

2022

## **Guardians Ad Litem in Idaho: 2022 Program Evaluation**

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# GUARDIANS AD LITEM IN IDAHO

## 2022 PROGRAM EVALUATION

GUARDIANS AD LITEM SERVE A CRITICAL ROLE IN THE LIVES OF IDAHO'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

Each of Idaho's seven judicial districts has a nonprofit organization providing representation to children and youth in child protection cases. These Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Programs support the state's guardians ad litem (GALs) who are appointed by the courts to represent children and their best interests in child protection cases. These programs are making concerted efforts to align with national best practices for child advocacy and key provisions of Idaho Code §§ 16-1632-33 and Idaho Juvenile Rule 35, enabling Idaho's GALs to adequately advocate for the best interests of the child. Additional GALs in the state would enable CASA Programs to serve all of Idaho's children and youth in child protection services (CPS). This is critical in child protection cases, as the children and youth are in especially vulnerable positions.

**93%**  
OF CPS CASES  
ASSOCIATED  
WITH A GAL  
2015-2021

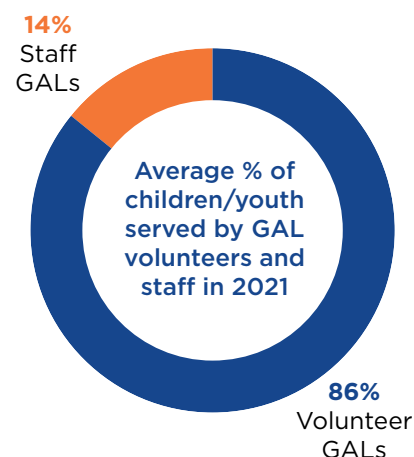
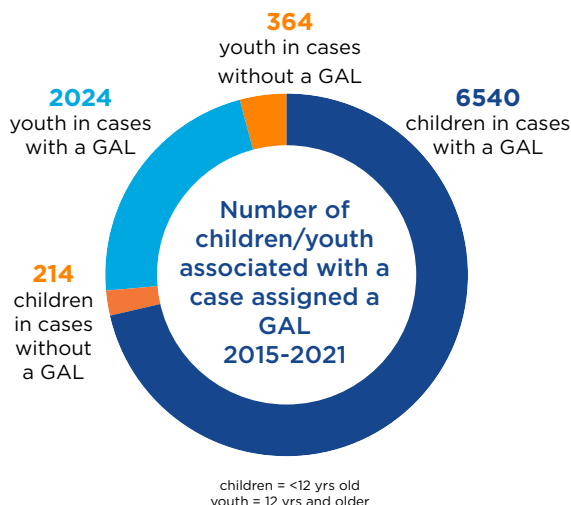
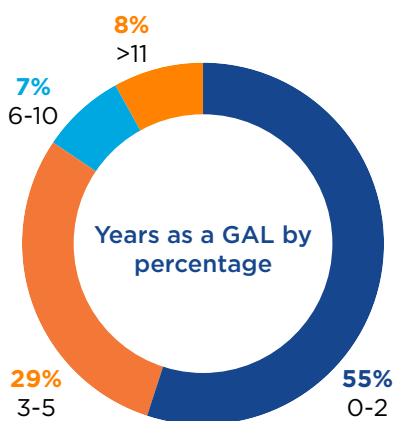


NUMBER OF IDAHO  
CHILDREN/YOUTH  
IN CPS  
**9,498**  
2015-2021

AVERAGE NUMBER  
OF GALs PER CASA  
PROGRAM IN 2021  
**98**

**369**  
AVERAGE NUMBER  
OF CHILDREN/  
YOUTH SERVED PER  
CASA PROGRAM  
IN 2021

### BY THE NUMBERS



### PERCEPTIONS OF ADVOCACY

**93%** of Guardians Ad Litem  
**100%** of CASA Program Executive Directors  
**89%** of Magistrate Judges



believe  
GALs adequately advocate  
for the best interests of  
the child/youth

# CHALLENGES

**32%**  
of magistrate judges indicate more GALs are needed in Idaho

**CASA PROGRAMS LACK CONSISTENCY IN CARRYING OUT STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS & ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL STANDARDS**

**32%**  
of GALs report challenges in working with Idaho Department of Health and Welfare

**GALS DO NOT FULLY REPRESENT DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUTH/CHILDREN SERVED**

**22%** of children and youth served are ethnic or racial minorities  
**12%** of GALs are ethnic/racial minorities

## POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC ALTERNATIVES

- Additional dedicated support to strengthen recruitment and retention efforts and target GALs better aligned with demographics of the children/youth being served.
- Dedicated support toward Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's efforts to attract and retain greater numbers of high-quality social workers which would provide more consistent partnership support for GALs.
- Increased effort to facilitate coordination between all stakeholders in a child protection case would lead to more efficiency and better outcomes for children and youth.
- Creation of a support system for GALs including support groups comprised of active GALs and CASA staff, access to therapists/mental health professionals, a mentoring program, and/or additional hands-on training/observation opportunities for GALs would help increase retention by addressing the issues associated with burnout and secondary trauma.
- A coordinated effort (e.g., state liaison position or oversight committee) to help increase stability and consistency for CASA Programs and enabled increased collaboration in their efforts to overcome barriers to aligning with national best practices for child advocacy and Idaho rules and statutes.

## CONCLUSION

Idaho's CASA Programs serve children and youth across the state in child protection cases. These programs are making concerted efforts to align with national best practices for child advocacy and key provisions of Idaho Code §§ 16-1632-33 and Idaho Juvenile Rule 35. However, there are not enough GALs in Idaho necessary to serve all children and youth in child protective cases. By building off the GAL program's strengths, Idaho can increase coordination among CASA Programs, increase support systems for GALs, and actively work to improve GALs' stakeholder partnerships. Doing so would support CASA Programs' retention and recruitment efforts, thereby helping increase statewide GAL numbers and enabling the state to better serve all children and youth in child protective cases.