



STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM OFFICE

Long Range Program Plan

Fiscal Years 2018-2019 through 2022-2023

August 15, 2017

Alan Abramowitz
Executive Director

600 South Calhoun Street, Suite 273
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Phone: (850) 922-7213
Fax: (850) 922-7211

AGENCY MISSION AND GOALS

STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM OFFICE

Mission: *“I am for the Child”*

Goals:

1. To assure that every child has a voice in court.
2. Using quantitative and qualitative data, demonstrate that Guardian ad Litem (GAL) advocacy correlates with improved outcomes for children in the dependency system.
3. To implement a consistent core program of evidence based training for GAL volunteers which strengthens their ability to address the needs of the children they represent.
4. To advance the mission alignment and operational relationships among and between the Office of the Executive Director, the local Non-Profit Boards, and the Foundation.

AGENCY OBJECTIVES

Priority # 1 Goal:

To provide effective advocacy and improved outcomes for all of Florida's abused, abandoned, and neglected children.

Priority # 2 Goal:

Advocate for timely permanency for children.

Priority # 3 Goal:

Increase number of volunteer advocates for children.

AGENCY SERVICE OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE PROJECTION TABLES

Outcome: Average number of children represented.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2016/17	FY2018/19	FY2019/20	FY2020/21	FY2021/22	FY2022/23
25,583	26,500	27,957	29,414	30,871	32,328

Explanation: The baseline number is the average of 12 months of point-in-time data, from July 1 of one year to June 30 of the next. The average number of children represented per month in FY 16/17 was 25,583.

Point-in-time monthly counts and averages of those counts significantly understate the total number of children served by the Program in a given year, because such counts are not cumulative. **During FY 16-17, the Guardian ad Litem Program actually represented a total of 40,876 unique children.**

The number of children needing guardians ad litem has historically exceeded Program resources. Recent trends, including a dramatic increase in the number of children in out-of-home care and excessive turnover in certain classes within the Program related have negatively affected the Program’s ability to reach more children. However, the 2017 Florida Legislature appropriated funds for stabilizing the workforce through salary adjustments for critical classes.

The Program has taken and continues to take steps to improve its capacity to serve additional children. The estimates above represent a multi-year plan to reach all children. The Program anticipates a modest increase in the number of children represented in the next fiscal year, as the GAL Program received resources to stabilize its workforce, which was designed to have a greater impact on the quality of advocacy than the quantity. In the 2019/2020 fiscal year through 2023, the Program will, through realignment of resources and requests for additional funding (when needed) endeavor to reach the remaining children.

Outcome: Average percent of children represented.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 16/17	FY2018/19	FY2019/20	FY2020/21	FY2021/22	FY2022/23
79.08%	82%	86%	91%	95%	100%

Explanation: The percentages reflected in the chart above show the proportion of ALL children in the dependency system served and projected to be served by the GAL Program. The FY 16-17 baseline was 79.08 percent, within one percent of the target. This small deviation from the target is due to the sharp increases year over year in the number of children in the dependency system.

AGENCY SERVICE OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE PROJECTION TABLES

The Program has taken and continues to take steps to improve its capacity to serve additional children. The estimates above represent a multi-year plan to reach all children. The Program anticipates a modest increase in the number of children represented in the next fiscal year, as the GAL Program received resources to stabilize its workforce, which was designed to have a greater impact on the quality of advocacy than the quantity. In the 2019/2020 fiscal year through 2023, the Program will, through realignment of resources and requests for additional funding (when needed) endeavor to reach the remaining children.

Outcome: Percent of cases closed with Permanency Goal achieved.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2016/17	FY2018/19	FY2019/20	FY2020/21	FY2021/22	FY2022/23
61.84%	70%	71%	72%	73%	74%

Explanation: A key outcome measure for children is achievement of permanency through reunification with family, adoption, or a permanent guardianship arrangement. Court supervision and case management by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Community Based Care Lead Agencies and Case Management Agencies is terminated when permanency is achieved.

As the numbers of children in the dependency system have increased, the time to permanency has also increased, preventing cases from closing and reducing the average number of children represented by the Program. In June 2017, statewide, only 22% of all children in the dependency system reached permanency within the statutorily mandated goal of 12 months. The percentage of children whose cases closed with permanency achieved was 61.84% for FY 16-17. This reflects the strain on the system created by increased numbers of children in care and resulting high caseloads.

Outcome: Number of new volunteers certified as a GAL.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2016/17	FY2018/19	FY2019/20	FY2020/21	FY2021/22	FY2022/23
2,686	2,700	2,800	2,800	2,800	2,800

Explanation: The Program first topped its goal of more than 10,000 volunteers statewide in February 2016. For all 12 months of FY 16-17, the average number of volunteers was 10,621. The actual number of total volunteers on June 30, 2017 was 11,086. During FY 16-17, 2,686 new volunteers were certified.

During the coming year, the GAL Program will continue its aggressive volunteer recruitment efforts, and in partnership with the Program's Direct-Support Organization, attempt to further increase the number of volunteers available to serve children.

AGENCY SERVICE OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE PROJECTION TABLES

Outcome: Average number of volunteers.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2016/17	FY2018/19	FY2019/20	FY2020/21	FY2021/22	FY2022/23
10,621	11,200	11,250	11,250	11,250	11,250

Explanation: This number includes a small proportion of volunteers who do not carry a caseload but rather perform administrative and office work for the program. The Program’s goal is to maintain at least 10,000 volunteers at all times, and develop innovative ways to improve retention. For FY 16-17, the average number of volunteers was 10,621. The actual number of certified and non-certified volunteers on June 30, 2017 was 11,086.

LINKAGE TO GOVERNOR’S PRIORITIES

1. IMPROVING EDUCATION

World Class Education

GAL Program Goal #1: *To provide effective advocacy and improved outcomes for all of Florida’s abused, abandoned, and neglected children.*

A. Since the 2009 passage of legislation allowing the appointment of “surrogate parents” to act in the place of a parent in educational decision making and in safeguarding a child’s rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, volunteer Guardians ad Litem have increasingly volunteered and been trained to serve as “educational advocates” for the children they represent. Between 2012 and 2017, the percentage of GAL volunteers serving as educational advocates has risen from 12% to 40%. This means that almost half of all GAL volunteers across the state represent the best interests of their assigned children not only in the court room and within the child welfare system, but also in the educational setting, where many of these children struggle due to multiple moves, learning or physical disabilities and mental health issues.

B. The Florida Statewide Guardian ad Litem Program was chosen for a 2017 National CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Association Youth Advocacy Grant aimed at improving outcomes for the state’s abused and neglected children. This is the second year the Program has won the \$40,000 grant, which distributes funds from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, for the purpose of increasing the number of maltreated children who are assigned a volunteer guardian ad litem to advocate for their best interests.

The GAL Program uses the grant funds to continue its Fostering Futures Training Initiative, which focuses on advocacy and mentoring for older youth by providing them with volunteers specifically trained to serve as the one significant adult relationship they need to help them transition to adulthood. Florida's GAL has already demonstrated success in mentoring a population of older youth who have moved up in grade level and had clean arrest records and delinquency records.

The new grant award was based on the Florida Program's success from 2014 to 2016. Of the 179 youth served during that time 76 percent were promoted to the next grade level, while 96 percent had clean arrest and delinquency records.

C. Research shows that children with GAL volunteers are more likely to pass all courses, less likely to have poor conduct in school, and less likely to be expelled than those who do not. In addition, these children have better controls against deviant behavior, they value achievement, and work out conflict better with others.

2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

Focus on Job Growth and Retention

Reduce Taxes

Regulatory Reform

Phase out Florida's Corporate Income Tax

3. PUBLIC SAFETY

Protect our communities by ensuring the health, welfare and safety of our citizens

GAL Program Goal #1: *To provide effective advocacy and improved outcomes for all of Florida's abused, abandoned, and neglected children.*

Studies show children with a GAL volunteer are half as likely to enter foster care, and if they do enter foster care, they spend less time in care. They receive more services and are also more likely to have a positive view of the future. If parental rights are terminated, they are more likely to be adopted.

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS STATEMENT

The Guardian ad Litem Program was established in Florida in 1980 as a county-based program under the jurisdiction of the courts, to represent the best interests of abused, abandoned or neglected children involved in dependency proceedings. On January 1, 2004, the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office was created to provide the infrastructure to increase functionality and standardization among the existing programs. Section 39.8296, Florida Statutes, establishes the State Office as an independent entity within the Justice Administrative Commission. There is a single statewide program with local offices in each of Florida's 20 judicial circuits.

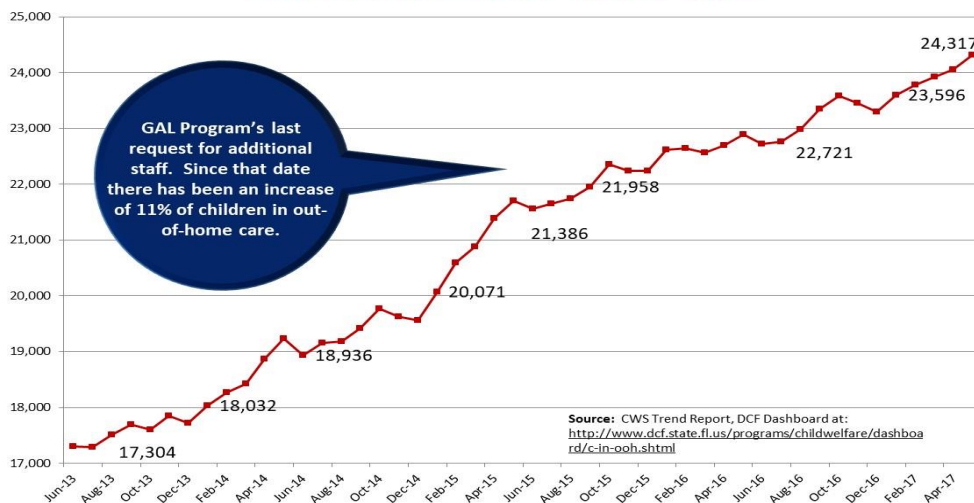
The GAL Statewide Office has oversight responsibility for providing legal, operational and technical assistance to all guardian ad litem and attorney ad litem programs within the judicial circuits. Responsibilities include collecting, reporting and tracking reliable case data, reviewing the programs in Florida and in other states, developing statewide performance measures and standards, developing a training program, reviewing various funding sources, and developing methods to improve delivery of program services.

Since 2004, an annual report has been filed each year which describes the environment, issues and strategies employed to address the GAL’s basic mission to represent all dependent children, as defined within Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes. Annual reports may be viewed at the Guardian ad Litem Program’s website, at <http://guardianadlitem.org/about-us/annual-reports-long-range-program-plans/> Reviewers are invited to read the reports and contact the Statewide Office with any questions.

The GAL Program has historically sought increasing resources to serve ever larger segments of all dependent children. However, guided by independent studies the Program determined that in FY 17-18 the most effective way to serve dependent children was to stabilize the Program’s workforce, which was negatively affected by low salaries and high caseloads leading to high turnover. The Florida Legislature responded by appropriating special pay adjustments for the five classes of GAL employees most directly affected by turnover and high caseloads.

The more significant trend affecting the ability of the GAL Program to fulfill its mission is the steadily increasing number of children in out-of-home care. DCF statistics show the number of children in out-of-home care has increased 11% between June 2015 and June 2017. At the beginning of this period, a greater-than-average number of children were being taken into care; more recent data show that the large number of children in out-of-home care is due to children staying in the system longer, and not reaching permanency. Additionally, recent DCF Dashboard data indicates that more than 36% of all children in out-of-home care are placed out of their home counties, and almost 20% are placed out of their home circuits.

Children in Out-of-Home Care



These conditions have the following impacts on GAL representation:

- When children stay in the system longer, their cases take longer to close and as a result, the GAL Program serves fewer children.
- The longer children stay in the system, the greater the risk of disruptions in placements and other negative outcomes which require more intense advocacy and a greater expenditure of GAL resources.
- When 36% of children are placed out of their home circuits, GALs must travel farther, spend more time, and incur greater expense to provide effective, well-informed advocacy unique to each child.
- The overburdened nature of the system negatively affects recruitment and retention of GAL volunteers resulting in the Program representing fewer children.

The GAL Program cannot predict when the numbers of children will begin to decrease. For this reason, the GAL Program is re-examining its own practices to identify changes to reach more children and attempt to move those in out-of-home care to permanency more quickly, with fewer incidents of re-entry into foster care. To accomplish this, the Program has been working with outside consultants to create a strategic plan to reach 100% of the children.

EXHIBIT II – PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND STANDARDS

Department: Justice Administrative Commission	Department No.: 21
Program: Statewide Guardian ad Litem Program	Code: 21.31.00.00
Service/Budget Entity: PGM: Stw/Guardian ad Litem	Code: 21.31.00.00

Approved Performance Measures for FY2014-15	Approved Prior Year Standards FY2016-17	Actual Prior Year Standards FY2016-17	Approved Standards For FY2017-18	Requested Standards For FY2018-19
Average number of children represented	26,500	25,583	26,500	26,500
Average percent of children represented	80%	80%	80%	82%
Percent of cases closed with Permanency Goal achieved.	70%	62%	70%	70%
Number of new volunteers certified as a GAL	1,464	2,705	2,700	2,700
Average number of volunteers	5,057	10,621	10,000	11,200

EXHIBIT III – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Department:	Justice Administration
Program:	Statewide Guardian ad Litem
Service/Budget Entity:	Statewide Guardian ad Litem
Measure:	Average number of children represented
Action:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Outcome</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Revision of Measure
<input type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Output</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Deletion of Measure
<input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment of GAA Performance Standards	

Approved Standard	Actual Performance Results	Difference (Over/Under)	Percentage Difference
26,500	25,583	917	(3.4%)

Factors Accounting for the Difference:

Internal Factors (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Factors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff Capacity
<input type="checkbox"/> Competing Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Level of Training
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Previous Estimate Incorrect	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)	

Explanation:
The Program came very close to meeting this target during FY 15-16. High turnover – due to high workload and non-competitive salaries in critical child contact and court positions affected the Program’s capacity to meet this target.

External Factors (check all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resources Unavailable	<input type="checkbox"/> Technological Problems
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal/Legislative Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Disaster
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Target Population Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)
<input type="checkbox"/> This Program/Service Cannot Fix The Problem	
<input type="checkbox"/> Current Laws Are Working Against The Agency Mission	

Explanation:
See item above. The number of children in out of home care has risen dramatically over the past three years. The last legislative session has provided added resources for FY 17-18 to reduce turnover and stabilize the workforce so that more children can be served.

Management Efforts to Address Differences/Problems (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Training	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)

Recommendations:
The Legislature appropriated funding to help the Program stem high turnover in 5 critical classes. This should enable to Program to stabilize turnover and serve more children. With a more stable workforce and additional staff, this number should climb to the stated goal.

EXHIBIT III – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Department:	Justice Administration
Program:	Statewide Guardian ad Litem
Service/Budget Entity:	Statewide Guardian ad Litem
Measure:	Average percent of children represented
Action:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Outcome</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Revision of Measure
<input type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Output</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Deletion of Measure
<input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment of GAA Performance Standards	

Approved Standard	Actual Performance Results	Difference (Over/Under)	Percentage Difference
80%	79%	(1%)	(1.3%)

Factors Accounting for the Difference:

Internal Factors (check all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personnel Factors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff Capacity
<input type="checkbox"/> Competing Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Level of Training
<input type="checkbox"/> Previous Estimate Incorrect	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)	

Explanation: Excessive turnover due to high caseloads and increasing numbers of dependent children prevented the Program from reaching the stated target, although the difference was only slightly over 1%.

External Factors (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Resources Unavailable	<input type="checkbox"/> Technological Problems
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal/Legislative Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Disaster
<input type="checkbox"/> Target Population Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)
<input type="checkbox"/> This Program/Service Cannot Fix The Problem	
<input type="checkbox"/> Current Laws Are Working Against The Agency Mission	

Explanation: The number of children in out of home care has increased by 11% since the last time the GAL Program requested additional staff resources.

Management Efforts to Address Differences/Problems (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Training	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)

Recommendations:
 The Legislature appropriated funding to help the Program stem high turnover in 5 critical classes. This should enable to Program to stabilize turnover and serve more children. With a more stable workforce and additional staff, this number should climb to the stated goal.

EXHIBIT III – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Department: Justice Administration
Program: Statewide Guardian ad Litem
Service/Budget Entity: Statewide Guardian ad Litem
Measure: Percent of cases closed with permanency goal achieved

Action:

- Performance Assessment of Outcome Measure Revision of Measure
 Performance Assessment of Output Measure Deletion of Measure
 Adjustment of GAA Performance Standards

Approved Standard	Actual Performance Results	Difference (Over/Under)	Percentage Difference
70%	62%	(8%)	(11%)

Factors Accounting for the Difference:

Internal Factors (check all that apply):

- Personnel Factors Staff Capacity
 Competing Priorities Level of Training
 Previous Estimate Incorrect
 Other (Identify)

Explanation: Increases in caseloads in many areas of the state along with high turnover in key positions have affected the ability to achieve timely permanency and thus reduced the percent of cases with permanency achieved. Statewide in June 2017, only 22% of cases achieved permanency in 12 months.

External Factors (check all that apply):

- Resources Unavailable Technological Problems
 Legal/Legislative Change Natural Disaster
 Target Population Change Other (Identify)
 This Program/Service Cannot Fix The Problem
 Current Laws Are Working Against The Agency Mission

Explanation: Increases in caseloads in many areas of the state have affected the ability to achieve timely permanency and thus reduced the percent of cases with permanency achieved.

Management Efforts to Address Differences/Problems (check all that apply):

- Training Technology
 Personnel Other (Identify)

Recommendations:

As staffing is stabilized, we anticipate growth in the percentage of children with permanency goal achieved when their cases are closed.

EXHIBIT III – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Department: Justice Administration
Program: Statewide Guardian ad Litem
Service/Budget Entity: Statewide Guardian ad Litem
Measure: Number of new volunteers certified as a GAL
Action:
 Performance Assessment of Outcome Measure Revision of Measure
 Performance Assessment of Output Measure Deletion of Measure
 Adjustment of GAA Performance Standards

Approved Standard	Actual Performance Results	Difference (Over/Under)	Percentage Difference
1,464	2,705	1,241	85%

Factors Accounting for the Difference: Not Applicable. Target Exceeded

Internal Factors (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Factors	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Capacity
<input type="checkbox"/> Competing Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Level of Training
<input type="checkbox"/> Previous Estimate Incorrect	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)	

Explanation:

External Factors (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Resources Unavailable	<input type="checkbox"/> Technological Problems
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal/Legislative Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Disaster
<input type="checkbox"/> Target Population Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)
<input type="checkbox"/> This Program/Service Cannot Fix The Problem	
<input type="checkbox"/> Current Laws Are Working Against The Agency Mission	

Explanation:

Management Efforts to Address Differences/Problems (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Training	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology
<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)

Recommendations:

EXHIBIT III – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Department:	Justice Administration		
Program:	Statewide Guardian ad Litem		
Service/Budget Entity:	Statewide Guardian ad Litem		
Measure:	Average number of Volunteers		
Action:			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Outcome</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Revision of Measure		
<input type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Output</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Deletion of Measure		
<input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment of GAA Performance Standards			
Approved Standard	Actual Performance Results	Difference (Over/Under)	Percentage Difference
5,057	10,621	5,564	110%
Factors Accounting for the Difference: <u>Not Applicable. Target Exceeded.</u>			
Internal Factors (check all that apply):			
<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Factors	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Capacity		
<input type="checkbox"/> Competing Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Level of Training		
<input type="checkbox"/> Previous Estimate Incorrect			
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)			
Explanation:			
External Factors (check all that apply):			
<input type="checkbox"/> Resources Unavailable	<input type="checkbox"/> Technological Problems		
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal/Legislative Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Disaster		
<input type="checkbox"/> Target Population Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)		
<input type="checkbox"/> This Program/Service Cannot Fix The Problem			
<input type="checkbox"/> Current Laws Are Working Against The Agency Mission			
Explanation:			
Management Efforts to Address Differences/Problems (check all that apply):			
<input type="checkbox"/> Training	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology		
<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)		
Recommendations:			

**EXHIBIT IV – PERFORMANCE MEASURE VALIDITY AND
RELIABILITY**

Department: _____ **Justice Administration** _____
Program: _____ **Statewide Guardian ad Litem** _____
Service/Budget Entity: _____ **Statewide Guardian ad Litem** _____
Measure: _____ **All Performance Measures** **X**

Action (check one):

- Requesting revision to approved performance measures.
- Change in data sources or measurement methodologies.
- Requesting new measure.
- Backup for performance measure.

Data Sources and Methodology:

The data source for these measures are numbers tracked by each of the 20 Guardian ad Litem offices residing in the 20 judicial circuits. Each office records and reports, as of the last day of the month, data needed to assess Program performance and to determine whether standards are met. These data are recorded in the Program’s data system, Optima, and summarized in the Program’s monthly Representation Report and Scorecard. These reports are posted monthly on the Guardian ad Litem website:
www.guardianadlitem.org

Validity:

The methodology for collecting and reporting the data supporting all performance measures is an accurate approach to data collection.

Reliability:

The methodology is sound and consistent. Although minor issues remain regarding data collection, the Program feels confident that the process is dependable and will result in consistent information from year to year.

EXHIBIT V – ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES CONTRIBUTING TO PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Measure Number	Approved Performance Measures for FY 2017-18 (Words)		Associated Activities Title
1	Average number of children represented		Represent children
2	Average percent of children represented		Represent children
3	Percent of cases closed with permanency goal achieved		Represent children
4	Number of new volunteers certified as a GAL		Represent children
5	Average number of volunteers		Represent children