

**Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children
in Washington State:
*A Review of Effectiveness***

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with
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November 1998



*Washington State
Institute for
Public Policy*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1997 session of the Washington State Legislature funded an evaluation of court-appointed special advocates/guardians ad litem (CASA/GALs). Volunteer CASA advocates operate in 22 of the state's 32 court jurisdictions, investigating and representing the dependent child's perspective in family court. The evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the CASA/GAL program in improving outcomes for dependent children, and to examine cost effectiveness.

The Office of Crime Victim's Advocacy and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy collaborated on project management, contracting with Lucy Berliner from the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress as the research investigator.

First, the study limitations must be clarified. Since the legislative appropriation was relatively modest (\$30,000), the research could not follow individual cases through the child protection and court system. Studies of this nature have been conducted elsewhere in the nation, relying on budgets of several hundred thousand dollars. Even with generous budgets, researchers have faced great difficulties in measuring effectiveness through this research design. In many instances, CASA/GAL programs rightly prioritize the most serious and difficult cases, as well as younger children, thus the outcomes for these children cannot fairly be compared to older children in more benign circumstances.

It was possible, however, to assess program effectiveness by surveying persons who are knowledgeable about the program. This approach offers reliable, systematic information at a comparatively modest cost.

The research team reached the following conclusions:

- CASA/GAL programs in the state are *fulfilling their mandate*. The programs and their volunteers are consistently conducting investigations and monitoring cases in the manner that is expected.
- CASA/GAL programs enjoy widespread support. Professionals who interact regularly with CASA/GALs find that volunteers contribute an *independent and valuable perspective* on behalf of children during the case investigation phase. Respondents overwhelmingly prefer that a case have a CASA/GAL and they favor volunteers over paid GALs.
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 defined as outstanding, the *average ranking* of CASA programs by community professionals is 7.9.
- CASA/GAL volunteers report that their experiences of helping children reunite with families or finding alternative permanent homes are *extremely rewarding* and that the programs provide them with *sufficient training and support*.
- The programs are a *relatively inexpensive* method of providing representation to dependent children. It costs an average of \$500 per case served each year. Most funds are provided by the county where the program resides; the state has funded an enhanced recruitment effort in three counties.

CASA/GAL PROGRAMS IN WASHINGTON: OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Program Origins and Purposes

The concept of trained citizen volunteers serving as *guardians ad litem* for dependent children, instead of lawyers who traditionally fulfill the role, originated in King County Washington in 1977. It was a popular idea and quickly gained national support. The volunteers are usually called Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). The use of CASAs has been endorsed by The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the American Bar Association. The Washington State Office of the Administrator of the Courts (OAC) also strongly supports the programs.

In Washington State, volunteer CASA/GAL programs operate in 22 of 32 court jurisdictions. Most programs serve dependent children, but two provide volunteer representation in family law cases. Two programs are beginning in Tribal Courts. The state's programs range in size from very small with a single staff person and a few volunteers, to quite large with hundreds of volunteers. None of the programs provide CASA/GALs for all dependent children in their jurisdictions; paid GALs are also used for some cases in all counties and not all children are represented.

The programs are all administered locally, usually under the jurisdiction of the courts, although in some cases they are managed by social service agencies. Funding for most programs is almost entirely derived from the county within which they are located. A few programs obtain partial financial support from grants or fund raising efforts. State funding supports two pilot programs which are actually expansions of existing programs. The average amount of cost per case, based on calculating a ratio of program costs to number of children served, is approximately \$500.00. It is not possible to compare this figure to the costs associated with paid GALs because the payment mechanisms and reimbursement rates vary from county to county.

National Studies of Effectiveness

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in evaluating the effectiveness of CASA/GAL programs. A number of studies have been carried out in different states and at the national level. The results have shown that the programs are generally viewed favorably by judges, caseworkers, lawyers, community professionals, the volunteers, and children/families who have been surveyed. It has been far more difficult to determine empirically how well CASA/GALs perform and whether their efforts to promote successful outcomes for children are effective. This is largely due to the necessity of gaining access to case files and records, and having comparison groups of unrepresented children or children with paid representation.

The few empirical studies show that CASA/GALs appear to be superior to lawyer GALs in the investigation and monitoring role, while lawyers are more effective in the legal representation role. Results are mixed with regard to whether cases are resolved more quickly or have better outcomes. One possible explanation is that CASA/GALs are more often appointed in complex cases. The scientific evidence converges on the conclusion that volunteer CASA/GALs are at least as effective as paid forms of GAL representation.

Study Questions and Approach

This evaluation investigated *program effectiveness* by determining the extent to which CASA/GAL programs and their volunteers are carrying out the functions considered necessary to adequately represent children and assessing how the programs are perceived by key community constituencies. Information was also collected about the role of the volunteers, the relationships with other parties and professionals, concerns of volunteers and community professionals, and recommendations for program improvement. *Cost effectiveness* could only be partially determined because comparison information was not available; a cost per case was calculated.

The method used was surveys of program managers and inspection of annual reports; surveys of volunteers; an informal focus group with King County judges; and semi-structured telephone interviews with selected representatives of key constituents familiar with CASA/GALs. The groups were (1) caseworkers, (2) judges/commissioners, (3) social service providers, and (4) lawyers who represent parents in dependency proceedings. The telephone interviews were conducted by a survey research firm to insure confidentiality.

Survey Findings

The results revealed that programs and their volunteers are *consistently conducting investigations and monitoring cases in the manner that is expected*, including gathering information from a broad array of sources, preparing reports for court, and staying involved in cases for the long term. In general, their recommendations coincide with other parties and are almost always reflected in judicial orders. Despite the general concordance of recommendations, volunteers arrive at their opinions independently; they see their efforts as enhancing not duplicating the activities of the DCFS.

Volunteers report that they *understand their role and the expectations*, and are satisfied with their experiences serving as CASA/GALs. They believe they are adequately trained and supervised, are prepared for court, and are valued and respected by professionals, parents, and judges. In response to open-ended questions, many volunteers expressed frustration about the length of time cases took to be resolved and that parents seemed to be given too many chances to the detriment of permanency for children. There were concerns expressed about DCFS caseworkers being over burdened and being inaccessible. Volunteers also described the many rewards of being a CASA/GAL.

The interviews with key constituents were largely favorable as well. Across disciplines the *CASA/GALs were seen as making a unique and valuable contribution in most cases*. The most important role of the CASA/GAL is bringing a fresh, outside perspective. Monitoring was seen as a secondary activity and there was far less support for CASA/GALs functioning as experts in court proceedings. Respondents perceived CASA/GALs as being detrimental to a case when they lose objectivity, exceed the boundaries of their role, or become a "rubber stamp" for caseworker recommendations. These criticisms were usually with regard to individual CASA/GALs and did not reflect views of the programs as a whole.

Caseworkers tended to be the least positive, although they were still mostly supportive of the programs. Their concerns were about the additional burden on their time and on the children who have to deal with another person. The respondents overwhelmingly prefer that a case have a CASA/GAL and favor volunteers over paid GALs. They stressed the importance of screening,

training and supervision. There were specific mentions that volunteers often come from different backgrounds than the children and their families, and therefore there is a premium on qualities of open-mindedness and the capacity to be objective.

It was not possible to evaluate the actual impact of CASA/GAL representation on case outcomes. The primary reason is that CASA/GALs are appointed in only some cases and these cases are probably not comparable to those without representation. Comparisons would therefore be misleading. In addition, the programs do not routinely document case activities and case outcomes. Although the National CASA Association has established standards for case records and mechanisms for evaluating program effectiveness, Washington State programs have yet to implement such procedures.

Conclusions

Overall, the results of the various surveys reflect *widespread support* for the programs and evidence that the programs and their volunteers are doing what is expected in the role. There appears to be agreement that the *most valuable contribution* of CASA/GALs is an *independent perspective on behalf of the children during the investigation phase*. The lawyers emphasized the need to insure that CASA/GALs have legal representation in court. The volunteers find the role rewarding and believe they are making a difference.

It is recommended that the programs adopt and implement the standards for Volunteer Management and Program Evaluation promulgated by the National CASA Association. Standardizing documentation of case activities would enhance supervision and quality assurance in individual cases. Establishing benchmarks for successful case outcomes will eventually make it possible to know if the programs are really making a difference in the children's lives.

The programs are a relatively inexpensive method of providing representation; paid representation that reflected an equivalent number of hours invested would clearly be far more costly. This evaluation could not, however, demonstrate that the appointment of a CASA/GAL produced any savings in state costs with regard to dependent children.

LEGISLATIVE DIRECTION FOR EVALUATION

The 1997 session of the Washington State Legislature authorized the appropriation of \$600,000 for the 1998 and 1999 biennium to the Department of Community Trade and Economic Development for a contract with the Washington State Association of CASA/GALs to "establish pilot programs in three counties to recruit additional community volunteers to represent the interests of children in dependency proceedings." Part of this legislation directed an evaluation of the effectiveness of CASA/GAL in improving outcomes for dependent children. The evaluation was also to assess the cost effectiveness of the programs, and to the extent possible, identify savings in other programs of the state budget that resulted from the efforts of the CASA/GAL volunteers.

The Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress conducted an evaluation of volunteer CASA/GAL programs in Washington State. The evaluation consisted of:

- a review of the literature;
- a survey of program managers for all programs in the state and inspection of their annual reports;
- a survey of all identified active volunteer CASA/GALs;
- an informal focus group with King County judges; and
- structured interviews of professionals from the key consumers of CASA/GAL activities across the state.

In addition, consultation was carried out with knowledgeable experts.

Origins of the CASA Program

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA, 1974) was the federal legislation that provided the impetus for the modern child protection response. This law established certain requirements for states to be eligible for federal funds under the Act. One provision of the Act required that a guardian ad-litem (GAL) be appointed to represent the best interests of maltreated or dependent children.

Traditionally lawyers were appointed to fulfill this function. In 1977, Judge David Soukup, then the presiding judge of the Superior Court in King County, Washington, initiated the first program that used trained volunteers to serve as GALs. Almost immediately the concept was embraced by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges which proposed the term Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). States passed legislation authorizing CASA programs and the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice provided funds to support the National CASA Association (NCASAA) that was established in 1982.

The concept of CASA has received widespread support since its inception. The American Bar Association endorsed the approach in 1989 and the federal Victims of Child Abuse Act of 1990 included language that "a court appointed special advocate shall be available to every victim of child abuse and neglect in the United States that needs such an advocate." There are currently

approximately 650 CASA and GAL programs operating in all fifty states; in 1997 volunteers were appointed for 172,000 children.

In Washington State volunteer CASA/GAL programs operate in 22 of 32 court jurisdictions. Most programs serve children who have been found dependent by the juvenile court; two (King County CASA Family Law and Benton Franklin Family Court Services CASA) provide CASAs for children in high conflict divorce or custody modification cases. There are also two incipient programs through the Tribal Courts (Nisqually Tribal Court and Spokane Tribal Court). The programs vary in size, and therefore in capacity to serve all eligible children. At this time it is estimated that less than 50 percent of all eligible children have a volunteer CASA/GAL appointed. Other jurisdictions rely on paid GALs who may be lawyers, community professionals and in some cases juvenile court staff such as probation officers. Despite the law mandating the appointment of a GAL or CASA for dependent children, most dependent children do not have one.

Duties of the CASA/GAL

Under Washington State law, the duties of the GAL include but are not limited to the following: (1) to represent and be an advocate for the best interests of the child; (2) to collect relevant information about the child's situation; (3) to monitor all court orders for compliance and to bring to the court's attention any change in circumstances that may require a modification of the court's order; and (4) to report to the court information on the legal status of a child's membership in any Indian tribe or band (RCW 13.34.105).

Establishing the specific duties and responsibilities of the CASA/GAL has been the subject of discussion and debate. Duquette (1990) defines the role with reference to maltreated children as having five major functions: (1) fact finder, (2) legal representative, (3) case monitor, (4) mediator, and (5) information and resource broker. However, largely because of the multiple roles, it is sometimes difficult to explain exactly what it is that GALs do. For example, Raven Lidman and Betsy Hollingsworth, clinical law professors at Seattle University, have written about the potential confusion and duplication of activities that can result from the multiple roles assigned GALs (Lidman & Hollingsworth, 1998). These authors argue that the undefined role can undermine due process and that courts should instead appoint individuals to fulfill specific, recognized functions in particular cases.

Lawyers may also be appointed to represent maltreated children. Lawyers function as advocates who represent the expressed wishes of the child as opposed to the perception of best interests. There has been increasing concern on the part of lawyers representing maltreated children over the roles of lawyer versus GAL. As noted by Haralambie (1997), the laws in many states have been unclear about which role the lawyer should take and in some cases have expected the lawyer to assume both roles. A symposium was held at Fordham University in 1995 to wrestle with the ethical issues related to these roles in child maltreatment cases. The result of this meeting was a rejection of the category of GAL to the extent that the role "includes responsibilities inconsistent with those of a lawyer for a child" (p. 198). Dennis Ichikawa, currently with the Washington State Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, argues in favor of lawyers for children who are the subject of child abuse and neglect proceedings: "For a judge to rule on what is in a child's best interest in a child abuse/neglect proceeding, the child's position must be effectively advocated" (pp. 202-211) (Ichikawa, 1997). Lawyers who represent children seem to be saying that the GAL role, if substituted for an advocate, has the potential to reflect personal preferences and biases, and to fail to convey the child's expressed wishes to the court. Commentators (e.g., Haralambie, 1997) argue that

lawyers can, when they are qualified to interpret children's responses, do more than simply parrot what children say they want. As one lawyer interviewed during this evaluation argued, when lawyers represent young children, they are always attempting to assert a considered position that is both what the children wish and what is in their best interest.

The National CASA Association was established to "support the growth and professional development of the CASA movement" (NCASAA, 1995). The organization serves as a resource for state and local CASA programs and provides a variety of services and materials to assist programs. Grants for program development are awarded through competitive application. The Association has established standards for volunteer and human resource management, fundraising, and evaluation. A training curriculum is also available.

Michael Paraino is a lawyer and the executive director of the NCASAA which is based in Seattle. In an interview for this evaluation, he described the unique contribution of volunteer CASA/GALs as the capacity to concentrate effort on a few cases at a time and by virtue of not being paid, the freedom from allegiance to a pay check, an institution, or an ideology. CASA/GALs are empowered to advocate solely on behalf of the child and can take certain risks without jeopardy. He acknowledges that CASA/GALs may duplicate some of the activities of the state caseworker, but believes that this serves children by picking up slack and insuring thoroughness. Even if CASA/GALs arrive at similar conclusions, they have done so by developing information and opinions through a different method. If there is a discrepancy between CASA/GALs' view of best interests and children's expressed wishes, this should always be made known to the court and a lawyer should be appointed.

OAC Report on State Programs: Training Requirements

In 1996, Washington's Office of the Administrator for the Courts (OAC) was directed to review issues related to the GALs and develop a comprehensive statewide curriculum for persons serving as GALs under Title 13 and Title 26 RCW. The OAC Report (1997) acknowledges that there are problems associated with the lack of specificity of the role of GAL, whether volunteer or paid, and this can create confusion and frustration. They recommend that the Supreme Court adopt rules that specifically describe and define the various roles and responsibilities. The report does not recommend mandating the use of CASAs for all dependency and family law cases, but strongly endorses the programs. "The state should encourage the use of CASAs for all Title 13 RCW dependency cases by appropriating funds for the establishment of new CASA programs and for the maintenance of existing CASA programs" (p.19).

One result of this report is that after January 1, 1998, all persons applying to become paid GALs must complete the training outlined in the OAC curriculum. Volunteer CASA/GAL programs have the option to adopt the OAC curriculum or present an equivalent training program that must be approved by OAC before a new CASA/GAL is appointed to a case. The OAC curriculum is oriented toward providing a prospective GAL with the *knowledge* needed for proficient practice (e.g., understanding the law related to representing children), *skills* needed to complete responsibilities (e.g., report writing, interviewing), and *abilities* required to perform complex decision-making like adhering to strict ethical standards (p. 3, OAC Washington State GAL Training Curriculum: Title 13 & Title 26 Facilitators Guide, 1997). The curriculum focuses on a variety of topics including ethics, the law and legal process, investigation, interviewing, systems, agencies and resources, training in child development, chemical dependency and mental health, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, personal security and cultural diversity.

It is clear that, despite questions that have been raised about the role of GAL in general, in the state of Washington the courts strongly support the volunteer programs. It may be that the role conflicts that lawyers experience are less a concern for volunteers. Because they are not lawyers and are trained to provide certain types of services that the court is seeking, they fulfill a function that is missing or less complete without their involvement.

Testing Effectiveness: National Studies

Implementation of the volunteer programs is generally assumed to contribute to improved outcomes for children. However, the scientific evidence that the programs actually achieve their goals has only recently been a focus of attention. For example, the reauthorization of CAPTA in 1988 required states to begin evaluation efforts to determine the effectiveness of CASA programs. Since that time a variety of efforts have been undertaken.

The National CASA (1996) compiled a list of evaluations/reviews of CASA/GAL programs. These reports summarize 16 efforts with a qualitative focus (primarily surveys and interviews) and 15 efforts that included process and/or outcome measures (examination of case files/court records as well as surveys/interviews). Three studies were national in scope, three involved more than one state, and the remainder were conducted in 19 different states. None involved Washington State.

The qualitative studies reveal that in general there is a positive view of volunteer CASA/GALs among the key players (i.e., judges, caseworkers, lawyers, community professionals, the volunteers, and children/family members, depending on the study focus). However, a majority of judges in several surveys did not use volunteer CASA/GALs, and respondents in other surveys believed that the role of the GAL was not always clearly articulated. Concerns were expressed about the need for more GALs, improved training, and program standards.

Many of the investigators reported difficulties in carrying out quantitative research and obtaining adequate data from the existing data sources. In order to establish effectiveness it is necessary to have access to case files and court records, and to have comparison groups where some children have CASA/GAL representation and others do not. Absent comparable comparison groups, it is not possible to conclude that any observed differences are due to the activities of the CASA/GAL. Despite these difficulties some preliminary conclusions have been drawn.

A number of studies have attempted to compare volunteer CASA/GALs with other forms of representation (e.g., no representation, private lawyers, staff lawyers). The results vary depending on the type of comparison and outcome measure. One result seems clear; having representation accelerates case resolution. For example, the Oregon Task Force on Juvenile Justice (1995) found that children who had a CASA or a lawyer GAL spent significantly less time in substitute care compared to children with no representation.

Condelli (1988) found that private attorneys tended to be the weakest method of providing representation, whereas GALs, and especially CASAs were associated with a greater number of best interest outcomes. The author suggests this may be due to training and time available. In an early study (Duquette & Ramsey, 1986), differences in the quality of representation were attributed to training, whether the representation was provided by private lawyers, law students, or volunteers. These results underscore the importance of GALs, regardless of background, having sufficient time and adequate training to be effective in promoting children's interests.

Poertner and Press (1986) compared lay volunteers and trained attorneys and found that CASA volunteers performed as well as lawyers on a majority of process variables, but there were few differences in terms of outcomes except that CASA cases tended to result in adoptions more often. Another study also found that cases with CASAs compared to cases without CASAs more often resulted in adoption versus long term foster care (Abramson, 1991). However, these results may be related to the type of cases that are assigned to CASAs. Smith (1992) reported that CASA cases tended to have more placements, be in the system longer, and be more likely to be adopted. The author speculates that CASAs may be appointed in the more difficult and complex cases. Leung (1996) did not find statistically significant differences in length of placement or number of placements in cases with CASAs.

Two studies (Snyder, 1995; CSR, Inc, 1995) explicitly examined the extent to which CASAs and lawyer GALs (either private or staff) differed in the five roles identified by Duquette. The findings reveal that to some extent performance depends on the role. Both studies suggest that CASAs are superior in the *investigator/factfinder* function. Only one of the studies found that CASAs were as effective as lawyers in the *legal representation* function whereas the other confirmed that lawyers were in fact more effective in this role. Similarly, one of the studies found CASAs as effective as lawyers as *negotiator/mediators* and the other found staff lawyers more effective in this role. Both studies report that CASAs spend more time/are better at *monitoring case* activities, and one of the studies found that CASAs more often acted as *resource brokers*. The results were inconclusive regarding the resource broker role in the other study. Both studies conclude that the CASA represents the child interests at least as well as the lawyer GAL model.

Multi-State Evaluation Underway

At the national level, CASA programs have demonstrated their commitment to being accountable by undertaking a multi-stage evaluation effort. This plan was recommended by a group of experts who agreed that there was a lack of information about the outcomes for children and the cost effectiveness of the programs. The research effort is supported by the Packard Foundation. As part of the evaluation a database software called COMET has been developed and tested to collect information about cases and volunteer activities. A manual has been developed for programs to use in tracking outcomes and evaluating effectiveness (Litzelfelner, McDonald, & Poertner, 1997). The authors state that program effectiveness can only be determined using a comparison group, but programs can evaluate the extent to which they achieve their goals. They offer a variety of specific ways that programs can do this.

The existing research shows that CASA programs are popular and appear to be comparable to other forms of child representation. While it has not been proven that they are superior, either in outcomes or cost (e.g., compared to well trained lawyers who have the time to do the job right), they certainly do no less well. It also clear that only a minority of children receive representation because there are insufficient volunteers or other GALs available. In fact, many of the evaluations/reviews observed that both volunteer CASAs and lawyer GALs were desirable for maximum benefit to a case.

SECTION I: ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS

Are Volunteer CASA/GALs Effective in Promoting Improved Outcomes for Represented Children?

The ultimate measure of effectiveness is the extent to which the appointment of a CASA/GAL accelerates the successful resolution of state intervention with dependent children. A successful outcome is generally considered achieved when children are in a safe permanent home. Whenever possible, it is desirable that children return to birth families who have corrected the conditions that led to maltreatment or risk of maltreatment. If family reunification is not possible or fails, placement in a permanent home through adoption, guardianship or long term foster care, preferably with kin, is the goal.

Time to Permanency for Dependent Children

It is not currently possible to determine whether CASA/GAL programs in Washington State decrease the length of time to permanency for dependent children. The primary reason for this is that a CASA/GAL is not appointed in all cases. Because there are insufficient volunteers available, courts and programs make decisions about which cases are most in need of a CASA/GAL. For example, programs report that an informal convention has been adopted of primarily serving younger children. Adolescents generally have a lawyer appointed instead. Among younger children, CASA/GALs are more often appointed in difficult and complex cases. These practices have evolved to make the best use of limited resources. At the same time, it is likely that complex cases inherently take longer to resolve. As a result, cases with a CASA/GAL are not comparable to those where there is no CASA/GAL. It would, therefore, be misleading to use comparisons of length of time to permanency as a measure of program success.

Another method of evaluation, as recommended by National CASA, is to establish benchmarks for key steps toward permanency and strive to have a certain proportion of cases with CASA/GALs reach these goals each year. Currently, information about time frames and case progression is not routinely collected by CASA/GAL programs. There is no standard method by which volunteers or programs keep records of case activities and outcomes.

Record Keeping

During the course of this evaluation, an inspection of case files in one program revealed a great deal of variability in the amount and nature of information gathered in individual cases. Even reports to the court vary in format and content across programs. The reason for this is that programs are substantially influenced by the directives of the local court jurisdiction. For example, in several jurisdictions, judges have established the preferred format for court reports. As a result, comparable information about cases across programs in Washington State is not currently available.

However, programs are beginning to institute more standardized record keeping procedures. For example, Snohomish county, the program for which files were reviewed, has recently implemented a new format for documentation of case activities. They now require that volunteer CASA/GALs record the date, time, and location of each in-person or phone contact;

note the topics discussed; and track all formal documents that are reviewed (e.g. school reports, medical reports, psychological evaluations).

Survey Purposes

For the purposes of this evaluation, the *effectiveness of programs* was assessed by determining whether CASA/GALs are carrying out the activities identified as central to the role of GAL and the extent to which the programs and volunteers are perceived to be effective by key community constituencies. The team conducted surveys of:

- Program Managers,
- Volunteer CASA/GALs, and
- Key community constituencies.

In addition, an informal focus group was conducted with judges.

The findings for each group are presented separately.

A. SURVEY OF PROGRAM MANAGERS

Information was collected from Program Managers via a survey and by inspection of the annual reports of the programs. The survey (see Appendix A) included questions about the program standards and expectations (e.g., job description, criteria for case appointment); activities of volunteers in specific cases (e.g., who is contacted in the course of the investigation, how often CASA/GALs testify, how often the CASA/GAL's recommendations are reflected in the judge's decisions); supervision of volunteers (e.g., estimated hours of supervision per case, whether or not reports are reviewed, evaluation of volunteers, handling of complaints); characteristics of case outcomes (e.g., reunification versus adoption or relative guardianship); and the extent to which recommendations of CASA/GALs agree or conflict with those of other parties (e.g., sources of disagreement with caseworkers, incorporation by judges). The annual program survey provided information about the number of cases handled, program cost and sources of support, and level of staffing.

Program Capacity

Surveys and annual reports were received from all programs serving dependent children (N=19). The programs vary substantially in size. San Juan County has one paid staff and 4 volunteers who handled 16 new dependency cases in 1997, while the King County program, the largest in the state, has 7 staff and 320 CASA/GALs who managed 1656 new cases in 1997. Programs also varied dramatically in the ratio of program staff to volunteers. The range was from 1:4 to 1:132, although about half (58 percent) of programs had a ratio of 1:30 or less. This compares favorably with the standard set by the National CASA of 1:30.

In order to determine the rates that programs respond to need, two ratios were calculated for each program based on data provided for 1997. One ratio was of the number of cases with a CASA/GAL appointed to the total number of dependency petitions filed and the second was the percentage of cases referred to a program where a CASA/GAL was appointed. (See last two columns of table.)

State CASA/GAL Programs: 1997 Activity

| (N=19) | Number of Dependency Petitions Filed in 1997 | Number of Children Referred for a CASA in 1997 | Number of Children With CASA Appointment | Percent of Petitions Referred | Percent of Referred Cases With CASA Appointment | Percent of Filed Petitions With CASA Appointment |
|------------------------|--|--|--|-------------------------------|---|--|
| | Spokane | 376 | missing | missing | - | - |
| Island | 35 | missing | - | - | - | - |
| Chelan/Douglas | missing | 30 | 30 | - | 100% | - |
| Yakima | 156 | 56 | 56 | 36% | 100% | 36% |
| San Juan | 5 | 5 | 5 | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Walla Walla | 75 | 40 | 40 | 53% | 100% | 53% |
| Snohomish | 395 | 395 | 105 | 100% | 26% | 26% |
| Pierce | 391 | 84 | 84 | 21% | 100% | 21% |
| Lewis | 123 | 123 | 103 | 100% | 84% | 84% |
| Kittitas | 8 | 10* | 10 | 100% + | 100% | 100% |
| King County | 1052 | missing | 381 | - | - | 36% |
| Jefferson | 18 | 23* | 20 | 100% + | 87% | 90% |
| Clark | 134 | 134 | 134 | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Clallam | 49 | missing | 49 | - | - | 100% |
| Kitsap | 259 | 81 | 81 | 31% | 100% | 31% |
| Thurston | 118 | 118 | 40 | 100% | 34% | 34% |
| Benton/Franklin | 115 | 64 | 57 | 56% | 89% | 50% |
| Whitman | 24 | missing | 14 | - | - | 58% |
| Cowlitz | 96 | 87 | 87 | 91% | 100% | 91% |

Note that numbers marked with an asterisk do not add up. It appears that more cases were referred than petitions reported. This data was extracted from each program's 1997 annual budget report and Washington State CASA budget data.

Significant variation exists among counties in the referral and appointment process. For example, in some counties the majority of children on whom dependency petitions were filed in 1997 were not referred for a CASA assignment (i.e. Walla Walla, Pierce, Kitsap), but in these three counties, CASA/GALs were appointed in all referred cases. In other counties all cases are referred but program capacity limits the number of CASA/GAL appointments.

Despite the fact that many programs must make decisions about which cases to appoint a CASA/GAL, only 18 percent of programs have written criteria for case assignment. Similar to other states, the age of the child appears to be an important variable in Washington State programs. Program Managers (N=19) reported that over 70 percent of cases involved children under 12 years.

About two thirds (68 percent) of programs report that they use paid program staff as well as volunteers to serve as CASA/GALs. For example, in the Spokane program when no CASA is available for appointment, the CASA Program Manager has been appointed by the court to provide oversight and monitor court orders for dependent or alleged dependent children. The Program Manager explained, "Our program is currently working with the Superior Court judges and Juvenile Court administrators to change this procedure. The number of cases in which the Program Manager or designee provided oversight increased to a larger number than the number

of cases in which CASAs were appointed. This oversight responsibility has become increasingly time-consuming, resulting in inadequate staff time to support and supervise CASA volunteers. Approximately 70 percent of program staff time was taken in responding to crises involving cases which had no CASA, leaving inadequate time for supervision, support and recognition of CASAs."

These results do not reveal the total percentage of dependent children in Washington State who have GAL representation. Not all jurisdictions use volunteer CASA/GALs and three-fourths of Program Managers reported that paid lawyer or professional GALs are also used in their jurisdictions.

Expectations for Volunteers

Program Managers reported that CASA/GALs are expected, in the course of an investigation, to have contact with the child, the foster parents, the birth parents, DCFS caseworkers, and the various professionals who may be involved including physicians, mental health and other service professionals, teachers/day care providers, and police when these individuals have knowledge of the child/family situation. The volunteers are expected to review DCFS case files and any available reports. All children are at least seen in person, except in rare cases where the child has been placed outside county, but the nature of the contact varies. For example, children are not routinely interviewed about the allegations of maltreatment, but in some cases may initiate discussion about abuse. Older children are usually, but not always, asked about their preferences for reunification or permanency. A report is prepared in all cases and most often follows a standard format (95 percent). However, the specific format is determined by local judges.

According to the Program Managers, the recommendations of the CASA/GAL are generally consistent with the DCFS caseworker (60 percent of cases), and with those of all parties (e.g., the parent attorneys) in 60 to 79 percent of cases. In the vast majority of cases (80 to 100 percent), the CASA/GAL recommendations are reflected in the judge's final orders. These results suggest that, although CASA/GALs recommendations are usually similar to those of the state, most of the time they do not differ from the other parties either and are almost always contained in the judicial decisions.

Reasons for Disagreements

In order to identify areas where there are differences of opinion between CASA/GALs and other parties (e.g., caseworkers, parent attorneys), Program Managers were asked to rank order the potential areas of disagreement. The following results were obtained:

When there are disagreements among the volunteer CASA/GAL and other parties, what are the most common areas?

| Rank Order | Area of Disagreement |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Visitation |
| 2 | Placement of target child |
| 3 | Services for child |
| 4 | Services for the parent |
| 5 | Permanent plan |
| 6 | Placement of siblings |
| 7 | Validity of abuse allegations |

The investigation phase of a case may conclude by agreement between parties or at a Fact Finding Hearing. Most cases are resolved without a trial. When there is a trial, CASA/GALs are reported to testify in about half of cases. The monitoring phase of a case lasts until it is dismissed by the court. CASA/GALs continue to be involved during the monitoring phase of a case and are expected to have contact with the same individuals during this phase, as during the investigation phase. This phase may take years in some instances. For example, Program Managers report that in the vast majority of cases even where parental rights are terminated, CASA/GALs continue to be involved. In Washington State it takes approximately two years from the point that children are legally free until they are in a permanent home (Bodonyi, 1997). Program Managers report that the final outcome of the majority of cases is that children remain with or are reunified with their families.

Supervision and Quality Control

There is a written job description for volunteers in three quarters of programs. A slight majority (56 percent) of programs have specified standards for supervising volunteers, and only about a third (32 percent) have a standard evaluation process. On the other hand, programs reported that program staff or lawyers review court reports before they are released in almost all cases. Almost all programs (84 percent) have procedures for handling complaints about volunteers, and 84 percent of programs reported that they had dismissed a volunteer. This compares with about 10 percent of programs who reported that the court had removed a volunteer from their program. Program Managers specified a variety of different reasons why they had dismissed volunteers in the past (see box below for examples).

Have you ever dismissed a volunteer CASA/GAL in your program? If yes, describe the reasons why:

- A volunteer's lack of involvement and follow-through.*
- Lack of objectivity.*
- Repeated lack of writing reports.*
- Attending court hearings without adequate contact with staff.*
- Alliance with a parent to the detriment of being able to consider the child's best interests.*
- Conflict with a social worker to the point that the child's best interests were being obscured.*
- Lengthy period of not attending training.*
- Lack of confidentiality.*
- Not appearing for court.*
- Too emotionally involved.*

B. VOLUNTEER CASA/GAL SURVEY

The names and addresses of all active volunteers were provided by Program Managers. Surveys were sent to 1178 volunteers. The survey (see Appendix B) included demographic information about the volunteers, number of cases handled and amount of time spent per case, questions about case activities (e.g. who is contacted, how often they testify), and the outcome of recommendations (e.g. agreement with other parties, reflected in judicial orders). They were asked open-ended questions about how they determine "best interests" and how they manage a conflict between a child's wishes and the volunteer's perception of best interest. The remaining components of the survey consisted of a series of questions suggested by National CASA (Litzelfelner, McDonald, Poertner, 1997, p. 48). Volunteers were asked to rate satisfaction regarding various aspects of their role- duties, training and supervision- and were offered the opportunity to respond to several open-ended questions about areas of concern, the rewards and difficulties of being a CASA/GAL, and suggestions for program improvement and training..

Volunteer Characteristics

Surveys were received from 493 CASA/GAL volunteers, producing a 42 percent response rate. The response rate across the 19 programs ranged from 15 percent to 77 percent. There were some respondents from each county's program.

Demographic Characteristics of Volunteer CASA/GALs

| Demographics | (N=493) | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|
| Gender | Male | 13% |
| | Female | 86% |
| | Missing | <1% |
| Age | 20-30 years | 7% |
| | 31-40 years | 18% |
| | 41-50 years | 26% |
| | 51-60 years | 23% |
| | 61-70 years | 19% |
| | 71+ years | 5% |
| | Missing | <1% |
| Ethnicity | Caucasian | 94% |
| | African American | 2% |
| | Pacific Islander | <1% |
| | Asian | <1% |
| | Hispanic | <1% |
| | Native American | 1% |
| | Mixed Race | 2% |
| | Missing | 1% |
| Employment | Full-time | 35% |
| | Part-time | 17% |
| | Employed/Student | 5% |
| | Student | 3% |
| | Unemployed | 6% |
| | Retired | 28% |
| | Other | 6% |
| Program Location | East | 35% |
| | West | 64% |
| | South | <1% |
| Program/Jurisdiction Size | Small | 13% |
| | Medium | 45% |
| | Large | 37% |
| | Missing | 5% |

The large majority of CASA/GAL volunteers are female, identify themselves as Caucasian, are over 40 years old, and do not work full-time. Presumably, these demographics reflect the segment of the population that is available to volunteer, but they depart significantly from the characteristics of the parents of dependent children.

There was a broad spectrum of experience among the CASA/GAL volunteers. The length of time respondents had served as CASA/GALs ranged from 1 month to 20.5 years. On average, the respondents had served as CASA/GALs for 4 years (Mean = 4.16; Median = 3.00). The total number of children that each volunteer CASA/GAL had served ranged from 0 to 200. One respondent had not yet been appointed a child and was just finishing training at the time she was surveyed. The average number of children the respondents had represented was 10 while the median number was 5. Due to the great variability of responses the median amount of children (5) offers a more accurate picture. At the time of the survey, volunteer CASA/GAL

respondents were carrying an average caseload of 3 children (range: 0 - 31; Mean = 3.38; Median = 2.00).

Time Estimates

It was difficult to determine the amount of time that volunteer CASA/GALs spend per case. Respondents were asked to estimate the number of hours for the investigation phase and for the monitoring phase. Many respondents did not complete the question or substituted a per month or a per week estimate. Of responses received (76 percent), volunteers reported having spent an average of 29 hours in the investigation phase (Mean = 29.48). However, because of the great variability of responses (Range = 0-700) the median of 20 hours is a more accurate estimate of time spent by volunteers in the investigative phase. Estimates for the monitoring phase were even more difficult to obtain. One reason is that cases vary widely in the amount of time spent during this period (e.g., some remain in the monitoring stage for years before resolution occurs). In addition, CASA/GALs often represent several siblings and the contacts with professionals or caregivers may occur on behalf of more than one child. CASA/GALs reported spending an average of 13 hours per month on each case (range 0 -125; Mean =13.10; Median = 10.00).

Case Activities

Volunteers' reports of their activities in specific cases were consistent with the expectations described by Program Managers. In almost all cases, during the investigation phase the CASA/GAL has contact with the child, the birth parents, the foster parents, the DCFS caseworker, and the various professionals involved with the case including mental health and other service providers (e.g. substance abuse counselors, doctors, teachers/day care providers, neighbors, clergy, and police). They routinely review DCFS case files and any available reports. Although the volunteers virtually always have direct contact with the children they represent (94 percent), a majority (52 percent) reported that it is rare to discuss the maltreatment allegations (as compared to 25 percent of Program Managers who stated that it was rare). The volunteers were similar to the Program Managers in how often they discussed preferences for permanency and comments revealed that it was mostly determined by the age of the child.

When necessary, testifying in court is one of the specified duties of a CASA/GAL. The survey data revealed that it is uncommon for volunteers to testify in contested hearing or Fact Finding. Most volunteers reported that they had testified in a disputed hearing in less than 10 percent of their cases. Eighty-two percent of the volunteers reported that in the vast majority of cases (60-100 percent) their recommendations were reflected in the judge's final orders.

Reasons for Disagreements

Volunteers were asked to rank order the areas of potential disagreement among volunteers and other parties (i.e. parent attorneys, caseworkers). Overall, the volunteers' ranking of disagreement areas were similar to those ranked by the Program Managers (see table).

When there are disagreements among the volunteer CASA/GAL and other parties, what are the most common areas?

| Volunteer Rank Order | Area of Disagreement | Program Manager Rank Order | Area of Disagreement |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Placement of child | 1 | Visitation |
| 2 | Visitation | 2 | Placement of child |
| 3 | Services for the parent | 3 | Services for child |
| 4 | Permanent Plan | 4 | Services for the parent |
| 5 | Services for child | 5 | Permanent Plan |
| 6 | Validity of abuse allegations | 6 | Placement of siblings |
| 7 | Placement of siblings | 7 | Validity of abuse allegations |

Activities After Investigation

Volunteers reported that they continue to be involved in cases during the monitoring phase and generally have contact with the same individuals as during the investigation phase. When asked about the role they had when parental rights are terminated, 66 percent of the volunteers who responded reported that they stay on the case and remain active. Twenty-two percent reported that they become inactive. However, 27 percent of the volunteers did not respond to these questions and indicated they had no experience in this area.

Fifteen percent of the respondents indicated having an "other role" when parental rights are terminated. Responses varied among these volunteers regarding the other role. One volunteer explained that she continued to be active until after adoption, then she has casual contact indefinitely. Another volunteer explained she stayed on the case to make sure the caseworker followed through with the paperwork. Another reported his status depends on if the child remains dependent; if they do he stays on the case and if not, he is inactive. Another reported she remains active until the permanent plan is achieved.

Satisfaction of Volunteers

Volunteers responded to a series of questions regarding their duties and experiences.

| (N=493) | Percent Strongly Agree | Percent Agree | Percent Disagree | Percent Strongly Disagree | Missing |
|--|------------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| 1. I understand what I am expected to do as a CASA volunteer. | 60% | 36% | 1% | - | 3% |
| 2. I feel I have received adequate training | 48% | 45% | 4% | - | 3% |
| 3. I am comfortable making recommendations in my role as a CASA/GAL. | 57% | 40% | 2% | - | 1% |
| 4. I am prepared for the court reports and court. | 58% | 36% | 3% | <1% | 2% |
| 5. I think my recommendations are taken seriously by the judge. | 63% | 28% | 4% | 1% | 4% |
| 6. I feel comfortable talking to my supervisor about the case. | 81% | 16% | 1% | - | 2% |
| 7. I think I receive enough supervision. | 60% | 32% | 6% | - | 2% |
| 8. My supervisor is helpful. | 73% | 23% | 2% | <1% | 2% |
| 9. My supervisor helps keep me motivated. | 53% | 33% | 9% | 1% | 4% |
| 10. I feel valued by the parents. | 16% | 43% | 32% | 3% | 7% |
| 11. I feel my opinion is respected by the child welfare worker. | 26% | 56% | 12% | 3% | 3% |
| 12. I feel that I am making a difference. | 53% | 38% | 6% | <1% | 2% |
| 13. I plan to continue being a CASA/GAL. | 56% | 32% | 5% | 2% | 5% |

The large majority of CASA/GALs report that they understand their role and expectations as a CASA, are satisfied with their training and supervision, are prepared for the court reports and hearings, and feel comfortable making recommendations. Over ninety percent of the volunteers think their recommendations are taken seriously by the judge, and the majority agreed that their opinion is respected by the Child Welfare Worker involved. Only 15 percent of the respondents believed that they were not valued by the parents during the process. CASA/GAL volunteers feel they are making a difference and plan to continue their work as a CASA.

Supervision

Volunteers were asked to specify the amount of supervision they received. Sixty-four percent of the respondents estimated that they received an average of 5 hours of supervision per case. The remaining 36 percent of the respondents offered estimated hours of supervision per week or per month.

Comments on Role and Purpose

Results from the open-ended questions in the volunteer survey should be taken as suggestive because not all respondents answered the questions and the answers were not systematically coded.

Determining best interest: Most respondents focused on the importance of gathering information from a broad array of sources. They did not articulate specific principles that they apply to their ultimate recommendations. Few had encountered situations in which there was a difference between what a child wanted and what the volunteer considered to be in the child's best interests. However, many provided examples of how they did or would handle such a situation.

What factors do you consider in determining what is in the child's best interests?

Who might harm the child? Is there a dangerous situation? Who can help the child? What, if any, services would benefit the child? What does the court need to know to help the child?

Parents' current situation; past history; child's safety; child's needs (i.e. level of development, behaviors)

If parents are complying with court orders and how that is going. How the children are doing in their placement and schools. Interview and listen to the children.

Safety, bonding to caregiver, what needs does the child have and can they be met in the home; is the parent willing to see the problem and take steps to correct it?

Describe how you handle a conflict between the child's wishes and best interest recommendations, when there is a discrepancy (e.g. The child wants to go home but the professionals determine home is dangerous).

I never promise the child that he/she will get exactly what they want. I try to help the child navigate and understand the whole situation (as appropriate) and focus on as big a picture as they can handle

Depends on many factors such as child's age and mental health status, but often by calling for a team meeting to see what can be done such as varying levels of contact with the parents as appropriate (phone, visits, supervised outings), being honest with child about if they will get their wish.

*Talk to the child and incorporate the child's therapist
...explain to child 'mommy is sick' or other appropriate explanation.*

Areas of concern and difficulties: There were a wide range of responses to these two questions. Two common themes emerged. Many respondents noted that cases took far longer to resolve than was desirable; that it often seemed as though children's situations were compromised because parents did not address their problems and/or were permitted too many chances by the system. Difficulties working with DCFS caseworkers were noted by many respondents. They reported that caseworkers sometimes seemed to view the involvement of a CASA/GAL as a burden or that they were difficult to reach. In addition, volunteers expressed concerns about their roles vis a vis service provision and in the legal arena.

Please explain any areas of concern you have:

Cases move through the system far too slowly. Parents are given far too much time to correct conditions which caused child to be removed, while the child is in limbo. Once the child is legally free and adoptive parents identified, finalization takes over two years.

Caseworkers' caseload is far too great and department's operation is very inefficient.

Caseworkers spend too much time on paperwork, to the detriment of the children they are paid to help.

All CASA offices in Washington need to be independently funded so that neutrality is maintained and the CASA can represent only the best interests of the child and not the interests of the parent organization.

Giving parents so many chances- the length of the dependency.

My concern is the court system seems so busy with ensuring the rights of the parents are never compromised to the extent that it prevents the children from being placed in a nurturing, safe, permanent home.

CPS caseworker has too many cases or so I am told is the reason why they are unable to adequately meet the needs of the children.

I've found a dark side to the system that truly upsets me. I feel that many clients rights are violated by social workers and some professional staff.

State too quick to return kids to home and dismiss case.

Systems delay in moving the child out of harm's way permanently.

Parents and caseworkers aren't held accountable for lack of progress.

It seems to me that often times the only difference between the neglect the children face at home with their parents and the neglect the children face in the CPS system is that at least in the former the parents love them (or prefer to do so).

Sometimes I feel I have been in over my head legally.

What has been most difficult for you as a CASA?

Watching the court allow a case to drag on while a child's life is put on hold; the agonizingly slow pace and inefficiency of the adoption process; the cruel emphasis on reuniting a family over the welfare of the child; drug addicted mothers who give birth to multiple drug addicted babies.

I sometimes feel that social workers view CASAs as troublesome or useless.

Working with lame social workers who try and intimidate their clients and a CASA staff who backs them up because they are afraid of them.

Feeling alone.

Remaining objective.

Intruding on children who already have so many people talking to them.

Knowing the resources available.

Understanding the DCFS jargon.

When I've had a difficult caseworker who'd rather get the case over with and give the child back to parents even though they agree parents will fail and child will be hurt again.

Quite often feel very much at odds with caseworker, sorta like I'm an irritant.

Watching the system not save a child.

Seeing the damage that has been done to innocent children.

Adversarial role in court.

Worrying about my own safety.

Getting through the first court appearance.

To stand back from a situation to view it from all sides to abstain from a rush to judgment.

Not being in the service provider role and needing to check myself on slipping into that role.

Trying to help parents who don't have the desire to change.

Feeling as though I was in the middle of some sort of game where people's entire lives are determined by the outcome of the game.

To not provide direct counseling services but to be the observer, the referrer, and not the fixer.

Helpfulness of programs and training: Over all, CASA/GALs were extremely positive about the program staff. Many made complimentary comments about responsiveness of supervisors and about the level of support they received. It was common for respondents to say that there was no additional help needed.

Please describe how your program supervisor and the CASA office could be more helpful to you:

I'm so impressed with the professionalism, dedication and wisdom of our managers. They are always supportive, responsive and encouraging.

Can't! They are a wonderful support group. (They) answer any and all questions...they help us through any problems.

To my knowledge they offer me all the support needed-their attitude is always great.

We have a tremendous executive director and a great staff.

The program has been very supportive and always there when I needed them.

Volunteers who did make suggestions identified a variety of possible improvements and additional topics for training.

Describe how your program supervisor and the CASA office could be more helpful to you:

Have a monthly brown bag meeting at juvenile court to address any problem areas.

Keep changing the way to do the reports so they're easier.

Maybe call me or someone from office to see how I'm doing.

Go into court with me—this still makes me nervous.

Having inexperienced GALs mentored by long-experienced GALS.

Staff the CASA offices sufficiently so that immediate assistance can be obtained when a problem arises.

Be prepared to brainstorm with me—encourage me to do that.

Please describe additional training you might find helpful:

Mock court room settings.

Procedures/laws.

A more not so legal explanation of court proceedings.

Process recent change of how judges and commissioners are assigned.

Court report training session-should be broken up into shorter meetings. Three hours of information is too much to remember.

Better reference manuals -understand the function of each agency.

Clearer directions on authority of agency representatives.

More definition of local resources, public, private, religious.

Detecting drug usage among families and especially the children.

What to look for in child/parent per age/developmental signs and symptoms of things- checklist.

Dealing with difficult parents who are in denial or who lie and blame others for their actions.

*Attachment issues, permanency for 0-3, 4-9, 10+, medical neglect issues
cultural classes/ cultural relevancy.*

Assertiveness training for CASAs to feel an equal part of the equation.

(Training) with AG office and public defenders to understand their position.

When kids are in foster care and are already closely supervised what is my role then? Do they need one more person to get close to who will then disappear?

How to put files together.

Many respondents described the benefits of serving as a CASA/GAL. They reported on the gratification of making a contribution toward improving children's lives.

What have you found most rewarding/helpful?

That not only do I make a difference in children's life but I am also able to discover new and exciting things about who I am on each case I work on. I also make an impact on adult lives.

Being a child's voice.

Children knowing that there is someone out there who cares and watches out for them.

They know they're not alone anymore and will be protected.

Their (children's) safety, well-being, support. To know they can rely on me to offer best assistance and for them to know they are not at fault or alone.

That my opinion counted in court- that my volunteer work makes a difference in lives of children.

Seeing a truly loving relationship between children and parent.

Seeing parents join together for the children.

Seeing children grow up healthier and protected.

Making a difference.

When my CASA kids are adopted by loving, healthy, well adjusted parents who are thrilled to become parents.

Judge notices specific concerns I have concerning child and addresses them when making a decision.

Just being able to help. The case I am currently working with, I have been the only 'constant'...been going almost 4 years and have had 4 social worker changes.

Community support and uncovering issues that may have been overlooked if the case depended solely on the over worked social services personnel.

Being viewed as neutral, yet influential by clients-being able to motivate compliance or suggest alternate routes to goal or to smaller goal they can embrace.

Able to be a part of the positive change in a child's trauma

Feeling that child/children will have a better chance at life because I was involved

C. KEY INFORMANTS

In order to obtain community perceptions of the effectiveness of CASA/GAL programs, a group of key professionals was selected for interview. This method was chosen because it afforded the opportunity to gather in-depth qualitative, as well as quantitative information from especially knowledgeable individuals across the state. As a result, the sample size is restricted and respondents are not representative of all professionals who may have contact with a CASA/GAL in a given year. Therefore, the results must be considered in light of these limitations.

Respondents were drawn from four key constituencies who have contact with CASA/GALs or who are consumers of their reports:

- Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) caseworkers;
- lawyers representing parents in dependency cases;
- mental health service providers treating dependent children or their families; and
- juvenile court judges and commissioners.

Potential respondents were identified by local CASA/GAL programs. A letter from the evaluator described the CASA/GAL evaluation, explained the purpose of the interviews, and solicited their cooperation.

Endresen Research, a survey research firm based in Seattle, was hired to carry out the interviews. Endresen Research contacted those professionals who had received letters and requested participation. Professional survey interviewers conducted confidential interviews with 40 professionals from across the state. Only professionals who indicated that they had recent experience with a CASA/GAL were scheduled for interviews. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the respondents and lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. Ten caseworkers and mental health professionals, 11 lawyers representing parents, and nine judges were interviewed. Every effort was made to have geographic representation; at least one professional from every county with a CASA/GAL program was interviewed.

The interview guide (see Appendix C) consisted of a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. Respondents were asked to rate the contribution of volunteers to cases, the performance of volunteers on various activities, and how volunteers compare with paid GALs. They were also asked open-ended questions about the desirable characteristics of CASA/GALs, the role of the CASA/GAL, their training, and recommendations for program improvements.

Profile of Respondents

The sample consisted of professionals who were knowledgeable about CASA/GAL programs, with 80 percent reporting that they were very familiar with the program and the remainder being somewhat familiar. On average, the respondents had been involved with 41 cases in the past year where a CASA/GAL was appointed, and had contact with 16 different volunteers. Judges had more experience than other professionals, with an average of 77 cases, while mental health providers had the least amount of experience, averaging about 23 cases and contact with five different volunteers. The full report is appended (see Appendix C).

CASA/GAL Role and Purposes

Respondents primarily perceive the appropriate role of CASA volunteers as looking out for the best interests of the child, and advocating for and representing these best interests to the court and involved community services. The most effective vehicle for achieving this goal is seen to be through investigation of the child's circumstances, something CASA volunteers are believed to do thoroughly from a fresh, outside perspective. Mediation and monitoring court orders are considered to be secondary functions of CASA volunteers, while being an expert witness is, for the most part, not considered one of their duties. There is overlap of these roles with regard to what the state caseworker does, however this is not perceived as a negative by most respondents.

Reports written by CASA volunteers are considered to contain sufficient detail, to be comprehensive, and helpful. Respondents like to see reports that contain facts regarding a case, not personal opinions or interpretations of conversations or behaviors. Occasionally reports written by CASA volunteers lack clear decisions and recommendations regarding the case.

Cases that include a CASA volunteer are overwhelmingly preferred to cases without a CASA. They are thought to be more thoroughly investigated, and to contain more objective information that more accurately depicts the home situation of the child. Cases with CASA involvement are also valued because they include representation of the child, something that is seen to be sometimes lost in the DSHS and court systems. Some respondents, primarily caseworkers, prefer not to include a CASA in a case. The most common reason given is because it unnecessarily involves one more person creating a situation with more work. These sentiments, however, are restricted to caseworkers who seem to carry most of the burden of the additional work brought on by a CASA volunteer.

The involvement of CASA volunteers is perceived to be detrimental when they lose their objectivity, exceed the boundaries their role allows, or do not make their own recommendations, acting as a "rubber stamp" for the state caseworkers. These criticisms are typically remarks about individual CASA volunteers, not blanket statements about the program as a whole.

CASA Contribution to Case Decision-making

Respondents also overwhelmingly prefer to work with cases that include a CASA volunteer versus a paid GAL. They primarily have experience with lawyers acting as a GAL. Lawyers are perceived to have a great deal of experience and legal expertise, however they are unable to invest the time required to do a thorough investigation. As lawyers are professional advocates, their ability to remain objective is also called into question.

As CASA volunteers typically come from a very different background from that of the children they represent, the ability to remain objective, flexible, and open minded are the most ideal characteristics they are seen to have. Good communication skills, both written and oral, maturity, life experience, and quality of judgment are also highly revered.

CASA volunteers are seen, on many occasions, to come up with similar recommendations to those of the state caseworkers, however this is not always the case. They are perceived to often come up with their own conclusions, sometimes strongly opposing the recommendations of state caseworkers. This opposing viewpoint is valued for it increases the level of performance invested by everyone in a case.

Rating

Overall, most respondents believe that the CASA volunteer program in their community is quite valuable. They do feel that "some CASAs are better than others" but on the whole they believe the rationale for the program is strong. Training is seen to be extremely important to the success of a CASA volunteer. Suggested topics for training are the court system and DSHS system, family dynamics, investigative techniques, child abuse and neglect, and the appropriate role of a CASA volunteer.

Interview respondents were asked to rate or grade the CASA volunteer program in their community on a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 = "Absolutely outstanding, it is extremely valuable" and 1 = "It is not a good program, major improvements are needed" (See table below). The overall mean rating for this question was 7.9. Mental health service providers appeared to view the program most favorably with a 8.8 average score while caseworkers gave the lowest rating with a mean of 6.9. Interviewees have a largely favorable opinion about the local programs.

How would you rate or grade the program in your community?

| Rating | Percentage (N= 40) |
|---|--------------------|
| (10) Absolutely outstanding, they do an excellent job | 20.0% |
| (9) | 10.0% |
| (8) | 32.5% |
| (7) | 25.0% |
| (6) | 2.5% |
| (5) | 0.0% |
| (4) | 0.0% |
| (3) | 5.0% |
| (2) | 0.0% |
| (1) It is not a good program, major improvements are needed | 0.0% |
| Don't know/refused | 5.0% |
| Mean Rating = 7.9 | |

Overall Assessment

Respondents were asked to provide an overall assessment of the value of CASA volunteers. As can be seen, CASAs are considered to make a valuable impact on cases (see table below).

In your opinion, how valuable are CASA volunteers when it comes to having a positive impact on a case?

| Rating | Percentage (N= 40) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| (4) Extremely valuable | 60.0% |
| (3) Somewhat valuable | 32.5% |
| (2) Not very valuable | 0.0% |
| (1) Not at all valuable | 0.0% |
| Don't know/refused | 7.5% |
| Mean Rating = 3.6 | |

In your opinion, what is the appropriate role of a CASA volunteer? What specific activities would you expect them to engage in?

To look after the best interest of the child. Visit with the child in their environment. Make an assessment of the child and parent and to explore all avenues before making recommendations.

Represent the child, not the parents, the child. Because children do not have representation.

To make their own independent investigation. Look at circumstances of the family, go to court and represent the interests and advocate on behalf of the child. First and foremost in-home visits. Interview child, parties.

Advocate for the best interests of the child without being hampered or helped by policy and laws that we, ourselves, are forced to follow. (To) come up with different recommendations than we do. It is helpful.

I like the way they keep me honest. A guardian angel watching over the process. I need to take this into account. There is somebody second guessing what I am doing. It causes me to think more thoroughly about what I am doing to move more thoughtfully, purposefully. CASA volunteers are not in the loop, but are looking over the loop.

In your opinion, what are some of the unique contributions the CASA volunteers are able to provide? What do they do specifically that makes them valuable? Specifically, what is it that you value in cases where CASA volunteers are involved?

An extra set of eyes coming from a different approach than the professionals.

A unique perspective of everyday folk with common sense decision making skills.

Looking out for the child. This is their first priority. Not a lot of community people do that.

CASAs have the time to make many contacts. They may know the child very well and may be truly expert on this child and their circumstances.

A level of depth of understanding. Nobody else is able to do this. A three dimensional view of people involved. Social workers have their viewpoint – to reunite. Family members have another. The CASAs viewpoint has more dimension.

Case workers are very restricted. Too many cases.

More likely to develop a rapport with a child.

Easily develops a relationship with parents and child. Objective yet supportive of the family. As it is now, there is more openness to accept them (CASAs).

What do you think is the biggest difference between cases in which the *guardian ad litem* is a CASA volunteer versus those cases in which the *guardian ad litem* is a paid advocate for the child?

No comparison. Attorneys never did anything but meet with the child five minutes before court.

Paid advocates don't take time. They review the case five minutes before the hearing. Don't explain to kids. CASAs can see through parents' manipulation of the child.

More enthusiasm and time from CASA volunteers.

More day to day, week-to-week contact(with CASA). Better at keeping their nose to the ground.

Paid advocates do a better job. More in-depth investigation, more in-depth report.

A MSW has a greater sense of the whole. They see more sides and look at more areas in depth. CASA volunteers are set at basic beliefs or value judgments. It is hard for them to look beyond that. They are white upper-middle class Protestant women who come from a place without direct experience relating to the client. Sometimes they roll their eyes and say 'Oh this is so horrible, these poor kids' They have different minimum standards of care than the clients.

Paid advocates have more confidence regarding legal issues. They are more proactive at getting services to the child. CASAs have more interaction with the family. More relationship things going on.

Objectivity. A lawyer is an advocate. This is how we are trained. A lawyer is not objective. Volunteers, I find, are more objective.

In general, would you say that you prefer to work with cases that do or do not include a CASA volunteer? Why is that?

Do. Another set of eyes and ears. More input and a higher likelihood that we will make the right decision for the kids in the long run.

Do. A CASA has an ability to gather information objectively, and will add to the case enormously to the information we have. We have a more powerful case if we come in with a mutual agreement.

Do. As a defense council, I can get good information from them.

It is one other set of eyes. In case someone drops the ball or misses something. If they are there in the best interest of the kids, then I say 'go for it'.

Do. They care more than the caseworker. Not as many cases as the caseworker.

One with a CASA offers a different perspective. As much information as possible. I would rather have a poor one than not one at all.

Do. I like the input. Without a CASA we only get the caseworker. The attorney gives us only one side of the picture. Nobody is saying this is what is in the best interest of the child.

Don't. Less people to work with in a case. It may make a difference in a bigger office. Workers are pretty involved in the cases here.

Don't. Another person to manage in my case load. Can be a real detriment to the family.

I would rather have a paid professional. They do a better job. It doesn't hurt to have a CASA there, but if it is going to supplant a paid professional, I would rather have the paid professional.

Some people might ask "Why is a CASA/GAL necessary, don't they usually come up with the same recommendations as the state case workers?" What is your reaction to that question?

They go a lot farther than the state caseworker.

They don't. They always deviate a little in every plan. The value of them is this. If I disagree with a CASA, I will reevaluate myself.

Many times they do. However, I have found that CASAs sometimes find more information, different records than state caseworkers do.

They're not afraid to go against the state. Not a rubber stamp, and state caseworkers know that.

It is not always the same, but it is typically close. Their independent investigation serves as a validation, a checks and balances.

Most don't, they arrive at their decisions independently. When they are the same, it just validates. Not mimicking.

There is a lot of thoughtful looking at facts when a CASA is involved. It forces us to do a better job. May not have thought about their perspective. I appreciate it very much.

No, many times they do not. The state looks at it from the perspective of doing all they can do, not what needs to be done. They are driven by services they can provide.

They don't come up with the same ideas. Professionals in the field have limitations on the availability of resources. Many need an outside person to say 'That's not enough'.

D. INFORMAL FOCUS GROUP WITH JUDGES

During the 1998 Children's Justice Conference, all attending judges and commissioners were invited to meet with the evaluator to give their views of the volunteer CASA/GAL programs in Washington State. Fourteen judges/commissioners were present for some or all of the discussion; all of them were from King County.

In general, they were supportive of volunteer programs. Their views were consistent with those of the survey respondents. They appreciated the ordinary person perspective that a volunteer brings to a case that is not necessarily reflected in professional opinions. Volunteers are in a position to learn more about the every day lives of the children, especially by conducting home visits and they can bring a common sense approach to recommendations.

The judges/commissioners commented that when CASA/GALs stray from this role by assuming a more "expert" type of position, their value is diminished. The judges/commissioners do not put much stock in CASA/GAL opinions of other professionals or of professionals' evaluations and reports. They expressed some concerns about CASA/GALs in court, and the importance that they have representation by a program lawyer. While not all judges/commissioners thought CASA/GALs were extremely valuable or added to a case, none of them reported that the appointment of a CASA/GAL detracted from a case.

SECTION II: COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Are CASA/GAL Programs Cost Effective?

Determining whether CASA/GAL programs are cost effective can only be accomplished by comparing the cost of the programs to some other means of providing representation to dependent children.

A crude measure of comparative cost is the relative cost per case when a volunteer, as opposed to a paid GAL is appointed. CASA/GAL program budgets reflect the expenses associated with staff salaries and benefits, expenses and rent, and are available for all of the programs. However, there is no standard compensation method for paid GALs. For example, a survey of programs and lawyers serving as paid GALs revealed that every county has a different system for payment and in many cases the specific amount per case cannot be ascertained. One reason for this is that in some cases (e.g., Douglas County) a law firm simply receives a contract to provide GAL service along with public defense, but does not keep records on the cost per case. In other cases (e.g., Kitsap County, Spokane County), the GAL may be a county employee (e.g., probation officer) who carries out this function in addition to other duties. Occasionally, a lawyer serves on a pro bono basis.

Some counties reported that paid GALs are reimbursed by unit of service. For example, in Lewis County, lawyers receive \$150 for Shelter Care or Fact Finding hearings and \$75 for Review hearings. In Island County paid GALs receive \$340 to open a file and a set amount for different kinds of hearings. Other counties pay an hourly rate, although the number of hours may be limited by the judge (e.g., Cowlitz, \$50/hour; Walla Walla, \$75/hour). Only one program was able to offer an estimate of the cost per case: \$500 to \$600 (Clark County).

A cost per case (single child) was calculated for the CASA/GAL programs by dividing the annual budget by the number of cases handled in a year (see table below).

Cost Per Case

| Program Name | Total Operating Budget (TOB) | Total Number Children Served in 1997 | Cost Per CASE |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Spokane | \$ 371,362.00 | 400 | \$ 929.08 |
| Island | \$ 22,196.00 | 65 | \$ 341.48 |
| Chelan/Douglas | \$ 42,608.00 | 92 | \$ 463.13 |
| Yakima | \$ 128,850.00 | 724 | \$ 177.97 |
| San Juan | \$ 5,000.00 | 16 | \$ 312.50 |
| Walla Walla | \$ 27,100.00 | 40 | \$ 677.50 |
| Snohomish | \$ 268,000.00 | 424 | \$ 632.07 |
| Pierce | \$ 100,000.00 | 225 | \$ 444.44 |
| Lewis | \$ 3,500.0 (NA) | 247 | \$ 14.17 (NA) |
| Kittitas | \$ 22,325.00 | 39 | \$ 572.43 |
| King County | \$1,002,711.00 | 1656 | \$ 605.50 |
| Jefferson | \$ 40,987.00 | 71 | \$ 577.28 |
| Clark | \$ 252,632.00 | 452 | \$ 558.92 |
| Clallam | \$ 106,359.00 | 184 | \$ 578.04 |
| Kitsap | \$ 57,776.00 | 131 | \$ 441.04 |
| Thurston | \$ 54,403.00 | 75 | \$ 725.37 |
| Benton/Franklin | \$ 139,235.00 | 247 | \$ 563.70 |
| Whitman | \$ 10,000.00 | 20 | \$ 500.00 |
| Cowlitz | \$ 73,000.00 | 210 | \$ 347.62 |

The cost per case ranged from a low of \$177.97 to a high of \$929.08. Lewis County was excluded because the annual budget information provided by the program did not accurately reflect the *total* budget according to Washington State CASA. The average cost per case was calculated by dividing the sum of all programs' cost per case by the number of programs to yield \$497.98. This means it costs approximately \$500 per dependent child served by a CASA/GAL.

Time Per Case

Cost per case does not necessarily capture the value of the service provided. For example, CASA/GALs spend far more time on cases than paid GALs. While the amount of time expended does not mean that the outcome of the case is superior, it is clear that one of the perceived values of the volunteer CASA/GAL is that they can devote extensive time to each case that is handled. On the other hand, some communities in Washington State prefer to use paid GALs and all of the jurisdictions with programs, use paid GALs in some cases.

Cost savings for other government agencies cannot be determined. If it could be established that the appointment of a CASA/GAL accelerated successful case resolution compared to cases without a CASA/GAL or cases with paid GALs, savings would accrue by the reduced length of involvement of government employees in handling cases. There might also be savings in the costs associated with out of home care, if children who were in state subsidized placements were more rapidly returned home or were adopted.

Funding Sources

CASA/GAL programs are established by court jurisdictions. In some cases they are administered by the courts, whereas in others, local social service agencies manage the programs (e.g., YMCA in Clark County). Typically programs receive the bulk of funding from the county within which they are located, although some programs have obtained grants or state funding (see tables below) . Grants are usually small and two (total of \$12,000) came from National CASA. A few programs carry out other fund raising efforts.

The 1997 Washington State legislature allocated funds to establish two "pilot projects" which actually consisted of support for program expansion in the two counties (Clark and Spokane).

Program Funding Sources

| Type of Funding | Yes (N=19) | | No (N=19) | |
|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| State | 3 | 16% | 16 | 84% |
| County | 18 | 95% | 1 | 5% |
| Community | 9 | 47% | 10 | 53% |
| Grants | 7 | 37% | 12 | 63% |
| Other | 7 | 37% | 12 | 63% |
| Private | 8 | 42% | 11 | 58% |

Percentages of Each Source of Funding

| CASA/GAL Program | State | County | Private |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Spokane | 27% | 73% | |
| Island | | 100% | |
| Chelan/Douglas | - | 56% | 44% |
| Yakima | | | |
| San Juan | | 100% | |
| Walla Walla | | | 100% |
| Snohomish | | 100% | |
| Pierce | | 99% | <1% |
| Lewis | | 100% | |
| Kittitas | | 55% | 45% |
| King County | 12% | 88% | <1% |
| Jefferson | - | 100% | - |
| Clark | 30% | 40% | 30% |
| Clallam | | 100% | |
| Kitsap | | 100% | |
| Thurston | | 100% | |
| Benton/Franklin | | 100% | |
| Whitman | | 100% | |
| Cowlitz | - | 15% | 85% |

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of the various components of the evaluation of Washington volunteer CASA/GAL programs are very consistent with research and evaluation efforts in other states and at the national level. According to the Program Managers and the volunteers, the activities considered necessary in investigation and monitoring to insure the child's best interest are routinely carried out. Volunteer CASA/GAL recommendations are usually similar, not only to those of the caseworkers, but also the other parties including parents' lawyers and they are almost always reflected in judicial orders.

Assessment by Key Constituencies

The key community constituencies are largely favorable in their assessment of the value of the programs. As in other studies, volunteer CASA/GALs are perceived to be most effective in the investigation role. The amount of time they have to devote, as well as the ordinary citizen point of view gives them a different and welcome perspective on the child's situation. Even when they make recommendations that are consistent with those of caseworkers, CASA/GAL reports serve to reinforce and validate state recommendations. The fact volunteers are not aligned with any institution or system contributes to their ability to form alliances with parents and to keeping the focus on the child. Volunteer CASA/GALs are generally favored over paid GALs. Overall, the community professionals find the programs a valuable and unique contribution to the investigative and monitoring process.

Assessment by Volunteers

The volunteers do not evince the concerns about role confusion that lawyers for children and other commentators have raised. They report being clear about what is expected and, although they do not articulate the principles they apply, it is apparent that they see themselves as advocates for children's best interests. They also perceive themselves as accomplishing their goals by gathering information from a broad array of sources, presenting recommendations to help children and families, and attempting to insure that these recommendations are carried out. They do not seem to have a bias about the preferred outcome, other than that the children receive necessary services and are in safe, permanent home environments without lengthy delays.

CASA/GALs are very positive about their experiences. They are satisfied with the training and supervision, and believe that they are respected and make a valuable contribution to case outcome. The programs appear to be doing an excellent job of supporting the volunteers. The many heart felt comments about the rewards of serving as a CASA/GAL volunteer speak to their commitment and the level of effort made on behalf of the children. It would seem that this form of volunteerism is not only rewarding to the volunteers, but provides an important opportunity to engage citizens in helping government institutions to carry out their duties.

Areas of Concern

Some areas of concern emerged and could benefit from additional focus. It was clear from both the volunteers and the caseworker respondents that the relationship between volunteers and DCFS caseworkers is not always completely smooth. Volunteers echo common complaints about caseworkers being overburdened by caseloads and bureaucratic requirements, and

therefore not always accessible or responsive. Caseworker respondents to the professional survey also tended to be less positive than other professionals about CASA/GALs. This may reflect a sense among caseworkers that they also are seeking to represent the child's best interests and that CASA/GALs simply create extra work. On the other hand, some caseworkers commented that the presence of a CASA/GAL on a case served to reinforce and back up caseworker plans.

Greater skepticism was voiced about CASA/GALs when they venture into the formal legal arena or assume an expert role. There was a strong message from lawyers and judges, that volunteer CASA/GALs should have legal representation when they appear in court. This representation should not be provided by the Attorneys General who are representing the state. The volunteers themselves expressed concern about court related activities. However, it appears that volunteers seldom actually testify because most cases are resolved by out of court agreements.

Selection and Supervision of Volunteers

There was broad agreement on the importance of screening, training and supervision of volunteers. Not all volunteers are well suited to the job. Community respondents commented that there were some problematic volunteers and the Program Managers all acknowledged that they had, on occasion, dismissed a volunteer. It is apparent that volunteers often do not match the ethnic or socio-economic characteristics of the families of the children they represent. Because there is always a subjective component to determining "best interests," it is especially important to insure that cultural or class biases are carefully addressed in screening procedures, supervision of volunteers and in training.

The majority of programs have yet to adopt expectations for systematic documentation by volunteers. Nor do they use benchmarks or other measures to assess the effectiveness of their services. This appears to be because programs often operate on what they consider a "shoe string" budget and they concentrate efforts on securing enough volunteers, overseeing program activities, and responding to requests from the judges. Some Program Managers or staff also remarked that they were somewhat reluctant to impose additional requirements on volunteers who were already making personal sacrifices on behalf of children.

Case Documentation

It will not be possible for programs to move to more objective ways of evaluating the services they provide until they have in place more uniform and systematic methods of collecting information. The National CASA standards are clear in listing the basic requirements for record keeping, including accurate and complete documentation of all contacts. Considering the importance of the CASA/GAL role in case decision-making it seems reasonable that programs establish standardized expectations regarding documentation of case activities. The method being implemented in Snohomish County may serve as a model. Supervision of individual cases, as well as evaluation efforts would be enhanced by this means.

In addition, identifying key outcomes (e.g., receipt of services, return home, achievement of permanency) and keeping track of time frames would permit programs to measure the extent to which benchmarks are achieved. It would be especially helpful to have data from DCFS for comparison purposes (e.g., length of placement, percent of children returned home, time to establishment of a permanent plan). Again, the National CASA has produced a document that

provides specific guidance for programs in establishing mechanisms for assessment. One step towards this goal is the adoption of the COMET tracking program.

Costs

Volunteer CASA/GAL programs appear to be a relatively inexpensive way of accomplishing representation of the best interests of dependent children. The average amount of \$500 for about 30 hours of investigation, monitoring, and court appearances amounts to a relatively small hourly expenditure. Certainly, paying lawyers on a per hour basis to provide an equivalent amount of service would be far more costly.

The research recommendations from this study are as follows:

Promote Effectiveness

1. Programs should be encouraged to adopt and fully implement the National CASA standards for Volunteer Management and Program Evaluation.
2. Programs should establish criteria for appointment of volunteers as recommended by National CASA if there are more cases referred than available volunteers. The practice of assuming other roles (e.g., monitoring cases) should be discouraged because of the potential to dilute the unique contribution of the CASA/GAL.
3. Programs should insure that the Office of the Administer for the Courts (OAC) approved training is delivered to volunteers.
4. Programs should make special efforts to enhance relationships with the Department of Child and Family Services.
5. Programs should consider increasing opportunities for peer supervision, consultation, and mentoring among volunteers.

Cost Effectiveness

The local jurisdictions do not currently fund programs at a sufficient level to insure appointment of either a volunteer CASA/GAL or a paid GAL for all dependent children. CASA/GAL programs can only recruit, train, and supervise volunteers to the extent that there is adequate staff support to carry out these activities. The programs are cost effective compared to paying for a lawyer or other professional to provide an equivalent level of service in terms of time expended.

This evaluation could not demonstrate that cost savings accrue to the state as a result of GAL appointment because it was not possible to determine that CASA/GALs actually make a difference in case outcomes that might lead to reduced state expenditures.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Program Manager Survey

Appendix B: Volunteer CASA Survey

Appendix C: Endresen Research Final Report

APPENDIX A: PROGRAM MANAGER SURVEY

To be filled out by the Program Manager(s) or the most knowledgeable program staff member regarding the activities of volunteer CASA/GAL.

Program Name _____
How long has your program been in existence? _____

CASE SELECTION

The law mandates the appointment of a GAL or CASA under RCW 13.34.100, but the capacity of CASA programs is limited. Not all cases can be served. How are cases selected and what proportion of all eligible cases do they represent?

1. In addition to your volunteer program, are there other paid or volunteer GAL serving children in your jurisdiction?

- No
 Yes

2. If yes, who serves as paid or volunteer GAL?

- Paid staff, please explain _____
 Private Attorneys
 Mental Health Professionals
 Other, please explain _____

3. Does your program have a written volunteer CASA/GAL job description?

- No
 Yes (please attach)

4. When there are more cases than volunteer CASA/GALs, how does your program decide whether a case is assigned a volunteer? _____

5. If there are criteria for whether a case is assigned a volunteer CASA/GAL, are they specified (in written protocols)?

- No
 Yes, please attach and describe _____

6. Among cases referred for a volunteer CASA/GAL, is a lawyer ever assigned to the child as well?

- No
 Yes, please describe the types of circumstances _____

7. Estimate the proportion of cases assigned a lawyer as well as a volunteer CASA/GAL? _____

CASE ACTIVITIES- INITIAL INVESTIGATION PHASE

8. Do your volunteer CASA/GALs have open access to the official CPS file?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes
- _____ Almost always

9. If volunteer CASA/GALs have open access to the CPS file, do they routinely review the entire file?

- _____ No
- _____ Yes

10. If volunteer CASA/GALs do not have open access to the CPS file, describe how they obtain the case information _____

11. Are your volunteer CASA/GALs *required* to contact certain parties during the initial investigation phase?

- _____ Yes (if yes, list which parties) _____
- _____ No

12. Does the volunteer CASA/GAL always have direct contact with the child (either interview or observation)?

- _____ Yes
- _____ No

13. If the child is interviewed, does the volunteer CASA/GAL discuss the alleged maltreatment with the child directly?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes (specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

14. Does the volunteer CASA/GAL ask the child about their preferences about placement and visitation?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes (specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

15. Check all of the boxes that apply:

Does the volunteer CASA/GAL interview or consult with:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent(s) accused of maltreatment? | <input type="checkbox"/> The non-offending parent (if there is one)? |
| _____ Rarely | _____ Rarely |
| _____ Sometimes(specify, _____) | _____ Sometimes(specify, _____) |
| _____ Almost always | _____ Almost always |

Siblings (if verbal)?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Foster parent (if there is one)?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Other relatives?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Social worker/case worker?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Teacher/school personnel/day care provider?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Primary care doctor?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Child evaluator/therapist (if there is one)?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Parent evaluator/therapist (if there is one)?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Other professionals? Please list _____)

16. In general, are formal evaluations/reports (if they exist/are available) reviewed?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes (specify _____)
____ Almost always

RECOMMENDATIONS- INITIAL INVESTIGATION PHASE

17. Are there standard formats for all formal CASA/GAL reports to court?
____ No
____ Yes (attach example)

18. What are the guiding principles in determining the child's best interest?

19. Describe how a conflict between the child's wishes and best interest recommendations is handled, when there is a discrepancy (e.g. The child wants to go home but the professionals determine home is dangerous). _____

20. Estimate the % of cases where the recommendations are generally consistent with the recommendations of the caseworker/state?

- <20%
- 20-39%
- 40-59%
- 60-79%
- 80-100%

21. Estimate the % of cases where all parties generally agree on recommendations (e.g. caseworker/state, parents/their lawyers)?

- <20%
- 20-39%
- 40-59%
- 60-79%
- 80-100%

22. When there are disagreements between the volunteer CASA/GAL and other parties, what are the most common areas? Please rank order them (1 - 7):

- Validity of the allegations of suspected child abuse or neglect
- Placement of target child
- Placement of other children
- Services needed for parent
- Services needed for child
- Visitation
- Permanent plan
- Other (specify _____)

23. Estimate the % of all cases where the volunteer CASA/GAL testifies in a contested hearing or fact finding?

- <5%
- 6-10%
- 11-24%
- 25-49%
- 50-74%
- 75-100%

24. Estimate the % of the time the volunteer CASA/GAL recommendations are reflected in the judge's decision?

- <20%
- 20-39%
- 40-59%
- 60-79%
- 80-100%

CASE ACTIVITIES- MONITORING PHASE

25. Check all of the boxes that apply:

Does the volunteer CASA/GAL continue to have contact or interview:

Child (if verbal)

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Parent(s) accused of maltreatment?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

The non-offending parent (if there is one)?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Siblings (if verbal)?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

The foster parent (if there is one)?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Other relatives?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Social worker/case worker?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Teacher/school personnel/day care provider?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Primary care doctor?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Child evaluator/therapist (if there is one)?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Parent evaluator/therapist (if there is one)?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

Other professionals? Please list _____)

26. If formal evaluations/reports are conducted, are they made available for review by the volunteer CASA/GAL?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes (specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

27. Does the volunteer CASA/GAL continue to provide the caseworker with substantive information?

- _____ Rarely
- _____ Sometimes (specify, _____)
- _____ Almost always

28. Under what circumstances does the volunteer CASA/GAL make a motion to bring the case back to court outside of the regular review period ? _____

29. Under what circumstances does a case no longer require a volunteer CASA/GAL? _____

30. Estimate the % for each of the following standard reasons for closing a dependency case (must = 100%):

- _____ Case dismissed.
- _____ Case referred to family court.
- _____ Change of venue.
- _____ Termination of parental rights.
- _____ Other (please describe _____)

31. When a dependency case is dismissed, what are the most typical reasons for dismissal? Please rank order them (1 - 5):

- _____ Family is reunified
- _____ Relative guardianship
- _____ Non-relative guardianship
- _____ Adoption
- _____ Other (describe _____)

32. Estimate the proportion of cases in which the families reunify?

- _____ <20%
- _____ 20-39%
- _____ 40-59%
- _____ 60-79%
- _____ 80-100%

33. When parental rights are terminated, what role does the volunteer CASA/GAL generally have from that point on? (check all that apply)

- _____ They stay on the case and remain active (if so, specify their role _____)
- _____ They become inactive.
- _____ Other (specify _____)

SUPERVISION/CASE CONSULTATION

34. Estimate the average number of hours you provide supervision for CASA/GAL volunteers *per case*? _____ hours/case

35. Is there a standard process for *supervising* CASA/GAL volunteers?
 No
 Yes (describe or attach _____
_____)

36. Is there a standard process for *evaluating* CASA/GAL volunteers?
 No
 Yes (describe or attach _____
_____)

37. Are formal reports prepared by the volunteer CASA/GAL reviewed by a program staff member or attorney before they are submitted?
 Rarely
 Sometimes (specify, _____)
 Almost always

38. Is there a standard process for handling complaints from other professionals regarding a volunteer CASA/GAL in your program?
 No
 Yes (describe _____
_____)

39. List the most common complaints against volunteer CASA/GALs _____

40. Has the *court* ever dismissed a volunteer CASA/GAL in your program?
 No
 Yes (describe reasons _____)

41. Have *you* ever dismissed a volunteer CASA/GAL in your program?
 No
 Yes (describe reasons why _____
_____)

42. What are your recommendations for changes to improve your CASA/GAL program? _____

43. In what ways could professionals work better with your CASA/GAL program? _____

13. How often do you have difficulty acquiring records kept by others or interviewing persons with knowledge of the case?

- Rarely
- Sometimes (describe, _____)
- Almost always

14. If you have open access to the CPS/CWS file, do you routinely review the entire file?

- No
- Yes
- N/A (I do not have access to these files)

15. If you do not have open access to the CPS file, describe how you obtain the case information: _____

16. Does your program *require* that you contact certain parties during the initial investigation phase?

- No
- Yes (If yes, list which parties _____)

17. Do you always have direct contact with the child (either interview or observation)?

- Yes
- No (if No, explain) _____

18. If the child is interviewed, do you discuss the alleged maltreatment with the child directly?

- Rarely
- Sometimes (specify, _____)
- Almost always

19. If the child is interviewed, do you ask him/her about their preferences for placement and visitation?

- Rarely
- Sometimes (specify, _____)
- Almost always

20. Check all of the boxes that apply:

During the Pre Fact Finding Phase, do you interview or consult with:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent(s) accused of maltreatment? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify _____) ____ Almost always | <input type="checkbox"/> The non-offending parent (if there is one)? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify, _____) ____ Almost always |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Siblings (if verbal)? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify _____) ____ Almost always | <input type="checkbox"/> Foster parent (if there is one)? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify, _____) ____ Almost always |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other relatives? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify _____) ____ Almost always | <input type="checkbox"/> Caseworker/social worker? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify, _____) ____ Almost always |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/school personnel/day care provider? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify _____) ____ Almost always | <input type="checkbox"/> Primary care doctor? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify, _____) ____ Almost always |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child evaluator/therapist (if there is one)? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify _____) ____ Almost always | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent evaluator/therapist (if there is one)? ____ Rarely ____ Sometimes(specify, _____) ____ Almost always |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other professionals? Please list _____) | |

21. In general, do you review formal evaluations/reports (if they exist/are available)?

- ____ Rarely
____ Sometimes (specify _____)
____ Almost always

RECOMMENDATIONS- Initial Investigation Phase

22. What factors do you consider in determining what is in the child's best interests?

23. Describe how you handle a conflict between the child's wishes and best interest recommendations, when there is a discrepancy (e.g. The child wants to go home but the professionals determine home is dangerous). _____

24. From your experience, when there are disagreements between you and other parties, what are the most common areas? Please rank order them (1 - 7):

- ____ Validity of the allegations of suspected child abuse or neglect
- ____ Placement of child
- ____ Placement of siblings
- ____ Services needed for parent
- ____ Services needed for child
- ____ Visitation
- ____ Permanent plan
- ____ Other (specify _____)

25. Estimate the % of all cases where you have testified in a contested hearing or fact finding:

- ____ <5%
- ____ 6-10%
- ____ 11-24%
- ____ 25-49%
- ____ 50-74%
- ____ 75-100%

26. Estimate the % of the time your recommendations are reflected in the judge's decision?

- ____ <20%
- ____ 20-39%
- ____ 40-59%
- ____ 60-79%
- ____ 80-100%

CASE ACTIVITIES- Monitoring Phase (following Fact Finding, Review Hearings)

27. Check all of the boxes that apply:

During the Monitoring Phase, do you continue to have contact or interview:

Child (if verbal)

- ____ Rarely
- ____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- ____ Almost always

Parent(s) accused of maltreatment?

- ____ Rarely
- ____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- ____ Almost always

The non-offending parent (if there is one)?

- ____ Rarely
- ____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
- ____ Almost always

Siblings (if verbal)?

The foster parent (if there is one)?

____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify _____)
____ Almost always

____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Other relatives?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify _____)
____ Almost always

Social worker/case worker?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Teacher/school personnel/day care provider?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify _____)
____ Almost always

Primary care doctor?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Child evaluator/therapist (if there is one)?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify _____)
____ Almost always

Parent evaluator/therapist (if there is one)?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes(specify, _____)
____ Almost always

Other professionals? Please list _____)

28. If formal evaluations/reports are conducted, are they made available for you to review?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes (specify _____)
____ Almost always

29. During the monitoring phase do you continue to provide the caseworker with substantive information?
____ Rarely
____ Sometimes (specify, _____)
____ Almost always

30. Under what circumstances do you/have you made make a motion to bring the case back to court outside of the regular review period ? _____

31. Under what circumstances does a case no longer require your services? _____

32. When parental rights are terminated, what role do you generally have from that point on? (check all that apply)
____ I stay on the case and remain active (if so, specify your role _____)
____ I become inactive.
____ Other (specify _____)

SUPERVISION/TRAINING

33. Estimate the average number of hours of supervision you receive *per case*?

- _____ hours/case
34. In general, do you receive enough supervision and guidance on each case?
- _____ No (describe _____)
- _____ Yes

The statements below describe reactions CASA volunteers may have about their experiences as a CASA. For each statement, circle the response which best describes your feelings about the statement.

| | | | | |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. I understand what I am to do as a CASA volunteer. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 2. I feel I have received adequate training. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 3. I am comfortable making recommendations in my role as a CASA/GAL. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4. I am prepared for the court reports and court hearings | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 5. I think my recommendations are taken seriously by the judge. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 6. I feel comfortable talking to my supervisor about the case. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 7. I think I receive enough supervision. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 8. My supervisor is helpful. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 9. My supervisor helps keep me motivated. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 10. I am prepared for the court reports and court hearings. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 11. I feel valued by the parents. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 12. I feel my opinion is respected by the child welfare worker. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 13. I feel that I am making a difference. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 14. I plan to continue being a CASA/GAL. | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |

15. Please explain any areas of concern you have.

16. Please describe additional training you might find helpful.

17. Please describe how your supervisor and the CASA office could be more helpful to you.

18. What has been most difficult for you as a CASA?

19. What have you found most rewarding/helpful?

APPENDIX C: ENDRESEN RESEARCH FINAL REPORT
