**BEST INTEREST HEARING REPORT WRITING GUIDELINES**

**CASA KANE COUNTY**

**For Advocate Supervisor Use Only** – GAL Volunteer does not complete this section. Leave blank.

**For GAL to Complete** – GAL Volunteer completes all the information for this section.

**1. Heading**

* Case Number(s)
* Temporary Custody Date (also known as Shelter Care Hearing Date)
* Adjudication Date
* Disposition Date
* Last PRH Date
* Date of Goal Change
* Last Child/Family Team Meeting – leave blank if one has not occurred since last report
* Hearing Date - date scheduled for the Termination of Parental Rights/Best Interest Hearing
* Type of Hearing – Termination of Parental Rights/Best Interest

**2. Child Section**

* Children listed in birth order from oldest to youngest
* Use full name, ex. Robert Price
* Date of birth
* Age of child, as of the date of the hearing, calculated to nearest year
* calculate in months for children under two years of age (listed as 1-24 months)

**3. Interviewed for this Reporting Period**

* For the time period starting with the last court hearing (not including Status) and the writing of this court report
* Include only those whose information you utilized in the Findings for Children and Overview for Parents section of this court report
* List person's name and relationship to child
* use first name and last initial only for Foster Parents
* People interviewed more than once are listed just once
* Do not include the children or your Advocate Supervisor

**4. Reports and Materials Reviewed**

* For the time period starting with the last court hearing (not including Status) and the writing of this court report
* Include only those reports and materials that you used in the findings section
* List date and title of each report
* If for one individual, list the name of the person associated with the report or material
* Do not include court orders, agency reports or previous CASA/GAL reports, emails or text messages

**5. Dates of Child Visits**

* For the time period starting with the last court hearing (not including Status) and the writing of this court report
* List child’s name
* List dates for child visits
* If visit dates are the same for all children involved, you can list all children on one line and only list the visit dates once
* Indicate if the visits were in-person or virtual
* If visits were in-person and virtual, list them grouped together by type per child
* If a child visit is not completed, provide good-cause explanation

**6. ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act)**

* If there is involvement, detail who identified Native American heritage, when that information was provided, and all known follow-up completed by DCFS/SAO

**7. Case History**

* Typically, does not change once written for the Dispositional Hearing Report
* As brief as possible, includes all facts relating to why the case came into care
* Written in paragraph format and in past tense
* Using documents such as the police report for details, write this section in your own words…do not copy and paste
* Do not include who made the hotline call; this information should be kept anonymous

**8. Findings for the Children**

* Findings describe events, observations, and other information
* Written in paragraph format
* When a date is used in a sentence, the full date is used.
* Example: January 29, 2016 instead of 01/29/2016
* Include a Findings section for each child
* Start with children, oldest child first
* Each child’s section is a narrative that includes the following sections in order to provide the judge with a complete but concise picture of the child:
* Physical Safety and Welfare
	1. Description of placement / home and what space has been dedicated to the child, including sleeping arrangements
	2. Family composition (who lives in the home)
	3. Needs are being met, like food, clothing, etc.
	4. Any safety risks or concerns
* Development of Identity
	1. How long has the child been in the pre-adoptive home?
	2. Observations of child’s growth and development since being placed in the pre-adoptive home
	3. Is the Foster Parent willing to continue to permit the minor to visit with their biological siblings and/or extended biological family?
* Familial, Culture and Religious Background
	1. How are foster parents fostering the child’s cultural background?
	2. Describe any sibling or relative contact and relationship
	3. Native language of child and whether it is being used or fostered
	4. Child’s religious background
	5. Racial or ethnical traditions/heritage
* Sense of Attachment
	1. Describe where the child actually feels love, attachment, and a sense of being valued
	2. Describe the child’s sense of security (i.e. runs to foster mother when scared, etc.)
	3. Are the foster parents willing to provide permanency?
	4. Describe child’s interaction with household members
	5. Describe child’s interaction and bond with foster parents
	6. Have the interactions you described been consistent in all of your visits?
	7. What does the child call the foster parents?
	8. Child’s interaction and bond with foster parent’s extended family
* Wishes
	1. Include details of what the youth has shared with you
* Community Ties
	1. School, daycare
	2. Friends
	3. Activities
	4. Religious activities and involvement
* Need for Permanence
	1. How long has the child been in care?
	2. Child’s current age
	3. Observations regarding child and parent relationship including frequency of visits and contact
	4. Is the continued relationship with parent figures, siblings or relatives important for the child’s emotional and mental wellbeing?
	5. Therapeutic Recommendations on Permanency
* Uniqueness of Family & Child
	1. Does the child have any special needs or services?
	2. Are foster parents providing or committed to providing those needs?
	3. If the child has any needs, describe how their needs are being met now

**9. Recommendations**

* Find it is in the best interest for the parental rights to be terminated and the minor be free for adoption
* Proceed to Permanency Review Hearing instanter and consider the permanency goal of adoption
* Find at the Permanency Review Hearing that minor remain a ward of the court and Custody and Guardianship remain with DCFS
* Agency has made reasonable efforts
	+ If no, explain the circumstances supporting the selection
* The Client Service Plan and services are appropriate
	+ If no, explain the circumstances supporting the selection
* Additional Recommendations
	+ Each additional recommendation is focused on previous recommendations that have not been addressed, services that have not started, and/or new recommendations being made