

What are the critical indicators of effectiveness of a VGAL?

An evaluation of the Snohomish County Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem Program

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Abstract:

The child welfare system in the United States is experiencing an increasing number of cases of abused and neglected children and a lack of Volunteers Guardian Ad Litem (VGALs) available for each case. A VGAL is a court-appointed special advocate who represents a child's best interests in dependency cases. The purpose of this study is to address a gap in literature that explores the effectiveness of VGALs by gathering data from the volunteers themselves instead of case outcomes. This study interviews ten VGALs in Snohomish County with the intent to produce a more in depth picture of what indicators of effectiveness were common to successful volunteers. The potential factors of effectiveness identified in this study are personal development, belief in program, support systems, balance and objectivity, and personal identity. A better understanding of what makes a VGAL effective could lay the groundwork for future quantitative studies, as well as be used to identify areas of strength or weakness for future program improvement and policy.

Chapter 1: Purpose and Introduction of the Study

Program Background Information

In the United States, more than 600,000 children are in foster care for some period of time every year (Court Appointed Special Advocates, 2013). It was not until the 1970's that the United States Congress took action against a child welfare system that was inadequately protecting children. This was most notably done through the creation of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974. Some of the requirements of this law were for all states to have child abuse and neglect reporting laws, investigate reports of abuse and neglect, educate the public on child abuse and neglect, and provide a guardian ad litem to every abused or neglected child whose case results in a judicial proceeding ("The National CASA Association," 2007). The term "ad litem" means "for the suit" or "for the court" ("The National CASA Association," 2007).

In response to this federal law, the first Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem (VGAL) Program was started in Seattle, WA in 1977 by Judge David Soukup who felt social workers assigned to cases were not able to provide the individualized attention that children in the system required for the best possible outcomes. The program recruited volunteer citizens to conduct case investigations to provide information on the behalf of abused and neglected children for the judges making decisions for these children. The National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program, a national non-profit with many local organizations, had evolved from the program by 1982 with the mission "to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused or neglected child can be safe, establish permanence and have the opportunity to thrive" ("Court Appointed Special Advocates," 2013). To do this, a CASA volunteer represents a child's best interests in court to try to help foster children "get needed

services, resources, or entitlements” (“Court Appointed Special Advocates,” 2013). In 2013, 74,918 CASA volunteers worked on cases for 238,527 children in the United States (“2013 Annual Report”, 2014). While CASAs have been able to help thousands of children, there are still thousands of children each year who go without a CASA to help them get into a safe, permanent home.

Volunteers in programs that are a part of the National CASA Association are known as VGALs, CASAs, ProKids, and many other titles, but all are advocating for abused and neglected children in the court system (“The National CASA Association,” 2007). The Snohomish County Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem (VGAL) Program, the program evaluated in this study, was the second CASA Program to open in the United States and chose the title “VGAL” instead of “CASA.” As the Snohomish County Program chose the Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem (VGAL) name, all volunteers will be called VGALs going forward for the purposes of this report, except in the literature review where studies were performed on programs with the CASA title. All VGALs in Snohomish County report to a Program Coordinator (PC) who is responsible for assigning cases, monitoring case progress, reviewing reports, and helping VGALs solve problems (“The National CASA Association,” 2007). Currently, there are over 200 VGALs in Snohomish County.

To become a VGAL in Snohomish County, citizens must pass a background check and intensive interview process. They then participate in 32 hours of training before being assigned to a program coordinator and their first case. Once assigned a case, a VGAL will remain involved with the case until the child or children are placed in permanent homes, whether back with the biological parents, adopted by a new family, or otherwise. During the course of a case, VGALs will conduct a thorough investigation so that he or she can make informed

recommendations to the court via a written report. The investigations are ongoing until the case closes, requiring VGALs to continue to monitor and follow up on their cases in addition to their annual training requirements. Information is gathered from all parties involved in a case which includes biological parents, foster parents, teachers, service providers, and many others (Snohomish County VGAL Program Brochure). A typical volunteer will manage multiple cases, though this number varies based on the volunteer's experience with the program and his or her time constraints.

There are five key components of a VGAL's role. These are investigation, facilitation, advocacy, reporting, and monitoring. A VGAL in Snohomish County must "carry out an objective examination of the situation, including relevant history, environment, relationships, and the needs of the child" ("The National CASA Association," 2007). The VGAL facilitates relationships between all involved parties to better provide the child with his or her needs and advocates for a child through a thorough court report that is submitted to the judge. In addition, the VGAL must keep track of everything that happens during a case while assigned to it. This could include checking to see if child protective services plans have been followed or tracking the court orders ("The National CASA Association," 2007).

Importance of Study

In 2013, Washington State had over 9,000 children, a number increased from previous years, in foster care due to abuse or neglect (Child Welfare, 2014). The Snohomish County VGAL Program and other CASA groups like it are needed as long as children continue to be in situations where they are abused or neglected in order to help get these children in permanent, safe homes and to prevent them from lingering in the system. For this reason it is important to conduct research that could positively contribute to the program's ability to be effective in the

work they are doing, especially given that there are not enough VGALs to assign to every case that could benefit from one.

VGALs have the power to affect the lives of many children who would otherwise be lost in the system through their case research and presentation in court cases via reports or questioning. Research has shown that those entering foster care at a young age have greater risk for developmental, physical, and mental health problems so the success of a VGAL can reduce the risks many foster children face (Meloy, 2012). VGALs are knowledgeable about many services and, from their in depth research on cases, can often suggest more personalized services to benefit the children involved than social workers. Because of this, many children are introduced to services that they may not have had access to otherwise (Markwood, 1994). Research on what influences a VGALs' ability to be effective in getting children into permanent homes is vital because of their direct interaction with traumatized children and their ability to impact case outcomes for these children.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the functions, responsibilities, experiences, and opinions of VGALs to discover critically relevant factors not currently being measured that contribute to or hinder the effectiveness of VGALs in Snohomish County. Critical and consistent indicators of VGAL effectiveness have not previously been identified signaling a need for further investigation to determine which factors are affecting a VGAL's ability to be effective in his or her work. Previous research has failed to use in depth interviews and information from the VGALs themselves to identify these potential indicators. Factors identified in this study could lay the groundwork for future quantitative studies to analyze the effectiveness of VGALs, as well as be used to identify areas of strength or weakness for future program policy and improvement.

This could also lead to an increase in positive outcomes for children in foster care through increased awareness of the program, policy implementations related to findings, and future studies that could affect more programs outside of Snohomish County.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In order to determine what makes a VGAL effective, it was important to have a working definition of how effectiveness is measured. The mission of the CASA program is to work to provide every abused or neglected child a safe, permanent home and the opportunity to thrive. It is the opportunity to thrive that is the most difficult to measure. One theory defines an effective VGAL as one who instills a sense of empowerment in foster children by helping them to learn to speak and advocate for themselves, a skill essential to positive outcomes for children in foster care (Litzelfelner, 1997; Kaplan, 2009). This study implies that a child who can articulate what he or she needs will be more likely to succeed long term and a child advocate can help them with that skill.

Another way to define the “opportunity to thrive” is by the level of Central Capabilities that a child is provided. These capabilities, put together by Martha Nussbaum in *Creating Capabilities*, are defined as those which all humans should have at minimum in terms of basic human rights. The list of essential capabilities includes life (not dying prematurely or having one’s life reduced to a standard not worth living), bodily health, bodily integrity (definition includes security against violent assault), senses, imagination, and thought (the ability to be creative and do things in a human way), emotions (not having one's emotions blighted by fear or anxiety), practical reason, affiliation (to engage in various forms of social interaction and to be treated as an equal to others), other species, play, and control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2011). The opportunity to thrive using Martha Nussbaum’s definition would

therefore be the ability to aid in getting a child to permanent situations where these basic needs are met.

Similarly, Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit take this a step further in their book, *Disadvantage*. The two researchers evaluated Nussbaum's list of capabilities, and, through the use of interviews with the public, extended the list to include the function of being able to communicate. Although the researchers discovered additional central capabilities, they also were able to narrow down, again through interviews with the public, the eleven fundamental capabilities to the top six most important. These were life, bodily health, bodily integrity, affiliation (often described as "belonging"), control over one's environment, and sense, imagination, and thought (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007). The VGAL Training Manual and training course addresses some of this through the "best interest" principle which explains that no matter what task the VGAL is working on, he or she should focus on getting the children they work with into safe, permanent homes as fast as possible ("The National CASA Association Training," 2007). Thus, some of the level of success of each VGAL could be determined by his or her ability to provide or get a foster child in a situation that provides capabilities necessary to survive and thrive.

In terms of the performance of VGALs, there have been quite a few quantitative, quasi-experimental studies performed to evaluate the effectiveness of the VGAL or CASA Programs and VGALs as individuals. One example is a study conducted by Dr. Pat Litzelfelner in Lexington, KY. This study took place for two years starting in 1994 and attempted to measure CASA effectiveness through the variables of case closure rates, length of time under court jurisdiction, number of children adopted, the type of placements children were in while in case, number of court continuances, and number of services provided to the children and their families

throughout the process. The study compared case outcomes of 119 cases where a CASA was present to 81 cases where there was no CASA. The results found that there were no differences in outcomes between a child with a CASA and one without in terms of permanency outcomes and the types of moves the children experienced. However, it was found that those with CASAs had statistically fewer placements while in care, fewer court continuances, and more services provided to them (Litzelfelner, 2000). This questioned whether CASAs made a positive difference in case outcomes. The findings found that for some measurements this was the case and for others there was no difference which may mean that the most relevant factors were not necessarily being evaluated.

A similar study that attempted to measure the effectiveness of the CASA program was conducted by Cynthia A. Calkins and Dr. Murray Millar in 1994 in Clark County, Nevada. This study also attempted to measure CASA effectiveness by comparing cases where a CASA was involved to those without a CASA, also using length of time children spent in care as a measure of CASA effectiveness. Other measures of effectiveness included the number of placements children experienced while in care of the courts, and type of permanency outcomes achieved. It was found by these researchers that cases with a CASA had statistically significantly fewer placements, less time in foster care, and more desirable permanency outcomes compared to those cases without a CASA (Calkins & Millar, 1999). This study produced results that showed that statistically CASAs are more effective in getting positive case outcomes than cases without a CASA.

At the University of Washington Bothell, a researcher performed a similar study on cases filed between 2008 and 2012 in Snohomish County, Washington. The study was designed to compare VGAL to no VGAL cases in terms of length of dependency, number of placements,

number of services provided, and likelihood of ongoing contact with family members after case dismissal. The study used 47 cases that included the participation of a VGAL volunteer and 51 that did not. Data was controlled for level of risk, race/ethnicity, and age. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of length of dependency, number of services provided, and ongoing contact with family members upon dismissal. There was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of the number of out of home placements among cases. It was found that those with a VGAL experienced a greater number of out of home placements than those cases without a VGAL (Tuff, 2014). While increased numbers of placements are often viewed negatively, this could mean that VGALs were able to move children out of bad placements and into those that are more permanent and beneficial to the child. Compared to the different findings from other quantitative studies discussed earlier this is also an example of how the current measures of effectiveness are not giving the whole picture as to what impacts a VGAL's ability to be effective in the work they are doing.

Similar studies of comparisons of outcomes between cases with CASA/VGALs and those without also found mixed results (Poertner & Press, 1990; Abramson, 1991; Leung, 1996; Weisz, 2003; "Evaluation of CASA Representation," 2004). Overall, these studies show that while a CASA or VGAL does have the ability to make an impact on case outcomes, it is not clear what factors lead them to be effective or what factors are the greatest measure of this effectiveness in getting children into safe, permanent homes.

The findings of these various quasi-experimental studies are inconsistent and not replicable. Different from these kinds of studies, one investigation took a new approach and attempted to evaluate the satisfaction of the performance of the CASA Program through the use of surveys. The groups surveyed included judges, attorneys, child welfare workers, and parents

of foster children. The results of this study found that attorneys and judges were the most satisfied with CASAs as opposed to child welfare workers and parents who were the groups least satisfied with CASA performance. The results indicated that one's satisfaction with a CASA is a result of the CASA as an individual and his or her interpretation of their role as a CASA. There was inconsistency in the description of CASA experiences among those surveyed. That being said, the results also indicated a desire for more CASAs to be appointed to cases (Litzelfelner, 2008). This study does a better job of including a variety of sources of data to evaluate the role of a CASA, but does not allow for a broader range of factors of CASA effectiveness to be identified and acted on. Rather, the study only allows for those involved to rate their levels of satisfaction with the program through each person's individual interaction with CASAs.

These results were similar to those of a different CASA study performed in Washington State which found, also through the use of surveys, that judges reported CASAs to be "very effective" and that they frequently incorporate volunteer recommendations into their court orders (ORS, 2005). Other research performed in Washington State reported that caseworkers were the least positive of all groups surveyed when rating their satisfaction with CASA effectiveness ("Evaluation of Court Appointed Special Advocates," 2005; Berliner & Fitzgerald, 1998). Although all groups may not have the same high levels of satisfaction with CASAs, their high ratings among many groups shows their ability to impact case outcomes and the importance of researching the program to identify what allows CASAs or VGALs to be effective in their work.

Although there have been a handful of qualitative studies performed to evaluate the VGAL Programs, most studies have been quantitative in nature. While these quasi-experimental studies show some similar characteristics in their findings, demonstrating that all factors measured potentially play a role at some level in a VGAL's success, they are lacking in terms of

the qualitative elements of research that introduce data from the VGALs themselves. The work that VGALs perform can be subjective and varies on a case by case basis. This may mean that the quantitative variables used are not the best measures of a VGAL's ability to effectively help a child in need.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study used a theory building, descriptive case study of the Snohomish County VGAL Program to determine factors of effectiveness of VGALs. The study built on a previous quasi-experimental study where a researcher attempted to replicate a study of VGAL success by using the following variables: 1) months in dependency, 2) number of out of home placements, 3) services obtained for the child, and 4) family contact after dismissal (Tuff, p.6). Given that this study, as with previous studies, was unable to produce consistent results with other studies on the same factors, the assumption for this case study was that the indicators of success previously measured are not the only relevant indicators of a VGAL's ability to be effective in getting a foster child into a safe, permanent home with the opportunity to thrive. The study used embedded units of analysis as the data was focused on the individual VGAL volunteers rather than on the program as a whole.

In order to determine factors of VGAL effectiveness a working definition of what is meant by this was required. The mission of the National CASA program is to "support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused or neglected child can be safe, establish permanence and have the opportunity to thrive" ("Court Appointed Special Advocates," 2013). For the purposes of this study, the definition of an effective VGAL was based on this mission statement. Effectiveness was defined as a VGAL's ability to get a child into a safe, permanent home, with the opportunity to thrive.

Data Collection Method and Sources

No data was obtained before receiving approval from the University of Washington Human Subjects Division to proceed. Given that the information gathered is not generalizable outside of the Snohomish County VGAL Program, the Human Subjects Division ultimately waived the need for IRB review for this particular study. Regardless, all participants signed informed consent forms showing their agreement to participate in the research project and promising confidentiality of their identity before each interview was conducted. This study used a retrospective, sequential design as the same researcher conducted all interviews with the VGALs who were asked about their previous experiences with the VGAL program (Creswell, 2014).

There are 215 CASA/VGAL volunteers in Snohomish County; however, given the time constraints of this study, it would have been impossible to conduct interviews with all of them. Participants were selected according to their experience with the program defined by length of time as a VGAL, the variety of cases worked on (in terms of the variety of neglect or abuse), the number of cases worked on, and reputation in Snohomish County as an effective VGAL and a good representation of the program. Participants were not selected randomly as the primary aim of the study was to determine which behaviors contribute to a VGAL's ability to be effective and it was determined that VGALs with the greatest amount and variety of experience were the most likely to exhibit repeatable behaviors that can be tracked for the purposes of this study. A Program Coordinator at the organization in Snohomish County served as a contact to connect the researcher with VGALs for this study. The Program Coordinator's years of involvement with the VGAL program, as well as her recent degree from the Master of Arts in Policy Studies Program

at UW Bothell, gave her the knowledge required to select credible and experienced volunteers to participate in this study.

The Program Coordinator reached out to her fellow coordinators via email for a list of volunteers they each felt fit the description detailed above. Each potential VGAL participant was approached by his or her Program Coordinator with the request about the interest in participating in this study, but did not give detailed information about what the researcher was specifically researching. A list of interested participants and their email addresses was compiled by the main Program Coordinator and the researcher used it to reach out to potential participants. Twelve VGALs were emailed by the researcher with a request to participate which resulted in eleven responses with agreement to participate. The sample size used was appropriate given the scope of this study and the level of experience on the part of the VGAL necessary to have meaningful responses to interview questions.

The ten participants (not including the participant who was used for a pilot interview) had a wide range of experience with the Snohomish County VGAL Program. The amount of experience as a VGAL ranged from 7 months to 10 years. VGALs described the number of those they helped in terms of either cases (which could include multiple children) or number of children. This self-reported number ranged from 2 cases to 500 children. All participants ended up being females.

CAPSTONE PARTICIPANTS

Interview Number	Years Experience	Number of Cases	Number of Children
1	3	30 cases	-
2	6	-	13 children
3	7	-	15 children
4	2	4 cases	8 children
5	10	-	500 children
6	7months	2 cases	-
7	4	-	19 children
8	4	20 cases	-
9	8	18 cases	-
10	7	-	56 children
RANGE	7 months - 10 years	2 - 30 cases	8 - 500 children

A pilot interview, whose data was not included in the analysis of results, was conducted with one VGAL who had 6 years and 42 cases worth of experience to ensure that the interview questions were broad and open enough to gather appropriate information for the goals of this study. Slight modifications were made to the questions prepared for this study as the pilot interviewee found the wording of a couple of them to be confusing. Once questions were finalized and approved by the Capstone advisor for this project, data was collected via ten open-ended, unstructured interviews conducted by the researcher with VGALs from Snohomish County. Interviews lasted between forty and seventy minutes and were conducted using the same eight interview questions (see Appendix A). The interview questions focused on VGAL individual experiences and approaches to their cases in order to stay on task throughout the interview process. However, interviews were flexible in nature to allow for follow up questions on VGAL responses. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by a hired third party who was given the audio files without names or other identifiable information. Audio equipment was checked out from the University of Washington IT Help Desk and all audio files

were deleted by the researcher before the return of the equipment. Transcriptions varied in length from 5 to 11 single spaced pages and were labeled by the interview number. All interviews were conducted in person by the researcher in various public locations, including the Lynnwood Library, the UW Bothell Library, and four different coffeehouses in the area.

Data Analysis Method

No analysis was conducted until all interviews were received in order to avoid having information from one interview affect a future interview during this study. This research was done in an effort to explore the potential factors of effectiveness of the Snohomish County VGAL Program and as such was not intended to test a hypothesis, but rather identify a broader range of factors of effectiveness of the volunteers in Snohomish County. The coding process described in John W. Creswell's *Research Design* was used to produce a list of major ideas that surface from this analysis (p.198). The inductive process of creating codes from the interview data began with a general review of the first five transcribed interviews to gain a sense of the overall data. Notes were taken on the major themes and patterns that emerged and from this, codes were created and defined. These codes were then tested on the remaining five interviews. Codes were modified through this process to create the final list of codes which were then tested on all interviews using a color coding scheme to mark information in each interview from each coded category. (Creswell, 1998). This methodology produced five primary codes/categories with fifteen sub-categories (see Appendix B for the codebook used).

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The results of this study produced 5 primary coding categories, each with a number of sub-categories. The categories consistently discussed during the interviews that were described as factors that influence effectiveness of VGALs in Snohomish County have been categorized as:

personal development, belief in program, support systems, balance and objectivity, and personal identity. Personal development is defined as going far above the minimum volunteer requirements to find information and attend trainings outside of those offered by the program and above the minimum annual hourly requirement of 12 hours. This also includes developing methodologies and approaches to cases assigned to a volunteer. Belief in the program is defined as expressing positivity about the program as a whole as well as the passion and desire to help families. This often shows itself as viewing parents who have had their children removed from them as good people who just need help. The support systems show themselves via guidance, availability, and advice coming from program coordinators, fellow VGALs, or family members of VGALs. Balance and objectivity is defined as a VGAL's ability to control his or her emotions despite the difficult circumstances they witness. It also shows up as a VGAL's conscious effort to have a volunteer life balance so that their volunteer work does not consume their lives. The last category, personal identity, is defined as a VGAL's belief in themselves as a VGAL. This stems from an internal connection to the mission of the program, such as prior experience with the foster care system, as well as the belief that they can handle any case because of their calling to be a VGAL.

These findings differed greatly from the quantitative studies reviewed in this paper as the potential measures of effectiveness or ability to help a child successfully. They had more to do with the VGALs' support systems and intrinsic motivators than, for example, the number of services he or she could provide or placements avoided. However, when asked what success means for the VGAL, most volunteers described the idea of helping a child get into a positive and permanent situation, a description that would include many of Nussbaum's *capabilities* as described in the literature review.

Personal Development

Nearly all participants talked about going above the minimum in terms of their continuation of learning related to this program and the ability to independently work to find information and develop methodology for cases. For some, this was in the form of increased training hours within the program:

“I’ll always end up with 3 or 4 times more time than the training required because I like to keep it going...sometimes even if we don’t get credit it’s something that we’ll do because it’s something that can help us. (Interview 7)”

For others, this was done via classes outside the program:

“ A couple years ago I went to Edmonds to their paralegal program just so I could kind of understand better what was going on legally with the kids so that was a lot of training that year. (Interview 3)”

Other volunteers combined this training with research done on their own:

“I’m crazy about researching. I have a new case... and she has been diagnosed with some mental issues and I read everything I could about her. I got online and I have 6 books holding for me at the library. I read everything I could on the internet. I just want to know everything I can about her before I talk to her to just understand what’s going on in her own head and what I can do to help her. There are so many books out there to help.” (Interview 8,)

Through interviews with these ten VGALs it was found that volunteers seemed to feel they could be more effective by getting more training or seeking more information from sources other than those provided by the program. These kinds of motivated personality types are something Snohomish County and other VGAL programs could look for when recruiting

volunteers. Knowledge of the increased level of effectiveness volunteers in Snohomish County felt they had through these increased numbers of classes and research could be used by the program as an incentive to promote this kind of approach to cases. The program could provide a space on their website where VGALs could submit future trainings they plan to attend so that other volunteers inside and outside Snohomish County can more easily be aware of the opportunities that exist for further training. For example, one VGAL talked about how she had stumbled upon a Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Clinic at the University of Washington that she and two other VGALs decided to attend because they thought it would be helpful for their cases. Given that there are over 200 VGALs in Snohomish County as well as many others in other counties in the area, it is conceivable that other VGALs would have benefitted from the information provided at that particular training. While it may not be feasible to require volunteers to attend an increased number of hours of training per year, further research on whether or not that makes a difference could provide an incentive for programs to provide greater amounts of information in a more systematic way for their volunteers on trainings outside of the program.

Belief in Program

Most VGALs made comments about their belief in what the program accomplishes as a whole through the passion they found in their work. Often this was when asked, “Is there anything else you’d like to add?” at the end of their interview. For some this was the compassion and desire to help families that VGALs had entered the program with or developed through the program:

“I was humbled...Before I got into this I used to think, aw man kids in foster care, that’s horrible. These parents must be horrible people. But then I learned they’re struggling just like everyone else.” (Interview)

This passion was also expressed through positivity and enthusiasm about the Snohomish County VGAL program. One VGAL simply stated, “I wish there was a VGAL for every case.” (Interview 4). Others elaborated on this:

“...That was really appalling to me how the child is treated so poorly through the system. And that, to me, spoke volumes to why VGALs are needed. Without VGALs on those cases the child is not served to the best of the system. The VGALs make the system rise to the standard that it’s supposed to work at.” (Interview 1)

These volunteers share a belief in the ability of the VGAL program to make the system work as best as it can for those involved in it, specifically abused and neglected children. While belief or support of the VGAL program is not necessarily something that can be measured for future studies, it is important to note this overall trend in responses from notoriously successful VGALs. As this support of the program could come from a variety of sources, it may be beneficial to compare this kind of support with other programs to see if the same trend exists and why it does or does not. The VGALs from Snohomish County interviewed for this study all expressed a belief in what the VGAL program as a whole can accomplish.

Support Systems

All participants referenced at least one support system, though many referenced more than one, which aided them in their success as a VGAL. These support systems were broken

down into three sub-categories, though many VGALs referenced multiple support systems. These systems were Program Coordinator support, fellow VGAL support, or family support.

Whether each VGAL interacted with other VGALs or not, all cited their Program Coordinator as a primary support system who is available to them for a variety of needs. Many talked about how they felt they probably relied on their PC “more than other people” (Interview 4). For some it was the time that the PC provided:

“The PCs are amazing. We are so blessed to have somebody to turn to. I know anytime you pick up the phone she is always going to give me time.” (Interview 8)

For others, it was the guidance that a PC could provide:

“But this program in Snohomish County PC’s are really incredible. You can literally if ever you feel unprepared you can ask for help or for them to come with you. If (my PC)’s not there I would ask any of them.” (Interview 9)

Some cited the emotional support provided by a PC and its importance given that VGAL are unable to talk about case specifics with anyone outside their program:

“Our PCs are amazing and we can vent to them any time we need to.”
(Interview7)”

In addition to PC support, many VGALs cited reliance on their fellow VGALs as something that helps them with their cases. Much of this interaction is conducted or initiated through a regular monthly VGAL only meeting, called the “GALA” which stands for Guardian Ad Litem Auxiliary, where volunteers are able to meet and discuss case specific information with their fellow, sworn in volunteers:

“We have this meeting with a bunch of VGALs where we get together once a month...and we just talk about our cases...We are allowed to discuss our cases with other VGALs. So I know they’ll walk through upcoming meetings with me and three of them are seasoned VGALs, like 20 plus years, and so every time I go to those they have an answer. Obviously I can email or call them, but they are so wise and so I never feel like I am left hanging or anything.” (Interview 8)

For those I spoke with who started the VGAL mentorship program, GALA, they cited a real need in the program for this type of support system:

“One of the things that I have done since I’ve been in the program is myself and three other VGALs have gotten approval to establish a mentoring program because one of the things that I have had a problem with and I found out that these other VGALs also did was you feel the training is amazing.... But you’re still kind of thrown out there in the deep end when you actually get a case. You get your PC and you can refer to them all you want, but you still feel like you’re still what do I do? ...Now we have this mentoring program and we go... with a brand new VGAL to their first meeting...We will not interfere, but say this is where you go and maybe give them feedback after and let them know their next step....So while I didn’t feel prepared (for my first case) at all it’s not because training isn’t adequate. They didn’t have the resources to have someone go with you.” (Interview 7)

Often, despite the fact that they are unable to talk case specific information with those outside the program, VGALs mentioned the ability to vent about non case specific information to

family members as an aid to process information and an emotional support needed after witnessing traumatic situations. For most of the women interviewed, this was done with a spouse.

“I generally talk to my husband about it. I can’t use any names, but he will listen.”

Interview 4)

The establishment of support systems available to VGALs as they work in difficult situations seems to be an incredibly important factor for VGAL effectiveness in Snohomish County for many reasons. When interacting with PCs, VGALs are able to get more than emotional support, they are also able to get support for their report writing and advice on steps to take when they are stuck on something. As PCs generally have a greater amount of experience than VGALs, they are able to advise about services or contacts that VGALs did not know were available or step in during situations that need to be taken to a higher level. This is most often the case when a VGAL is having trouble connecting with a social worker on the same case. Most VGALs talked about contacting their PC on a frequent basis, much more often than the required minimum monthly check in.

Many VGALs expressed the need to be able to vent or have an emotional support available to them after witnessing traumatic situations during their volunteer work. A support system, whether via family, PCs, or other VGALs, allowed them to express their emotions and move on, rather than become consumed with a difficult situation. Others found their ability to be effective positively enhanced by the ability to talk about case specific issues with PCs or fellow VGALs. Many talked about how their cases are “not so bad” (Interview 10, Interview 7) after hearing about the cases their fellow volunteers were dealing with. It was also mentioned that the PC and the GALA in particular, were beneficial for the retention of volunteers. One VGAL told

a story about a fellow VGAL who was ready to quit the program because of the severity of the case she was handling. After attending the GALA, “everyone there changed her mind and she stuck with it.” (Interview7) Given that the highest quitting rate of VGALs is within the first two years, the same length as an average case, those who do not have the established support systems in place during this work may not stay with the program long enough to increase their effectiveness as a volunteer.

Balance and Objectivity

Most VGALs talked about the importance of what I have termed, “balance of self,” which refers to the VGALs’ ability to control his or her emotions and stay neutral throughout their work, as well as maintain an appropriate work-life balance. Without these balances, VGALs are skeptical that VGAL work could successfully be carried out. When asked what kinds of things affect a VGAL’s ability to be successful, one VGAL explained:

“Good self-care, I think, is super important. Good balance, it’s very easy to get lost in this work because it’s an endless need and it makes a huge difference... So it’s a little addicting and then you want to do more because there is this big need so it’s really important to kind of have lots of things in your life that are important and maintain good balance and good self-care.” (Interview 3)

In terms of emotional stability affecting VGAL work:

“I finally had a professional that I was talking to say to me if you don’t learn how to harden yourself a little bit then you can’t do this work. It’s just too painful to look at these kids and know what they have been through and put your emotions

aside and then work on what is the best thing for this child and how you can advocate for them. So I just had to learn that and I still care deeply for the kids, but you know and just want the best for them, that's still there, but I know what my job is." (Interview 4)

The ability to control their emotions and not allow their volunteer work to consume their thoughts positively impacted their ability to be effective. For many the work would be impossible without the ability to make the separation between their role as a VGAL and their life outside of the volunteer work. One VGAL describes this separation as simply having boundaries. She said, "I care a lot for these kids, but I don't have the desire to bring them home with me or buy them shoes" (Interview 9). While emotional stability and boundaries are difficult to measure, it is necessary to note the importance of this for a VGAL to be effective in his or her work and could be something where programs could work to help volunteers who struggle with the separation of work and volunteering to be more conscious about their efforts to create these boundaries to avoid burnout and emotional turmoil as much as possible.

Personal Identity

All VGALs interviewed had a high level of confidence about the work they were doing and their abilities to be effective as a VGAL. Often this seemed to stem from a connection to the program itself or children from something in their background when entering the program. This varied from having a connection to children from being a mother, to experience as a foster parent, or a degree in a related subject such as education or social work that further connected them to the work of a VGAL. Many saw being a VGAL as part of their personal identity or their "calling" and more than one talked about taking "a lot of cases nobody wanted" (Interview 1) or

being able to handle any case they had. One VGAL, when talking about how she picks caseloads referenced this confidence when she said:

“I choose challenging cases from time to time. It depends on how many cases I have at that time that are particularly contentious. I could handle all of them, but my PC doesn’t like me to because they can’t.” (Interview 5)

Another VGAL when talking about how she handles the work expressed enthusiasm about the program and her connection to it:

“When things get really bad I’ll go for a walk and walk my dog to clear my head and regroup before I dive back into it again because it’s not fun work, but it’s so meaningful. I feel like I’ve found my calling like this is what I was meant to do. Before this I felt like I was meant to be a mother and I threw everything into my kids to be a good mom and now that they are grown they don’t need me as much ...so I can focus on this.” (Interview 4)

This category shows a trend between effective VGALs and an internalized connection to the work performed. While a background in social work or similar experiences is not a requirement for a VGAL to be effective, it does speak to the possibility that there are groups of people who are not hearing about the program because their background is not connected in any way to the child welfare system. This passion for the program and confidence in themselves that VGALs exhibited in the interviews conducted for this study may also stem from other factors. VGALs may feel more confident in their ability to handle any case they work on because of the support they receive from their PC, for example. It may be enlightening to take a look at how VGALs’ perceptions of their abilities in programs where PC support is not as readily available differs from those in Snohomish County.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Given that the number of children in foster care continues to increase and a shortage exists of VGALs available to help, a focus on an increased number of factors of effectiveness could increase the number of children a volunteer is able to help through expanded training and policy implementation. This study found that for those in Snohomish County, the perceived factors of effectiveness for VGALs were personal development, belief in program, established support systems, balance and objectivity, and personal identity. While some of these factors, such as belief in program and personal identity may be more difficult to use for future policy implementation or program requirements, it is important to report them as trends that emerged from this particular study and would be beneficial to see why these trends are or are not the same for other VGAL programs.

Other factors found in this study such as personal development, taking advantage of available support systems, and creating a volunteer-life balance are factors that could be used for further research as well as policy implementation should the factors prove to be critical indicators of effectiveness for VGALs. It was apparent from these interviews that VGALs in Snohomish County relied heavily on their support systems, specifically their PCs. The connection and constant availability of PCs in Snohomish County could be one of the greatest influences to VGAL effectiveness and a factor that should be looked into more closely.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this study. The time and resources available limited the scope of the study to just one VGAL Program in Washington State with interviews of only 10 volunteers. This scope limits the relevance of the findings to Snohomish County and cannot be

generalized to other VGAL Programs. This was appropriate for this particular study as it meets the objectives of the study purpose.

In addition, the participants of this study were all seasoned VGALs asked to participate by one of the Snohomish County Program Coordinators because of their great background of experience and firsthand knowledge of working with the program and within the child welfare system. As this method was used instead of random selection the ability to include a diverse group of participants was limited. Given that the participants were not selected randomly, all participants ended up being females. While females make up the majority of the program's volunteers, there are many male volunteers as well which opens up the potential for bias in my study findings as all groups in the program were not represented. However, given the scope and purpose of the study, this was most appropriate as it allowed interaction to be only with participants who have enough experience with the program to provide meaningful responses. Given that these participants have such great amounts of knowledge and experience with the program, this research will hopefully provide the program with some information that could be used to help new VGALs in the program find ways to be effective in their work or other programs to create policies around factors that have surfaced as indicators of effectiveness in Snohomish County.

Reactive effects are a potential internal validity concern for this case study (de Vaus, p. 236). By having the researcher, an outsider to the organization, conduct interviews, participants could respond differently than if they were talking to someone who is a part of the organization. They may, for example, have given answers to make the organization they work with sound like it is incredibly more effective than it is in order to produce what they perceive to be positive results, or make their program appear to be a more effective organization. Although reactive

effects are a concern when an outsider inserts themselves into an organization to gather information, these effects should be diminished through the lengthy, open-ended interviews which give the participants' time to either become more comfortable or let information slip as they continue with their answers. In addition, the approach by a program coordinator possibly gave me, as the researcher, a greater level of credibility and trust with those interviewed than would have existed had I reached out to them on my own with no affiliation to the program.

Internal validity is a concern when it comes to the interpretation of what is been said during the interview. Interview responses were interpreted as objectively as possible and compared among each other to ensure that wild assumptions were not being made about what the participant was saying. Because this is qualitative research, analysis can be complicated, but the benefits outweigh the risks as qualitative research is important to do to set the stage for future qualitative and quantitative studies. The findings of this paper would be strengthened from further studies to confirm the validity of the results.

There are a few threats to external validity with this project. One threat is a result of a Program Coordinator contacting the VGALs to participate in the study as all volunteers must report to a program coordinator. The benefits outweigh the risks in this case as the help of the Program Coordinator for this study allows the strategic selection of cases which enhances the external validity of case studies (de Vaus, p.238). Another threat to external validity for this project is that it is a case study, and has therefore not produced results representative of all CASA/VGAL programs in the country. Although not statistically generalizable, this study aims to build a theory around the effectiveness of VGALs and therefore may produce theoretical generalization (de Vaus, p.237).

Recommendations for Snohomish County

This study has produced results that could benefit Snohomish County's VGAL program. One recommendation for this program would be to implement a more centralized availability of trainings outside of the program as well as encourage VGALs to more consistently share the trainings they have found. Most of the VGALs interviewed for this study were very proactive in finding and attending trainings above and beyond what is required of them by the program. There are many other volunteers who may not be motivated enough to find trainings on their own, but may be willing to attend more trainings if the courses were easier to find. While a program coordinator in Snohomish County currently sends out mass emails with the trainings that she is aware of, there seem to be a lot of trainings that VGALs are attending on their own. If VGALs shared more with their program coordinators, the program coordinators could publish a calendar or list of trainings online for VGALs to access. Google has a widget which can embed a Google calendar into a website so that the information is constantly pulled from the one calendar which a program coordinator could update. This is just one example of a more user friendly and cost effective way that Snohomish County could make the trainings their volunteers find more readily accessible, though there are many different routes the program could take with this recommendation.

A second recommendation resulting from this research would be for Snohomish County to implement policies surrounding program coordinator and VGAL support systems as VGALs perceived those as being very important in their ability to be effective in their work. There are a few different ways that the program could do this. One idea would be to create a policy where new VGALs must attend at least one GALA within their first year of volunteering. This attendance would count towards the required 12 hours of training that the VGALs have on an annual basis and would potentially help the volunteer establish a VGAL support system right

from the start. While VGALs are all different in the level of interaction they choose to have with other volunteers, an exposure to VGALs and the work they do could still benefit the new volunteer even if she or he only attended the one event. For those who attend the event and find it helpful, as those interviewed for this study did, they may in turn be a mentor to a new VGAL in the future.

Similarly to the *Consumer Satisfaction with CASAs* study described in the literature review, most VGALs cited the need for more volunteers. The volunteers expressed feelings of helplessness in getting the word out about the program due to the confidentiality aspects of their work and for their own personal privacy and safety. Future research or work could be done to broadcast the work and results of the program. All VGALs interviewed for this study heard about the program via word of mouth or a prior exposure with the child welfare system (usually via a degree program or family friend) which opens up the possibility that there are groups of people who are not aware the program exists. This is especially tricky since all VGALs in Snohomish County use an alias to protect their identity and cannot talk about case specific information, making it difficult for them to spread the word about the work they are doing. The program could try increased advertising in print and social media or could try to make connections with other volunteer groups that could have a greater reach of potentially interested people. For example, the University of Washington's Carlson Center allows postings of different types of volunteer work that students can take part in. If the VGAL program posted information there, students in majors such as law or social work, who already have interest in working in the system, may have an interest in volunteering. Most VGALs who stick with the volunteer work seem quite passionate about the work they are doing, so a student who thinks he or she wants to try working on one case, may become a lifelong volunteer. Additionally, since most volunteers talked about

hearing about the program via word of mouth, it may be beneficial to hold a by-invitation-only information night where current volunteers can invite any friends they may have that they think would be good at the work to come and learn more about the VGAL program. This way the event is limited to only those who are really interested in possibly getting involved and the current volunteers do not have to worry about letting information that are not supposed to share slip as they try and recruit more volunteers. These, and any other recommendations, if implemented should be assessed on an ongoing basis in order to continue to find ways to benefit the program in Snohomish County.

Recommendations for future research

This exploratory investigation is one of the first qualitative studies where VGALs themselves were used as a direct source of information about child advocacy programs. Future qualitative research should be conducted with other VGAL Programs who may have different program resources, environments, and support systems so that a greater understanding of the factors that influence a VGAL's ability to be consistent and effective in their work is discovered. Further studies are needed to confirm the validity of what has been found in this study. Qualitative research is sometimes difficult to interpret, but is important to conduct as programs, like the VGAL program, will not improve without conducting this type of preliminary research.

Qualitative research should be the starting point, but quantitative studies on a wider range of factors should be conducted in order to provide a more accurate representation of what may influence a VGAL's ability to be effective. For example, a high level of program coordinator support may lead a VGAL to have a greater awareness and confidence about how to present information that prevents children from having too many placements, a measurement used in previous studies to show VGAL success compared to cases without a VGAL. This project found

that program coordinator support was what most VGALs in Snohomish County identified as extremely influential in their ability to do a good job as a VGAL and so future studies could explore this concept. Qualitative studies similar to this one could be performed to see if VGAL support systems existed to the extent that they do in Snohomish County. Quantitative studies could also be performed to see if programs that report a greater number of established support systems have better case outcomes. Given that not all programs are run the same or have the same resources as Snohomish County, it would be beneficial to conduct research to test whether or not having an exclusively VGAL support system, for example, would be helpful in all programs.

Additionally, most VGALs cited the need for more volunteers and the feelings of helplessness in getting the word out about the program due to the confidentiality aspects of their work and for their own personal privacy and safety. Future research or work could be done to broadcast the work and results of the program. All VGALs interviewed for this study heard about the program via word of mouth or a prior exposure with the child welfare system (usually via a degree program or family friend) which opens up the possibility that there are groups of people who are not aware the program exists. This is especially tricky since all VGALs in Snohomish County use an alias to protect their identity and cannot talk about case specific information, making it difficult for them to spread the word about the work they are doing.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What drew you to the CASA/VGAL Program? How long have you been a volunteer? How many cases have you worked on?
2. Could you describe your experience as a volunteer? How much time you spend on a case? How much time training? What kinds of cases you choose or avoid? etc.
3. Did you feel prepared coming into the program to handle this type of work? If so, why? If not, what prepared you? Did the work turn out to be what you expected? Were there any big surprises?
4. What has been most challenging for you since you became a volunteer? How do you approach these challenges?
5. Being a CASA/VGAL, you have been witness to many difficult circumstances. Have you ever had a case you were concerned you couldn't handle? How do you handle those cases?
6. How closely do you collaborate with your program coordinator, fellow volunteers, social worker, attorney, etc. on any given case?
7. The goal of this study is to find a more complete picture of what makes a CASA/VGAL case successful. What do you think influences the CASA/VGALs contribution to getting a child into a safe, permanent home? Is this how you would define success for a CASA/VGAL case?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Capstone Codebook

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Example from Interviews
1. Personal Development			
	Attending trainings above minimum (program training, college classes, outside classes)	Getting training outside of the program via classes chosen by the VGAL and approved by the program.	<p>Interview 5: “When I first started I went to all the trainings just to get an idea of what was going on because I had no idea how DSHS worked. So the more training I got to explain how they worked, the more knowledgeable and successful I thought I’d be able to be as a VGAL.”</p> <p>Interview 7: “I’ll always end up with 3 or 4 times more time than the training required because I like to keep it going...sometimes even if we don’t get credit it’s something that we’ll do because it’s something that can help us.”</p>
	Seeking information (google, reading, classes outside program, developing understanding of system)	Developing an understanding of the court system to be effective in work. Constantly reading and seeking information to have more general knowledge that can be applied to many cases.	<p>Interview 1: “I went back to school to get my Master’s in Human Services.”</p> <p>Interview 3: “A couple years ago I went to Edmonds to their paralegal program just so I could kind of understand better what was going on legally with the kids so that was a lot of training that year.”</p> <p>Interview 4: “I saw how overworked the social workers are and that if there was a VGAL attached to the case what a difference it made because the social workers don’t have time to investigate like the VGALs do. So I’ve been able to take a case, dig really deep into it, find things that the social</p>

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Example from Interviews
			worker never would have found, and then ask for certain services.”
	Independent work	Developing methodology for cases, avoiding groupthink, doing more than the minimum	<p>Interview 3: “Being successful in my job means I’m meeting my own standards for thoroughness. It means not doing what’s easy, but making sure that I’m checking myself against some absolute standards.”</p> <p>Interview 5: “A good VGAL has to be sort of a self-starter. Those people have to take the initiative...”</p> <p>Interview 6: “Myself and three other VGALs have gotten approval to establish a mentoring program.”</p>
2. Belief in Program			
	Compassion for people	Seeing the good in people	<p>Interview 1: “I was humbled...Before I got into this I used to think...these parents must be horrible people, but I learned they’re struggling just like everyone else.”</p> <p>Interview 2: “You just remember that everybody is a good person. They have made bade choices and gotten themselves in a difficult spot, but they are still a good person.”</p> <p>Interview 3: “By always being respectful and by always listening to people more than I talk. This is very weird for me. But that I make sure to hear what they are actually</p>

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Example from Interviews
			<p>saying not what I want them to say or what I think they are saying. .But to make sure that I have empathy for their story and their situation and the position that they are in. And that covers parents and social workers and attorneys as well. To just treat everyone genuinely and equally. They are all really important voices in the life of this child.”</p>
	Desire to help kids/families		<p>Interview 2: “I did have a desire to help families.”</p> <p>Interview 6: “That fact that I’m helping is a success for me.”</p> <p>Interview 10: “These kids deserve to have a good life and not necessarily an adopted life. It needs to be a happy life. It’s just cool to watch them blossom.”</p>
	Positivity/enthusiasm about program		<p>Interview 4: “I wish there was a VGAL for every case.”</p> <p>Interview 1: “Without VGALs on those cases the child is not served to the best of the system. The VGALs make the system rise to the standard that it’s supposed to work at.”</p> <p>Interview 1: “I can’t say enough about the program and how important it is for children in foster care.”</p>
3. Established Support Systems			

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Example from Interviews
	Program Coordinator	Support, guidance, middleman work from the PC. 24/7 availability of PC.	<p>Interview 1: “I couldn’t do what I’ve done without (my PC’s) guidance and direction and encouragement.”</p> <p>Interview 3: “She (the PC) is always available if I need that sort of assistance.”</p> <p>Interview 8: “And the PCs are amazing. We are so blessed to have somebody to turn to. I know anytime you pick up the phone she is always going to give me time.”</p>
	VGAL support	Support group for VGALs only, called the GALA (Guardian Ad Litem Auxiliary). Created by a group of volunteers in the program. PC’s not allowed. Those who’ve developed relationships with other volunteers can now call them for advice/chat about possible approaches to cases.	<p>Interview 1: “It’s (the GALA) helped me tremendously and I’ve been able to get to know other VGALs and get their perspectives on cases too.”</p> <p>Interview 7: “Now we have this mentoring program... We have a monthly meeting where we just get together and it’s outside, sanctioned by the program and we just talk and vent... We can talk about cases among each other cause we are all court appointed... I’ve gotten so many great ideas and positive feedback.”</p> <p>Interview 8: “Three of them are seasoned VGALs, like 20 plus years, and so every time I go to those (GALAs) they have an answer. Obviously I can email or call them, but they are so wise and so I never feel like I am left hanging or anything.”</p>

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Example from Interviews
	Family support	Ability to talk/vent to spouse about non-case specific information and receive support/understanding	Interview 2: “I won’t talk about case specifics to my spouse but I will say I’ve run into this issue does that seem weird to you because he’s in education and he helps with that.”
4. Balance and Objectivity			
	Ability to control emotions, staying neutral	Ability to adjust to severity of problems, ability to work well with different (often frustrating) groups of people. Ability to avoid getting attached to children/families or letting emotions dictate actions.	<p>Interview 2: “Sometimes you aren’t prepared for the emotions that are going to come out...so it’s reminding yourself that you are the neutral person. You can take a step back...You’ve got to remind yourself that you are not the person that’s solving the problem, you are the person that’s putting the information out there in a neutral manner that’s allowing the judge, who is the decision maker, to make the best decision.”</p> <p>Interview 6: “Don’t take it personal...that’s my motto.”</p> <p>Interview 10: “One thing about having worked in medicine is that it’s very similar dealing with people so you have the ability to look at a picture and stay removed emotionally because you have to and you can handle it and not take things said to you personally, whether they are the social worker or parents.”</p>

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Example from Interviews
	Volunteer-life balance	Keeping distance where necessary, don't let cases control life as it leads to burnout	<p>Interview 2: "If you can't keep your personal emotions out of it, it would be very difficult...I like to have the two separate. Your regular life and then this one little added life."</p> <p>Interview 3: "Good self-care, I think, is super important. Good balance. It's very easy to get lost in this work because it's an endless need and it makes a huge difference."</p> <p>Interview 9: "I'm really good with boundaries. I care a lot for these kids, but I don't have the desire to bring them home with me or buy them shoes."</p>
5. Personal Identity			
	Belief in self/VGAL as personal identity	Taking on "cases no one wants." Belief in ability to handle any case and be helpful.	<p>Interview 1: "It's changed me completely. I'm a better person because of it...It influenced me so much I decided to put myself in debt and go back to school."</p> <p>Interview 4: "When things get really bad I'll go for a walk and walk my dog to clear my head and regroup before I dive back into it again because it's not fun work, but it's so meaningful. I feel like I've found my calling like this is what I was meant to do. Before this I felt like I was meant to be a mother and I threw everything into my kids to be a good mom and now that they are grown they don't need me as much ...so I can focus on this."</p>

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Example from Interviews
			<p>Interview 7: “I haven’t actually had a case that I felt I couldn’t do. I did have one case where...I was taken off because I was threatened. I wanted to continue, but they wouldn’t allow it because of safety.”</p>
	Background	<p>Connection to children (mother, sister, foster care experience, teacher, human resources, related degree etc.)</p>	<p>Interview 1: “What drew me to the VGAL was the opportunity to help children in different ways. I volunteered for many years (prior to the VGAL program) and in many different areas with children with vulnerable families.”</p> <p>Interview 3: “My brother came to us through foster care and so children in foster care have always been on my mind.”</p> <p>Interview 8: “I got my degree in Human Services...and have been doing it (working as a VGAL) ever since.”</p>