

Volunteer Advocates in Juvenile Matters Advisory Board

Minutes

November 23, 2010

The Advisory Board meeting was called to order on Tuesday, November 23, 2010 at 10:00 am at 231 Capitol Ave, Hartford.

Members in attendance: Honorable Barbara Quinn, Honorable Christine Keller, Honorable Mary Sommer, Honorable Peter Brown, Cynthia Cunningham, Esq. Carolyn Signorelli, Esq, Michael Miller, Esq., Benjamin Zivyon, Esq. for Susan Pearlman, Esq., Elisa Gordon, Esq. for Jeanne Milstein, Jill Bicks, Esq., Joan Jenkins, J.D., Martha Stone, Esq. Barbara Claire, Esq.

Staff: Michele Massores, Marilou Giovannucci

Materials distributed:

- Joint Report of the Office of the Child Advocate and the Attorney General dated October, 2008 on the Review of Connecticut's Court Appointed Advocates Program.
- Legislative Proposal prepared by the Carolyn Signorelli on behalf of the Commission on Child Protection.

1. Judge Quinn welcomed the member of the Advisory Board and introductions were made.

2. Judge Quinn explained that the Advisory Board was one of the core recommendations of the report from the Child Advocate and the Attorney General. Therefore, this Advisory Board is being established, given the many changes that have occurred in the court system over the years, to examine models for use of volunteer advocates that may be most beneficial to the court and to the children who are subject of proceedings in the court.

Joan Jenkins indicated that she had written a response to the OCA/AG report. She will forward it to Marilou who will distribute it to all members of the Advisory Board. Judge Quinn indicated that the Branch also had filed a response to the report and that can be distributed to the members as well.

3. Judge Keller provided a summation of the current use of volunteer in courts. She reported on an informal survey of the presiding judges in Juvenile Matters. An observation was made that with the recent budget cuts a number of coordinators were laid off and the remaining ones are spread thin.

In the following courts volunteer advocates has little presence: Rockville, Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, Hartford, Middletown; there are active volunteer advocates in Torrington and Willimantic and the most presence of volunteer advocates exists in New Britain, Waterford, Stamford and Danbury.

Judge Keller gave a brief history of the role of the volunteers as monitors and identified that there is currently some confusion about the role of the GAL generally. It was reported that the number of requests for appointment of GALs has declined. A discussion ensued about the role of the GAL in delinquency matters and child protection matters. Judges and parties prefer the appointment of an attorney as GAL because they have an office presence, can issue subpoenas, file pleadings and cross examine. The Volunteer GALs can take the stand and can be cross examined.

Attorney Zivyon described his understanding of the role of the former CIP Coordinators. While concerned about the possibility of ex-parte communications, he expressed interest in exploring new ways to use volunteers to benefit the process. He indicated that his personal experience with volunteer GALs in Stamford and Norwalk was good.

Joan Jenkins went onto explain that the former CIP monitor model did not require direct contact with individuals in the case. Contacts were made with DCF social workers, providers and others and a report was submitted to the court. She indicated that the Judges who use the current program are not present at today's meeting. There are volunteer GALs appointed in every court except Hartford. She indicated that some of her coordinators have been told by the Clerk's Office not to appoint CIP/GALs.

Cynthia Cunningham clarified that the Clerk's Offices not longer have the authority to appoint GALs and that any request for a volunteer GAL must be specific or the request for appointment will be referred to CCPA.

4. A discussion ensued about the areas that volunteer advocates could be useful. Martha Stone indicated that one area is educational advocacy as a child does not get an educational surrogate until after they are committed. Other areas discussed were Health Advocacy, discharge planning for children exiting care, programs on youth empowerment.

Michael Miller described the role of the GAL in Probate Court versus the role of the GAL in Juvenile Court. He described the multidisciplinary law office model versus the use of panel attorneys.

Judge Sommer spoke about how judges from other states use volunteers based on what she learned at her experience at the Child Abuse and Neglect Training. Elisa Gordon mentioned that CASA and NCJFCJ have information about models that would be helpful to the group.

Carolyn Signorelli described the CCPA best practices model designed to ensure that children have adequate legal representation to represent the child's voice in court, including the model law offices that use a multidisciplinary process. She has proposed utilization of volunteers with contract attorneys who are solo practitioners to create a multidisciplinary model with CASA volunteers.

The appellate decision in Re: Tayquan H. was discussed. Carolyn's office is proposing legislation to clarify the role of the GAL.

Judge Quinn suggested that the Advisory Board might decide to break into subcommittees to explore areas of interest to the entire Board.

Members were invited to submit information about the various models for use of volunteer advocates to Marilou for distribution to members.

Different Models for use of volunteer advocates identified thus far are:

- Volunteer Advocates working with contract attorney to create a multidisciplinary team approach;
- Volunteer Advocates focused on Educational issues;
- Volunteer advocates focused on Health issues;
- Volunteer Advocates focused on young children.

The next meeting of the Advisory Board will take place on **January 10th at 2:00 pm**
location to be determined.

The meeting adjourned at 11:42am.