



THE GUARDIAN GLOBE

13TH CIRCUIT GAL PROGRAM



A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR, TABITHA LAMBERT

As we move into our 6th month of COVID life, we are making progress!!!

The courts have moved into their 2nd phase of reopening the courthouse. There are 4 phases total. In the 4th phase, that means COVID is no longer a threat.

The 2nd phase of reopening give the Judges the ability to schedule in-person hearings. I'm sure you know how important this is for our kids and being able to resolve some of our cases and help our kids achieve some permanency! Right now, the in-person hearings will focus on trials and evidentiary hearings. It is important that you notify the assigned GAL attorney if you are not able to attend court in person. The courts are willing to work with the parties to ensure that everyone is present in some way, but advanced notice is necessary.

The Judges and Magistrates are all transitioning to Zoom instead of other platforms. They are also looking at what can be done to make the dockets not as lengthy. For example, Division C (Judge Oster) is looking at staggering particularly hearings so that they will be every 15 minutes and not all at the same time in order to avoid long wait times.

The courts are also looking at what has been done during COVID and if any of these changes can be made permanent. Of course, any changes that are declared permanent will be communicated once we learn of them, so stay tuned!

We are still not at the point of reopening our GAL office and do continue to work remotely. When the courts move into Phase 3 of reopening, we will start to reopen our GAL office as well. I am just as anxious as everyone is about being able to return to some sense of normalcy and it was really great to see some of you during our school supply pick up, but we definitely want to be cautious and return when it is safe to do so.

Of course, we have had to be a bit creative when looking at some events and the holiday season will be here before we know it! Although we will not be able to hold our traditional Toy Shop, we are looking at other options to ensure our kids have presents for this holiday season. Voices for Children definitely wants to make that happen for our kids. We are in the beginning stages of planning how we will make it happen, but don't worry! We will definitely get something figured out so you can help make your kids' holiday special.

And, did you know that you can soon purchase a GAL license plate the next time you renew your license plate???

Our program was able to get approval to have specialized GAL license plates. Soon, there will be an opportunity to reserve your plate in advance as 3,000 need to be pre-sold, so be on the lookout!!! Don't miss the opportunity to support the GAL Program and spread the word!

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

Happy September Anniversary to our Volunteers!

1 Year

Ashley Spring
Shantanice Vaxter
Mary Floyd
Christa Queen-Sutherland
Lucy Short
Kelly Cassidy
Laura Manz
Maria Pfohl-Anthony
Chrissmyrre Adrien
Rhonda Patton
Brittany Watts
Ann Benoit
Madanys Guzman
Gabrielle Hertz
Rachel Kummelman
Kirsten Buell
John Gerding
Susan Kaloust
Cristalyn Stokes

2 Years

Alexis Jarvis
Sonja Johnson
James Kidder
James Alter
Kendra Blaker
Alicia Guy
Gertrude Creekmore
Austin DeCrosta
Todd Lowry
Lee Alexander
Danielle Griffore
Rachel Martinson
Danny Whittaker
Jessica Gulic
Amanda Pena
In Willmon
Jill Stelzig
James Davis
Valerie Layland

Amanda Pavek

4 Years

Cynthia Pidala
Tina Wilson

5 Years

Pauline Tracy
Carol Simon

6 Years

Scott Maurer
Sakeena Rock
Dianne Pou

7 Years

Danette St. John-Kearse
David Mielke
Crystal Speer

Lora Showers
Alexis Vars

8 Years

Lindsay Carr
Bryne Ortiz

11 Years

Jamie Gomez

Non-Profit Partner, Voices for Children

Children is one of the Top 200 finalists in the State Farm Neighborhood Assist Grant Program and we are SO EXCITED! We were selected from 2,000 submissions BUT now we NEED YOUR HELP!

40 grants for \$25,000 will be awarded on November 4th and YOUR VOTES will help decide which causes will win! The voting phase is open from 12:00:01 a.m. ET on September 23rd until October 2nd at 11:59:59 p.m. ET. People can vote EVERY DAY, up to 10 votes/day with just one click! Please help Voices for Children and the Guardian ad Litem Program secure these much needed funds. It's a quick and EASY one time sign up. They will ask for your name, DOB (because you must be 18 years of age) and email in order to set up a password (they won't use your info – we confirmed). After that, if you use the same device, it's just one click from there on out. Such a fun and easy way to make a big difference for our foster kids!! You can access our direct link and VOTE here:

<https://www.neighborhoodassist.com/entry/2033901>

All of the funds we receive will directly support the GAL Program in Hillsborough County, so we can continue to help YOU promote the education, health, and emotional well-being of the children you serve. Every child deserves the chance to feel like a kid and TOGETHER we can make the difference in the life of a child! Thank you for your unwavering dedication to our children in need!



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!

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. This training will provide guided information in preparing volunteer child advocates to become mentors to former foster youth who plan or have enrolled in public colleges, universities or technical schools. The training will explore the various Independent Living programs and services, post secondary opportunities as well as the support services provided by the Positive Pathways Program. The goal is to increase the current success of dependent teens "aging out" of state care by providing them with volunteers specifically trained to serve as the one significant adult relationship they need to help them successfully transition from care into adulthood.

Register for this training by clicking [here](#)

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.

Thursday, 10/22 at 5:30pm

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.

Did you know that we are continuing to offer monthly training classes and weekly information sessions?

In fact, we've certified a total 163 new Guardian ad Litem Volunteers so far in 2020! We lead the state in the average number of volunteers who are certified each month with an average of 20 new volunteers each month! Check out our numbers for this year:

If you know of someone interested in the GAL Program, please let them know we are continuing to offer training classes via Zoom and a weekly conference call information session so anyone interested can learn more.

There are only 2 more training classes left for 2020! Help us continue to grow our volunteer numbers, so that more kids can have a voice!

January	27 New GALs
February	19 New GALs
March	7 New GALs
April	19 New GALs
May	21 New GALs
June	30 New GALs
July	19 New GALs
August	21 New GALs

GUARDIAN SPOTLIGHTS



I am happy to highlight Linda Helman for GAL spotlight of the month. Linda has been with our Guardian program since 2015. Since then she has had numerous cases both with our county and courtesy cases. I have been her CAM since 2019 and it has been the

greatest pleasure to have her on my team. Linda has always illustrated a passion for every one of her cases and assigned children. She currently has a rather complicated case and is constantly following up with the child's therapist, case management team, the child's family and the GAL team. She is a reliable resource to case management about the child's history and continuous needs. We are currently on a deadline to get the child to a placement from his therapeutic home, and

Linda has made sure case management continues to keep the ball rolling with completing the paperwork. Linda is always on time with her notes and attendance with staffing's and necessary court hearings. She ensures that the necessary parties are informed of meetings and if she has information pertinent to hearings and staffing's she provides it. Linda never hesitates to contact possible placements and continues correspondence with potential caregivers. She investigates and researches the case, recently finding the father was arrested and no one else knew. Linda never hesitates to ask questions to her GAL team and is always collaborating with us. Linda is an awesome GAL to have!

~ Submitted by Crystal Pistone, CAM



This nomination was very hard because all my GALs are very dedicated to their cases and their kids. But if I have to choose one to highlight, I would have to choose Michelle Murray. Michelle is one of the first volunteers assigned to me when I joined the program last year. Michelle was fresh out of the new GAL training. When I started I was given transferred cases and when I told Michelle that at that time those were the cases I had available she immediately took them and has immediately connected with the children. She took one case to begin with and then short thereafter another.

During her time on her cases one of the moms had a baby on the case and she asked to become the GAL for the child as well without hesitation. Michelle makes an effort to attend in person or virtual parent visits, all court hearings, and visits her children multiple times a month. Michelle has made relationships with the parents on her cases as well, that she has helped a father connect with medical treatment who is going through a terminal illness. One of the children on her cases was going through an emergency surgery during the COVID-19 pandemic and helped take shifts with the foster parent and one at a time watched the baby in the hospital. She even helped communicate to the parents about the child's medical condition so they would be informed. Michelle has gone above and beyond to not only help the kids on her case but the caregivers and parents. I am proud and thankful of Michelle! Charlie is too! (My cat)

~ Submitted by Kat Danvers, CAM

TIBET AND LORNE'S ADVENTURES



Lorne and Dayle went to Marion County to support one of our kids that was going to live with her paternal grandmother. She was not living with her Mom or Dad due to neglect and was assaulted by a family member. This was a forensic interview, so Lorne and Dayle provided pre and post support.



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of Voices for Children

Deposition at the Suncoast Center in Pinellas. This is a Hillsborough felony sexual abuse case, but the deposition occurred in Pinellas via Zoom with Hillsborough SAO. After the one hour and 20-minute deposition, Tibet and child "decompressed" on the floor.



The Recruitment Corner

First, let us say THANK YOU!! Just to update everyone on the success of our NextDoor posts... To date we have had 20 inquiries and 7 of those have already submitted their applications and most, if not all, are part of our September training class. GREAT JOB!! It really does take a village and we appreciate your willingness to help us find more volunteers just like you!

We are also looking for a few volunteers to join our Interview-Team (I-Team). Do you have a couple of hours a week to spare? Our I-Team helps out with interviews for our prospective volunteers and with the current restrictions during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the interviews are all conducted via telephone. Most interviews take about 45 minutes to an hour. We have all of the interview questions all ready for you and once the interview is complete you would simply email the interview to the Recruiter! This is a great opportunity to share your passion for the Guardian ad Litem Program while helping the Recruitment Team with the Volunteer Onboarding process. We will be scheduling an Interview training for those who are interested. We will also have you observe an interview in process. and then will schedule a time for you to join one of the Recruitment Team on a phone interview. If you are interested in learning more please contact Sharon Beningfield at 813-334-7001 or Yvonne Marrone at 813-846-9717.

Featured Legal Lesson: What is Dependency Drug Treatment Court?

The Thirteenth Judicial Circuit is one of the dozen circuits in Florida that has a Dependency Drug Treat Court. The Honorable Jack Espinosa Jr. has presided over the Dependency Drug Treatment Court here in Hillsborough since its creation in 2006. This specialized problem solving court provides parents who have had their children removed from their care the chance to complete a comprehensive substance abuse treatment program with the eventual goal of being reunified with their children and gives them the best long-term chance of addressing the substance abuse and related issues, like mental health and domestic violence that brought their children into care.

Research studies have shown that families who come into the dependency system with substance abuse issues are substantially more difficult and challenging to serve and that these families experience lower levels of reunification and higher levels of child welfare recidivism. It has also been shown that children whose parents successfully complete drug court are out of their parents' care less time and are reunified sooner on average than families with underlying substance abuse problems whose cases go through traditional dependency court. This all leads to savings, on average of thousands of dollars, to the legal system to treat the families who go through dependency drug court.

The Dependency Drug Treatment Court method uses close collaboration between the court, substance abuse treatment specialists, and child welfare experts, who come together in a less adversarial setting to thoroughly, assess both the needs of the children in the case and identify and treat the parent's substance abuse and related problems comprehensively. After completing the intake process with the treatment specialists, the parents are referred to the appropriate level of treatment for substance abuse and any other related issues that brought the children into care. The more frequent court appearances in drug court encourages the parents to become engaged with the services offered sooner and also address

any later potential issues with a parent relapsing earlier. This approach has been proven to be more successful and usually faster than treatment for parents with severe substance abuse problems who don't go through drug court.

So how does a case get to into Dependency Drug Treatment Court? First, the case must be transferred from one of the regular dependency court divisions, usually at the disposition hearing on the ratified recommendation of a party to the case or by the presiding judge acting on their own accord. The parent also has to sign a contract agreeing to comply with all the conditions of drug court when their case is transferred. These conditions include; successful completion of a substance abuse treatment program and all related case plan tasks, abstinence from use of drugs and alcohol, and staying in close contact with their assigned treatment specialists throughout the time their case is drug court. Once a parent enters into drug court they are subject to sanctions by the court, up to being sentenced to jail time on criminal contempt charges if they fail to successfully complete treatment or violate the terms of the contract with the court. That makes it very much sink or swim for the parents who have their case transferred to drug court. However, those parents who enter the treatment program offered through dependency drug court give themselves the best chance to address their underlying problems with addiction and get their children back in their care as quickly as possible. On the other hand, in the cases where the parents don't successfully complete treatment, our program is in a position to advocate for the permanency of children in an alternative placement sooner than we would otherwise be able to in a traditional dependency court division.

Should you have any questions about your Drug Treatment Court, please do not hesitate to reach out!

~Submitted by Jerry Nichols, Esq.