

GUARDIANSHIP

Guardianships are established and monitored by the Washington State Superior Court. Guardians are appointed as part of a legal process created to protect the rights of the individual while identifying areas of vulnerability that require addressing. GSS becomes involved when there is no family, when family are unable to serve due to distance or other factors, when there are irreconcilable differences among family members, or when there has been exploitation or neglect. When there is family support, GSS strives to foster and maintain positive contacts.

Guardianship is appropriate when the individual requires a surrogate to make or implement important decisions. The duties of a guardian can include a wide variety of activities such as crisis intervention, property management, management of income and regular expenses, management of medical care and consent, and ensuring that proper living arrangements are in place.

Court appointed guardians are obliged to make decisions based upon what are known to be the client's competent preferences or else upon the best interests of the client. A guardian of the estate may be given authority to assume control of bank accounts, real property, personal property and other assets. The guardian of the estate typically assumes responsibility for payment of routine bills and managing claims against the client's assets.

A guardian of the person often has responsibility for ensuring that the client's medical and personal care needs are met. This can entail a wide variety of assistance depending on the physical condition, cognitive status, and living situation of the client. Guardians cannot require the client to accept medical care and are very limited in their ability to direct or otherwise control the client's personal behavior.

Many times, the guardian's authority can be conditioned or limited to better fit the abilities of the client. Co-guardianships are sometimes created, which can allow family to share the duties of guardianship.

Our primary goal is to ensure that clients are treated as valued members of the community and are served in the most valued and least restrictive settings possible. Many of our clients can live independent lives with some assistance. We prefer to provide assistance to clients in their own homes. When this is not possible, we have considerable experience in developing the least restrictive residential settings. For clients in adult family homes or skilled nursing facilities, we make regular visits to ensure that appropriate care is provided and advocate for less restrictive alternatives.

Guardians are required to make an initial report that includes a detailed description of the client's assets, care needs, and the plans of the guardian. Guardians are also required to provide an annual court report of the guardian's activities.