



NIGALA

NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency

*A voice for Children and Young People
in Family Courts*

ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT 2016/17



**NORTHERN IRELAND
GUARDIAN AD LITEM AGENCY**



FORWARD



Peter Reynolds
Chief Executive

It gives me great pleasure to present the Northern Ireland Guardian ad Litem Agency's fourth Annual Quality Report. The Report documents the journey which NIGALA has taken over the past year to give effect to the DHSSPS vision as set out in Quality 2020 - a 10 Year Strategy to protect and improve quality in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

As Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA), I am committed to the provision of high quality standards of service in advising the courts of children's wishes and feelings and independently representing and safeguarding the interests of children who are the subjects of Specified Public Law proceedings and Adoption proceedings in Northern Ireland.

Guardians ad litem are highly dedicated and skilled professionals, and as such they play a vital role in the provision of safeguarding children's best interests at a critical point in the State's intervention in family life. This intervention is normally to protect children from abuse and neglect and only embarked upon when other interventions have been unsuccessful. It typically involves difficult judgements in balancing the rights of the child and birth family to be together and the right of the child to be protected from harm.

The year ending the 31st March 2017 was a very busy and challenging year¹ for the staff and Board of NIGALA, not only managing a significant increase in demand from all five HSC

¹ NIGALA Annual Statistics Report 2016/17

Trusts but also bringing about cultural changes in the areas of leadership, staff participation and information management. NIGALA recognises the pressures on the system of family justice and was pleased to work closely with key stakeholders in supporting the Care Proceedings Pilot and the Civil and Family Justice Review, chaired by the Right Honourable Lord Justice Gillen. No doubt there will be proposals for change going forward in how we all work collectively to achieve improved access to justice and better outcomes for court users, particularly those who are the most vulnerable in our society including both adults and children.

I am proud and grateful to all the staff of NIGALA for their dedication and professionalism in working with children under increasingly difficult circumstances. Despite such challenges and meeting the priority of having a named guardian appointed to every child at the outset of proceedings, during the year the Agency has worked closely with the Departments of Health and Justice on the Care Proceedings Pilot, while promoting the priorities contained within the Social Work Strategy for Northern Ireland and the Assembly's vision for Health. NIGALA recognises the great opportunity for change and will work closely with key stakeholders across Health and Justice to bring about positive changes and best outcomes for children and young people.



Peter Reynolds
Chief Executive NIGALA

INTRODUCTION

Quality 2020 was officially launched in November 2011 by the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The purpose of Quality 2020 is to create a strategic framework and plan of action that will protect and improve quality in health and social care over the next 10 years.

Its vision is for the HSC 'to be recognised internationally, but especially by the people of Northern Ireland, as a leader for excellence in health and social care'. It highlights five strategic goals necessary to realise this vision:

- **Transforming the culture;**
- **Strengthening the workforce;**
- **Measuring the improvement;**
- **Raising the standards and**
- **Integrating the care**

Quality 2020 defines quality under three main headings:

Safety – avoiding and preventing harm to patients and clients from the care, treatment and support that are intended to help them;

Effectiveness – the degree to which each patient and client receives the right care (according to scientific knowledge and evidence-based assessment), at the right time in the right place, with the best outcome;

Patient and Client Focus – all patients and clients are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect and should be fully involved in decisions affecting their treatment, care and support.



In line with the 'Quality 2020' principles, NIGALA agree that quality is everyone's business and is a part of everyday business and within the HSC there is never a time to be complacent and always room for improvement.

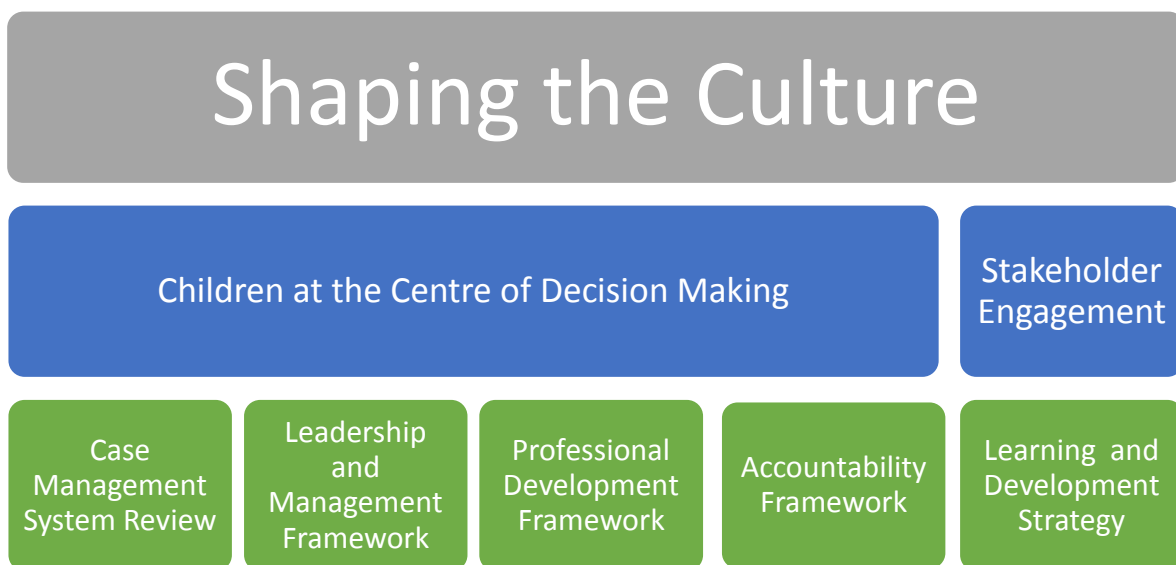
This Quality Report sets out what NIGALA has achieved to improve its services under each of the five strategic goals: Transforming the Culture; Strengthening the Workforce; Measuring the Improvement; Raising the Standards; and Integrating the Care. The Report gives a few examples of quality improvement within each of the five areas and reports on progress on goals highlighted in last year's report.

1. Transforming the Culture

Organisational culture is based on shared attitudes, beliefs, customs and rules; it is defined as the way an organisation conducts its business and it affects the organisation’s productivity and performance. Not only is Social Care facing challenges of greater complexity than ever before, but to more effectively deal with these challenges the demands for leadership is increasing exponentially. New notions of leadership stress that leadership is not simply the domain of a few but is prevalent throughout an organisation; leadership that emphasises care for staff through leadership behaviour is more relevant than ever before.

The NIGALA seeks to place the child at the centre of its activities and to promote the behaviours required to support the delivery of the Agencies strategic objectives, service improvement and improve benefits for service users. This can be seen in Figure 1 below -

Figure 1



In 2016/17 NIGALA has endeavoured to transform its culture in a range of ways including the following –

- **Culture and Climate Survey**
- **Board Connectedness and Visibility within the Agency – Developing Trust**
- **Creating a more Collaborative and Shared form of Leadership**
- **Development of NIGALA Leadership Framework**

Culture and Climate Survey – March 2017

In May 2015 NIGALA commissioned BSO Human Resources to conduct a staff survey. This was completed via the HSE Management Standards indicator tool, a 35-item questionnaire relating to the seven primary stressors identified in the Management Standards in relation to Work-Related Stress. The questions are intended to provide a broad indication to organisations of how well their workforce rates their performance in managing the risks associated with work-related stress.

The results of this survey indicated very low weighted average scores against benchmarks which suggested an unhealthy and stressful employment environment. HR identified three key areas which needed to be addressed; Culture, Communication and Leadership Style and provided 14 recommendations for improvement.

A follow up survey to assess whether there had been improvement in NIGALA's working culture was completed online (fully anonymised) via Survey Monkey between 20 February and 3 March 2017. The survey questions were the same as the May 2015 survey and following analysis of the results, Internal Audit also carried out face-to-face meetings with three members of staff in the Belfast office to discuss themes emerging from the survey.

The response to the survey was excellent at 83% of NIGALA staff. The results of this work suggest that NIGALA's working culture has significantly improved in the last 12-18 months. Staff feel more content, more in control of their workload and more engaged with decisions

made by management. The vast majority of staff would recommend NIGALA as a place of work.

It was recommended that NIGALA should develop an Action Plan to further enhance culture and the working environment, based on the survey results. In particular the Agency should –

- Investigate areas in the HSE Management questions not rated ‘green’ and consider whether action can be taken to improve these areas – particularly in the stressor area of ‘Demands’
- Availability of supports to guardians who are faced with challenging situations that may result in post-traumatic stress
- Further means of engaging regularly with staff, for example a staff forum.

Board Connectedness and Visibility within the Agency – Developing Trust

The NIGALA Board has undertaken to improve its connectedness within the Agency. Table 1 evidences the work undertaken by the Agency in the period since September 2016 to date.

Table 1

Area	Evidence of progress
Leading/Leadership	
Board connectedness and visibility within the Agency/ developing ‘trust’.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEO updates to staff (established); • Board/SMT staff engagement and planning meetings (established); • Opportunities for Board members to attend Agency events/ training (established); • Guardian representation on Social Care Governance Committee and Information Governance Committee (established);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff attendance at Board Meetings to consider ‘service improvement’ initiatives (established); • Reviewed and approved ‘values’ and placing the ‘child’ at the centre of everything we do (established); • Climate and Culture Survey outcomes (established and to be repeated every two years); • Review of SMT Framework and functional areas in line with ‘strategy’ and ‘service delivery’ (ongoing – will come to the Board and staff separately).
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Creating a more Collaborative and Shared form of Leadership

As mentioned under the Culture & Climate Survey, one of the areas of concern from the 2015 survey was leadership style. Following on from that the Agency has sought to develop a more collective type of leadership within the Agency. Planning and progress is set up in table 2 below.

Table 2

Area	Evidence of progress
Creating a more collaborative and shared form of leadership; Developing guardians as ‘leaders’ and ambassadors for the profession, modelling high professional standards and contributing to the development of social work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making relevant the ‘Social Work Strategy’ to guardians – through revised stakeholder engagements (Part of NIGALA Business Plan for 2017/18); • Formalised relations with CAFCASS – ‘Partners in Practice’ (established and being developed).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust/NIGALA protocol to review mutual expectations, communication and liaison arrangements (in progress and to be completed by September 2017); • Revised Supervision arrangements to enhance guardian participation/ skills development (currently being piloted and will be subject to review in 2017/18).
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Development of NIGALA Leadership Framework

During 2016/17 NIGALA revised its leadership and management framework. This Leadership Framework has been created to articulate what is expected of NIGALA’s leaders to drive future success. It describes the attitudes and behaviours needed for high quality leadership and represents the foundation of leadership behaviour that all staff should aspire to. The behaviours identified are those which NIGALA value and believe will help to achieve our long-term goals.

Fundamentally the NIGALA Leadership Framework is a plan to achieve a result over the long term. The Framework is intended to provide a clear direction for all of us, taking account of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, so that we can better tackle the future challenges and opportunities faced. It aims to take us from the traditional position of a senior team leading and managing and moving towards a recognition of leadership being something that occurs throughout the Agency and is recognised as such.

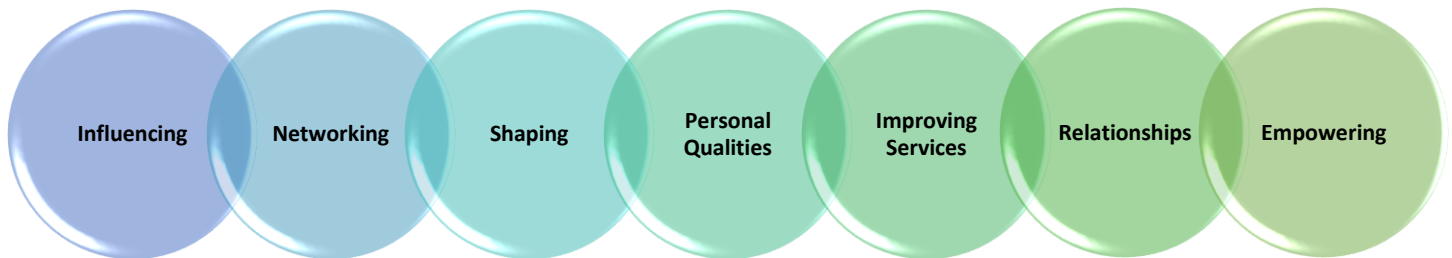
Senior leaders need to take an active role in the development of the existing and next generation of NIGALA leaders. This relates to both members of SMT and experienced staff in others areas of the organisation.

This Framework is designed to focus on seven key areas of leadership in NIGALA and the competencies, values and behaviours which are the foundations of this. These



competencies and behaviours should be exhibited in all interactions and at all levels of the organisation. Leaders in NIGALA **INSPIRE** through:

Figure 1: Areas of Leadership in NIGALA



Each area of the framework describes the characteristics of a ‘Good Leader’, that is the behaviours, competencies and attitudes which are apparent if someone is demonstrating leadership qualities. Moreover, consideration is given in each to the NHS Healthcare Leadership Model’s nine dimensions of leadership behaviour and how these behaviours are demonstrated through NIGALA’s leadership areas. The Healthcare Leadership Model is utilised for the recruitment of all NHS/ HSC staff at Band 6 or above. As the above clearly demonstrates, none of these areas stand in isolation; they are all intrinsically linked and each has an impact on the others.

NIGALA’s Leadership Framework is underpinned throughout by the principles of collective leadership and co-production; that is, everyone has a responsibility for the success of the Agency as a whole which is achieved through working collaboratively, both internally and externally, to ensure the service delivered is high quality, child/ young person centred, effective, safe and compassionate.

2. Strengthening the Workforce

Health and Social Care is changing and the demand for services is rising inexorably. In these challenging circumstances NIGALA recognises the need to reshape our service and to support our workforce to deliver new and innovative ways of working. In this wider context of change NIGALA is seeking to continuously improve and raise standards of practice and service delivery.

Most successful organisations will testify that employees are the most important resource for any company. How they are treated and how much they value the organisation they work for will have an impact on how it performs. Diversity, health and safety, workplace conditions, personal development, work/life balance and remuneration are all issues that responsible employers need to address to ensure a happy, motivated workforce.

According to the book, *The Joy of Work, Jobs, Happiness and You* (Warr and Clapperton, 2009), extensive research has demonstrated links between being happier in a job and being better at a job, and companies with higher than average employee happiness exhibit better financial performance and customer satisfaction. NIGALA prioritises the need to create and maintain positive work environments and leadership that contributes to the happiness and nurturing of their staff as a potential resource.

NIGALA has many strengths in terms of its workforce. Our retention rates are amongst the highest in the HSC family in Northern Ireland with the majority of staff throughout corporate, administration, guardian ad litem and management having been with the Agency for more than 10 years. However there is no room for complacency and, as already acknowledged, staff across all sectors are faced with unprecedented levels of change and increased workload demands.

NIGALA is working to develop both a culture which welcomes change and innovation and to develop strong leadership at all levels to support these changes. This can be achieved through strengthening and developing the workforce to enable capacity to deliver. Whilst change is inevitable, management is committed to reducing the impact on staff by improving communication of why the change is necessary or required, prioritising and staging change and ensuring that change supports the overall mission of the Agency.

It may be a cliché, but the old adage that an organisation's primary asset is its staff is particularly true for NIGALA. We are, and always have been, a lean organisation with a flat management structure whose resources whose resources are predominantly used to provide a voice for the child in court proceedings via guardian representation. Therefore we are very aware that our workforce needs to be continuously strengthened and developed to meet the increasing demands it faces.

In 2016/17 NIGALA has endeavoured to strengthen its workforce in a range of ways including the following;

- **The Development of Professional in Practice (PiP)**
- **Staff Development - Skills Sharing Initiatives**
- **Communicating and Consulting with Staff**
- **Mechanisms for Staff Support and Engagement**

The Development of Professional in Practice (PiP)

In last year's Quality Report, NIGALA committed itself to promoting PiP within its Social Work Qualified staff in 2016/17. For many years staff have enjoyed a full programme of internal and external training, as well as peer support via the more recently re-established Professional Development Groups and Skills Sharing Events (discussed later in this section). However, there has not been any way for this significant amount of training to be converted into formal post-qualifying credits until the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) developed its PiP programme in 2016.

Professional in Practice (PiP) is the Professional Development Framework for Social Work. As registered professionals, social workers are required to develop and maintain their knowledge and skills to practise competently and safely. Professional in Practice is about –

Being A Professional - demonstrating the skills and knowledge which make a professional social worker

Being Professional in - making decisions and working across disciplines

Being active in Practice - continuously developing skills and knowledge to update and improve practice

PiP recognises all learning both formal and informal. It offers autonomy and flexibility and it places practitioners like guardians and social work managers in charge of their own professional development. PiP provides an opportunity to accumulate credit by recognising a wide range of training and learning as well as providing a range of Professional Awards.

During 2016/17, NIGALA ran a series of information sessions in conjunction with Brenda Horgan from NISCC on how to apply PiP. These sessions were held in all three NIGALA offices and have encouraged staff to start to accumulate PiP credits for their regular and ongoing training. The Agency is pleased to report that a number of staff have engaged in this process and we look forward to see this progress and develop in the next number of years. NISCC randomly audit social workers with regard to their compliance to their PRTL requirements (90 hours CPD each three-year period) and those selected have to provide a written report on how their learning and development has impacted on their practice development. However having a minimum of 100 PiP credits provides immunity from this process and three members of staff have engaged with PiP rather than provide a written report.

Staff Development

Each year a series of internal training activities are arranged for all staff. The majority of training is largely driven by the need for guardians to be kept up to date with developments in child protection, family support and adoption. In order to ensure that training is effective



and good value for money an annual report on Effectiveness of Training Delivered within NIGALA is produced each year and reviewed by the NIGALA Social Care Governance Committee.

Skills Sharing Initiatives

NIGALA provided a wide range of learning opportunities throughout the year as set out in the 2016-17 Learning and Development Plan which is overseen by the Social Care Governance Committee.

One new element in the training plan over the past year has been the development of 'skills sharing' days where the Agency has harnessed the considerable skills that already exist within the guardian ad litem group. For example in October 2016 more than 40 staff were involved in a skills sharing event on working with children with a disability. We have now held three of these events with a plan to make this a feature of NIGALA's ongoing training.

In a similar vein, 2016-17 saw the embedding of five Professional Development Groups within the Agency. These are another avenue whereby social work trained staff learn from one another and are accountable to one another.

Communicating and Consulting with Staff

Building effective communication and consultation processes between management and staff has been a focus in 2016/17. The Culture and Climate Survey provided very useful feedback to the management team in terms of how staff regarded communication and consultation, highlighting the need for improvement in these areas. The Survey illustrated there was the need to strengthen the communication channels between management and staff, with management being more accessible and staff having meaningful input into the direction of, and decision-making in, the Agency.

Already established formal communication channels in NIGALA have continued throughout 2016/17, with regular staff meetings taking place in Armagh, Derry and Belfast and management continuing to meet on a quarterly basis with the trade union NIPSA through

the Joint Consultative Committee. Furthermore, a staff newsletter is published twice annually, detailing developments within NIGALA and the wider HSC / family justice areas, staff social activities, training initiatives and conferences that have been attended. This has been well received by staff and they can contribute to the content of the newsletter. This publication is available electronically and in hard copy.

Table 3 – Mechanisms for Staff Support & Communication

Area	Evidence of progress
<p>Mechanisms for staff support and engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency, structure and content of staff Meetings revised in response to staff survey (revised arrangements for staff meetings in place following staff consultation); • Staff Forum being progressed, with staff members identified across the three sites; a date for initial meeting to be scheduled (in progress and will be reported upon separately); • Communication Plan drafted and for Board approval – NIPSA consulted (Completed and to be supported via new Post – ‘Communications Officer’ (Band 5); • Consideration being given to how to progress other mechanisms of staff support e.g. psychological and emotional wellbeing (meeting has taken place with Dr Michelle Kavanagh (Psychologist) and Catherine Mullin (Trainer for Supervision groups) – it has been agreed to review the working of the groups and whether anything addition is required); • SCG Forum and ‘knowledge/skills’ exchange events (established);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions to be derived from Whistleblowing Review (Public Concern at Work); BSO has co-ordinated training with further training to be progressed on staff awareness (to be further progressed); • Re-run of Climate and Culture Survey (March 2017) with actions to be progressed (completed with positive outcomes); • Climate and Culture Survey to be held every two years, providing staff/Board/DoH assurance (established and will be reported upon to Board and DoH).
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3. Measuring the Improvement

NIGALA recognises the need to evaluate the impact of service improvement initiatives on service users. Currently improvement is measured through the following mechanisms -

- Personal and Public Involvement & Stakeholder Engagement
- Developing Methods of Engagement with Children and Children's Participation
- Development of a Young Persons Forum
- Service User and Stakeholder Feedback
- Collaboration with NICCY and Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC)

Personal and Public Involvement & Stakeholder Engagement

Core themes for NIGALA during 2016-17 were -

- To progress processes of engagement with children and young people
- To promote engagement with stakeholders in order to improve service delivery.

Progress Processes of Engagement with Children and Young People

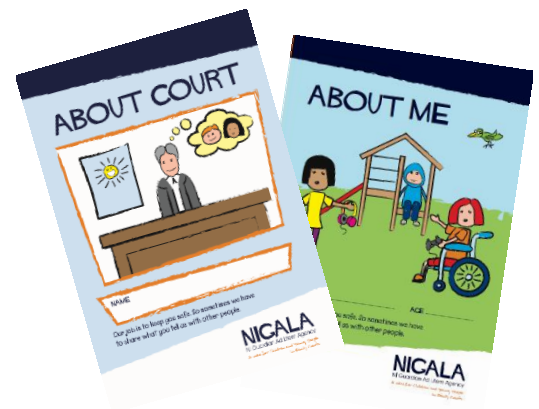
In 2016-2017 the Children's Participation Group embarked on a project to update and revise resources for engagement with children and young people.

At the core of the project was an engagement process with children and young people. The first stage of the engagement process involved Guardians engaging with children and young people on the signage for the Guardian ad Litem Office in Belfast.

The aim was to co-produce the suites of characters and images which were to represent NIGALA branding in the office.

The second stage of the project was to develop tools and resources for Guardians engaging with Children and Young People and these were highlighted as 'Next Steps' in last year's Quality Report. Two documents were developed which consist of a variety of engagement tools aimed at opening up dialogue with children and young people about their wishes and feelings as well as promoting children and young people's engagement with the Court process.

The documents are entitled **About Me** and **About Court**. In order to progress this project a PPI grant was sought and obtained from Public Health Agency (PHA).



The third stage of the project was to set up a pilot project to consult with children and young people on the design and content of the engagement tools and to harness their views and suggestions. The pilot project involved twenty two guardians who consulted with over thirty children.

The finished documents, About Me and About Court incorporate in their design and content the views and comments from the children and young people involved in the project. The suites of characters used are those which were co designed in the office décor/signage consultation process.

The newly designed signage in the Belfast office and the resources About Me and About Court are the outcome of NIGALA's consultation with children and young people.

Young Persons Forum

Following on from the successful engagement with children and young people as part of the NICCY Project, NIGALA has commenced a pilot exercise which has involved setting up a

“Young Person’s Forum”. The Forum comprises currently five young people and is being piloted in the North West. The ultimate aim is to establish the group regionally.

The focus of the group is to place the views of children and young people centre of NIGALA decision making. The initial focus of the group has centred upon the issue of children’s participation in Court proceedings and has involved engagement with the Judiciary.

Children’s Feedback

As part of the process to improve service delivery to children and young people, NIGALA provides feedback opportunities to children and young people at the end of their court proceedings.

Feedback by children and young people to NIGALA is provided by three methods - a paper questionnaire, an online questionnaire and a questionnaire which VOYPIC assist children and young people to complete.

The following statistics outline the numbers of questionnaires which were completed and satisfaction levels registered by the respondents.

Paper Questionnaire - There were 50 questionnaires were returned. 54% of respondents were female and 44% were male.



Half of respondents were aged under 10 years old (50%). 24% of respondents were aged between 10 and 12 years, 16% were aged between 13 and 15 years, 8% were aged 16 and over. One respondent did not answer the question.

Overall, respondents were happy with their Guardian. 52% of respondents rated their Guardian as ‘Excellent’, 28% rated their Guardian as ‘Very Good’ and only 6% of respondents did not think much of the Guardian.

Online Questionnaire - There were 19 online responses. A majority of respondents were female (58%) and 42% were male.



More than a third of respondents were less than 10 years of age (37%) while just under a third of children were between 13 and 15 years. 16% of the sample were between 10 and 12 years and 16% were over 16 years of age.

The vast majority of cases were Care applications (74%). The rest were Adoption proceedings.

From the online feedback, just under half of respondents (47%) gave the Guardian a rating of 100%. 21% of the sample rated the Guardian as 70/100, with 11% giving a rating of 80/100. Two respondents (11%) gave a rating of 20/100.

VOYPIC Assisted Interview - There were 9 VOYPIC assisted responses returned to NIGALA. Six respondents were female (67%). Three respondents were male (33%).



Six of the respondents were in either the over 16 age group or in the less than 10 age group. Two of the sample were between 13 and 15 years old. Just one respondent was in the 10-12 years age group.

Four of cases were Care applications. Two were contact applications and two were Secure Accommodations. The lowest number (one respondent) was in Adoption proceedings.

Seven of the respondents (78%) were very satisfied with their Guardian and gave a satisfaction rating of 100%. Two respondents (22%) gave a satisfaction rating of 50%.

Stakeholder Events

In May 2016, members of NIGALA presented an input on Children's Participation at the Children Order Panel Accreditation Board (COPAB) Conference and displayed resources at a NIGALA stall (practical and literature) in relation to social work theory and direct work with children and young people. NIGALA has also completed a snapshot study which outlines information gathered about the level and manner of children and young people's participation in Court proceedings in the first six months of 2016. Further collaboration with the Judiciary relating to promoting children and young people's participation is planned in 2017.

NIGALA has also engaged with Stakeholders through membership of other fora with the Trusts including Legal Issues Group and the Regional Adoption and Fostering Taskforce and meetings with Health and Social Care Trusts have taken place to discuss feedback arrangements and initiatives to promote social work practice.

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People (NICCY)

In June 2016 NIGALA collaborated with NICCY and Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) in a project to ascertain children and young people's views relating to media involvement in the Court process. Guardians from NIGALA consulted with 17 children as part of this project, and their views were the basis of a report by NICCY for the Civil and Family Justice Review.

4. Raising the Standards

NIGALA has carried out key pieces of work under the Raising the Standard strategic goal including –

- **Learning from Comments, Compliments, Complaints and Incidents**
- **Lone Working/Personal Safety Training**
- **Developing a Quality Improvement Framework**
- **Revised Professional Standards**

The following are some examples of progress made in this area of quality improvement.

Learning from Comments, Compliments, Complaints and Incidents

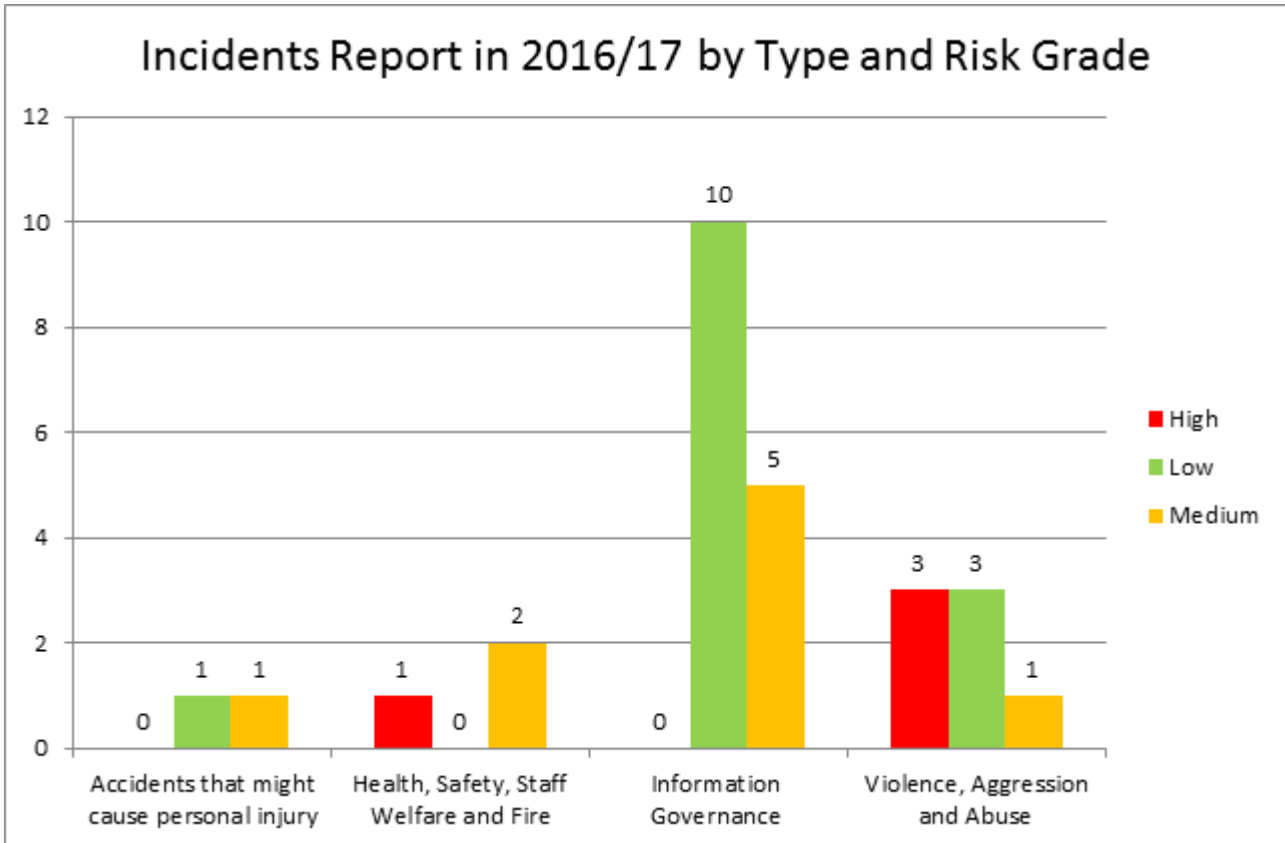
Numbers and Types of Comments, Compliments and Complaints

A key element which also informs the management of risk is the NIGALA Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and reporting system. During the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 NIGALA received a total of 7 Comments, 13 Compliments and 0 Complaints.

Numbers and Types of Incidents

In support of the management of risk, NIGALA has an effective incident management system in place to capture the categories of incidents. During the year 2016-17 there were 27 reported incidents. The chart below details the incident type by Risk grading (see chart and table below).

Chart 1: Incident type by Risk Grading



Please note the majority of the medium risk Information Governance Incidents reported involved damage to IT equipment such as Surface Pro Device, Laptop or mobile phone.

Table 2: Incident type by Risk Grading

Risk Grade	Violence, Aggression & Abuse	Accidents that might cause personal injury	Fraud or Suspected Fraud	Health, Safety, Staff Welfare & Fire	Information Governance	Total
Low Risk	3	1	0	0	10	14
Medium Risk	1	1	0	2	5	9
High Risk	3	0	0	1	0	4
Total	7	2	0	3	15	27



Lone Worker/Personal Safety

From September 2016 to March 2017 the Agency arranged to provide **Personal Safety Training** for all staff. The drive to prioritise this came from both the Health and Safety Committee, which routinely discusses the personal safety of all staff and the Social Care Governance Forum, which has been concerned about the potential vulnerability of guardians as lone workers.

To this end training was provided by Colum Jordan from *Staysafe Systems* with four separate training events to cover as many staff as possible. *Staysafe Systems* tailored the training to the specific demands of NIGALA. At a planning meeting with Mr Jordan there were a number of guardian representatives who helped shape the makeup of the half days event. The purpose of the training was as follows –

The training will teach participants how to put in place their own personal safety plan for their daily routine by recognising risks to their personal safety and learning how to deal with them at the earliest opportunity. We do this by providing good practice procedures with risk control measures and strategies to deal with personal safety and confrontational situations in a legal and safe manner.

The training was well attended and strongly evaluated. As well as reminding staff of the risks associated with lone working it also provided the Agency and individuals with practical ways to ensure their safety.

Developing a Quality Improvement Framework

Three members of the NIGALA senior team attended a Quality Improvement Clinic provided by the HSC Leadership Centre in 2016/17. This has led the Agency to plan a Quality Improvement Framework.



Area	Evidence of progress
<p>Placing <i>'improving'</i> and <i>'quality'</i> at the centre of embedding a <i>'culture of quality'</i>.</p> <p>In terms of quality of work - what does <i>'good'</i> look like for you in your job? (Climate Survey (10/04/17)).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMT attendance at HSC Leadership Centre – Quality Improvement Clinic (QA&TM to develop knowledge and skills in this area); • Agreed definition of <i>'what good looks like'</i> (Reported upon in Climate Survey (April 2017)); • Making explicit links between SCG and a framework of Quality Improvement (QI) – (QI moves beyond quality assurance and relies on data-driven decision making and is used to make a process or system, better, using <i>'outcomes' as evidence'</i> (in progress)); • Review arrangements for Quality Assurance (in progress); • SCG Forums/ work streams; • Climate Survey (10/04/17) • 19 of 55 respondents (35%) noted ensuring the best outcome for the child and ensuring high quality work; • 20 of 55 respondents (36%) noted meeting deadline/targets, having a manageable workload, getting work done within the working day; • 2 of 55 respondents (4%) noted having an opportunity to reflect or discuss with colleagues; • 10 of the 55 respondents (18%) noted feeling valued, respected and supported, getting meaningful feedback; • 77% of words used were positive to describe NIGALA (rewarding work/supportive,

	<p>colleagues/positive work atmosphere/ professional/child centred);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23% of words used were negative to describe NIGALA (work pressures);
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Review of the NIGALA Professional Standards

The *NIGALA Professional Standards* have been in place since 2007 and have been reviewed this business year following a recommendation from the Social Care Governance Committee.

What are the Professional Standards?

NIGALA’s Professional Standards are one part of the standards of the Agency. They relate to the day to day work of the guardian in their role as the independent representative for the child or young person. As such they are specific to the practice of the guardian. Whilst the standards are primarily for guardians a statement of expectation, a common framework for developing and sharing good practice and a basis for demonstrating accountability and achievement, they also provide a transparent statement of intent for service users (children/young people and the courts) and stakeholders.

Although NIGALA must base its standards on the existing legislation, it should do so recognising that the law is a living and evolving thing and that guardians need to take this into account in their application of these standards.

The Aims of the Professional Standards

- To provide a professionally competent service for children
- To outline what the courts can expect through an efficient and effective service
- To provide an independent voice for the child in court proceedings
- To present a measurable criteria by which the service can be monitored, reviewed, appraised and inspected



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- To adopt a consistent and standardised approach to the role of guardian ad litem whilst ensuring that innovation and creativity are allowed and encouraged.

There are six standards –

1. The Welfare of the Child
2. Guardian Ad Litem Conduct of a Case
3. Report Writing
4. Recording
5. The Participation of Children and Young People
6. Continuous Professional Development.

The review of the Professional Standards was carried out in 2016/17 and are currently out for consultation with staff. Progress on the implementation of the new standards will be reported on in next years' Quality Report.

5. Integrating the Care

The objective of the Quality 2020 strategy to integrate the care is to develop integrated pathways of care for individuals. Northern Ireland has an integrated HSC system but in order to be effective there should be seamless movement across all professional boundaries and sectors of care. This has implications for the transfer of information and how data is held.

As an *Arm's Length Body* and a small specialist service, NIGALA sits outside of the integrated health and social care service to some extent and therefore has a greater challenge in evidencing examples of compliance with this particular strategic goal of Quality 2020. However within these constraints we offer the following examples of good practice.

- **Participation in the Regional Care Proceedings Pilot**
- **Programme for Government (PfG)**
- ***An Evaluation of Practice in Working with Children and Families from Black Minority Ethnic Communities***

Care Proceedings Pilot

In 2016-17, NIGALA has been involved in the Care Proceedings Pilot which has involved engagement with Health and Social Care Trusts, Solicitors, Court Services and the Department of Health in order to capture information relating to the causes of delay in Court proceedings.

NIGALA continues its engagement with the Judiciary through attendance at Family Court Business Committees and Children Order Advisory Committee (COAC).



Declan McAllister (Corporate Services Manager) presenting at the Care Proceedings Conference

The Programme for Government (PFG)

The Programme for Government (PFG) sets out 14 outcomes as identified by the NI Executive, which represents a vision for our society. The outcomes are supported by 42 indicators which are clear statements of change. The PFG contains two indicators which can be linked to the statutory responsibilities of the Guardian Ad Litem -

1. *to improve support for looked after children (Indicator 10);*
2. *Increase the effectiveness of the Justice System (indicator 38).*

The identified outcomes include -

- We are an innovative, creative society where people can fulfil their potential;
- We have a safe community where we respect the law and each other;
- We care for others and we help those in need;
- We have high quality public services;
- We give our children and young people the best start in life.

The importance of NIGALA as an enabler to actively assist in the delivery of these outcomes can be considered in the following terms;

1. NIGALA will play a vital role in the lives of children and young people, ensuring their **best interests** are met in accordance with effective care planning which is **relevant to their needs** and gives them **the best start in life**;
2. NIGALA will be **proactive** in ensuring that **proceedings are timely** and **outcomes** are relevant to children and young people's **time-lines**;
3. As a regional organisation, NIGALA will play its role in **connecting with the five HSC Trusts, the Courts and other related organisations** to ensure that **issues concerning children** and young people who are subject of public law and adoption proceedings are prioritised strengthening best outcomes based on need.

Over the course of this strategy NIGALA will take cognisance of the DoH Strategic Vision for Health and Social Care set out in Quality 2020 and engage with the Northern Ireland Court Service in their plans for the management of family law work over the period of the Programme for Government.

An Evaluation of Practice in Working with Children and Families from Black Minority Ethnic Communities

NIGALA was delighted that having completed a report on 'Guardian practice in working with families from BME communities', this work was published in the Child Care in Practice journal in late 2016. This was followed by a launch of the Report at the Law Society in February 2017 where a number of professions were represented. Speakers included Patrick Yu from the Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality and social workers from the Southern HSCT.

The Report was featured in the HSC 'Message of the Week' and this has led to further dissemination of the findings throughout Northern Ireland and opportunities to share the learning with other organisations. Since the launch, NIGALA has been invited to present its

findings to other groups and later in 2017 will be part of a DOH wide seminar on cultural competence.



l-r Catherine Stirrup, Leva Karpaviciene, David Gervin, Patrick Yu, John Sheldon, Dr Patricia Devine & Peter Reynolds.

CONCLUSION

NIGALA remains committed to quality improvement and continued service development. 2016/17 has proven to be a challenging year for the Agency, but one which has set strong values and principles for quality improvement over the coming years. With increasing financial austerity NIGALA is required to do things more efficiently, but maintain high levels of quality service. Changes with respect to service delivery and underlying processes is constantly under review and this of course can be difficult for staff and difficult to manage. Communicating the need for change effectively will pose continued challenges for the Agency as we move forward.

Under such conditions, the core values of NIGALA have become increasingly important. In prioritising our services, we continue to focus on safeguarding the interests of children in specified public law and adoption proceedings in Northern Ireland. Many of these children represent some of the most vulnerable in society. Maintaining the centrality of children in decision making within NIGALA along with a continued commitment to quality, accountability; and transparency will be the hallmarks of how NIGALA responds to austerity in the years ahead.

Going forward the Agency will ensure that our children and young people remain a priority alongside the continued focus on the development and support of a highly professional, qualified guardian ad litem workforce.