South Carolina Department on Aging

SC Vulnerable Adult Guardian ad Litem Program
Brenda Stalzer, Program Director
SC Vulnerable Adult Guardian ad Litem (VAGAL SC)

What Do We Do?

- Recruit and train volunteers to serve as Guardians ad Litem (GALs) for vulnerable adults in state custody
- Conduct a thorough assessment of the adult’s situation
- Advocate for the adult
- Represent the adult’s best interest in SC’s family courts
SC Vulnerable Adult Guardian ad Litem Program - Who Do We Serve?

• Vulnerable adults who are taken into state custody due to:
  • Self-Neglect – 54%
  • Neglect – 32%
  • Abuse – 8%
  • Exploitation – 6%
How VAGAL SC Works with Adult Protective Services (APS)

• APS legal team notifies VAGAL SC when adult is taken into custody
• VAGAL SC assigns a volunteer GAL for the adult
• GAL and APS independently assess adult’s situation
• GAL and APS work together to advocate for the adult
• In court, each party makes a recommendation

• When legal case closes, GAL is relieved
Mrs. Brown

- 84 year old with dementia
- Taken into custody after she was found living in home infested with bed bugs and no electricity
- A GAL was assigned to advocate for her
Mrs. Brown – What GAL Learned

• Caregiver beat her

• Caregiver became her POA

• Caregiver emptied her retirement account and misused her income
How Does the New Vulnerable Adult Law (S425) Impact VAGAL SC?

• Allows volunteers to address concerns about financial exploitation immediately

• In most cases, the APS case manager would make the report to a financial institution

• When necessary, GAL can make report directly
Who can volunteer as a GAL?

- 21 or older
- Volunteers needed statewide
- Able to attend court hearings
- No legal training required
- Passionate about helping vulnerable adults

Volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds!
How much time is required to volunteer as a GAL?

TRAINING:
- Complete application
- Attend all day training class
- Shadow court hearings
- Background & reference checks
- One to two year commitment

SERVING AS A GAL:
- Cases last an average of six months
- Average - 20 volunteer hours per case
- Choose how many cases to take
- Choose which counties to serve
How can I become a GAL?

• Aging.sc.gov/vagal

• Contact Brenda Stalzer:
  • 803-445-5953
  • bstalzer@aging.sc.gov