



THE GUARDIAN GLOBE

13TH CIRCUIT GAL PROGRAM



FROM THE DIRECTOR, TABITHA LAMBERT

As we move into our 4th month of working remotely, I continue to hope that everyone is remaining safe and healthy. We are looking at developing a plan to slowly open the office, but we are considering social distancing, CDC guidelines, and our staff and visitors' safety when visiting the office. Please stay tuned for additional updates. At this time, we will continue to keep the office closed until the courts consider reopening for in-person hearings. The courts remain in Phase 1 at this time. When we do reopen, our office will certainly be a little different in terms of the number of staff and volunteers allowed in the office at one time, requiring masks to be worn, and we will have sanitizer everywhere!

There are 2 updates to report. One is about kids attending court and the other involves a modification to essential visits being done for children placed in group homes.

We have been asked that if a child wants to speak with GM Ellis or GM Montagno, you must let your attorney know 72 hours prior to the hearing. Both GMs are requiring 48 hours advanced notice to make the necessary arrangements to allow a private discussion. As you can imagine, this is more challenging to arrange due to the virtual nature of our court hearings. No other judges have requested advanced notice, but it's always good to let your GAL Team know if the child will be present!

Our circuit has made the decision to temporarily suspend face to face visits in Hillsborough County group homes due to the increased number of COVID cases and possible exposure to our staff and volunteers. If you have a child who you feel it is necessary for you to conduct a face to face visit in a group home, please speak with your CAM to seek permission. Your safety and minimizing risk is extremely important. Once numbers start to decrease, this suspension will be reevaluated. Please continue face to face visits when children are in other placement settings if they are essential.

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!

Recruitment Corner

Our program is doing something fun to show our united volunteers across the state. We invite you to join in! The goal is to have all 10,000+ volunteers and staff post something similar on their Facebook page to raise awareness on July 27th. Sometime on Monday July 27th, please consider posting the following:

"The best part about being a Guardian ad Litem is _____.
#makeadifferencetochildren".

Feel free to post what it is that you enjoy about being a Guardian ad Litem, or a selfie, a photo of your badge... etc. Please do not post any photos of the children on your case or any identifying information. If it would be easier, feel free to contact us for a preapproved image, such as the shown one here!

If someone expresses an interest in learning more about joining you in this work, they can contact one of our recruiters by emailing [Yvonne](#), [Shawn](#), or [Sharon](#).

From our perspective, the best part of being a Guardian ad Litem is being able to work with all of you, and seeing your passion for child welfare. We are so much better together! If you're interested in being part of one of the largest social media movements of the GAL Program, set a reminder to post on your social media on July 27th!



Happy July Anniversary to our Volunteer Child Advocates!

1 Year

Candace Norris
Nur Vega
Nancy Brown
Jessica Salmeron Caban
Galina Zahorsky
Luisa Restrepo
Ryan Ruderson
Diana Krahenbuhl
Karah Greene
Mitra Ahmadiavin
Iris Vitelli
Callan Hurley
James Lindquist
Michaela Pattison
Brian Paredes
Renee Hoover

Zuhey Medina-Gonzalez

2 Years

Marsha Edwards
Amy Fattori
Anthony Pavek
Enid Pavek
Madison Stahler
Eddi Mayfield
Sara Diaz
Stephanie Hinson
Elizabeth Irving
Emmanuel Joiner
Gerald Gude
Jonathan Sharf
Caroline Smith
Karen Bracero

3 Years

Edward Mierzejewski
Leslie Schmidt
Laurel Reddish
Nancy Tortorello
Deon McFayden
Janna Davis
Christy Gorenc
Melissa Winfield
Edward Hacker
Adrianna Jones

Leslie Burke
Rhonda Tuttle
Nicole Hackney

6 Years

Jennifer Jones
Sadie Craig

23 Years

Dot Conklin

32 Years

Richard Doyle

4 Years

Fred Galvan
Marlene Reese
Tammy Wooster
William DeMeza Jr.

BACK TO SCHOOL TIME!

We are getting close to that time of year...school! Although school will look quite differently for many of our kids, Voices for Children has still been collecting school supplies for our kids who need them. We will be doing the school supply pick up a little differently due to our office being closed for COVID and to minimize the number of people in our office. While we want to be sure to get the needed supplies to our kids, we also want to be sure that we are keeping everyone as safe as possible.

In order to minimize the number of people in the office, please sign up for a time to come and pick up school supplies by using the link below. We will have staff members on site who will be able to assist in making sure that you get exactly what you need for your child. We will likely gather basic supplies in advance and have them ready for you to pick up.

Many of you may be concerned about getting items to your kids. You can easily pick items up and drop them off at the child's home without seeing anyone!

Please make sure that you wear a mask when coming to the office. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask! This is certainly uncharted territory for us too and it requires a bit of outside the box thinking to ensure our kids have what they need to start the year off successfully!

And, don't forget! Voices for Children also has brand new New Balance shoes available for our kids in sizes 12 kids to 5 adult! For our older kids who also need shoes, we will have a limited number of gift cards available to some local shoe stores. We will also have kid sized masks available for our elementary aged kids.

Click [here](#) to sign up and reserve your spot to pick up supplies for your GAL kids!



Non-Profit Partner, Voices for Children



VFC feels very fortunate that donations are still rolling in despite this difficult time!

We have received a very special donation of **New Balance shoes** from the Florida Division of the Salvation Army, ranging in size 12 kids to a 5 adult.

We also continue to receive **diapers** from the Junior League Diaper Bank as well. If your child is in need of a new pair of shoes or diapers, please contact Dayle at durquhart@vfcgal.org or Jennifer at jstarr@vfcgal.org. We will be coordinating a distribution plan that will be safe and easy for all involved.



As always, please feel free to continue submitting specific requests through your CAM. VFC is here to support your very important efforts as a Guardian ad Litem Volunteer and we appreciate your time and commitment.



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!

Upcoming Trainings:

Tuesday, 8/11 at Noon

Building Strong Relationships with Teens. Presented by the GAL Teen Team

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

Tuesday, 8/18 6-7pm

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, 8/24 4-6pm

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

Register for the training [here](#).

Thursday, 9/10 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 training link or contact your CAM for information.

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



Karen Ryan found out about the Guardian ad Litem Program in 2014 while watching the Dr. Phil Show. Dr. Phil highlighted CASA/Guardian ad Litem and DCF, the work that they do and how they benefit the children and families in the dependency system. She came home and immediately sent in her application.

Since joining the program 5 ½ years ago, Karen has jumped in and taken on some of our most difficult cases. She's lost track of how many cases she had over the years but currently holds a case load of 10 cases with 13 children. She says that she would take on as many cases as I would let her, and yes, I have had to tell her "no". She describes herself as a "workaholic" and her hobby is writing Judicial Review reports.

Karen says that her family is her greatest achievement! She is widowed and has a son, Sean, in Worthington, Ohio. He is married to Amber and they have two sons, Declan and Liam. Karen is also proud of her career, she was promoted to Assistant Dean of Finance and Facility Management at the School of Education at Syracuse University in 2004. She was placed on long-term disability 13 years ago after suffering a work related injury and now teaches 2 online courses each semester. This brought her to Hillsborough County and then to GALP with thanks to Dr. Phil. This program has been everything she expected and more! Karen loves investigating and talking to the parents and really digging into the cases. She is always taking trainings as she has learned that each case is different and there is always something new to learn.

Other than some feral cats that she helps to take care of in her community, her heart and dedication lies with the Guardian ad Litem Program. Karen's favorite parts of being a Guardian ad Litem are seeing the big smiles on her kid's faces when they see her, getting a hug and a thank you, and seeing a family reunified!

I know we are all missing those things during this time of uncertainty and wanting normalcy. Hopefully, we will get back to them soon!

~ Submitted by Carly Hurlburt, CAM



Kim Miller has been a dedicated Guardian ad litem since 1993! Touching the lives of 9 families total she takes great care in every case she signs onto. She has faced various case outcomes ranging from reunifications, TPRs, and teaming up with our Best Interest Attorneys to file a dependency petition when the department decided to withdraw theirs. As her CAM, I'm always impressed with her ability to adapt to various cases while remaining objective. She keeps a close eye on all of her kids by visiting them multiple times a month. Kim is also a frequent visitor to parent visitation which enables her to testify to critical insights in the child's best interest.

Kim is originally from Georgia but grew up in Lakeland, Florida. She has been married to her wonderful husband, Steve, for 22 year and has 3 children Ben (21), Alex (19) and Abby (17). She considers her greatest achievement to be her family, although she does not take full credit for this. She enjoys yoga, tennis, and hiking.

Kim is an attorney and was the former Executive Director of Mary Lee's House. She currently lends her talents by volunteering at Radiant Church, Mary Lee's house, Child Hope International, and Created Women. According to Kim, the most rewarding part of being a GAL is "when I am able to advocate something for a child that makes a positive impact in their life. It doesn't always happen, but when it does it makes it all worth it. It is also rewarding to be in court and see how much judges rely on the GAL for direction."

Thank you Kim for continuing to advocate for our children throughout the years, we are lucky to have you!

~ Submitted by Cat Granger, CAM

Featured Legal Lesson:

Permanent Guardianship or Adoption?

What are the options available if reunification is no longer an appropriate goal? Under Florida Statute 39.621, there are several permanency options for our kids and they go in a specific order: Reunification, Adoption, Permanent Guardianship, Permanent Placement with Fit and Willing Relative, and APPLA. This article will focus on the two most common permanency options if reunification is no longer appropriate, adoption and permanent guardianship.

The legal definition of adoption is “the act of creating the legal relationship between parent and child where it did not exist, thereby declaring the child to be legally the child of the adoptive parents and their heir at law, and entitled to all the rights and privileges and subject to all the obligations of a child born to the adoptive parents in lawful wedlock”. § 39.01(6). Adoption is the second most preferred goal if reunification cannot be achieved. A legal determination must be made by the court that reunification is no longer appropriate before we can talk about this goal- including termination of parental rights proceedings. Just because a Termination of Parental Rights Petition is filed does not mean the goal is changed. The court must accept the goal of adoption as the appropriate goal. Adoption severs all parental ties that biological parents have to their children.

The legal definition of permanent guardianship is “a legal relationship that a court creates under § 39.6221 between a child and a relative or other adult approved by the court which is intended to be permanent and self-sustaining through transfer of parental rights with respect to the child relating to protection, education, care and control of the person, custody of the person, and the decision-making on behalf of the child.” § 39.01(55). Permanent Guardianship essentially means that the court closes the case with the children remaining in their identified placements and the placement having the parental “say-so”. Permanent Guardianship does have circumstances that allow for the case to be re-open unlike adoption. For the permanent guardianship goal the children have to be residing in their identified permanent guardian placement for at least six months. Further, the caregivers have to be willing to close the case permanent guardianship and have an

understanding as to what this means. Caregivers have to be willing to facilitate parental visitations-parents still have the right to visit with the children should the case close permanent guardianship. Caregivers should also be willing to facilitate sibling visitation if they have some children of a large sibling group.

There are several factors the court must determine for a permanent guardianship goal. The court must determine that the proposed permanent guardian is safe, suitable, and stable enough to provide for the children as if they were their biological parent. The court must determine that the oversight of the department is no longer needed in order to ensure the placement remains stable.

The court requires that the caregiver notify the court if their physical address changes. The court requires notification of any significant change in circumstance as well as this determines if a case re-opens: Such as a caregiver passing away. The court also requires the caregivers to facilitate visitation for the parent at the ordered schedule determined at the closure hearing.

Both adoption and permanent guardianship lead to case closure and both provide some type of benefit to the caregiver. Adoption is far more “permanent” than a permanent guardianship closure. In a permanent guardianship, the court retains jurisdiction over the children and the parents still have a right to visit. Remember – permanent guardianship is a legal term but it looks different for every family depending on the family dynamic.

This article is a very brief overview of two permanency goals other than reunification. Remember you have a GAL team on each case-use your resources and if you want to explore changing the goal on your case from reunification, request a meeting to discuss the options. In changing the goal, not only do we have to meet the legal requirements of the goal, we must also take into consideration what is best for the children and families we serve.

~Submitted by Nancy Lawler, Esq.