



I am For The Child

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Newsletter Date - Fall 2017

A Message from Marcia Hilty, Circuit Director

Dear Volunteers and Supporters of the Guardian ad Litem Program,

Despite the “lazy days of summer,” there’s been little time for laziness or chilling here in the 5th! The number of children involved with our local courts continues to exceed 2,100. Although the Florida Department of Children and Families has conducted additional staff training on the methods used to assess risk, more children continue to come into care than at any other time in recent history.

As you might expect, this makes the job of determining who is served by the Program and who isn’t all the more challenging. Realizing the importance of a GAL volunteer in every dependent child’s life, Alan Abramowitz, Executive Director of the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Program, will introduce two significant pieces of legislation this legislative session.

The first piece of legislation is intended to ensure continuity of advocacy. It seeks \$331,262.00 for travel reimbursement purposes. Those volunteers who travel extraordinary distances will be eligible for consideration. Given the fact our supply of foster homes has not kept up with demand, this action is both welcome and timely.

The second legislative budget request asks for \$996,920.00 to fund eighteen positions statewide (one position locally) to enhance advocacy efforts and services offered to parents of children ages 0-3. Early Childhood Courts, or Baby Courts, have demonstrated positive outcomes showing that when a concentrated, more intimate and less intimidating approach is implemented, children achieve permanency at a much higher rate than do their non-Baby Court counterparts.

Finally, while talking about legislation, I would like to take a moment to extend a special note of thanks to Senators Jack Latvala and Dennis Baxley for supporting our successful efforts to adjust staff salaries. I would also like to thank Representative Jennifer Sullivan for sponsoring the continuation and expansion of the Keys to Independence Act, which allows foster children, ages 16 and above to secure driver’s licenses and all our delegation members for supporting adoptive and foster parents free access to state parks and extending enhanced benefits to those who adopt special needs children. We are indeed fortunate to have such “child focused” legislators representing us in Tallahassee.

As always, thanks for all you do to make sure our children are well-served in court and our communities. Your efforts are sincerely appreciated.

Congratulations - Doug Feldkamp

The 5th Judicial Circuit is pleased to announce Douglas E. Feldkamp, CAMII, has been promoted to Assistant Circuit Director (ACD). Doug, who began as a volunteer, has been employed with the Program since 2013. He began as a CAMI and shortly thereafter was promoted to CAMII, supervising the Case Managers located in the Hernando office.



Prior to becoming affiliated with the Guardian ad Litem Program, Doug was an Assistant County Attorney for twenty four years in Louisville, Kentucky. While employed there he prosecuted all cases in Juvenile court, including those involving delinquency and dependency matters.

As ACD, Doug will among other things, supervise the CAMIIs in their daily operations and work with legal staff to make sure cases are being addressed in the most efficient and effective manner necessary. He will also work with Amy Robertson to make sure those cases extending beyond twenty-four months are given priority attention.

Doug brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table, but probably his most notable attributes are his passion for the children we serve and his commitment to volunteers and staff.

Please join me in welcoming Doug to the Assistant Circuit Director position.

Marcia Hilty, Circuit Director

And He Does it All.....



Thank you Joneall'e Hill for capturing the picture of Doug, doing what he does best - "he does it all" When the fire alarm sounded recently in the Hernando County Courthouse, Doug was there, as he always is to help. Doug is pictured carrying CAM Lynn's crutches in one hand and helping her up the hill to safety with the other hand - an example of Doug's hands-on leadership.

Around the Circuit - Citrus & Sumter Counties

The last few months have brought about a lot of changes in both Citrus and Sumter Counties. The Sumter County Best Interest Attorney, Leila Chacko, is out on maternity leave. She had a beautiful baby girl in September and we are so happy that Leila is spending time with her baby before returning to work. She should be back by the end of the year. While Sumter County certainly misses Leila, we appreciate all of the support from the other attorneys throughout the Circuit, especially Supervising Attorney, Rashel Johnson. Also in Sumter, our office sustained some damage from Hurricane Irma. Most of the repairs are done now, but the office still needs some work. Please bear with us through this construction process. And, we are so thankful that Roxy is back! We missed seeing her smiling face everyday in Sumter County!

We have had some staff changes in Citrus County and currently are looking for a new CAM. The biggest change, though, is our move! The Citrus County office moved from the Brannen Bank building, where we had been for 10 years, down the road to the Citrus County Courthouse! We are very excited, and somewhat anxious for this move, which took place on October 23, 2017. Thank you so much to all of the GALs who have devoted time to helping us pack and make this move easier. We could not do this without your help and we are eternally grateful! We plan to have an open house some time in November so everyone can visit our new office once we are settled in.

Submitted by Amy Nourie, Citrus & Sumter Counties CAM II

New Contact Information for Citrus County Office

Office Location:

Citrus County Courthouse
110 N Apopka Avenue
Suite 2011
Inverness, FL 34450

Main Office Number - 352.341.8770

Fax Number - 352.341.8771

Staff Extensions:

Amy Nourie - 8774

Susan Follick - 8775

Darlene Falgout - 8773

Michael Dandurand - 8776

Keri Koesel - 8777

Melissa Egan - 8778

Teri Crouch - 8779

Around the Circuit - Hernando County

I am sure that everyone has heard the saying, *“When one door closes, another opens...”* This famous note was penned by Alexander Graham Bell just about a century ago, but many don’t realize that there is more to this quote. It actually reads *“When one door closes, another opens, but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.”* Our Guardian ad Litem volunteers provide the second door--- the one that opens. We are challenged to open the doors for renewed opportunities to enable the children entrusted to us to regain their childhood, their security, and their emotional stability. The recent arrival and departure of Hurricane Irma left a path of physical destruction. To some, it also left a path of emotional insecurity. Our Guardians ad Litem made sure caregivers knew that counseling services were available to our clients who felt this loss. Thank you.

I also feel sure that you have heard of the “revolving door theory.” While it allows some to exit, it provides entrance to others. In Hernando County, that revolving door has found its way into the office of the Guardian ad Litem program. Many of you will remember Brandy Germer who was a Hernando CAM for a few years before she departed for a position with the Department of Corrections. She was replaced by Dawn DaSilva who came to us from the visitation division in the Pasco County program. When Dawn ultimately decided to return to further her education, who came back through that revolving door? None other than Brandy Germer! Now Brandy is back in her CAM position, but the story doesn’t end there---because after being off for a short time, Dawn DaSilva decided she loved us so much, she is now working a contract position on a part time basis in our Hernando County GAL office while attending classes!!

So, thanks to the Guardian ad Litem Volunteers, the Staff in our offices and the opportunities to open many doors. As Graham Greene said, *“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”* Keep opening doors!

Submitted by Doug Feldkamp, Assistant Circuit Director

Around the Circuit - Lake County



Rebecah Farish

The Lake County Office is proud to welcome Rebecah Farish to our staff for the next few months. Rebecah is working on her Masters in Social Work at Saint Leo University. She chose the Guardian ad Litem Program as the place to do her internship for two semesters. Rebecah has completed the required training and has begun accepting cases where the children are placed out of county. This helps to assure advocacy for those children and frees up CAMs to assist volunteers on cases where the children are in County. Rebecah is also employed by the Haven of Lake and Sumter Counties so she has a wealth of information on services provided through that provider and knowledge on Domestic Violence. Please Join us in welcoming her to our staff.

Lake County has also begun their Christmas Wish List Drive. All Lake County GALs should be inquiring of the caregivers and children what the children want for Christmas. We try to provide for all children, Lake County Cases and Courtesy Cases. Please do not wait until the last minute to submit the children's wishes as most donors want their names by the end of October. If anyone has any questions please feel free to contact our office.

Submitted by Connie McMaster, Lake County CAM II

Around the Circuit - Marion County

The Marion County office is thrilled to welcome two new CAMs to our staff.

Danielle Horosh recently returned to her hometown Ocala, FL after living in Cologne, Germany. She studied criminology and German at the University of Florida and is now pursuing a master's degree in forensic psychology through the University of North Dakota's online M.A. program. Her passion for community service and helping children began in 2010 on a mission trip to dilapidated Haitian orphanages. Since then, she has served as a University of Florida Senator and as a Leadership Development Consultant for the Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women. Following in her volunteer Guardian ad Litem mother and grandmother's footsteps, Danielle is thrilled to have been given the opportunity to become a Guardian ad Litem Child Advocate Manager.



Danielle Horosh

Denise Kimbrel was born and raised in Grand Rapids, MI. She worked as a case manager for special needs children for eight years. Denise then worked 25 years for the Kent County Circuit Court for the Family Division (Friend of the Court). She started off as a caseworker enforcing child support orders, moved to mediation, and then ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) Supervisor, as well as conducted court-ordered mediations. Denise retired in May 2015 and moved to Ocala, FL in August 2015. She has four children and five grandchildren. Although she's retired, she still had the desire to work towards the best interest of children. The Guardian Ad Litem Program is a perfect fit and she enjoys working with such caring and dedicated people, who are "For the Children".



Denise Kimbrel

Submitted by Buff Moring, Marion County CAM II

A Message from Diana Hollwedel, Director of Recruitment/Training

Dear Volunteers,

As we head into the holiday season, we are planning our new volunteer trainings for the coming year. Our first training of the new year will be in The Villages on January 25th - 27th, 2018. Experience has showed us that having an inside contact has better outcomes in our efforts to promote the program within 55+ communities, Faith Based Organization and Social Groups. We have new rack cards with easy to read information that we would like distributed to Doctor's offices, Vet offices, Beauty Salons, Barber shops and any type of office or business that will allow us to place this information. If you are a member of one of these groups / organizations or would be willing to place this information in an office or business you frequent, we would appreciate it very much.

For more information and to pick up the rack cards:

Hernando, Citrus & Sumter - Call Diana at 352-812-6971
Marion & Lake - Call Amarilys - 352-343-2736



A Message from Rashel Johnson, Supervising Attorney

As we approach the Holiday season, one of my favorite times of the year is Thanksgiving. Yes, the food is great!!! But it is also a holiday that we stop to express GRATITUDE!

*So as we approach this season, please allow me to stop and say
THANK YOU.*

The legal team is extremely GRATEFUL for our volunteers. You are advocates! With your recommendations - you defend and protect - the best interests of children! Being an advocate is not easy. Some of you have spent countless hours on a case, travelled far and wide, and have experienced good outcomes and disappointments on your cases. But you continued getting back up on behalf of your child.

As legal advocates, the Best Interest attorneys have to stay in the know with changes in the law. One of the most significant changes this year is House Bill 1121. We will discuss this bill with you in more detail in the near future. In the meantime, I want to give you brief overview of the Bill's intentions:

"HB 1121 makes multiple changes to the child welfare system to protect vulnerable children. The bill expedites permanency for children by making changes to the procedures DCF and the courts use to identify and locate prospective parents to require inquiry and search much earlier in the dependency case. The bill changes the process that DCF and the courts use to assess and order services for substance exposed newborns and children who enter households already under investigation or under the dependency court's jurisdiction to improve risk assessment. The bill also facilitates more participation by a child in his or her case planning, streamlines processes for child protective investigations, and aligns statute with current practice by moving away from using substantial compliance with a case plan as the standard to determine whether to place a child back in his or her home and instead using a Family Safety Assessment to determine whether conditions for return of the child are met and reunification can be safely achieved while the case plan is still ongoing. These changes are detailed in the analysis below.

"Children, Families, and Subcommittee Bill Analysis, (June 2017)".

I want to encourage you to go to the following link (type provided link in your browser exactly as it is shown), and read the *Children, Families, and Subcommittee* analysis to learn more about the purpose of this bill and how it will affect Chapter 39 -

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2017/01121/?Tab=Analyses>

Volunteers, again, we appreciate you and all that you do!



Voices for Children

NORMALCY GRANT - Thank you to Sky Ranch! They recently awarded Voices for Children of North Central Florida, Inc. a \$25,000 grant to continue its Normalcy Program for the next 18 months. The program provides funds to children involved in dependency court to participate in sports, music and dance, camps, school trips and more. Thank you also to Peg Donovan, Voices Board Member, who is affiliated with Sky Ranch and pursued this grant on our behalf.

BOARD UPDATE - Voices for Children would like to welcome Jo Mrotek and John Conroy to our Board of Directors. Jo has been a GAL for many years, has volunteered to work in the Ocala GAL office from time to time and has assisted Voices for Children with our Angel Tree project. Jo also has a background in IT and has volunteered to maintain our website and assist with improvements and changes. John is a member of the Citrus County Executives' Association who support Voices throughout the year with donations, sponsorships, Angel Tree gifts. John always takes those opportunities for his company to donate. John, although just joining the board, has already volunteered to help with activities. Both are tremendous additions to our Board.

BELK KIDFEST - Voices for Children recently participated in the Belk Department Store Kidfest, which is a back to school celebration that features local children modeling back to school clothes from the store. It was a fun event with games for the children; Voices had drawings to award prizes to the kids.

ANGEL TREE - Do not let the warm weather fool you! Voices is in the process of securing donors/sponsors for our Angel Tree Project. We need and welcome any new sponsors wishing to make Christmas a little brighter for our children. Please contact us at: 352.484.0319 or sue@voices4childrenfl.org

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Voices for Children is actively seeking potential board members to assist with projects, events, activities. If you are interested, please contact us: 352.484.0319.

Visit our website - www.voices4childrenfl.org

GAL OFFICES

Marion County
110 N. Magnolia Avenue
Ocala, FL 34475
352-671-5757

Citrus County
110 N. Apopka Avenue
Inverness, FL 34450
352-341-8770

Hernando County
20 N. Main Street
Brooksville, FL 34601
352-754-4226

Lake County
418 West Alfred Street
Tavares, FL 32778
352-343-2736

Sumter County
115 N. Florida St.
Bushnell, FL 33513
352-569-6980

5th Circuit GAL Management Team

Marcia Hilty, Circuit Director

Douglas Feldkamp, Assistant Circuit Director

Rashel Johnson, Supervising Attorney

Buff Moring, CAM II, Marion County

Amy Robertson, CAM II, Special Projects

Connie McMaster, CAM II, Lake County

Amy Nourie, CAM II, Citrus & Sumter Counties

Verna Cardona, Administrative Assistant

Diana Hollwedel, Director of Recruitment / Training

**Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're
worthless, but because they're priceless.**

~Sherry Anderson~

Newsletter Publisher - Diana Hollwedel

We are on the Web
www.guardianadlitem5.org