



October 11, 2008

## Lend your voice to a child in need

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Under Indiana law, every abused and neglected child is required to have an advocate appointed by the court to look out for him or her. However, it is very difficult to recruit enough volunteers for every child. Thousands of Indiana children enter the welfare system every year. These children are removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect, often because of their parents' addiction problems. They are placed with relatives, in a foster home, or in a treatment facility. Many of them are assigned a volunteer guardian ad litem or a court-appointed special advocate, but many others are not.

If you are a child who gets an advocate, you have a person who visits you, who helps you understand what is going on in your case, who gets to know you, and who tells the judge about what you need so the court can make better decisions about your future. In 2007, more than 7,000 children had an advocate -- another 3,000 children remain on the waiting list.

The urgent need to provide children with an advocate is about more than the need to comply with Indiana and federal law; it is about giving children under state care a voice. GAL/CASA volunteers are trained advocates who learn how to act as an independent, objective party appointed to offer the court a recommendation about what may be best for a child. The volunteers do very sensitive work and ultimately play a role in determining where the child will find a safe and permanent home.

The GAL/CASA program is run independently in 67 counties with Indiana Supreme Court support through its Division of State Court Administration. The program also has support from the Indiana legislature. In 2007, the General Assembly voted to provide \$2.9 million in statewide funding. Lawmakers established guidelines that allow the Supreme Court to provide grant money to counties that have matching funds. The financial distributions began in January. The Department of Child Services also contributed \$500,000 in federal funds and is committed to contributing another \$500,000. With the new money there is also new hope.

The Supreme Court is launching the "Each One Reach One" campaign and partnering with the Indiana Retired Teachers Association. The goal is to recruit volunteers. Retired teachers can be especially effective volunteers because of their insight into a child's educational and emotional needs and their dedication to helping children succeed. But with 3,000 children still on the advocate waiting list, we cannot solely depend on retired teachers. We need your help as well, especially in large cities such as Indianapolis, Evansville and South Bend.

The child welfare system can be slow, frustrating and confusing. But it also can protect children and bring them in contact with positive role models. Teachers, who are already long-time advocates for children, are joining the "Each One Reach One" campaign, as are others. In 2007, the number of volunteers increased 7 percent statewide. Please consider using your good judgment and compassion to give a child in need a voice. Not only will you change the life of a child in a positive way, but you will enrich your own life tremendously. To learn more call (800) 542-0813 or visit [www.in.gov/judiciary/galcasa/](http://www.in.gov/judiciary/galcasa/).

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