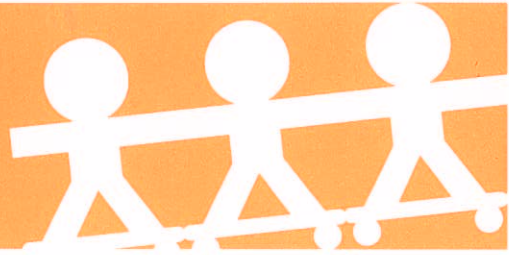


THE ROLE OF THE GUARDIAN AD LITEM IN

FREEING FOR ADOPTION

(under the Adoption (N.I.) Order 1987)



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS, CARERS AND PROFESSIONALS

Who is a Guardian ad Litem?

When the court receives an application to free a child for adoption, a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) is appointed to safeguard the interests of the child. Having a child freed for adoption does not mean he or she is adopted. It does mean that a child is free to be adopted with or without parental agreement in an application made by prospective adopters.

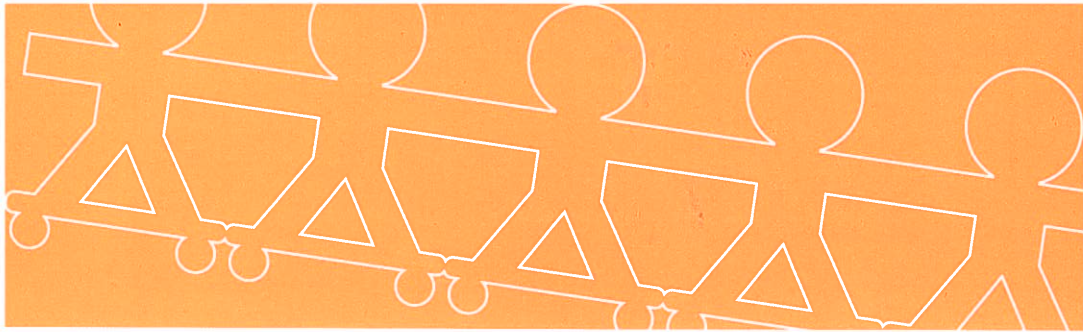
The granting of an Order to free a child for adoption involves the transfer of parental responsibility from a parent or parents to an adoption agency. As this is an extremely significant and important decision, the GAL is asked by the court to conduct an independent investigation into the freeing application, and provide the court with a report recommending what is the best interests of the child.

Who will The Guardian ad Litem speak to?

Depending on the age and level of understanding of the child, the GAL will meet with the child to talk about the Freeing Application. The GAL will do their best to make sure the child understands what is happening, and will want to know what the feelings and wishes of the child are in relation to the Freeing Application.

The GAL will also want to speak to other people who are important in the child's life and may have a view on the Freeing Application. These will include:

- The child's birth parents (where possible)
- The child's carers
- Anyone else who may be relevant – this could include other family members, school teachers or social workers who have previously been involved with the child.



What will the Guardian ad Litem consider?

In the course of their investigation, the GAL will want to review all relevant information to enable them to make their recommendation to the court. They will look at:

- all written information that has been lodged with the court
- the adoption agency case file

and attend meetings as appropriate.

What if I don't agree with the GAL's recommendation to the court?

If you don't agree with the GAL's recommendation to the court, you are advised to seek legal advice.

However, NIGALA is keen to obtain feedback on the service it provides, and so if you wish to provide any feedback, please complete the enclosed Comments, Compliments and Complaints form and return to the Agency.

What else does the Guardian ad Litem do?

The GAL also has the following responsibilities:

- To appoint a solicitor for the child if the court feels this is necessary
- Where necessary, write to the court to advise of specific matters that the court needs to know about
- Make a recommendation as to whether the child should/should not attend court for the final hearing
- Write a report for the court after the investigation is finished, recommending what they think is in the child's best interests.

NIGALA
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency
a voice for children