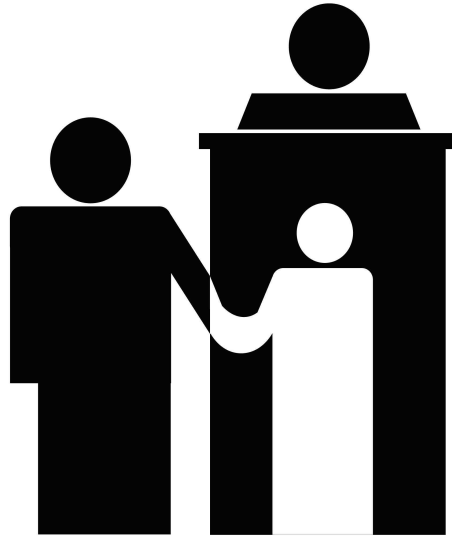


Guardian ad Litem



A child's advocate in court

VOLUNTEER!

**BE THE VOICE FOR AN
ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILD TODAY!**

Mecklenburg County Guardian ad Litem Program

The Mission of the Guardian ad Litem Program is to provide trained independent advocates to represent and promote the best interests of abused, neglected and dependent children in the state court system and work towards a plan that ensures that these children are in a safe, permanent home.

A Guardian ad Litem is a trained community volunteer who is appointed by a district court judge to investigate and determine the needs of abused and neglected children petitioned into the court system by the Department of Social Services. The Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Volunteer makes independent recommendations to the court for services, which focus on the needs of each child. The Guardian ad Litem advocates for a permanent and safe home for every child within the shortest time possible.

700 East 4th Street, Suite 300
Charlotte, NC 28202

704.686.0075 (phone)
704.686.0076 (fax)

www.galcharlotte.com

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Job Description

A Guardian ad Litem in North Carolina is a trained community volunteer who is appointed by a district court judge to investigate and determine the needs of abused and neglected children. The Guardian ad Litem Volunteer makes recommendations to the court about services which focus on the needs of each child. The Guardian ad Litem volunteer advocates for a permanent and safe home for every child within the shortest time possible.

Activities

- Visits the child
- Ensures that the child's wishes are known to the court
- Interviews the social workers and other service providers and reviews records related to the family
- Gathers and assesses information about the child sufficient to recommend a resolution that is in the child's best interest
- Prepares written reports for court hearings
- Attends and participates in court hearings and other related meetings
- Keeps all records and information confidential
- Explains the role of the Guardian ad Litem to every child old enough to understand
- Consults with program staff for support and guidance
- Completes at least 6 hours of In-Service Training annually.

Qualifications

- The main qualification is a sincere concern for the well-being of children. The volunteer must be a mature adult of sound character with good verbal and written communication skills. The Guardian ad Litem must be able to interact and talk with people of various educational and ethnic backgrounds. An essential characteristic is the ability to be objective and non-judgmental.

Requirements

- The process of becoming a Guardian ad Litem requires a written application, three written, personal/professional references, a criminal background check, an interview and 30 hours of training. A personal interview will be conducted by a seasoned volunteer or staff member. A Guardian ad Litem will be appointed for the life of a case.

Training

- The Volunteer must complete 30 hours of required training, which includes court observation. The fully trained and screened volunteer will then be sworn into service by a judge before assignment of his or her first case.

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Questions and Answers for Recruitment

Question: What is a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)?

Answer: A GAL is a trained volunteer who is appointed by the court to advocate for the best interests of an abused or neglected child. The GAL serves as an important voice for the child in court.

Question: Who can be a Guardian Ad Litem?

Answer: Anyone who is 18 years or older. GAL volunteers come from all walks of life and have a variety of professional, educational and ethnic backgrounds. No special education or experience is required.

Question: How will I know what to do?

Answer: GAL offices use a nationally recognized training program. You will learn all about your role in the court system so that you can be confident when you take your first case. Each volunteer is also assigned a Program Supervisor who can provide guidance and support.

Question: I work full time. Can I still be a GAL?

Answer: Many volunteers have full time jobs. Much of the work can be done at night or on weekends as well as by phone. We ask that you see each child at least once a month. There will also be times that you will attend team meetings that might include the child, the child's parents, the child's social worker and other persons important to the case. Many employers encourage and support community service. It is important that your employer knows of your participation and approves any time away from work such as for the purpose of attending court hearings which occur every 3 to 6 months.

Question: What is the time commitment for a GAL?

Answer: After the initial training, you will usually spend 8 to 20 hours a month working with our case until the child is placed in a permanent situation. The length of time will vary from case to case. We ask that you see a case through to the child's case is closed by the court.

Question: How many cases will I be expected to take?

Answer: There is no set minimum number of cases for a volunteer. Each volunteer accepts only as many cases as he or she has time to handle.

Question: How is a GAL different from a social worker?

Answer: The social worker is an employee of the Department of Social Services which has legal custody of the child or children involved in the case. The social worker is responsible for finding a child a safe placement and pursuing a permanent placement in a timely manner as well as securing needed services for each child. The social worker will have a caseload of children. A GAL typically does not have as many cases and can devote more time to each child. The GAL is responsible for advocating for the child's best interests and what the child wants.

Question: I worry that the parents will not be cooperative?

Answer: It is not unusual for parents to want to tell their version of the events that resulted in their children coming into custody of DSS. As a GAL you can ask questions and listen.

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Question: Is being a GAL dangerous?

Answer: You will never be asked to do anything that makes you feel unsafe. You can arrange visits with your Program Supervisor or another GAL volunteer. Some volunteers make visits with the DSS social worker and other team members. You can make arrangements to make visits at a public place including a DSS office.

Question: What, if any, reimbursement is provided for volunteers?

Answer: Volunteers can request specific needs for children from their YFS social workers and may solicit donations. However, any personal funds expended cannot be reimbursed by the program. In addition, when coming to the GAL office and court, volunteers can get their parking validated for parking at the City-County garage and the 4th Street Parking deck.

Question: Can volunteers provide transportation for children and families?

Answer: Volunteers should not provide transportation in that it is a liability for the volunteer. The volunteer's role is to advocate for services needed and to assist with making referrals for services. Volunteers should work with the YFS social workers to secure needed transportation for children and families.

Question: Is the volunteer's jurisdiction limited to Mecklenburg County?

Answer: The Guardian Ad Litem program is a statewide program. While volunteers work with children under the court jurisdiction of Mecklenburg County, children may be placed outside the county and family members may live in another county. The volunteer may visit across county lines. However, reimbursement for travel outside of the county must be pre-approved.

Question: How many children are in the legal custody of Mecklenburg County? How many have a volunteer and how many children need a volunteer?

Answer: As of July 2009, there were 900 children in the GAL Program who are in the legal custody of Youth and Family Services. Approximately 566 of these children have a volunteer while 325 children still need to be assigned a volunteer.

Question: Are there donation opportunities?

Answer: Mecklenburg County is fortunate to have a GAL Foundation which has a not for profit status and may accept donations. Contact Dana Frady at 704-686.0075 for further information about how to make a donation.

Question: Where do volunteers typically visit with the children?

Answer: Volunteers may visit with children in their placements which could include foster homes, group homes and relative placements. Volunteers may also visit with children at their school or child care centers. It is important to have identification and your court order to present as proof of your status and authority to visit with the children.

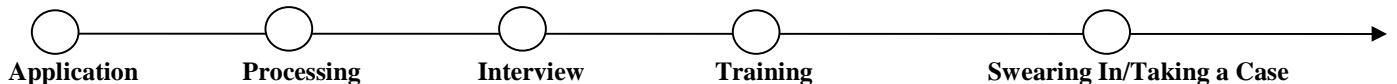


Guardian ad Litem

Volunteer Checklist

Please use the following as a checklist as you complete and return your application to our office.

After Step I you can check off the remaining steps as they occur. We cannot process unfinished applications. If you have any questions at any point during the process, please call Melissa Orr at 704-686-0090 or by e-mail at Melissa.p.orr@nccourts.org



- I. Complete the attached application for volunteering.**
- A. Provide **Full Name** and **Social Security #**.
 - B. Provide your **Full Mailing Address** (Apt#, City, State and Zip Code).
 - C. Provide **Complete Mailing Addresses/E-mail Addresses for 3 References** (Apt/Ste #, City, St. and Zip Code).
 - D. Please **sign and date** at the bottom of the application.

II. Mail, Fax or E-mail the Completed Application to:

Guardian ad Litem-Application Processing

700 East 4th Street, Suite 300

Charlotte, NC 28202

704-686-0076 (fax)

melissa.p.orr@nccourts.org or jordan.g.reich@nccourts.org

- II. Interview for Volunteering** -We will call you to set an interview up within 7-14 days after we receive your completed application and if the initial background check is clear.

- III. Volunteer Training-** We conduct a training every other month and select trainees based upon interview, background checks and references. The Training will be used as an extension of the interview process for further assessment of your compatibility with the program.

DISCLAIMER: Training sessions are only offered to Guardian ad Litem applicants who have been **interviewed, screened and who have received a formal invitation to training**. Guardian ad Litem trainings are usually held in the evening on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:30pm until 9:30pm with one Saturday training from 9am-12noon.

Training Session I

Training Session II

Training Session III

Training Session IV

Training Session V

Training Session VI

Training Session VII/Swearing In Ceremony

Court Observations can be done at any point during Training.

Court Observation

- IV. Starting a Case-**Guardian ad Litem cases will be given at the end of Training.

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Directions to Guardian ad Litem Office:

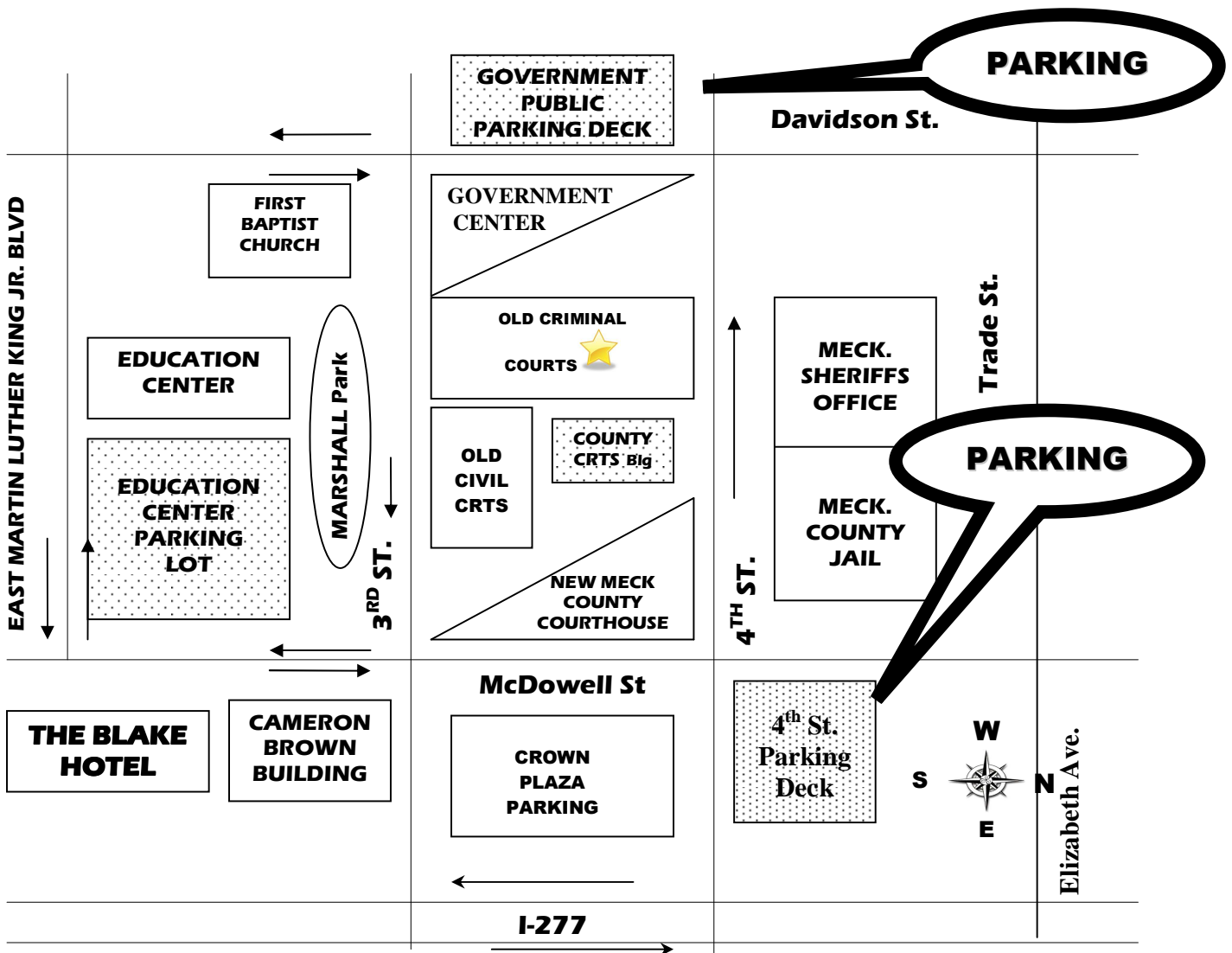
1. From Interstate 77 SOUTH take Exit 10 B or from I-77 NORTH take Exit 10 (Trade Street/5th Street Exit)
2. Take Trade Street East.
3. Follow Directions below depending on which parking deck you will use:

Parking for your interview:

(Validation is not available for GAL Interview)

1. **Government Center Public Parking Deck** (see below)-Turn RIGHT onto Davidson Street and RIGHT into the parking Deck at 232 S. Davidson Street.
2. **4th Street Parking Deck** (see below)-Turn RIGHT into the parking deck after crossing over McDowell Street.

We are in the Old Criminal Court Building as noted below with the 
Check our website for a link to Mapquest directions to our office. (www.galcharlotte.com)



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