



THE GUARDIAN GLOBE

13TH CIRCUIT GAL PROGRAM



A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR, TABITHA LAMBERT

Can you believe it? We are moving into our 5th month of working remotely, I continue to hope that everyone is remaining safe and healthy. Unfortunately, there are no updates to our courts reopening at this time. The Hillsborough County Courts remain in Phase 1. All county buildings are now requiring temperature checks prior to entering, which does include our office. Our office does remain closed at this time. If you are in need of school supplies from the office, please arrange a pick up time with your CAM.

Many of our volunteers have asked, “how do I connect with my kids through a virtual visit?”

We know this a be challenging. Visiting over the phone or by video is definitely not the same as sitting next to them during a visit. Here are some suggestions from some of our veteran volunteers. These may also be helpful for parent visits with their child! You may also look at this [website](#) for more info on how to build and maintain connections through virtual visits.

I hope you find them helpful and thanks to everyone for the suggestions!

- ◆ Wear a kid-focused shirt, such as a superhero
- ◆ Read a short book together
- ◆ Play a game, such as Simon Says, Red Light/Green Light, Charades, Hangman
- ◆ Have a staring contest
- ◆ Tell corny jokes... “What did the left eye say to the right eye?” “Between us, something smells!”
- ◆ Show and Tell...show something cool in your house or maybe your pet!
- ◆ Play 20 questions
- ◆ See who smiles first
- ◆ Do a craft together
- ◆ Journal together
- ◆ Take fun photos with filters
- ◆ Eat a snack together
- ◆ Dance or sing together...just be silly!

I hope some of these ideas are helpful in completing your virtual visits! Be sure to document your contacts in Optima!

As additional information pertaining to court, visits, or the office environment becomes available, we will most definitely share it as soon as possible. Thank you for all that you are doing and please do not hesitate to contact us if there is anything that comes up! We appreciate everyone’s flexibility and consideration during this time. We hope to get back to a more normalized way very soon!!

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via [email](#) or phone 239.771.0821. Thank you!

Happy August Anniversary to our Volunteer Child Advocates!

1 Year

Brenda Eisele
Kaitlyn Gardner
Rebecca Campos
Chelsea Holden
Daniel Holden
Emily Fiore
Ashley Griffin
Carrie Elwell
Cintia Morales
Janelle Lowry
Natasha Johnson
Rashda Brewer
Candie Schwartz
Robert Gillespie
Allison Edwards
Karen Holmquist
Aline Viegas
Kathryn Beeson
Ricardo Padron
Trivia Kimbrough
Thanh Huynh
Jennifer Kilburg

2 Years

David Murray
Melissa Espana
Janice Colon
Deb Lauren
Wendy Porter
Laura Lindsey
Finley Riordon
Tijuana Odom

3 Years

Lisa Rodriguez
Marilyn Jones
Kurt Daley
Rosalie Gonzalez
Arthur Hollows

4 Years

Janet Chappel
Valerie Dickinson
Kelley Howard-Allen

Casey Smith

Samantha Smith
Cynthia Strady
Monica Strady

5 Years

Jonathan Hart

6 Years

Marilyn Garcia
Channing Sampson
Jerry Nichols
Valentina Villalobos
Pamela Decker

7 Years

Krista Kalson
Lily MacDonald

8 Years

Indranie Schweizer
Wanda Dunmore

Felicia Sails

9 Years

Ronda O'Farrell

10 Years

Stephanie Orlick
Yolanda Almeida

14 Years

Allen Guy

16 Years

Joyce Ganster

18 Years

Cathy Mogge

Non-Profit Partner, Voices for Children

We are THANKFUL to work with so many AMAZING Guardian ad Litem Volunteers and Staff Members.

We have filled countless requests over the past few months, ranging from gift cards to tutoring and even musical instruments. We rolled out a virtual school supply drive and received a substantial donation of New Balance Shoes. We appreciate you sending on thank you notes, photos and heart-warming stories. A HUGE shout-out to all of YOU! Without your unwavering dedication, so many children wouldn't know there are people out there who care and are committed to them.

Please know that Voices for Children is here to HELP YOU make their lives easier as they navigate through the court system by providing personal, educational, medical, emotional and legal needs. You can fill out a Children's Needs request for approval by your CAM. We are happy to support your valiant efforts.



THANK YOU for being A VOICE! Each one of us can make a difference! TOGETHER we can "Change a Child's Story!"



UPCOMING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

It is important to stay up to date with obtaining your 12 hours of required training each year! Here are some opportunities to help you stay up to date! The links to the training are included unless you are required to register in advance. On the training date, just click!

Upcoming Trainings:

Thursday, 8/27 Noon

The Keys to Good Documentation

Tune in to learn about effective ways to document your efforts in Optima. This will be recorded.

Register for the training [here](#).

Thursday, 8/27 4-6pm

Beyond the Bruises– A presentation about how to create a Domestic Violence informed child welfare system.

Register for the training [here](#).

Tuesday, 9/15 at Noon

Teen Team Training: Looking at all options

Join the teen team for the 2nd presentation in the teen series. This presentation will focus on Mobility Mapping, Family Finding, and Permanency Pacts for our teens after they turn 18. Be sure to tune in to learn what you can do to help our teens develop those lifelong connections.

Click [here](#) for the training link or contact your CAM for information.

Tuesday, 9/16 at Noon

Volunteer Support Group

Learn about the GAL program updates and seek support from other Volunteers!

Click [here](#) for the training link or contact your CAM for information.

Thursday, 9/24 at Noon

Trauma: How does it impact our children and how can we help?

Join Dr. Marlene Bloom as she discusses how trauma impacts our children and what we, as GALs, can do to advocate more effectively. Dr. Bloom suggests reading “They Boy who was Raised as a Dog” by Bruce Perry prior to the training. This book is available [here](#) if you would like to read it. Note that the book does discuss difficult topics. If you are uncomfortable reading the book, you may still participate in the training.

Click [here](#) for the link or contact your CAM for information.

Tuesday, 9/29 at 5pm

Positive Pathways: Helping our college bound kids

Join our pilot project focusing on helping our college bound kids. This new project that is being piloted in the 6th and 13th circuits will focus on how GALs can act as mentors for our teens who are entering post secondary education. It will include presentations by [Positive Pathways](#), the GAL Program, USF, St. Pete College, and HCC.

Registration information coming soon!

Thursday, 10/15 at Noon

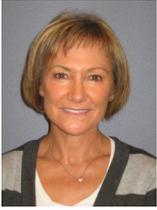
The Ins and Outs of the Adoption Process.

Presented by the GAL Adoption Team

The Adoption team recommends watching the video, “The Day I picked my Parents” prior to the training. You may access it on Hulu or through AE TV at this [link](#).

Click [here](#) for the training link or contact your CAM for information.

GUARDIAN SPOTLIGHTS



I think my fellow Child Advocate Managers can agree when I say we all have at least one volunteer (maybe more if we are lucky) that is willing to do just about anything when it comes to making sure we help our kids reach permanency both safely and as quickly as possible. While I am lucky enough to have several volunteers that fall into this category there is one in particular that comes to mind and that is none other than Julie Arnette. Julie has been a GAL for 5 years and is a fierce advocate for her kids!

I did not start out with Julie as a volunteer on my team; however, once she came over it was clear that Julie was pretty fearlessly committed to working hard for her cases. She will take on any case when asked and immediately begin to work through the jumbled mess of information we receive in order to focus on what the children may need. Julie will stop at nothing to make sure it is accomplished. Whether that

means encouraging a relative through medical training classes to get siblings placed together, or a field trip to the local Wawa to make sure a parent is served for their trial, Julie has never wavered in her willingness to see her cases through to the end despite the sometimes crazy things she may be asked to do. Her connection to the children she is assigned and her desire to see them reach their happy ending, whatever it may be, is clearly evident as well in her ability to call caregivers to task when there could perhaps be a little bit more effort to do more or do better.

While this is just some of the greatness I have gotten to see with Julie in the short time we have had together, it is my hope that she continues with the program for many years to come. It is certainly my belief that if she does our kids are going to be better off because of the work she does. Thank you Julie!

~ Submitted by Nicole Frey, CAM



Jonathan Sharf has been a certified Guardian ad Litem with our Program since June 2018. He and I have always “clicked” and I am thankful to have him on my team. He is a wonderful person and a fierce advocate for the children on his cases. He goes above and beyond to find resources and services to make sure the children he advocates for are fully supported. I am proud to have him on my team!

Jonathan is a married father of two teenage sons, who lives in South Tampa. He enjoys running and biking, and

he recently began kayaking as well. He has a 35 year career in medical information technology, and he is currently the Regional Director of Medical Informatics sales. When asked what attracted him to the GAL program, he stated it was “the opportunity to be hands on in helping children in need”.

He is “pleased and proud to be part of the GAL organization, with so many dedicated individuals who do so much for so many with so little”.

~ Submitted by Jena Rundus, CAM



I love the Andy Griffith Show. I mean I really, really love the Andy Griffith Show. It is just one of those shows that you can watch over and over. It's like good comfort food. No matter what else is going on in the world, the Andy Griffith Show makes things a little better.

There is one episode where Andy is chosen to be the judge for the Miss Mayberry beauty pageant. As word gets around that Andy is the judge everyone in town begins to pressure Andy to vote for their daughter, niece, cousin, etc. For Andy, it becomes overwhelming. When it comes time to announce the winner he is conflicted as to who to choose. During all the chaos of the beauty pageant and whom Andy will crown there is a subplot. In preparing for the beauty pageant there is a need for the crown and robe to be made for Miss Mayberry. As everyone else in town is demanding that Andy choose this girl or that girl, there is this one quiet, humble lady who just wants to help make sure that Miss Mayberry has a beautiful crown and robe. In the end, Andy chooses the one person in town who has shown true beauty – the humble lady who just wanted the best for others.

When I first started working as a Child Advocate Manager one of my first volunteers was Simoni Williams. In the nearly two years we have worked together she has been that steady, quiet presence that lets you know that no matter what

is going on that things will get better. She is not out trying to win any pageant or awards. She simply takes on the case. She connects with the children she serves. She builds relationship with the families that she works with that go beyond the life of the case. She truly strives for reunification believing and hoping that the parents can resolve their issues. She maintains a level of practicality that reluctantly understands that some of our parents will just not be able to reunify with their children. Month after month, she just keeps quietly pushing forward finding a way to bring the children in her cases to permanency. She does all of this, with an easy and peaceful spirit. She does not do this for a crown and a robe. She is not looking to be crowned Miss GAL 13th Circuit but (and this is really true of all our volunteers) she deserves to be.

I know that I do not say this enough (and Simoni knows I am not a very emotional, touchy-feely kind of guy) but it has truly been my honor to work alongside her these past couple of years. When she calls to speak with me, speaking with that soothing Turks and Caicos Islands' accent, it is just like an Andy Griffith Show – I know that things will be a little better. Thank you Simoni for your humble, sweet, quiet spirit. You truly deserve that crown and robe, Miss GAL 13th Circuit!

~ Submitted by John Raymer, CAM

The Recruitment Corner

DO YOU USE NEXTDOOR?

Hey everyone! Are you familiar with the Next Door app? It's a great way to connect with your neighbors, and get the word out about services, recommendations, businesses, and [VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES!!](#)

We are hoping you'll be willing to sign up (if you haven't already), and post something to Next Door, making your neighbors aware that we need volunteers in the your area.

Here's some suggested wording, which you can either copy and paste, or adapt to your own phrasing. Recruiter names are interchangeable.

"Guardian ad Litem Program needs Volunteers. Hi Neighbors! The Guardian ad Litem Program is a volunteer driven state agency that advocates for the Best Interest of Children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse, abandonment or neglect. Our volunteers are the one caring, consistent adult who is there to help them through this

tough time! We are looking for individuals who are able to volunteer for 12-18 months to Change a Child's Story. On average our volunteers give 10-12 hours per month helping to make a difference. If you would like more information please contact Shawn Stapleton at 813-399-7775 or shawn.stapleton@gal.fl.gov"

"Volunteer to help a foster child. Hi, Neighbors! If you've been thinking about ways to volunteer in our community consider The Guardian ad Litem program. Volunteers are often the one consistent adult in a child's life and make a huge difference in their success through support, research and advocacy in court. Foster children with a volunteer receive more services, do better in school, and often find a forever home more quickly. Our volunteers give an average of 10-12 hours per month, much of which is flexible. Information sessions are available by phone. Please contact Sharon Beningfield at 813-307-3323 or sharon.beningfield@gal.fl.gov."

Featured Legal Lesson: Advocating within the School System

With the school year resuming in a couple weeks, there appears to be more questions than answers when it comes to what the fall will look like for our GAL children. One main issue centers on the options of whether a child will attend school in-person, virtually or through a hybrid approach. Regardless of which option is chosen, it is important to remember that your GAL child's educational needs should still be addressed regardless of how they attend school. In this current climate, understanding the educational needs of your child can seem daunting, but understanding how to navigate the educational system can make it less so.

One of the first steps is to talk with your GAL team and case management organization to determine where your GAL child will be attending school or where they previously attended. Once you have done that, you can begin to reach out to your GAL child's school and request any records the school may have through use of your GAL Order of Appointment. The GAL Order of Appointment is a powerful tool in that it puts the school on notice that you have access to your GAL child's educational records, so always have it handy when speaking to the school. The school should then release records from your child's cumulative folder, if available, as well as any Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 Accommodations, attendance records and report cards.

After you receive these documents you should spend some time getting familiar with your GAL child's unique IEP Goals or 504 Accommodations, if they have one. The IEP will outline how the child's instruction will be provided. There will also be different types of goals for the child to meet by the end of the school year. It may be beneficial to meet with case management, the child's parents, and caregiver to request an IEP or 504 meeting to discuss how the school is planning on assisting the child in reaching these goals, especially this school year. The 504 Plan will outline any accommodations your GAL child may need to help them reach their academic goals.

If your GAL child does not have an IEP or 504 Accommodations, it is still important to review their school records to ensure they have attended school and whether there are any needed services such as tutoring due to lack of attendance or grades.

In terms of who to speak to regarding your GAL child's services, every school has a Student Services Team. This team includes a School Counselor, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, and sometimes the School Nurse. Once you learn who these individuals are, this is a great time to set up consistent contact with the school and this team. Schools appreciate when a GAL is available, as often times we assist with helping the Student Services Team facilitate communication to case management, parents, and caregivers, as we are often the most consistent adult in a child's life while they are in care.

Although you may not be able to make educational decisions for you GAL child, your communication and knowledge of their educational needs ensures their needs are not overlooked especially for our children who can move schools multiple times a year.

If there are any issues with obtaining records with use of your GAL Order, please do not hesitate to let you GAL Attorney know as soon as possible. Also, keep in mind that although the beginning of this school year may present some stress to your GAL child, your advocacy and consistency in ensuring they have their educational needs are being met will go a long way.

If you would like additional training to learn how to navigate the educational system and to become more familiar with services available at the school, including IEP and 504 plans, there are a number of online trainings available through the [I am For The Child Academy](#). These trainings have been done by Dr. Katie Kelly and are full of information!

~Submitted by Jennifer Chasin, Esq.