



Media Advisory

Editors and Reporters: The Pikes Peak Elder Abuse Coalition and our partners are providing opportunities to help inform the community about guardianships and conservatorships. This advisory is intended as a starting point.

Guardianships, Conservatorships Aid Those At-Risk, Enrich Lives

El Paso County, CO, September 29, 2021 – A pop culture movement has shined a light on guardianships and conservatorships, but many may be unfamiliar with how these critical services work and the roles local entities serve in helping some of the most vulnerable in our region.

The Pikes Peak Elder Abuse Coalition (PPEAC) works closely with others, including Silver Key Senior Services, Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging, El Paso County Department of Human Services (DHS), Probate Magistrate, to name a few.

In El Paso County, guardians and conservators have a positive impact on those they care for. Many professionals and trained volunteers provide services for free. Additional volunteers take on the task of reconnecting individuals in need to life and other activities.

The process involves many moving parts. Guardianships and conservatorships can be complicated, but at the heart is a desire to make sure individuals who are not able to make decisions on their own still have a good quality of life. Each story is unique.

Ann McKenzie with Silver Key Senior Services serves as a pro-bono guardian for many clients. Efforts are focused on critical needs, which makes it difficult to find time and ways to give clients special social activities and excursions. The Guardian Volunteer Advocate Program (GVAP) fills those gaps.

The mission of the PPEAC GVAP is to better serve the growing number of incapacitated persons who need a decision-maker in their lives, and to increase the number of individuals who can be served, thereby improving the quality life for those in need of such services.

Volunteer advocates work closely with the guardian. Whenever issues arise that require a medical decision to be made or when the expertise of a professional guardian is needed, volunteer advocates call upon the guardian to make the decision or give consent. Volunteer advocates are not authorized to make those decisions. All volunteers go through extensive criminal background and motor vehicle checks. They also complete a free two-day training.

Volunteers can take on a variety of tasks to help expand the capacity of guardians, and they can be an extra set of eyes on individuals at risk of exploitation or abuse. Here is just one example:

“John” was bronc rider in his younger days, and it had been many years since he was able to visit the rodeo to enjoy the sights and sounds. A GVAP volunteer and her husband took John and his girlfriend to the 2019 Pikes Peak or Bust Rodeo. As a guardian of many pro-bono clients, the pro-bono guardian said she doesn’t have a lot of time to do these kinds of activities. It is through GVAP that guardians can thoroughly equip volunteers to take clients out to enjoy life to its fullest.

Guardians, conservators, and others make a difference in lives every day. It is not easy work, and services are often needed by those who have no resources.

As the population ages, there is a growing need for trained volunteers willing to become guardians. The Colorado Office of Public Guardianship (OPG) is a public agency established by the Colorado General Assembly in 2017. The OPG recently sent a survey to organizations and entities that work with those who may need guardianships and conservatorships to collect data on need across the state.

Training and education is key to provide the most effective and supportive services while keeping elders and at-risk adults safe from abuse and neglect.

The next free Guardian Volunteer Advocate Program (GVAP) training is in the process of being scheduled. This training is for family guardians, those interested in being a volunteer of a guardianship agency, and professionals who are interested in learning more about supporting this valuable endeavor. For more information, or to register, contact skguardianship@silverkey.org or call 719-884-2355.

The judicial system is also involved in cultivating a strong network of guardians, conservators, fiduciaries, and others. In November, Probate Court will host a half-day conference for lawyers who work in probate court, professional fiduciaries, court visitors, and service providers in El Paso and Teller counties.

Note: Several subject-matter experts are available to give on-camera interviews on guardianships and conservatorships in our region. They can cover the process and other details in-depth.

Please contact Ann McKenzie at 719-884-2355 or AMcKenzie@silverkey.org to coordinate an interview about guardianships and the Guardian Volunteer Advocate Program. She may also be able to coordinate an interview with a volunteer in GVAP.

El Paso County Department of Human Services can field a staff member in Adult Protection Services to speak about abuse and neglect; please contact Kristina Iodice at 719-235-8478 or kristinaiodice@elpasoco.com to schedule.

The Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging houses the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, which advocates for individuals in long term care settings who may have guardians involved.

The [Office of Public Guardianship](#) (statewide entity) can be reached at Info@colorado-opg.org or 720-552-5215.

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