

2016

Utah State Courts

Annual Report

UTAH OFFICE OF GUARDIAN AD LITEM AND CASA

This past year, the Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA welcomed our new director, Stacey M. Snyder. Ms. Snyder takes the place of Elizabeth Knight who became a Third District Juvenile Court Judge in 2015. Ms. Snyder brings with her nine years of experience as a guardian ad litem attorney, most recently in the Second District where she has served since 2008. She has also served as a guardian ad litem attorney in Third District. Prior to joining the Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA, Ms. Snyder served as associate general counsel in the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel where she staffed the Health and Human Services Interim Committee, as well as Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Committee. In that capacity, she was responsible for drafting and advising on legislation concerning both child welfare and juvenile court issues. She received her B.A. from the University of Utah and her J.D. from Creighton University.

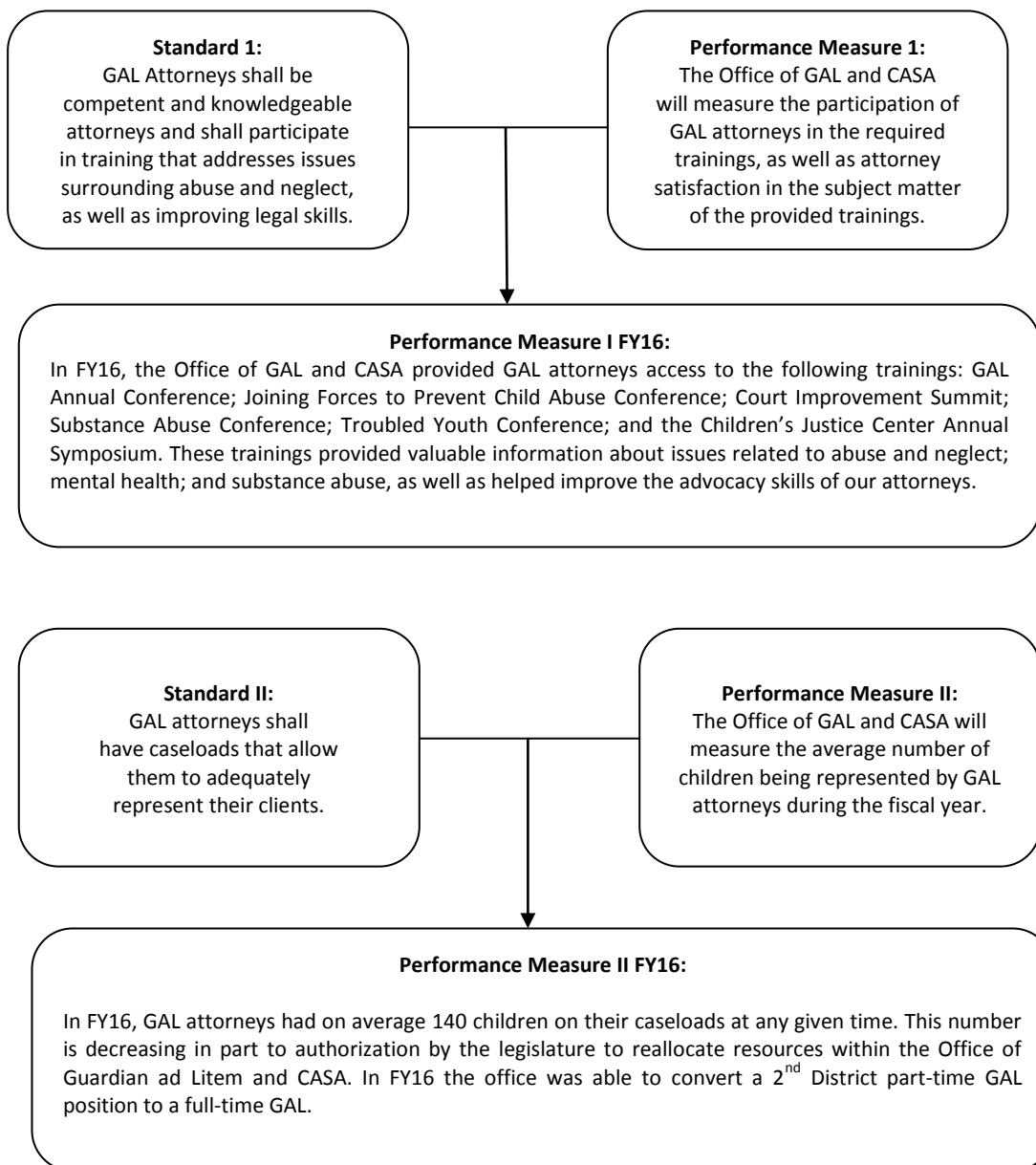
The Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA celebrated many successes this year! After several years of requesting funds for salary parity, the Legislature graciously funded an additional \$1,036,400 towards attorney and staff salaries. With this additional ongoing funding it is anticipated that the Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA will continue to recruit and train excellent attorneys and staff, as well as reduce the number of turn-overs within the Office by retaining GAL attorneys that are committed to representing the best interest of children. While this additional funding does not close the gap between attorneys with the Attorney General's Office, it does allow Guardian ad Litem attorneys to grow with the office and have salary increases that reflect the good work they do on behalf of Utah's children. The Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA is grateful for the support of the Legislature.

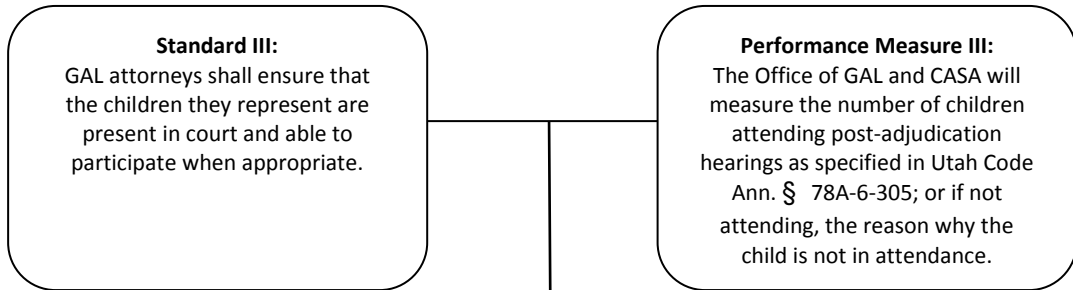
The job of a Guardian ad Litem attorney carries with it a tremendous responsibility. It is their job to stand in the shoes of the child and zealously advocate for the children the Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA represents. Our attorneys are committed and well trained, and as such, are an asset to the State of Utah.

OFFICE OF GUARDIAN AD LITEM AND CASA

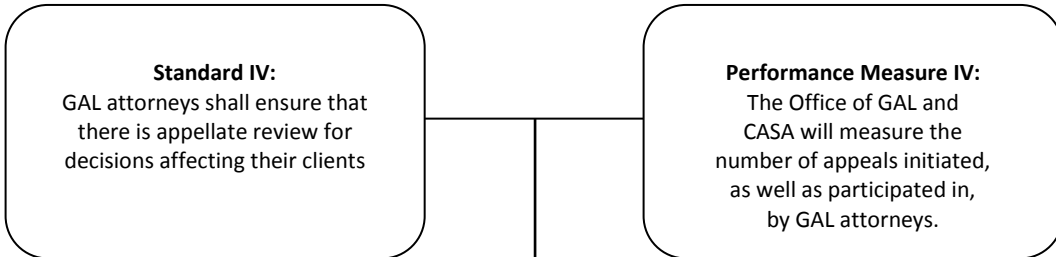
In FY2013, the Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA was asked to develop performance measures and to report on those measures annually to the Executive Offices and Criminal Justice Subcommittee. In FY2014, the Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA developed these Standards and Performance Measures and they were approved by the Executive Offices and Criminal Justice Subcommittee. The approved Standards and Performance Measures, as well as supporting FY2016 data, are listed below.

STANDARDS & PERFORMANCE MEASURES

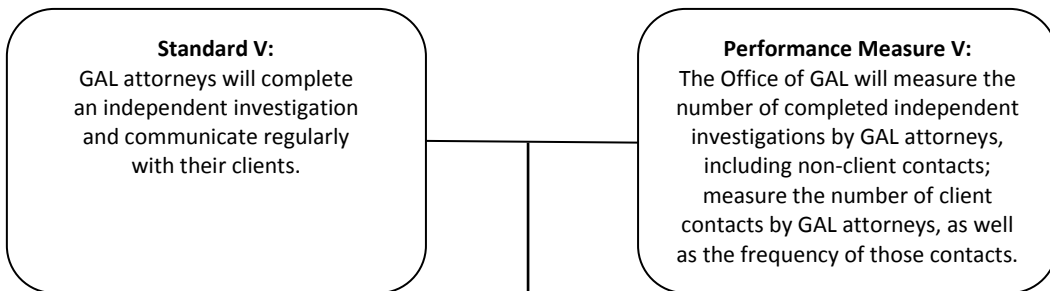




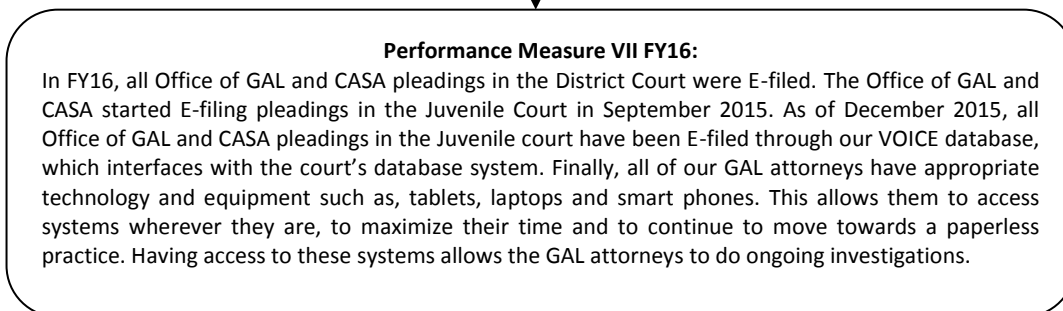
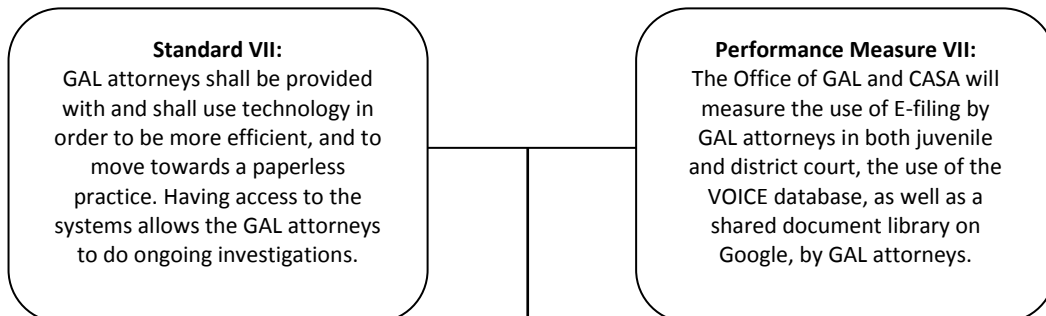
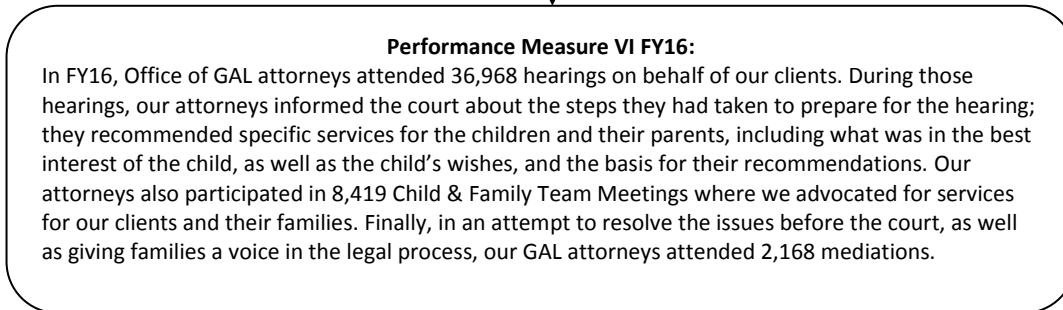
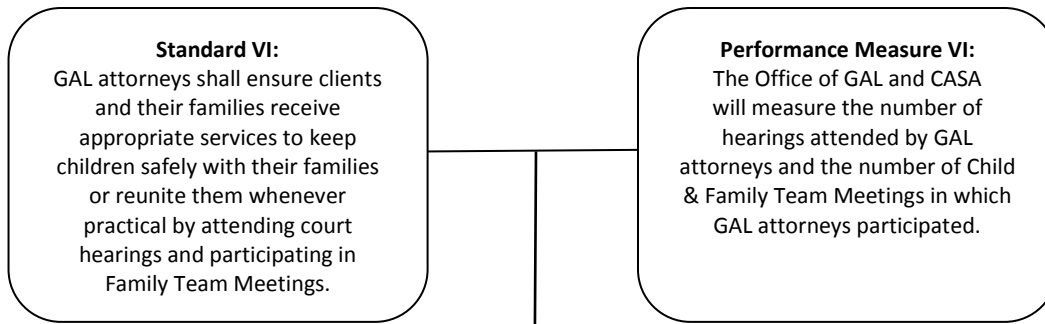
Performance Measure III FY16:
 In FY16, more than 50% of children attended and participated in their court hearings. The most common reasons for children not attending their court hearing is that it was impractical for the child to attend, or it was detrimental for the child to attend. The Office of GAL and CASA continues to work with the courts and community partners to increase the presence of our clients in court, especially older youth.



Performance Measure IV FY16:
 In FY16, The Office of GAL and CASA participated in 105 appeals on behalf of our clients. We also staffed many other cases to determine the efficacy of an appeal.



Performance Measure V FY16:
 In FY16, the Office of GAL attorneys engaged in 60,397 independent investigations on behalf of the 14,706 children we represented. Our GAL attorneys also met with these children 33,978 times. During these communications with our clients, especially older youth, GAL attorneys explained the court process, obtained the clients wishes and identified services with the clients to assist them with returning home or finding another permanent placement.



PRIVATE GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM

In FY16, the Private Guardian ad Litem program continued to expand. We currently have 143 private attorneys who have accepted over 246 cases this past year, including over 20 pro bono cases. Dixie Jackson, our Private Guardian ad Litem Coordinator, continues to support these private attorneys by responding to questions, providing guidance and attending hearings when necessary. Also, the Best Practice Guidelines were expanded significantly, in the form of a Private Guardian ad Litem Manual, in order for the Private Guardian's ad Litem to be better equipped to handle these difficult cases.

We continue to update our website monthly to keep the list of available Private Guardian ad Litem attorneys as well as the collection of pleadings that attorneys can use and modify. We also provide a Newsletter with information relevant to the role of the Private Guardian ad Litem each month. Finally, in an effort to assist the private attorneys comply with CJA R4-906, The Office of the Guardian ad Litem and CASA has hosted sessions of Continuing Legal Education throughout the state.

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE (CASA) PROGRAM

The CASA program is a highly valued resource for the Office of Guardian ad Litem and CASA. During FY16, 756 volunteer advocates served 1,299 children and donated 29,114 hours. Advocates are appointed pursuant to U.C.A. § 78A-6-902, subsection (4) (a) that states:

“An attorney guardian ad litem may use trained volunteers, in accordance with U.C.A. § 67-20-1 et seq...to assist in investigation and preparation of information regarding the cases of individual minors before the court.”

CASA volunteers are assigned to an individual case and gather information for the GAL attorneys by visiting consistently with child clients, attending child and family team meetings and court hearings, and tracking the child's progress in school. In addition, these advocates ensure that the child is receiving needed services and is in a safe, nurturing environment by monitoring court orders and reporting to the GAL attorney.

CASA volunteers are carefully screened; they receive a background check and are provided with 32 hours of pre-service training and 12 hours of annual in-service training. Research conducted by the National CASA Association has found that children with CASA volunteers do better in school, spend less time in the foster care system, are less likely to re-enter foster care and are more likely to have a consistent, responsible adult present than other children in care.

UTAH'S FRIENDS OF CASA

Utah's Friends of CASA is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization that supports the CASA program by providing supplemental funding for volunteer recruitment, training and retention. This past year, the Utah's Friends of CASA Board assisted in funding participation at the National CASA Conference for our Director and the interim CASA Program Administrator.



Standing in the Shoes of the Child

