

VOLUNTEER GUIDE

South Carolina Vulnerable Adult Guardian ad Litem Program (VAGAL SC)



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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in becoming a volunteer with the SC Vulnerable Adult Guardian ad Litem Program (VAGAL SC). VAGAL SC volunteers must be 21 years of age or older. Our training program consists of completing an application and interview, attending Zoom/in-person training classes, and shadowing two court hearings. In addition, to protect the vulnerable adults we serve, all volunteers must complete permission forms for a criminal background check. There is no cost to volunteers for background checks.

This guide includes responsibilities of a Guardian ad Litem (GAL). It also includes instructions on how to complete the online application. After the online application is completed, we will contact you to conduct an interview and discuss upcoming training opportunities. You may also contact the VAGAL SC office at any time to ask questions or register for training.

Why is a Guardian ad Litem appointed?

VAGAL SC volunteers are appointed by a Family Court judge to recommend the best possible outcome for those 18 years of age and older with physical and/or mental impairments that prevent them from caring for or protecting themselves. These vulnerable adults have been placed into Adult Protective Services Emergency Protective Custody and are often victims of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation by their caregiver, or they are victims of self-neglect.

What are the responsibilities of a VAGAL SC volunteer?

- ✓ Representing the best interests of the vulnerable adult
- ✓ Gathering information about the situation of the adult
- ✓ Meeting with and observing the adult
- ✓ Interviewing family, caregivers, and others
- ✓ Considering the wishes of the adult
- ✓ Advocating for the adult while they are in DSS custody
- ✓ Presenting written reports to the court

Where can I volunteer?

VAGAL SC volunteers serve all counties in South Carolina. On your application, you will choose which counties you want to serve. You may choose just one county or several counties. Sometimes we have enough volunteers in a county. If that's the case we may not be able to accept new volunteers in that county for a while. If this occurs in your area, we encourage you to consider volunteering in a nearby county.

What kind of time commitment is involved?

On average, guardians ad litem (GALs) spend a total of 20 hours on each case.

That time will be spent visiting the client, interviewing family, caregivers, and clinical staff, research, phone calls, preparation of the GAL report to be presented at family court hearings and attending court.

Most cases last between six months and one year. However, occasional cases may last several years. You can take one case at a time, or multiple cases. It's up to you.

What if something comes up and I cannot attend a hearing?

We understand that these situations occur. When they do, VAGAL SC staff and your assigned attorney can assist you with how to handle the hearing. In many cases, your attorney can present your report and recommendations in court for you.

What kind of support will I receive as a volunteer?

In addition to the initial training, VAGAL SC staff are always available for ongoing support. The VAGAL SC staff believes that ongoing education for volunteers is extremely important. Throughout the year, we offer free continuing education trainings to volunteers on issues related to being a GAL. Most continuing education trainings are not required, but we highly encourage volunteers to attend. In many cases, we are able to offer social work CEUs for trainings.

I have never been in a courtroom. Can I still do this?

Yes! Most of our staff and volunteers had very little or no courtroom experience prior to becoming a GAL. They come from a variety of backgrounds such as social work, manufacturing, education, military, caregiving, and law. Many of our volunteers are retirees and several are college students. The most important requirements are that you are passionate about advocating for vulnerable adults and willing to learn.

I want to become a GAL volunteer. What do I do next?

Great! Next, please complete the online application. A link to the application can be found [here](#). Once you have completed the application, Lauren Harper, our Volunteer and Project Manager, will contact you to discuss upcoming training opportunities.

Still have questions?

We get it. This is a lot to take in. Call the South Carolina Department on Aging at 803-734-9900 (or toll-free at 1-800-868-9095) and ask to speak with someone about becoming a volunteer Guardian ad Litem. We have a small, dedicated team, and one of us will be happy to speak with you! Additional information can also be found on our website, www.aging.sc.gov/vagal.

VAGAL SC volunteers act as advocates on behalf of the vulnerable adults they serve.

If you have a heart for advocacy, come join us.

Thank you!

www.aging.sc.gov/vagal



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