are Gals in carrying out case-related activities?	1	2	3	4	5
Researching case facts					
# of Respondents (N = 113)	1	6	25	43	38
% of Respondents	.9	5.3	22.1	38.1	33.6
Considering the best interests of children (e.g., advocacy)					
# of Respondents (N = 113)	0	4	8	41	60
% of Respondents	0	3.5	7.1	36.3	53.1
Preparing and maintaining appropriate records					
# of Respondents (N = 104)	0	9	21	42	32
% of Respondents	0	8.7	20.2	40.4	30.8
Preparing information for Court (e.g., reports, oral testimony)					
# of Respondents (N = 114)	0	5	19	42	48
% of Respondents	0	4.4	16.7	36.8	42.1
Testifying orally to the court					
# of Respondents (N = 113)	3	8	20	35	47
% of Respondents	2.7	7.1	17.7	31.0	41.6
Working with others in the court system					
# of Respondents (N = 110)	0	3	14	45	48
% of Respondents	0	2.7	12.7	40.9	43.6

Monitoring the case

of Respondents (N = 0 11 29 38 31
109)

% of Respondents 0 10.1 26.6 34.9 28.4

Assisting with permanent placement for the child/youth

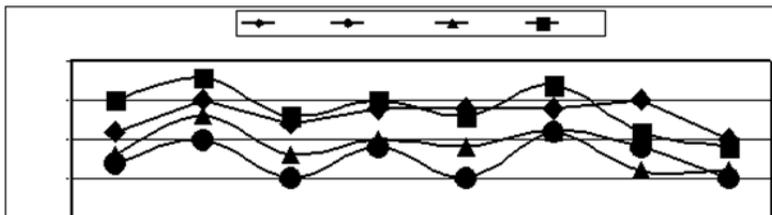
of Respondents (N = 2 12 29 36 28
107)

% of Respondents 1.9 11.2 27.1 33.6 26.2

Table 15. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of GAL Effectiveness with Case-Related Activities (1 = *Not effective*; 3 = *Somewhat effective*; 5 = *Very effective*).

**How effective are Gals Judges Attorneys CWWs GALs
in carrying out case-
related**

	Judges	Attorneys	CWWs	GALs
Researching case facts	4.1	3.7	3.8	4.5
Considering the best interests of children (e.g., advocacy)	4.5	4.0	4.3	4.8
Preparing and maintainaing appropriate records	4.2	3.5	3.8	4.3
Preparing information for Court (e.g., reports, oral	4.4	3.9	4.0	4.5
Testifying orally to the court	4.4	3.5	3.9	4.3
Working with others in the court system	4.4	4.1	4.1	4.7
Monitoring the case	4.5	3.9	3.6	4.1
Assisting with permanent placement for the child/youth	4.0	3.5	3.6	3.9



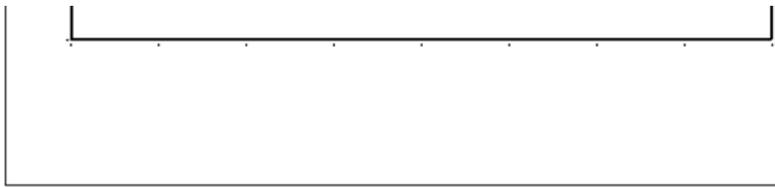


Figure 7. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of GAL Effectiveness with Case-Related Activities (1 = *Not effective*; 3 = *Somewhat effective*; 5 = *Very effective*).

However, regarding the researching of case facts, contrasting views to those reported above Table 14 were also expressed:

GALs have a different relationship with children and families. Families tend to see them in a more positive light, thus often provide the GAL more and different information than to social workers.

It's another look at the case from the perspective of a community member, researching the case, talking to the people involved. The attorney guardians just read reports. The two GALs I work with do an excellent job.

GALs are meeting with kids and family and getting to know situations first hand before making recommendations.

I am so impressed (still) that the GALs take the time to visit the child, birth parents, and foster parents prior to the hearing.

GALs meet with families which is very important. The prior GALs (attorneys appointed) did not.

They have information that I don't have and that parties don't share with the Child Protection workers. It gives you a much better picture of the situation. Sometimes it makes all the difference in the world as to the recommendations we make to the court.

I do independent study. I've been able to obtain information on six kids the county wasn't following. I found the kids in Canada. The county had given up on the case--the kids were out of their jurisdiction.

I present a written report after interviewing all parties in the case. I make the recommendations I think are correct for the situation and the

children's best interests.

We do more investigation than anyone else Our strength is our ability to get information that other people don't have time to get. We go all over the place [to gather information].

Qualitative participant feedback regarding GALs' advocacy for the best interests of children was exclusively positive with judges/judicial referees, attorneys, and GALs stating:

[GALs provide] preferences and opinions of the children.

Generally, the GAL is the best, if not only, source of information about the individual wants/needs/opinions of the child, especially at shelter care and early-stage hearings.

They do a good job of showing not only the children's wishes, but also providing insight into what they believe is happening with the children. Examples are when they report a child is fearful about expressing any opinion of one of their parents or are guarded about a certain situation, but open and honest about others.

Especially with older children, their wishes aren't the same as the parents. They're [GALs are] the voice for the children. I like the fact that they're a neutral party. They're seen as an extension of the court. The court gives a whole lot of weight to their findings.

Asking "why not," when a parent is supposed to be completing some task and is failing to accomplish it. It's wonderful when the GAL actually asks "why haven't you." It is investigation; it is advocacy; and it produces useful results.

[GALs provide] the child's wishes and statements. Often the GAL and our report is the only place they get to have a voice to the judge.

Judges rely on my background research and recommendation a great deal as they see me as a neutral "common sense" voice for the child.

Attorneys provided a large amount of feedback on the GALs preparation of information for Court (e.g., reports):

GALs give short reports of their opinions, but don't run down what

they've done to get there, so no one really knows how they came to the conclusion and it doesn't carry a lot of weight. GALs in my experience don't get involved much. I've never had one call me before the hearing to ensure I'm headed where they want.

They write a 2/3 page report, that's a nice summary, but they don't present whom they've contacted to get to the summary. We need more background information.

It depends on the GAL. The Judge and I appreciate someone who provides an independent, unbiased report of the people involved.

I would like their information (findings) earlier. We could read their findings and then negotiate with the parties ahead of the court case.

We don't get the information until immediately before the hearing; usually their report is pretty simple, we can digest it. But it prevents that person from being more involved in the case--we're reluctant to put those people on the stand and do "discovery" right there. If they would give us a thorough report, we would be more inclined to call them. We want to know ahead of time so we can plan.

I know that their reports aren't helpful. It means absolutely nothing to me. They need help to write reports that have some worth. Their report says "I looked at the Social Services reports, I talked to the kids" It's only one or two pages and it doesn't provide any new information.

CWWs addressed this topic with such comments as:

They need to prepare by knowing the facts, not what is noted by hearsay. Make sure the information in their reports is accurate.

They need to give more thorough reports, more concise recommendations

Improvement in written reports would include providing a clear reason why a recommendation is made; also improvement is needed in verbal reports.

Get written reports to custodians sooner.

They do a great job maybe if they were able to present more

information earlier in the process, it would serve us all better.

What I've seen out of the GALs reports, they give recommendations and a good written history. The Judge can read the GAL report and know what has gone on from Point A to Point B, and why the GAL is making the recommendations. When they're drafted like that, most judges wouldn't go any farther than that.

Relative to the GALs' testifying orally to the court, attorneys generated the following statements:

Be ready to provide a verbal report to the court. Although usually before the hearing, the judge has reviewed the GAL's report, sometimes the judge would like an update. The GAL should always be mindful that the court values their opinion greatly. Even if a judge doesn't always seem to respect, he or she does.

I don't think they understand how much influence they could exert. They don't stand up and say, "This really needs to be done on the child's behalf." I've never heard a GAL say those words.

What they probably need--and they don't get much training at all--is to "be ready for cross-examination!" The Judge may ask the GAL to take the stand. Then he opens it up for questions from the attorneys. Some defense attorneys are very nasty and rude, and the GAL isn't prepared for that. The worst thing a GAL can do is to waffle; to discredit their report--to say, "Maybe you're right about that," or I overstated things." GALs must be prepared for wicked cross-exam.

CWWs contributed the following:

Some [GALs] are pretty intimidated by the court process. Are they so intimidated that they don't speak up? It's normal; it just takes experience. The GAL has a big role, a huge job. It's intimidating. I question if they're really ready for this. It may be a training issue, and it may be an employment screening issue. Are they ready to have the battles that are going to happen?

I believe GALs should present in court and have more of a detailed testimonial position rather than saying "I agree or don't agree!"

Some GALs need to say more in court. Even if they repeat what is in

their court report, this would be effective as the parents would be hearing it from someone else besides the social worker.

Although 85% of the respondents rated the GALs as *effective* or *very effective* in "working with others in the Court System," there were several noteworthy comments regarding both GALs' working with others and others working with GALs. The examples below are arranged to illustrate both the positive and negative feedback on the same issues:

There is a learning curve for working together that they--all the parties including judges, attorneys, GALs, social workers, etc.--have to overcome.

Things are so much smoother when everyone has experience--judges and State's attorneys--everyone.

Judges could be more uniform in the manner they use GALs in the courtroom.

I think that GALs need to be proactive in working with attorneys and case managers.

There is a communication gap between attorneys and GALs.

More contact with attorneys.

If State's attorneys would work with us as a team effort for the sake of the child and read our reports occasionally, it would be great! And also keep us better informed of court dates/changes etc.

The communication could be better from the Public Defender Office to GALs. There have been occasions when the PD did not contact a GAL regarding a hearing until an hour before the hearing.

I believe that States attorneys don't always have the time to prepare for cases and would serve the children better if they had input before the hearing from Social Services and GALs as to the people needed at the hearing to testify.

[GALs provide] Input to both sets of attorneys which allows them to better serve children and their families.

We need to be more forceful with Social Services-- "You won't move this kid without telling me first."

Sometimes I think the social workers don't see much value in our services.

I'm sure social services sees them [GALs] as an asset, but perhaps some think someone's "looking over their shoulder."

[GALs need] Better and easier communication from all social workers, but some are more cooperative than others.

The only time I have difficulties is when I don't get notices of dates and such. Some social workers don't keep you in the loop. They forget to tell you about meetings that GALs are court-ordered to attend. It's hard to monitor when you aren't told about meetings.

When Social Services has a tough case, they involve us more. When it's cut-and-dried, or when we disagree with them, they minimize their involvement with us.

I am fortunate in that County Social Services agencies that serve the areas I work in the majority of the time are extremely dedicated to serving their families and providing me with information to make my investigation easier and more thorough. I don't believe that is the case in all counties.

We have great cooperation with the Judges and Social Services. We have a lot of respect. The Social workers are helpful. We aren't doing the same role, but we can support each other.

There's good communication between the Director of the Project and us GALs.

The qualitative data addressing the two topics--GALs' monitoring of the case and GALs' assisting with permanent placement for the child/youth--were repetitive of stakeholder feedback presented earlier in this report in the subsections on duration of GAL appointments and GALs' support of decision-making about placement stability and permanence. Therefore, the issues are not revisited here.

The qualitative and quantitative data in this section support the following three findings and recommendations:

Finding #14

A high percentage of the stakeholders rated the GALs to be effective in three areas of performance and activity: 1) GAL understandings and work performance; 2) GAL contacting and interviewing various parties; and 3) GALs' case-related activities. Mean ratings of effectiveness were generally higher for the judges/judicial referees and GALs than for the attorneys and CWWs.

Finding #15

The extensive stakeholder qualitative data relating to GAL effectiveness offer excellent insight into 1) reasons for participant ratings; 2) majority and minority points of view; 3) perceived strengths and weaknesses of the performance of GALs; 4) GAL performance that is valued and should be sustained; and 5) opportunities for improving the performance of GALs.

Finding #16

Throughout this report the comments of respondents from all of the stakeholder groups include perceptions that GALs have provided services of higher quality than those provided in the state by their attorney predecessors.

Recommendation #7

That over time, the Project decision-making leaders revisit the stakeholder qualitative data relating to GAL effectiveness to identify and prioritize Project objectives for 1) sustaining valued GAL performance and 2) pursuing opportunities to improve the performance of GALs.

Training of the GALs

Although the training of GALs is not a direct measure of their effectiveness, training is certainly a factor that contributes to their effectiveness. Therefore, training is addressed in this section on with the intent of providing information to be used in Project decision-making. Stakeholder feedback on the training of GALs addressed the following topics: 1) strengths and weaknesses of the present training and 2) the need for training on court and legal systems, on types of cases and

need for training on court and legal systems, on types of cases and issues, and on a variety of other specific topics.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Training

Administrator feedback included input about the training of GALs as well as supervision of their work:

As far as ongoing training, there are three strengths. First, a guardian can go to any training anywhere for their own growth and development. Second, at the monthly meetings there is often a presenter to talk about an issue or a program. That's an opportunity for professional development. Third, we pay for registration to significant conferences in the state and try to offset some of the costs.

Training is the #1 weakness. It's an 18-hour training--two nine-hour sessions over two weekends. I think it could be longer and managed in a different way. With 18 hours there's not a lot of time to get into depth. The topics are okay, but need more detail to be presented.

A weakness is that meetings are in the bigger cities where the Juvenile Court System is. Some guardians have to travel quite a ways. Since they're independent contractors, the state has taken the position that we won't pay for travel. They have to travel, take time off from their main jobs, pay to stay in a motel. That's a disincentive and a balancing act for them.

Do we meet the needs of the guardians once they take the cases? There are 50--55 guardians, and it's a challenge to get them all on the same page. When one has a difficult case, it's hard to meet the supervisory need. There's such a geographical and numerical barrier to meeting those supervisory needs. As I conceive ongoing training, it's a matter of reorganizing how the guardians function in their own district. Maybe a "lead guardian" in each of the four quadrants of the state. Then when there's a training need, or need for a direct contact for new guardians, or a need to make sure they're on solid ground before they take on their first case, there's someone available to address these needs.

GALs supported the continuation of specific content and procedures and suggested others:

We did have in the training how you should address the judge. They did have guardians come in and talk to new guardians about how to dress

have guardians come in and talk to new guardians about how to dress and act in court. Act independent, be independent, act professional, and take court seriously. Another point of view though was some Native people resent over-dressing; it's like you're flaunting your power.

We had a referee who did a super job of explaining the law to me. Every time he made a decision, he explained why he decided the way he did. I got so much Juvenile Law training from him. We need examples like his in our training.

It would be nice to have an opportunity to visit with judges in a workshop or seminar setting to learn how we might better help them.

We have a ways to go with the training. I went to the 18-hour training. It's good, but it's not enough. I tried to be engaged in the training, but I didn't feel comfortable or ready to be a GAL when it was done. There needs to be more hands on--more specific, realistic experiences. I think the guardians would approve additional training.

A lot of the training we need could be done together with Social Services--same terminology, same team, same goals. Social Services has much more funding than GALs. We could piggyback on their training--it doesn't cost much more to train 150 people than 100.

Training on Court and Legal Systems

About GAL training on the Court and Legal Systems, administrators and a CWW offered the following input:

Education and training components can be strengthened. Train everyone engaged in child welfare issues including GALs, [who need to] understand court processes better. They don't understand the roles and responsibilities of the court system/legal process.

Need a greater understanding by the guardians about the laws involved.
Need to assure they "have all the training and materials they need."

I think that additional training should be along the lines of talking to judges and referees to enhance juvenile law/legal training of the GALs.

Training on Types of Cases and Issues

Administrators and a CWW identified the need for training relating to

specific types of cases and issues.

We need to be building capacity in terms of the Indian Child Welfare Act and cultural diversity issues as well a better understanding cultural and legal issues with Native American children.

Need training on cases with domestic violence. These cases have different dynamics than other cases.

Last year there was a change in Termination of Parental Rights procedures. Guardians were not trained or involved in those termination cases previously, because attorneys handled those situations. Last year the guardians were charged with being involved. We need to have training and build the skill level.

I haven't seen problems with racial issues; but they [GALs] do need training in Native American culture. The two GALs I work with are sensitive to that need.

Other Specific Topics for Training

Administrators, judges, attorneys, CWWs, and GALs all offered additional topics for GAL training:

Guardians need more information on child development.

[GALs need] A greater understanding of behavioral dynamics.

[We need] more ongoing training for methamphetamine problems; attachment disorders; and parent's problems. We don't have enough "cards in our deck."

They need better training and to have the expectations laid out. But they also have to be comfortable in that role in the courtroom, and that doesn't happen until they've had some experience. Turnover is pretty fast. They don't know the system because of the fast turnover. They can be intimidated by the setting. Too many GALs don't take initiative; they ride in the back seat. They just file the report, and they're done. They're intimidated.

The longer they're a GAL, the more confident they are. Newer guardians need to be told, "Don't be afraid to take a stand" (as long as they believe

in what they're saying).

I don't know how they're trained, but they need to present themselves as independent people in this process and not aligned with Social Services.

The stakeholder perception data support the following finding and recommendation:

Finding #17

Stakeholder feedback on the training of GALs addressed the following areas: 1) strengths and weaknesses of the present training and 2) the need for training on court and legal systems, on types of cases and issues, and on a variety of other specific topics.

Recommendation #8

That the Project decision-making leaders immediately review the stakeholder feedback on the training of GALs to determine if there is input that has relevance for the planning of the July 2007 NDGAL Conference.

Summary and Conclusion

The application of the decision-oriented CIPP Model of evaluation to the NDGAL Project and the GALs has yielded the following conclusion:

Conclusion #2

Through context, input, and process evaluation based on stakeholders' perceptions, it is concluded that the NDGAL Project is supporting GALs at a level and in ways that are resulting, overall, in their rendering of effective services to children. However, this report provides several recommendations addressing contextual issues, needed resources, and aspects of GAL performance and training that merit attention for the improvement of the Project.

Satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and the GALs

In accordance with the defined purpose of this study, product evaluation was implemented only as an appraisal of stakeholder satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and the GALs.

Using a scale ranging from 1 = *Not satisfied* through 3 = *Somewhat satisfied* to

5 = *Very satisfied*, the four groups of questionnaire respondents indicated their levels of satisfaction with the Project and the GALs. As shown in Table 16, approximately 80% of 117 respondents indicated that they were *satisfied* or *very satisfied* (rankings = 4 or 5) with the Project. Approximately 75% were equally satisfied with the GALs. Another 16% and 22% were *somewhat satisfied* with the Project and the GALs, respectively. Approximately 1% (1 individual) was *very dissatisfied* and 2.6% (3 individuals) were *dissatisfied* with both the Project and the GALs. There was little difference among the mean rankings of satisfaction of the four groups as shown in Table 17 and Figure 8.

Table 16. Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating Levels of Satisfaction

with the NDGAL Project and the GALs (1 = *Not satisfied*; 3 = *Somewhat satisfied*;

5 = *Very satisfied*).

Satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and the GALs.	1	2	3	4	5
How satisfied are you with the NDGAL Project?					
# of Respondents (N = 117)	1	3	19	58	36
% of Respondents	.9	2.6	16.2	49.6	30.8
How satisfied are you with the GALs?					
# of Respondents (N = 117)	1	3	26	51	36
% of Respondents	.9	2.6	22.2	43.6	30.8

Table 17. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and the GALs (1 = *Not satisfied*; 3 = *Somewhat satisfied*; 5 = *Very satisfied*).

Satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and the **Judges Attorneys CWWs GALs**

GALs.

How satisfied are you with the NDGAL Project?	4.3	3.9	4.0	4.1
How satisfied are you with the GALs?	4.2	4.0	3.9	4.2

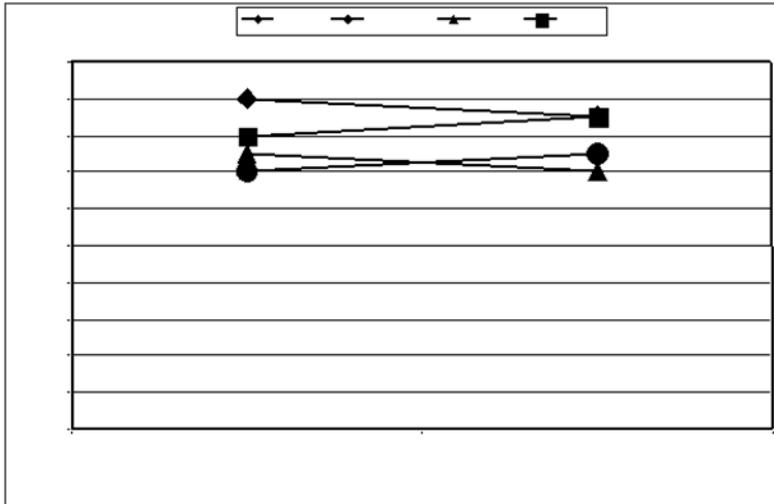


Figure 8. Mean Responses of the Four Participant Groups Indicating Levels of Satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and the GALs (1 = *Not satisfied*; 3 = *Somewhat satisfied*; 5 = *Very satisfied*).

Overall, these quantitative results indicate high levels of satisfaction with the Project and the GALs. The reasoning behind these ratings is suggested in the following qualitative perception data.

Responding to the interview protocol and to open-ended questionnaire items, the stakeholders provided the following appraisal of the Project. Input from all participant groups is represented among the following comments.

We had indigent defense attorneys doing GAL work; later the lay GAL program came in, and the lay GALs could spend more time on files and talking to the stakeholders. They had a lot better handle on the case, and actually made a report to the judge. It's been a very positive experience, seeing the greater depth of involvement that the lay GALs have. I'm pleased with the product that's come out of the project--the report to the court, having deep knowledge and background of what the child's best

court, having deep knowledge and background of what the child's best interest is. Better representation of Child's Best Interest.

I am happy with the program, and I appreciate the views of a concerned third party [GAL]. It is not an easy job and the more information the GAL can gather and present to the court, the better.

There is no control group so I don't know if we would have done just as well with them as without them.

It's a wonderful project, and I fully support and appreciate it. The judges need what GALs offer.

As a rule, I believe that the goals and objectives to serve children are being met.

For the most part I think kids are served very effectively. With 800 cases in a year, there's going to be some that are less successfully/effectively. I think for the most part getting a GAL assigned as early as possible has been good for the kids and everyone else in the system.

The Project is wonderful. I worked in the era when there was no training. Attorneys did it, and they had no support.

I've been really pleased with the Project; seeing how much better they are than the attorneys that did it previously. We've seen cases where the defense attorney has demanded an Attorney GAL; that's just asinine and very frustrating. The lay GALs are good, they do a better job of the legwork and the research.

I think the Children's best interest is being served better now. The indigent attorneys didn't have/take time to do the job. They didn't put 10-12 hours into researching the child's best interest.

I find the GAL Project much more effective in representing minors than the appointment of attorneys to that assignment. My satisfaction with the project and the GALs varies significantly with the competency of the GAL.

I hear nothing but good things. I expect the evaluation to be favorable, but the administration needs bolstering--financial and otherwise.

I suppose we're not perfect yet. The program is as good as the people.

I suppose we're not perfect yet. The program is as good as the people you have. We have some real good people in some areas, but some are more effective than others, like in any business.

It's a great program; I just hope it continues.

[GALs] are not helpful in my role as the attorney for the parent. I believe that children are entitled to GALs, but it's not working the way it's supposed to. Currently, it has no worth, it has no meaning to me whatsoever.

Stakeholders also expressed their satisfaction with the GALs:

It's a role that has great utility in the child welfare system. It's crucial to reaching the right decisions and outcomes for the kids. It's an absolutely necessary component to good systemic outcomes for children. To do the best work in the field, we need the GALs.

The various GALs I have worked with over the past decade vary from extremely effective to relatively ineffective. I think we do pretty well.

There is some variability in abilities; sometimes GALs come up with creative recommendations. Other times it's just the same thing that Social Services uses.

The most important thing is that we have highly qualified people serving as GALs.

Have GALs who are more educated.

They do so much now--visit with all parties, attend child and family team meetings, attend court hearings--I'm not sure what else we could expect.

The GALs we have in our county are great to work with! They review our files, interview children, parents, etc. write excellent reports, attend perm plan meetings. They always have the children's best interest in mind.

I have no suggestions. I have not had a bad experience. I have the utmost respect for their role.

Their personalities, their genuine caring about the kids that they represent. and the knowledge and assistance that they provide to us fare

very valuable.]

Some GALs are very good. The attorney ones were not good at all. They had NO CLUE what to do! Lay GALs/court visitors are the best.

We really appreciate the service they provide to us, and they're doing a fabulous job.

Part time GALs are good. They are from a variety of fields and backgrounds so the diversity adds to the program. I like independent contractors that have an interest in kids, but a different background than social workers. We don't want to be so formalized that we lose the diversity.

The work of the guardians is stellar.

I'm quite remote from the project, but my experiences would indicate that their professionalism and engagement are high. I think they're doing a nice job. They do play a vital role offering checks and balances--making sure everyone else is doing what they're supposed to. Keeping the Judge informed. Some have a superficial kind of relationship with some cases, because of the nature of the case.

Finding #18

Overall, both quantitative and qualitative data indicate a high level of stakeholder satisfaction with the Project and the GALs.

Recommendation #9

That over time, the Project decision-making leaders revisit the qualitative satisfaction data to identify and prioritize Project objectives 1) for sustaining high stakeholder satisfaction with the Project and the GALs and 2) for opportunities to improve the Project.

Summary and Conclusion

Product evaluation of stakeholders' satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and the GALs yielded the following conclusion:

Conclusion #3

Product evaluation based on quantitative and qualitative measurement of stakeholders' perceptions revealed a high level of satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and the GALS but was accompanied with additional suggestions for improvement of the Project.

1. For additional history and description of the NDGAL Project see Doan (2006) and Hager (2006).

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APPENDIX A

A Survey for Judges and Judicial Referees

Evaluation of the North Dakota Guardian ad Litem Project

A survey for Judges and Judicial Referees

Instructions

When you consider your responses please reflect back on your experiences with the NDGAL Project and the GALS. Be assured that your responses will remain confidential, and no responses will be attributed to specific individuals or jurisdictions. This survey should take about 15 minutes to complete.

Section I: Demographic factors

1. How many years have you participated in Juvenile or Family Court deprivation/abuse and neglect cases in which the NDGAL Project has been involved? _____

2. How many cases that had assigned GALs were you involved with during the past 12 months? _____

3. How many active cases that have assigned GALs are you currently involved in? _____

Section II: Usefulness of NDGAL Project

1. To what extent do you consider the NDGAL Project useful to a case involving:	Not	Some-	Very	N/A		
	Very Useful	what Useful	Useful	Useful		
	1	2	3	4	5	0

- Conflicting case information/highly adversarial parties
- The status of a case in relation to ASFA
- Issues related to reunification plans (e.g., disruption of plan, extra monitoring needed for reunification)
- Concerns about the implementation of services

2. To what extent do you consider the NDGAL Project useful in various cases?

- Cases involving sexual abuse
- Cases involving physical abuse
- Cases involving neglect

Section III: Role of GALs in supporting decision-making and court processes

1. To what extent does input from GALs on the following issues inform Court	Not	Some-	A	N/A
	Very Much	what	Great	

ISSUES FROM COURT
decisions?

1 2 3 4 5 0

Great
Deal

1 2 3 4 5 0

Placement stability and
permanence

Concurrent placement with
other minor siblings

Restrictiveness of placement

Location of placement

Service provision (e.g., physical
health, mental health,
educational)

Frequency of visitation by family
of origin

Written case plans

Safety of children/youth while in
placement and after Court
dismissal

**2. What other types of input from GALs not listed above, if any,
inform Court decisions 'a great deal'?**

Section IV: Effectiveness of the NDGAL Project and GALs.

**1. In general, how
effective are GALs
in conducting the
following activities
in**

Not Effective		Some- what		Very Effective	N/A
1	2	3	4	5	0

Contact/interviews
with child/youth

Contact/interviews
with biological parents

Contact/interviews
with foster parents

Contact/interviews
with other relatives

Contact/interviews
with collaterals (e.g.,
teachers, doctors,
...)

neighbors)

Review of records/documents (e.g., psychiatric evaluations, school reports)

Written reports to the Court

Verbal testimony to the Court

2. How often do GAL recommendations become incorporated into the hearing's court order?

Almost
Never

Some-
times

Almost
Always

1

2

3

4

5

3. How effective are GALs in doing the following?

Not
Effective

Some-
what

Very
Effective

N/A

Effective

1

2

3

4

5

0

Researching case facts

Preparing information for the Court (e.g., reports, oral testimony)

Preparing and maintaining appropriate records

Monitoring the case

Considering the best interests of children (e.g., advocacy)

Working with others in the court system

Assisting with

permanent placement
for the child/youth

**4. To what degree
do you agree or
disagree with the
following
statements:**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree N/A

1 2 3 4 5 0

GALs receive
adequate training to
prepare them

for their advocacy
role

GALs understand the
court system

GALs understand the
child welfare system

GALs act
professionally

GALs ask pertinent
questions

GALs carry out their
work objectively

The personal
knowledge that GALs
have about the
children/youth in their
cases is beneficial to
my decision-making

Children and families
are better served
because of GALs
involvement

The type and quality
of information that
GALs

provide me with is
beneficial to my

...to my
decision-making

GALs make
appropriate
recommendations

There are sufficient
GALs to meet my
caseload

Section V: Your overall satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and GALs

1. How satisfied are you with the NDGAL Project?	Not Satisfied		Some-what Satisfied		Very Satisfied
	1	2	3	4	5

2. How satisfied are you with the GALs?	Not Satisfied		Some-what Satisfied		Very Satisfied
	1	2	3	4	5

Section VI: Open-ended questions

- 1. In what ways could GALs better serve children?**
- 2. In what ways could GALs better serve court decision-making?**
- 3. Please give an example of something a GAL did that you found helpful.**

HBA would also like to interview Judges/Judicial Referees on how they utilize and are impacted by the NDGAL Project. If you are interested and willing to be contacted, please fill in your contact information below. This information will be kept confidential.

Name:

Time of day you would like to be contacted:

Phone number:

E-mail address:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMPLETION OF THIS SURVEY!

APPENDIX B

A Survey for Guardians

Evaluation of the North Dakota Guardian ad Litem Project

A Survey for Guardians

Instructions

When you consider your responses, please reflect back on your experiences as a Guardian ad Litem (GAL). Be assured that your responses will remain confidential and will not be used to evaluate your performance as a GAL. No responses will be attributed to specific individuals or jurisdictions. This survey should take about 15 minutes to complete.

Section I: Usefulness of NDGAL Project

1. To what extent do you consider the NDGAL Project useful to a case involving:	Not Very Useful		Some-what Useful		Very Useful	N/A
	1	2	3	4	5	0

Conflicting case information/highly adversarial parties

The status of a case in relation to ASFA

Issues related to reunification plans (e.g., disruption of plan, extra monitoring needed for reunification)

Concerns about the implementation of services

2. To what extent do you consider the NDGAL Project useful in various cases?

Cases involving sexual abuse

Cases involving physical abuse

Cases involving neglect

Section II: Role of GALs in supporting decision-making and court processes

1. To what extent does your input on the following issues inform Court decisions?	Not Very Much		Some-what		A	N/A
	1	2	3	4	5	0

Placement stability and permanence

Concurrent placement with other minor siblings

Restrictiveness of placement

Location of placement

Service provision (e.g., physical health, mental health, educational)

Frequency of visitation by family of origin

Written case plans

Safety of children/youth while in placement and after Court dismissal

2. What other types of input if any, do you provide to inform Court decisions 'a great deal'?

Section III: Effectiveness of the NDGAL Project and GALs.

1. In general, how effective do you perceive that your actions are, in helping the court	Not Effective		Some-what		Very Effective	N/A
	1	2	3	4	5	0

Contact/interviews with child/youth

Contact/interviews with biological parents

Contact/interviews
with foster parents

Contact/interviews
with other relatives

Contact/interviews
with collaterals (e.g.,
teachers, doctors,
neighbors)

Review of
records/documents
(e.g., psychiatric
evaluations, school
reports)

Written reports to the
Court

Verbal testimony to
the Court

**2. How effective are
you in doing the
following?**

Not
Effective

Some-
what

Very
Effective

N/A

Effective

1

2

3

4

5

0

Researching case
facts

Preparing information
for the Court (e.g.,
reports, oral
testimony)

Preparing and
maintaining
appropriate records

Monitoring the case

Considering the best
interests of children
(e.g., advocacy)

Working with others
in the court system

Assisting with
permanent placement

for the child/youth

3. To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree N/A

1 2 3 4 5 0

You received adequate training to prepare you for your advocacy role

You understand the court system

You understand the child welfare system

You act professionally

You ask pertinent questions

You carry out their work objectively

The personal knowledge that you have about the children/youth you serve is beneficial to the court's decision-making

Children and families are better served because of your involvement

The type and quality of information that you

provide is beneficial to the court's decision-making

You make appropriate

recommendations

Section IV: Your overall satisfaction with the NDGAL Project and GALs

- | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|---|---------------------|---|----------------|
| 1. How satisfied are you with the NDGAL Project? | Not Satisfied | | Some-what Satisfied | | Very Satisfied |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. How satisfied are you with your role as a GAL? | Not Satisfied | | Some-what Satisfied | | Very Satisfied |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Section V: Open-ended questions

- 4. In what ways could GALs better serve children?**
- 5. In what ways could GALs better serve court decision-making?**
- 6. In what ways could the court system work better with GALs?**

Section VI: Demographic factors

- 1. For how long have you been a Guardian ad Litem (GAL)?**

- 2. To how many cases have you ever been assigned as a Guardian?** _____
- 3. To how many cases have you been assigned as a Guardian in the last 12 months?** _____
- 4. How many CHILDREN have you served as a Guardian in the last 12 months?** _____
- 5. To how many cases are you assigned at one time?**

- 6. How long does a case typically last from assignment to final disposition?** _____

7. How many cases are you currently working on?

8. How many CHILDREN are you currently working with on your caseload? _____

9. How many clock hours did you actually devote to being a Guardian during the last 12 months? _____

10. On the average, how many clock hours have you actually devoted to each case? _____

HBA would also like to interview guardians ad litem about their impact. If you are interested and willing to be contacted, please fill in your contact information below. This information will be kept confidential.

Name:

Time of day you would like to be contacted:

Phone number:

E-mail address:

Thank you for completing this survey!