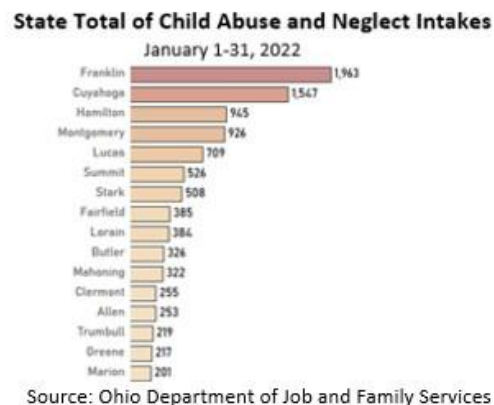


Friends of CASA of Franklin County, Ohio February 2022 Update

The Numbers

Court Appointed Special Advocates of Franklin County reports that despite in-person restrictions, over 900 Franklin County children were served by volunteer Guardians ad Litem (GALs) during the nearly two years of the pandemic. CASA estimates that 800 children from 350 family units will be served by GALs in 2022 now that children are back in school and other environments with mandated reporters again able to identify signs of neglect and abuse.

While reports of child abuse and neglect were lower in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic and state and county mandates, incident reports and referrals are again climbing. Numbers from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Ohio's Interactive Children Services Dashboard show that from January 1 through February 17, 2022, there were 24,823 child abuse and neglect intakes in Ohio – with Franklin County having the highest numbers by county at 3,171. Franklin County Children Services reports that in 2021, 28,979 referrals were received – nearly 2,000 more than in 2020 – and 88% of these referrals were for child abuse and neglect.



Did You Know?

A child is abused or neglected every 17 minutes in Ohio – and child abuse and neglect manifests in many ways. In addition to physical abuse and neglect, nearly half of the children served by GALs in 2021 experienced other forms of victimization, including:

- Child sexual abuse/assault
- Sex trafficking
- Domestic and/or family violence

Still others also endured homelessness and/or substance abuse by a parent(s).

New GAL Training Programs for 2022

Several new training programs are currently in development from grant funding awarded to Friends in 2021, with implementation of these programs slated to begin this year. These new programs are based on societal issues that are prevalent today and include:

- Helping GALs gain and maintain skills to mitigate their exposure to Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). STS is often compared to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and has been further defined by the U.S. Administration for Children & Families as “compassion fatigue.”
- Training to help GALs identify the risk for adolescent suicide in the abused and neglected youth they serve. Research indicates that youth within the juvenile justice and child welfare systems can be more at risk to attempt suicide, often exhibiting emotional and behavioral disorders associated with suicide.
- Helping GALs address and resolve additional stressors in children brought on by the pandemic. Reports state that those in the child welfare system are at particular risk for experiencing disaster-related traumatic stress. The CDC indicates a rise in suicide attempts among girls 12-17 due to the pandemic.
- Training for GALs to better understand, identify and address issues and concerns facing youth they serve who identify as LGBTQ. Reports estimate about 30% of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ – and face painful challenges such as family rejection, abuse and neglect, bullying, discrimination and more.

Interested in becoming a GAL?

Ohio law requires the court to appoint a GAL for each child victim of abuse and neglect, and GALs advocate for and work one-on-one with abused and neglected children ages 0-18 in the Franklin County court system. In 2020, when the pandemic quickly brought mandated closures and other restrictions, training of GALs was efficiently and effectively converted to virtual and online – with no loss of new volunteers – or lessening of the ability of GALs to help hundreds of abused and neglected children in the county. Training continues to be virtual and online in 2022.

Of CASA’s current active volunteers, 286 are female and 48 are male. CASA expects at least 75 new GALs will complete volunteer training and be sworn in this year, which could bring the number of volunteer GALs to over 400. You can be one of them. Learn more about what a GAL does [here](#).

In addition to ongoing and required annual continuing education for GALs, there are [three pre-service training sessions](#) scheduled so far this year. Each training session has two components: National Flex Training, and CASA of Franklin County Virtual Training.

- National Flex Training is a 15 hour training created by the National CASA organization that can be completed at each participant’s own pace.
- CASA of Franklin County Virtual Training is a 30-hour training centered on Franklin County-specific practices and local resources. This training contains 4 modules, each with pre-recorded weekday presentations to be completed at participants' own pace, followed by live video chat sessions to be completed either on Saturday or Sunday.

CASA would like to see more men sign up and train as a Guardian ad Litem. Tom Barry, current president of Friends of CASA, has been a volunteer GAL for over nine years – and says the reward from helping an abused and neglected child has been tremendous.

“Not being of want for any basic needs as a child, I believe it is truly a gift to me to help abused or neglected children not only have their basic needs met, but to see the smiles on their faces when they are placed with family after issues have been resolved. Please consider this opportunity to receive this gift yourself!”

To learn more or to sign up for the next training session which starts in April, visit the [CASA Volunteer Page](#).

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