
PROMISING PRACTICES IN ADULT GUARDIANSHIP IN OHIO

FEATURED COUNTY PROFILES

Amy Restorick Roberts
Candidus Nwakasi
Gifty Ashirifi

May 2020



MIAMI UNIVERSITY

SCRIPPS GERONTOLOGY CENTER

An Ohio Center of Excellence

INTRODUCTION

Ohio counties are implementing promising practices in adult guardianship which require resource stability, a commitment to excellence, and community collaboration. These profiles provide details of the model programs and approaches of the counties featured in the 2020 Scripps Gerontology Center research brief, “Promising Practices in Adult Guardianship in Ohio.”

The information in these profiles was provided by focus group respondents involved in guardianship in Butler, Cuyahoga, Franklin, Lorain, and Stark counties in 2016 and then updated in late 2019. Probate court judges and other court staff, along with volunteer, family member, and professional guardians shared information about what their county is doing to improve outcomes in adult guardianship. We thank these respondents for contributing their valuable insights and for their willingness to share information about their guardianship efforts. The authors recommend reaching out to the contacts provided in each profile for the most recent developments in their counties. Please note that throughout these profiles, the person under guardianship is referred to by the legal term “ward”, as this was the language most commonly used by the respondents who provided the information.

We highlight these innovative strategies in hopes that they may be modified to meet the needs in other counties in Ohio because it is paramount to continue to build and support a structured approach to adult guardianship.

Amy Restorick Roberts, PhD, MSSA, LSW
Candidus Nawakasi, PhD
Gifty Ashirifi, MGS, MASW

May 2020



To download the research brief, scan the QR code with your mobile device or go to: <https://bit.ly/3btOw0u>



To download the profiles of featured counties, scan the QR code with your mobile device or go to: <https://bit.ly/3cudiyV>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Butler County.....	1
Cuyahoga County.....	5
Franklin County.....	9
Lorain County.....	12
Stark County.....	15

Promising Practices in Adult Guardianship in Ohio: Butler County

CONTACT INFORMATION

Butler County Probate Court

Judge Randy T. Rogers

101 High Street

Hamilton, OH 45011

Phone: (513) 887-3303

Website: <http://www.butlercountyprobatecourt.org/>

BACKGROUND

Butler County initially developed a volunteer guardian program in 1996. However, within a short time the need for a staff guardian program intensified to serve a larger population of wards with needs greater than what would be appropriate for a volunteer to oversee. Therefore, the volunteer and staff guardian programs developed alongside each other. The initial volunteer program was funded with \$25,000 from the Mental Health & Addiction Recovery Services (MHARS) Board, \$25,000 from the Board of Developmental Disabilities, and \$10,000 from the probate court to provide for the salary and benefits of a volunteer coordinator. Additional funding from the community was necessary to add the staff guardian component to the program (e.g., a golf outing raised \$40,000). Financial contributors included hospitals, nursing homes, and other entities who serve individuals under guardianship. After recognizing the need in his community, Probate Court Judge Randy Rogers was integral in starting a professional guardianship program known as LifeSpan, which is run through Community First Solutions, a local non-profit organization. LifeSpan provides professional guardianship services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The probate court staff, including the full-time court investigator, magistrates, and judge, correspond with staff guardians from LifeSpan on a regular basis. In Butler County, the court investigator serves as the primary liaison between the court and LifeSpan.

The I-Team in Butler County includes the Veteran's Administration, ProSeniors, the county prosecutor, a county sheriff, the Board of Developmental Disabilities, and Elderly Services Program. The team prepares awareness events for Elder Abuse Awareness day in June every year and they meet as needed to have case conferences to problem-solve any complex cases.

Another collaborative model used by the Butler County guardianship program is the Summit meeting which is run by MHARS Board. This meeting occurs monthly and the participants are all in the mental health field such as the Mobile Crisis team. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss current resources available and to provide updates on current clients.

Today the Butler County guardianship program oversees over 1,000 guardianships. Around 250 guardianships are overseen by a team leader and six professional guardians at LifeSpan and 15 guardianships are overseen by 14 trained volunteers. Each professional guardian at LifeSpan has a caseload of approximately 40 cases. These cases are weighted on a scale from 1-4 which allows each employee's caseload to be tracked and adjusted if necessary. A part-time volunteer coordinator at LifeSpan facilitates the process of recruiting, training, and supporting volunteer guardians. Volunteers often spend time as friendly visitors to get to know the person under guardianship before they officially become a volunteer guardian.

MAJOR INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

THE CONNECTIONS PROGRAM

This program was developed by the probate court judge to reflect the value of servant leadership. The focus of this program is for each person under guardianship to be visited by a court representative to establish and maintain a relationship between wards, guardians, and the court. This program was created out of the idea of person-centered care. The program also aims to ensure continuity of care by being proactive about any issues the ward may be having and ensures future plans are in place for the ward.

The program is managed by a licensed social worker who is employed by the probate court as a court investigator. Social work and gerontology interns recruited from local universities are utilized to assist in reviewing guardianship files and ensuring that they are updated; the interns then schedule in-home visits with the guardian and ward. The program is especially helpful for wards whose guardians are family members because it allows the court to express their gratitude for the family and to be a support.

DATA COLLECTION

The court records, collects, and analyzes data that allows for the evaluation of practice and aids in showing outcomes and impacts. Data-driven decision making is a priority of the court as it allows them to apply for grants and make improvements of their practice.

Additionally, LifeSpan tracks their guardianship outcomes through several outcome measures such as least-restrictive environment, end-of-life care, and communications after hospital discharge. They have an online documentation system where they do almost all their documentation. LifeSpan consistently reviews guardianship performance through a Performance and Quality Improvement committee.

TEAM APPROACH

A unique aspect of the LifeSpan guardianship program is that the guardians work in team to facilitate easy collaborations. The team members are listed as co-guardians which allowed caseloads to be adjusted fluidly and this also allows easy transition if a team member is out sick or changes roles. This fosters a system of support amongst team members and ensures that wards are able to reach a guardian who can help them at all hours of the day.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

The Butler County guardianship program utilizes volunteers who can be either volunteer guardians or volunteer visitors. All volunteers begin as friendly visitors who are paired up with a guardian for six to eight months. The responsibility of the friendly visitor is to visit with the ward a couple times a month to develop rapport and check to see if they need anything. After the six to eight-month period, the volunteers can decide if they would like to become volunteer guardians or to remain a friendly visitor.

DEVELOPING STANDARDS

Judge Rogers stressed the importance of developing standards for the guardianship program either by borrowing from the National Guardianship Organization^{1, 2} or from Rule 66 and putting in place measures of accountability. All LifeSpan guardians are degreed and over time, they are expected to earn national accreditation certificates. The guardianship staff have over 60 policies and procedures based on the national guardianship standards and through the council on accreditation. Service outcomes are publicly reported and some community organizations report to LifeSpan to help them improve their program.

STARTING A NON-PROFIT GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAM

Butler County finds it more effective to have a non-profit organization implement its guardianship program because a non-profit can often be more deeply involved with the community, engage in fundraising, and is better equipped to handle all the administrative duties required, such as staff recruitment, training, human resources, and resource development. Because LifeSpan was already operating as a non-profit organization and experienced with providing case management and support services, the ad hoc committee felt it wise to allow them to implement the guardianship program rather than trying to create a new organizational structure. The lessons learned in Butler County over the years could be helpful to other counties and are offered here as recommendations for small counties interested in starting their own non-profit guardianship program.

Recommendations for Starting a Non-Profit Guardianship Program

- Determine which population(s) to serve and identify community stakeholders who serve these populations as potential sources of program funding, at least initially. Stakeholders may include developmental disability or mental health boards, hospitals, and nursing homes.
- Any professional guardianship program should be viewed as a part of a county's comprehensive approach to guardianship services. Trained volunteers, for example, can be excellent guardians for more stable cases.
- The probate court judge must embrace the "therapeutic" role of the court and be passionate about helping people; working closely with the professional guardianship program on complex cases.
- Follow the best practice standards outlined by the National Guardianship Association and invest in training staff who want to work towards achieving these designations.
- Engage in efforts to review and improve the quality of the program, both through internal and external evaluation.
- A program that serves multiple neighboring counties approach may be a good option for small counties that do not have the resources for their own program.

¹National Guardianship Association. (2013). Standards of practice. Retrieved from: <https://www.guardianship.org/standards/>

²National Guardianship Association. (2016). Standards for agencies and programs providing guardianship services. Retrieved from: <https://www.guardianship.org/standards/>

Promising Practices in Adult Guardianship in Ohio: Cuyahoga County

CONTACT INFORMATION

Cuyahoga County Probate Court
Judge Anthony J. Russo, Presiding Judge
Judge Laura J. Gallagher, Judge
1 Lakeside Avenue West
Cleveland, Ohio 44113
Guardianship Department Phone: (216) 443-8995
Website: <http://probate.cuyahogacounty.us/>

BACKGROUND

As one of the largest metropolitan areas in Ohio, Cuyahoga County has a correspondingly high number of adults under guardianship. While the majority of guardians are family members or friends known to the person before the guardianship determination, Guardianship Services (GS), a program of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry (LMM) is a non-profit organization that provides guardianship to the county's most complex cases; indigent vulnerable adults. GS works collaboratively with other county partners such as Division of Senior and Adult Services (DSAS), and the Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board.

The county's I-Team members include doctors, social workers, attorneys, and nurses. The collaboration has developed a strong support system for guardianship that allows professionals to draw on each other as resources and to problem-solve challenging cases. At the meetings, the members present difficult cases and time is dedicated to offering resources and insight in how to help the ward. When possible, these cases are revisited in subsequent meetings to review the outcomes.

As a non-profit organization, LMM has developed diverse funding streams to support the GS program. Funding is received through competitive county contracts with the DSAS, the probate court, ADAMHS Board, Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (Title III-B), United Way of Greater Cleveland, and through private foundations and

donors. GS also has contracts with nursing home facilities to provide guardianship services.

In Cuyahoga County, there are approximately 6,800 guardianship cases. GS staff serve approximately 750 wards, which are covered by 15 professional guardians (13.5 full-time equivalent). These cases are the most complex in the county and they often require housing placement decisions and/or medical decisions. To manage and monitor the acuity of staff caseloads, LMM uses a case weighting system from 10-50 to approximate the amount of resources needed to serve each ward. These professional guardians manage a caseload of a maximum of 740-point caseload and the weights are evaluated monthly to distribute caseloads of varying intensity equitably.

The program also manages a regional volunteer guardian program that currently covers 120 cases. Volunteers are assigned when the ward has more stability in their care arrangements, such as nursing home residents. In addition, about 25% of the county's cases are handled by private attorneys. Family members are most often appointed to serve as guardian. The assignment of third parties only happens if there are no family members willing or able to serve, or if appointing a family member is not in the best interests of the ward.

MAJOR INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

RESOURCES FOR ADULT GUARDIANSHIP

From an administrative standpoint, the probate court has made a commitment to use restricted funds in its control to supplement the provision of guardianship services.

CASE HEARING SCHEDULE

The biggest guardianship challenge facing the Cuyahoga County Probate Court is an insufficient number of guardians compared to the amount of people who need guardianship. To manage the continual referrals for new guardianships, the court worked hard to develop an efficient hearing process.

The court schedules all new guardianship hearings on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which is typically about 16 to 18 hearings. Two cases are scheduled every half hour and there are three magistrates that manage this docket system and hear guardianship cases. In the event that significant problems arise with a hearing, it is rescheduled for a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday, which are reserved for contested cases.

TEMPORARY GUARDIANSHIP

Another way Cuyahoga County is managing the demand for guardianship is by utilizing time-limited, or temporary, guardianships. Temporary guardianships are typically

assigned for individuals who have had multiple hospitalizations and multiple referrals by hospital psychiatrists. A temporary guardianship lasts between 90 and 120 days, and in that period, GS helps the individual to develop a support system to meet their needs in the community. Often, this means setting up a representative payee, finding the individual somewhere to live, and establish the individual with a psychiatrist, primary care provider, and a community mental health case manager.

REMOVING BARRIERS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

Cuyahoga County Probate Court is working on breaking down the barriers that prevent family members and friends from serving as guardian. To address financial barriers, the court has collaborated with APS and the county to establish and maintain a fund to help pay for the guardianship filing fees for family members and friends willing to serve as guardian. Additionally, the probate court allows the appointment of out-of-town family members to serve as guardian if they demonstrate involvement in the ward's life, which has alleviated some of the demand for professional guardians amongst the population of individuals with developmental disabilities.

MANAGING CASELOADS

Due to the high demand for service in an environment of capped funding sources, GS has worked over the years to develop a robust hybrid program of providing guardianship services. Professional guardians take on higher acuity cases and once stabilized are transferred to its volunteer guardians. Volunteers go through a six-hour training and receive a binder that is divided into different sections, including Medicaid information, end of life decision-making, questions, court forms, and the guardianship plan. GS also bestows annual guardianship awards to recognize the contributions of exceptional volunteers. A volunteer coordinator at GS is available 24/7 to volunteers seeking consultation. While some long-time volunteer guardians are comfortable and have a good understanding of local resources, the volunteer coordinator stays in close touch with all volunteers and makes sure that they know who to call when they need help or don't know what to do in specific cases. Volunteer guardians electronically input their notes on their wards through a case management system called "The Guardianship Gateway."

Another strategy used in Cuyahoga County to address high demand for guardianship services is an established referral process between attorneys who have guardianship cases and the county prosecutor's office. This referral process is used in cases of financial exploitation and helps attorney guardians address such issues quickly.

One of the probate court investigators has also created a release of information form that can be used to set up services for an individual who may have been referred to the court for guardian appointment, but for whom no guardian is immediately available. The

release allows the court to help strengthen the supports around the individual until an appropriate guardian can be found. In some cases, the release can also be used to assist individuals who do not qualify for guardianship.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

A court investigator has created a resource library that can be used to support family, volunteer, and professional guardians. An easily-accessible list of resources can often help guardians address and resolve issues before they become crises; which ultimately may reduce the acuity level of the cases.

“GUARDIAN PARTNERS” PROGRAM

In 2020, the Cuyahoga County Probate Court launched the new Guardian Partners monitoring program to provide an additional layer of oversight and protection for adults under guardianship. The program director is actively seeking involvement from graduate students with backgrounds in social work or human services to visit with adults under guardianship and speak with their guardians. Guardian Partners are trained in reporting protocols, conduct a 15 to 30-minute visit, and fill out a report that is returned to the court. They are paid a small stipend for each visit completed. The program aims to visit all of the persons under guardianship in Cuyahoga County (nearly 7,000) over 18 months and is funded from within the court’s current budget.

Promising Practices in Adult Guardianship in Ohio: Franklin County

CONTACT INFORMATION

Franklin County Probate Court

Judge Robert G. Montgomery

373 S. High Street

22nd Floor

Columbus, OH 43215-6311

Phone: (614) 525-3894

Email: probate@franklincountyohio.gov

Website: <https://probate.franklincountyohio.gov/>

BACKGROUND

The Volunteer Guardian Program in Franklin County started 25 years ago as a program staffed by volunteers. It was originally an unfunded system that served a low-income population. In 2015, Franklin County started the first of its kind public-public partnership named the Guardian Service Board (GSB), which provides professional guardianship services and receives funding from county and state agencies and private entities. This funding has allowed the system of adult guardianship oversight to shift from one that was reliant on attorneys to serve as professional guardians, to one that is focused on social services. Currently, the GSB employs eleven licensed social workers who work as professional guardians.

As a public-public collaboration, the GSB enables several public entities to partner with the probate court to develop and promote the guardianship program. The GSB is primarily funded through two public entities, the Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADAMH) Board and the Board of Developmental Disabilities, and each appoints a member to the board. Additionally, the county commissioners fund the health care and benefits cost for the GSB, which provides attractive benefits for staff, and they pay for the office space used as well. The GSB also receives Title XX funding through Job and Family Services in Franklin County, and monies from the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and Ohio Health Hospitals.

A large majority of the guardians in Franklin County are family members and friends. The others are covered by GSB which currently manages 300 active cases, the Volunteer Guardian Program (140 cases), and attorneys (500 cases). The GSB currently has a staff of 17, including 11 licensed social workers and the current case ratio is one social worker to 40 clients.

The I-Team in Franklin County is coordinated by the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging. The group meets to review complex cases on a monthly basis. The team also arranges a conference for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which focuses on education and training for various professions. It involves bringing together law enforcement, attorneys, court personnel, and social workers for an interdisciplinary model of training.

MAJOR INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

PUBLIC-PUBLIC COLLABORATION

Unique to the GSB is its structure as a “public-public collaboration.” This allows the stakeholders of guardianship to not only fund the program, but to appoint members to the Guardianship Service Board which oversees cases that require professional guardians. Three members make up the governing board and are appointed by the Board of Developmental Disabilities, the ADAMH Board, and the probate court. Together, the three members hired an executive director to lead the guardianship program. This collaboration has created a network for funding, recruiting volunteers, training, and referrals. Additionally, the board works closely with the Central Ohio Area on Aging to include and support the volunteer guardians. This is a robust strategy for garnering financial support and building a collaborative guardianship system.

SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEER GUARDIANS

The Volunteer Guardian Program is housed under the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging. The program provides structure and support to their volunteer guardians by being available for case consultations, completing a ward-volunteer matching process for each case, and providing team-based supervision. The individuals who manage the volunteer program work in teams of three to monitor the volunteer’s cases. This approach helps the team ensure that there is constant support available to a volunteer should they need it.

CREDENTIALLED PROFESSIONAL GUARDIANS

Franklin County has been deliberate in hiring professionals with specific qualifications. There are several master’s level and bachelor’s level trained licensed social workers

who serve as professional guardians. The employment of social workers provides a specific skill set which benefits wards and provides a biopsychosocial perspective that focuses on understanding the client holistically. Social workers have also benefited the guardianship system by providing knowledge of community resources, creating care plans, and linking clients to services.

Promising Practices in Adult Guardianship in Ohio: Lorain County

CONTACT INFORMATION

Lorain County Probate Court

Judge James T. Walther

225 Court St., 6th Floor

Elyria, OH 44035

Phone: (440) 329-5443

Email: jwalther@loraincounty.us

Website: <https://www.loraincounty.com/probate/>

BACKGROUND

Guardianship Services (GS), a program of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry (LMM), is a non-profit organization that provides guardianship services for the most complex cases for indigent wards in Lorain County, in addition to Cuyahoga County. GS works collaboratively with Lorain County's public entities such as the Department of Job and Family Services, Adult Protective Services Division (APS) and the Mental Health, Addiction and Recovery Services (MHARS) Board. The I-Team in Lorain County is called the Lorain County Elder Abuse Network. The group largely focuses on networking and meets once a month and whenever a member requests a meeting to review a case. Additionally, the MHARS Board holds monthly provider meetings to pass along resources and education that related to people with mental health issues. Regular contact among different members of the I-Team is helpful in terms of understanding how different entities can work together on challenging cases; bringing different expertise to the table and acting as a resource to each other.

Adult guardianship services in Lorain County are funded through a variety of sources. The probate court has added a filing fee to provide resources beyond the Indigent Guardianship Fund. The GS is funded through public and private sources, including the MHARS Board, the Department of Job and Family Services, the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (Title III-B), the probate court, private foundations, and individual donors. GS also has contracts with nursing home facilities to provide guardianship services.

The majority of guardians in Lorain County are family members, including spouses, siblings, and adult children. In addition, the County utilizes both professional and volunteer guardians to serve persons under guardianship. The staff guardians, employed by LMM, are professionals responsible for covering the cases with the highest acuity while less-challenging cases are delegated to volunteers. The guardianship staff includes staff guardians, a program director who is a nationally certified guardian and responsible for overall supervision, an intake suite consisting of a manager of client services, and a client assessor who tracks all referrals and performs in-person assessments prior to the establishment of guardianship. For wards who also have assets or property that need to be managed, LMM recruits volunteer attorneys to serve as guardian of estate.

To manage caseloads of professional staff, LMM uses a case weighting system from 10-50 to monitor the acuity of cases. The professional guardians manage a caseload of a maximum of 740 points. The weights are evaluated every month to distribute caseloads of varying intensity equitably.

MAJOR INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

LONGEVITY

The GS has had longstanding impact in the community. LMM has sustained a great working environment over time, and developed a strong relationship with APS and the MHARS Board so that both promote their work.

FUNDING GUARDIANSHIP

To help fund the guardianship program, the probate court has added a \$15 project fee to each of the services (aside from marriage licenses) filed through the court. The fee goes into a fund to help pay for guardianship services. As a non-profit organization, LMM has developed diverse funding streams to support the full Guardianship Services program. Funding is received through competitive county contracts with the Department of Job and Family Services (Title XX), Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (Title III-B), and the MHARS Board and through private foundations and donors. Recently, the program implemented fee-for-service contracts with nursing home facilities for guardianship services received. Over the past 20 years the GS has made efforts to educate their partners on their funding sources to clear the confusion about guardianship services are not reimbursable through Medicaid or Medicare in Ohio.

CROSS-TRAINING

GS conducted a cross-training that was attended by the MHARS Board, APS, and the Board of Developmental Disabilities. The training was used to discuss each

organizations' role in guardianship and to see how each organization can work within the larger system. The training allowed each organization to explain how they can help with guardianship and APS cases. Developing a stronger network of guardianship services among different organizations that help persons served means that community partners know who to call if they have questions or concerns.

VOLUNTEER GUARDIANSHIP RECRUITMENT AND SUPPORT

LMM has a full-time volunteer coordinator who is an experienced guardian that recruits, trains and manages the program's volunteer guardians. Volunteers go through a six-hour training and receive a binder that is divided into different sections, including Medicaid information, end of life decision-making, questions, court forms, and the guardianship plan. GS also bestows annual guardianship awards to recognize the contributions of exceptional volunteers. A volunteer coordinator is available 24/7 for consultation as needed. Some volunteer guardians have served for a long term and feel comfortable because they have the resources they need. The volunteer coordinator stays in close touch and makes sure that guardians know who to call when they need help or don't know what to do in emergency cases. Volunteer guardians electronically input notes on the persons under guardianship they are responsible for through "The Guardianship Gateway." They also send an email blast to enhance communication. The volunteer coordinator ensures the court required guardian reports are submitted, tracks the volunteers (he touches base monthly) and reviews all of the information to make sure that their volunteers are actually engaged.

Promising Practices in Adult Guardianship in Ohio: Stark County

CONTACT INFORMATION

Stark County Probate Court

Judge Dixie Park

110 Central Plaza South, Suite 501

Canton, OH 44702

Phone: (330) 451-7752

Email: dnpark@starkcountyohio.gov

Website: <https://www.starkcountyohio.gov/probate>

BACKGROUND

The Stark County Probate Court supervises the care of over 1,800 wards. The care of wards who do not have family or friend guardians is managed through three organizations that work together. First, Coleman Professional Services is a non-profit organization that provides professional guardians that serve the higher intensity cases for the county. Second, Guardian Support Services (GSS) is a non-profit agency that recruits, trains, and supports volunteer guardians. Third, Advocacy and Protective Services, Inc. (APSI), is a statewide organization that provides guardianship services for people with developmental disabilities who do not have anyone else to serve as guardian.

The I-Team in Stark County grew out of a branch of a larger group called the Stark Multidisciplinary and Advocacy/Protective Resources Team (SMART). The members of the SMART group include representatives from the probate court, Adult Protective Services (APS), the sheriff's office, the Department of Health, the Mental Health & Addiction Recovery (MHAR) Board, Job and Family Services, the Board of Developmental Disabilities, the county prosecutor's office, municipal police, Social Security, hospitals, geriatric care centers, banks, guardian services, and funeral services. The group holds a conference each year for World Elder Abuse Day to provide the community and professionals with education on abuse of people with developmental disabilities and older adults. The conference typically has 200 attendees. The I-Team, made up of representatives from the Department of Health, APS, two local hospitals,

the county prosecutor's office, and Job and Family Services, is a subcommittee of the SMART group. This I-team holds bi-monthly case conferences to review the most complex cases in the county. They discuss both immediate ways to assist the client and how the system can perform better to find solutions for service gaps.

Each of the local guardianship services groups (Coleman Professional Services and Guardian Support Services) is funded through United Way and the Indigent Guardianship Fund of the probate court. Coleman Professional Services also receives funds from the MHAR Board, the Coleman Foundation, and the Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Over 1,000 of the 1,800 guardianship cases in the county have a family or a friend who serves as the guardian. Of the other 800, approximately 160 cases are managed by 80 volunteer guardians at GSS. Volunteers at GSS become guardians for one or two persons, but some volunteers have been known to serve more. The remaining cases are managed by Coleman Professional Services and APSI. At Coleman Professional Services, each professional guardian maintains a caseload of approximately 35 persons under guardianship.

MAJOR INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

THE COURT ANGEL PROGRAM

The Court Angel program is a guardianship monitoring program funded through grants and the probate court's Indigent Guardianship Fund. It is a volunteer program in which volunteers attend a six-hour training on the guardianship process, and learn about common socio-economic, mental health, and medical conditions, and how to detect abuse and neglect. The volunteers then sign up to review cases and schedule meetings with the guardians and wards. In the meeting, the volunteer has a conversation with the guardian and ward to confirm the ward's well-being. The volunteer then completes a reporting form which is reviewed by court program staff to determine if the case requires any additional follow-up. The volunteers in the Court Angel Program are the "eyes and ears" of the court and provide support to both the guardian and the ward by relaying that the court wants to support them as much as possible. The program includes a recruiter and deputy clerk, along with approximately 75 volunteers.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

It is important to bring everybody to the table around issues of adult guardianship. In Stark County, it is a priority to have all agencies working together and to get people on the team that genuinely care about the most vulnerable people in society. They feel that a multidisciplinary is the best way to go about providing adult guardianship services,

because of the diversity of persons served and the opportunity to strengthen systems of support to meet their needs.

STREAMLINED COMMUNICATION VIA MAJOR INCIDENT REPORTS

The Stark County Probate Court requested that the Board of Developmental Disabilities send any major incident reports to the judge directly. Since the probate court judge is the superior guardian, this report is very helpful because the court is immediately notified of situations where individuals in the county are not receiving quality care, or are potential victims of elder abuse or neglect.

REMOVING BARRIERS FOR FAMILY GUARDIANS

To expedite training for family members, the probate court developed a shorter version of the six-hour training course for family and friends. As another example, the filing fee for family members is waived, which has been a huge help to relieve financial burden involved with becoming a guardian.