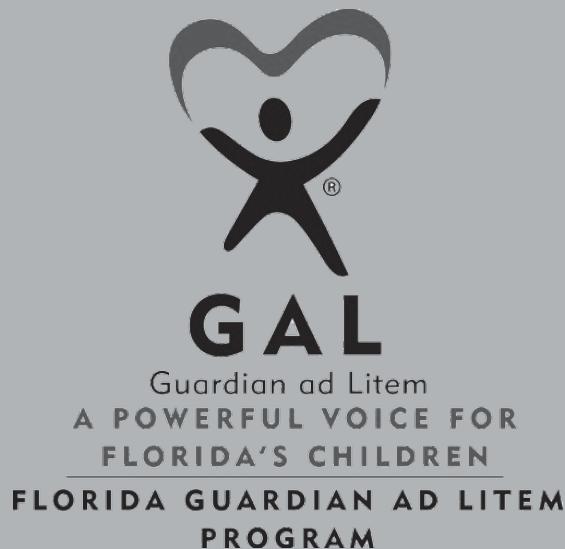




FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM

2011 ANNUAL REPORT





A Message from the Executive Director

The most enjoyable part of being a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is knowing the immense difference GALs are making in so many lives. As Executive Director, opportunities come to me more than most, to hear these wonderful stories about volunteers and staff making a difference in the lives of the children and families they serve.

Both the Legislature and the Governor focused on efficiencies in government this past year and strongly supported the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program's (the Program) efficiency and uncompromising focus on advocacy for children by continuing our level of budgetary support. As a result, we were not required to abandon any child's case due to funding cuts. On behalf of these thousands of children, I thank you.

Big challenges still remain. Our staff, our volunteers, and our supporters know that thousands of children do not have an independent GAL voice even though Florida Statutes require it. We currently represent only 70% of Florida's abused, abandoned, and neglected children, leaving thousands without that voice. To fill that gap, the Program is introducing a strategic five- year plan to ensure that every abused and neglected child has a voice they both need and deserve. In the meantime, there are far too many children who do not have that GAL voice, so we are forced to make choices.

To protect the most vulnerable children we serve we do something that medical professionals do every day; we triage cases to try and find those children that are most in need of GAL protection. Our staff struggles every day when trying to decide whose case we can advocate for and whose case we cannot. It's a heart-wrenching decision when we know that ALL children deserve a GAL. But we are limited in the numbers of children we can serve based on the number of volunteers we can support. Our volunteers need training, mentoring, and constant support through the cases in which they are assigned. Our strategic plan will guide our program as we expand our volunteers we can support including seeking more resources from the legislature and non-profits.

There will come a day when we together, can make the triage process obsolete. It will take all of us together to make that happen.

In the meantime, our Program will be creatively working to figure a way, some way, to ensure all children have a voice, given our current resources while beginning the process to grow towards the future. Every child deserves our best efforts to find that voice and we pledge that effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "alan f. abramowitz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish on the right side.

Alan F. Abramowitz

A Voice for Children

Florida's Guardian ad Litem Program advocates for the best interests of children alleged to be abused, abandoned, or neglected who are involved in court proceedings. This means preserving the child's physical safety and emotional well-being; finding a permanent placement in a stable and nurturing home environment that fosters the child's healthy growth and development; and protecting the child from further harm during the child's involvement in the court system. The Program uses a team approach to represent children: volunteers, case coordinators, and program attorneys. Volunteers bring a community based, common sense approach to children's cases. They are supervised by case coordinators who help them navigate the complex dependency system. Some case coordinators directly advocate for children and are called staff advocates. The case coordinators and volunteers receive essential legal counsel and support from program attorneys and pro bono attorneys. Program attorneys attend hearings and depositions, negotiate at mediations, and take on appeals. The unique perspective and expertise of each team member complements the others and all are critical to advocate for the best interests of children.

Florida Statutes require that a guardian ad litem be appointed at the earliest possible time in an abuse or neglect proceeding. § 39.822(1), Florida Statutes. After appointment, if resources are available, the Program accepts the case and assigns a volunteer or alternatively, a staff advocate is assigned. When the Program accepts a child's case, a GAL begins to collect comprehensive information about the child and family, attends staffings and hearings, and takes steps to further the child's best interests. Throughout the proceeding, the GAL visits the child monthly in his or her home environment. By visiting the child, the GAL gains an understanding of the child's needs and wishes. Frequent contact offers an opportunity to explain the court process to the child in an age-appropriate manner. Under Florida Statutes the GAL is required to make recommendations to the court as to the child's best interests and inform the court of the child's wishes. §§ 39.822(3), 39.807(2)(b), Florida Statutes. The GAL provides reports and recommendations to the court in order to assist judges in making pivotal decisions for children, including placement, visitation, termination of parental rights, and adoption.

The GAL also monitors the child's safety and well-being, as well as significant changes in the parents' lives which could impact the child's safety.

The GAL Program ... a Child-Focused Strategic Vision

The Program has worked hard to develop a child-focused strategic vision that will provide a roadmap for our staff and volunteers. The Program is committed to giving every one of Florida's abused and neglected children a voice in court. The Program's mission, vision, and core values will guide the Program to the ultimate goal of representing 100% of Florida's abused and neglected children in the next five years.

Mission. A Mission Statement is a brief expression of the organization's purpose. It should answer the questions: "Why do we exist?"

Program Mission Statement. Advocating for the child's best interest is our only interest.

Vision. A Vision Statement is a description of the organization's desired future state – a "picture" of the future an organization wants to create. It should answer the question: "Where do we want to be?"

Program Vision Statement. The Program will provide a powerful and effective voice on behalf of Florida's abused, abandoned, and neglected children and be recognized and respected as a partnership of community advocates and professional staff.



Core Values. Core values are the guiding principles on which an organization is built. Core values guide the organization's planning, operations, and programs. The Program's core values are derived from the ethical standards that guide the organization's interactions with the children we serve, the staff, volunteers, and community partners. Core values should answer the question: "What do we believe in?"

Program Core Values

- Commitment to Children. The children for whom we advocate are our most important priority.
- Communication Built on Trust. Have a culture of open communication, active listening, teamwork, and regard for the view of others.
- Circuit Empowerment. Each Circuit has the authority and responsibility to make and implement the best decisions to meet the child's needs.
- Collaboration. Have relationships that promote the well-being of the whole child.
- Courtesy. Value all who engage in this challenging work and ensure that they are treated with respect and dignity.

From a GAL's Perspective... our role is more than what happens in court – after a case is over we are still there when needed.

"When I met Dan for the first time, he completely left me speechless. He showed me a list of his goals and plans for his immediate future because he knew his dreams of adoption weren't going to happen. But he was motivated to make it on his own and pursue his dream of becoming a journalist. When he turned 18, Dan moved into his new apartment. I, along with his previous GAL, helped him transition out of care. I took him grocery shopping, showed him how to shop with coupons, and furnished his apartment with the help of some friends. On July 1st, 2011 Dan called me to inform me his mother had passed away. I asked him where he was and he said he was on the bus on his way to the hospital. I told him to get off on the next stop and wait for me. Dan and I went to the hospital to see his mother. He kept telling me he could do it on his own, but I reminded him he didn't have to be alone. After we left the hospital I asked him what he wanted and he said, "Let's go for ice cream." We ended the night with caramel sundaes and singing along to Michael Jackson songs - his mother's favorite musician."

Long Range Goal... Five Years to 100 Percent Representation

Today, the Program represents approximately 70% of all abused, abandoned, and neglected children in Florida's dependency system. With only 70% of Florida's dependent children represented, inevitable questions arise:

“Is 70 percent good enough?”

“Are we providing a powerful and effective voice for ALL of Florida’s dependent children?”



“a guardian ad litem shall be appointed by the court at the earliest possible time to represent the child in any child abuse, abandonment, or neglect proceeding, whether civil or criminal.” § 39.822, Florida Statutes (2010)

Florida Statutes would say, “NO.” The answer goes well beyond the statutory mandate to provide a GAL for every child. We have a moral responsibility to provide a voice for Florida’s dependent children as well. No abused or neglected child should be without the trained voice of GALs and the team that supports them. Which one of us can look into the face of an abused or neglected child and say, “Sorry, we just do not have the resources to help you.”

The Program resolves to do everything we can in partnership with legislators, constituents, community partners, and our staff to achieve a five-year plan to represent 100% of Florida’s abused and neglected children.

Program Long Range Goals. The Program's long range goals are the foundation of our efforts to provide a volunteer for every child. Each goal is vital to achieve our overall mission, core values, and vision. The Program's long range goals also represent the combination of efforts needed in the future and actions already taken to ensure success.

Program Long Range Goals

- To ensure that EVERY child has a voice in court.
- To use quantitative and qualitative data, to demonstrate GAL advocacy correlates with improved case outcomes for children in the dependency system.
- To implement a consistent core program of evidence based training for volunteers and staff that strengthens their ability to address the needs of the children they represent.
- To advance the mission alignment and operational relationships among and between the Office of the Executive Director, the Circuits, the Local Non-Profit Boards, and the Statewide GAL Foundation.



To ensure that every child has a voice in court...

Volunteer Recruitment and Management. Our current Fiscal Year 2012/2013 Long Range Plan and Legislative Budget Request details our short-term plan for achieving 80% representation (up from our current 70%) by June 30, 2013. We are currently working towards representing 100% of the children in care; a critical part of our Program's ability to achieve this goal will involve improved performance in overall volunteer recruitment and management. It is projected that we will need an additional 1,650 certified volunteer advocates to provide enough resources.

Creative Volunteer Opportunities. In an effort to recruit more volunteers, the Program will explore volunteer specialists, such as former educators and medical professionals. A quality education and healthy development are essential elements that are within the "best interests" formula. The expertise these professionals can provide is essential to the Program.

10,000 Voices! We have expanded the concept of what it means to be a volunteer, by the creation of our 10,000 Voices Project. By December 31, 2012, we want to have a group of staff and volunteers of all types, 10,000 strong, to be working together in partnership for the best interests of children.

Volunteers will be utilized as GALs, to help in the office, to help recruit or train other volunteers, and to work on our affiliated boards. Although volunteers will be working in different areas of the Program, they will all be working toward the common goal of representing the best interests of Florida's abused and neglected children.

Pro Bono Attorney Recruitment. With the assistance of Chief Justice Quince and countless other members of Florida's Judiciary, the Program has been extremely successful at improving pro bono involvement of Florida's attorneys with children in the dependency system.

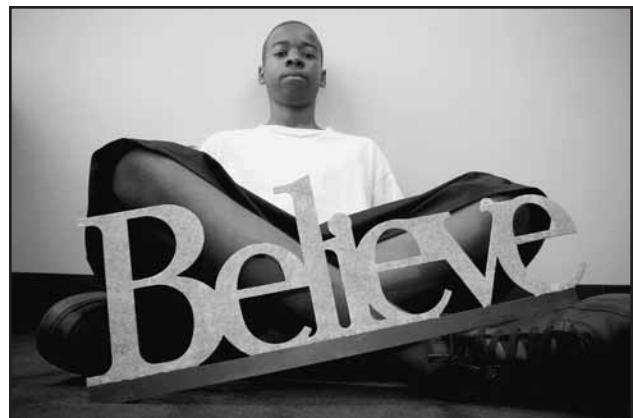
Cal Heusdens is one of those 10,000 Voices.

Our IT Director had recently resigned from the Program. Cal stepped in to rescue us. A former Department of Children and Families employee, that now works with the Northwood Shared Resource Center in Tallahassee, offered to help us examine and fix our systems. He spent hours in consultation and was the recipient of many phone calls as we restructured our systems. We cannot thank Cal enough for his invaluable support. Because of his assistance more dollars could be shifted to the community to have direct support for volunteers.

Each circuit worked with their local bar association, Judiciary, and non-profit board to reach out to local attorneys in an effort to recruit them as advocates. The Program organized numerous recruitment events and attended bar association meetings where members of the Judiciary and the Program explained the need for pro bono attorneys and addressed questions or concerns of the prospective volunteers. The Program streamlined the pro bono application process and the pro bono training has been tailored to meet the individual needs of each pro bono attorney depending on their experience and desired role.

These efforts have resulted in a significant increase in the number of pro bono attorneys working in the dependency system either as a Program volunteer or as an attorney ad litem for the child. Program staff has dedicated countless hours on a focused recruitment of attorney volunteers and designed individual training modules when appropriate to accommodate each attorney. Training modules are available on the Program's website (www.GuardianadLitem.org).

The Program has also partnered with Florida Children's First to recruit pro bono attorneys, specifically for children who have aged out of the foster care system and are in need of a "legal check-up."



Innovation Through Empowerment. The Program is not content to simply wait for volunteer growth and legislative action to improve our representation and our contribution to outcomes. The Program is constantly seeking new innovations by empowering our circuits and volunteers to think of creative ways to work with abused, abandoned, and neglected children. There have been some remarkable stories thus far. Of course, they tell only part of the story, but what a story!

- **Pet Advocacy Program.** Can you imagine a program where volunteers and their pets are screened and trained for therapeutic intervention? Well our staff in Jacksonville, the Fourth Judicial Circuit, did just that and created a Pet Advocacy Program in concert with Therapy Dogs, Inc.
- **Partnering with the Department of Corrections.** Learning of the need for volunteers in the Third Judicial Circuit, the Department of Correction's Warden and 14 of his staff members became certified volunteers representing 34 children. They made their training room available for the 30 hour certification and allowed the staff to attend training during their scheduled work hours.

- **Community Partners.** One of our Regional Directors was appointed as the Chair of the Seventh Judicial Circuit's Community Alliance, providing the Program a unique perspective and opportunity to influence system wide changes.
- **Creative Solutions for Everyone.** Who ever thought of adopting a 22 year old? Well, one of our West Palm Beach volunteers, with the full support of our GAL staff, did exactly that! That's true commitment to the children we serve and very creative thinking. This young adult has something that most of us take for granted: a permanent family and a place to call home.
- **Fund Raising.** Many of our affiliated, local non-profit organizations work with GAL offices to fill funding gaps for children in a variety of ways. Privately raised funds are used to supplement children's needs in medical, dental and psychological care, or used to provide normalcy activities for kids, and in some cases provide clothing or personal care items that are often in short supply.

Volunteer Support. Volunteers require significant support from volunteer supervisors, program attorneys, and support staff. To represent an additional 1,650 volunteers, and the nearly 3,400 additional children, an additional 64 employees are required. To support this growth, the Program has requested \$3,914,598 for Fiscal Year 2012/2013. In an effort to seek additional ways to support GALs, the Program is exploring partnerships with the Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association's GAL Program and corporate entities such as KForce, in Tampa to raise awareness and develop new sources of support.

Using Social Media to Support Volunteers, Staff, and for Recruitment. In an effort to expand the Program's ability to share best practices across the state and reach potential volunteers, the Program teamed with a community partner to develop multiple social media outlets. The Program now has a presence on Facebook, which is linked to a Program blog and Twitter page. Our Program can reach staff and volunteers instantly – creating a sense of community among volunteers and staff. Including social media in our arsenal of recruitment and support tools is the next step in reaching potential volunteers and keeping child welfare professionals aware of critical dependency issues.

The Program's website continues to be a go-to resource for staff, GALs, pro bono volunteers and child welfare professionals. The website is a powerful, effective and efficient tool to support volunteers, share best practices, and recruit potential volunteers. On the Program's website a volunteer can learn about issues critical to their case; a potential volunteer can fill out an application on-line and with a mouse click send it directly to the Program; an attorney can review statutes or even satisfy their continuing legal education requirements; volunteers can fill out court reports on-line and send them directly to their circuit office; pro bono attorneys can fulfill Program training requirements by watching training videos developed by experts across the state; and attorneys can review and search case summaries from 2004 to present and review Legal Briefs Newsletters.

The Program has partnered with Florida State University College of Communication and Information to develop a more user friendly and efficient website. Florida State University has donated their time and considerable talent to this endeavor. After surveys and focus groups are conducted students will develop a plan for a redesign of the website. The end-result will lead to an even better resource for Florida's child welfare professionals and volunteers.

Innovation in Action: The GAL Transportation Pilot Project. Based on feedback from volunteers, staff, and stakeholders, the Program has developed the GAL Transportation Pilot Project. The GAL Transportation Pilot Project has the twin goals of **fostering the relationship between the child and their GAL, and promoting normalcy for foster children**. No volunteer will ever be required to transport a child, and only carefully selected volunteers, who wish to transport, will be authorized to do so.

There are a variety of reasons why the Program adopted the GAL Transportation Pilot Project. The reality is that there are some clear benefits to permitting carefully vetted volunteers to transport children. Among these are:

Child safety. Child safety is the primary reason for instituting the GAL Transportation Pilot Project.

"As a CASA in California, I was permitted to transport. I remember at dinner, one girl disclosed to me that she was being sexually molested, (and) that she was in a 'place' with me where she felt safe."

Enhanced relationships. The bonding and trust that develops as a result of such shared experiences are more likely to result in disclosures by the child that provide the volunteer with insight into safety issues impacting the child.

One volunteer remembers the bond that developed when two little boys he took to McDonalds were beside themselves with excitement because it was the first time they had ever been to a "restaurant" to eat.

Improved communications. Meeting children on "their turf" gives them a sense of empowerment and has the ability to enhance a volunteer's ability to communicate with kids.

One volunteer remembers how his child, after listening to some of his favorite music on the car radio, began to relax and open up to him about things going on in his group home which were impacting the child's life.

Sense of Normalcy. Many of the everyday things that our own kids take for granted are not always something a dependent child can count on. By transporting children, volunteers can help bring these same childhood experiences back into the lives of our dependent kids.

Volunteer Retention. The satisfaction those volunteers who request and are approved to transport could enhance the volunteer experience.

"You have no idea how much you have helped our family; Things happen when you get involved; a four year old girl nearly knocks you over jumping up to give you a hug, and a little boy puts his arms around you, his head in your chest, and says, thank you, I feel like I have gotten a raise."



To use quantitative data and qualitative data, to demonstrate Guardian ad Litem advocacy correlates with improved case outcomes for children in the dependency system...

Information Sharing Across Agencies. The Program has consulted with both the Department of Children and Families (the Department) and the Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA), to determine efficient ways to share data to ensure that all parties are working with the same data, for the same outcomes. Outcomes can include how quickly a child reaches permanency, how efficiently referrals for needed services are made, or even how many dependent children return to the system. Information sharing is crucial because the Program shares in ALL of Florida's outcomes. Even when we choose, through necessity because of a lack of resources, to not accept a case, that act affects outcomes in ways that are not easily determinable.

As an example, the Program is involved in every adoption case and shares in adoption related outcomes as a full party to the case. The same can be said for residential treatment placements or Termination of Parental Rights trials where GAL testimony on manifest best interests has a direct effect on outcomes.

Quality Assurance System. The Program has also initially collaborated with the Department on their Quality Assurance System in an effort to further quantify outcomes. There is more work to do on this project, but it bears real promise on looking at issues that are unique to the role of the Program and GALs.

Quality Improvement Initiative. The Program recently developed a file based *Quality Improvement Initiative* that examines work product with a clear result in mind: "What was the impact of GAL involvement in the case?" The Quality Improvement Initiative process uses a combination of file based reviews and peer review of work product with the initial GAL team to discover how our advocacy could have been improved. One of the most important outcomes in child welfare is stability for the dependent child. In 2011, 68% of cases closed by the Program resulted in a permanent placement for the child. Using the Quality Improvement Initiative as well as training and other tools, the Program plans to improve these results, as stability and a permanent home are key elements in best interest representation.

Information Technology Improvement. The Program has begun a process to completely revise and reconstruct our GAL Tracker Program. GAL Tracker is a comprehensive database that assists staff in managing not only volunteer resources, but also assists them in managing critical child information and staff productivity. This software program has served the Program

well since 2004. However, GAL Tracker needs to be redeveloped to enhance our data capture capabilities: demonstrate outcomes, refine our case management and supervisory capabilities, build data links to important partners such as the Department and OSCA, eliminate redundant data entry, and improve our ability to calendar and track key events.

Infrastructure Redesign. Working closely with the management team at the Southwood Shared Resources Center (SSRC), the Program has nearly finalized a restructured approach to Information Technology (IT) in an effort to not only streamline our existing infrastructure, but to also take advantage of the cost effectiveness of centralizing IT support. The SSRC has helped the Program redesign and reduce IT architectural footprint by nearly 40% resulting in both cost savings and computing efficiencies. The redesign will improve our systems stability, update and eliminate redundancies in our hardware, and streamline our IT purchasing process. The Program is currently working with SSRC to integrate into a fully managed environment rather than our current shared management approach.

From a Program Attorney's Perspective. (*Child welfare has high turnover nationwide. It is not unusual for the volunteer GAL to be the only consistent person in the child's life and the person with the most knowledge about the case.*)

"The GAL Program went forward to terminate the parents' rights. Yesterday, while preparing two of my (non-Guardian ad Litem) witnesses, they both commented that they would not have had any historical information regarding the children if it wasn't for the volunteer who had been on this case since 2007. When they contacted the new case manager she told them to 'talk to the guardian, Sue.' She went on to tell them that Sue knows everything about the case. The therapist and the psychologist clearly attributed their ability to help the children to the hard work and knowledge of the GAL volunteer."

To implement a consistent core program of evidence based training for staff and Guardian ad Litem volunteers, which strengthens their ability to address the needs of children they represent...

With a generous grant from The Allegany Franciscan Ministries, staff and board members in both the Sixth Judicial Circuit and the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit have collaboratively developed two, new critically important trainings for staff.

- *Supervisory Training.* Although a critical part of a volunteer supervisor's job is training, they were likely hired because they were great case managers. Sometimes making that transition to supervision can be daunting and little training had existed in our Program to assist with that transition. The Supervisory Training program will change all of that with a directed four-day training that was developed and tested in both Clearwater and Tampa. Once private funding is found, this program will be rolled out to all volunteer supervisors.
- *Revised Volunteer Training Approach.* That same collaboration in the Sixth and Thirteenth Judicial Circuits' produced a new training program that enhances the method of our volunteer pre-certification training. Using our approved curriculum, through National CASA, this group devised a more experiential training approach to assist volunteers in making the transition from the theory of class work to real world application in the field.

To represent the best interest of the child, we help the family succeed:

There are many times when a volunteer works with the whole family in order to protect the best interests of a child. Such was the case with volunteer Russ Miller from the Seventh Judicial Circuit. Russ devoted many hours, gas mileage, and personal support, in assisting a Jordanian family in returning home to Jordan and getting their two boys reunified and out of the dependency system. He accompanied them to the airport and made sure that their itinerary and luggage were all taken care of. They have a chance to be a real family again.

Successful Collaboration. The Program has trained GALs on effective collaboration with lawyers and appropriate court room presentation.

Educational Advocacy. At this year's Pathway to Independence Summit hosted by the Department, the Program presented a training session for volunteers on educational advocacy

that addressed the basics of educational outcomes that all GALs should be addressing as well as more advanced topics on how a GAL can influence better educational outcomes. The Program will continue to present educational advocacy training for our staff and volunteers.

Legal Training. The Program continually seeks to enhance its legal advocacy to achieve better outcomes for children through on-going legal training on dependency-related topics and issues. Training of our program attorneys and pro bono attorneys continues to be a vital element in representing the best interests of children. Lawyers continue to be trained across the state. Case coordinators and GALs have joined lawyers in many of these trainings. Since October 2010, the Program has provided two new attorney trainings for all incoming lawyers. New attorneys have access to the New Attorney Training Module – an extensive program giving a new program attorney the basics they must know for successful representation – on the statewide website. Attorneys across the state have also had detailed training on termination of parental rights. In June, 2011, the supervising attorneys gathered for training on human resources issues, management skills, and a “Train the Trainer” session to better assist their attorneys in the circuits. Future trainings include; complex issues at disposition and protecting the child witness.

- *Monthly Training Calls.* The Program’s monthly attorney conference calls are a cost-effective method to ensure staff is aware of changes in the law, best practices, and current issues impacting Florida’s abused and neglected children. Continuing Legal Education credits are also available for attorneys which enables them to not only maintain good standing with The Florida Bar, but enable attorneys to receive the most up-to-date training on critical legal issues. All trainings are recorded and the audio files and associated materials are placed on the Program’s website.
- *Website Resources.* The Program’s website contains a database of legal resources for program attorneys including a Dependency Practice Manual, new attorney training, case law summaries, and practice bulletins which offer staff a comprehensive summary of legal case and topic. These resources are available to the public on the statewide website.
- *Pro Bono Attorney Training.* This year the Program partnered with experts across the state to create a series of instructional training videos for attorneys advocating for children in the dependency system. The instructors in each video are statewide experts in their field and provide a general overview to equip the advocate with the tools necessary to be an effective voice for children. Pro bono attorneys can complete the required dependency training at their convenience – from the statewide website.

Training Calls Included

Disability Rights
Child Hearsay
Effective Depositions: Laying the Landmines
Ethics in Dependency Court
TPR and the Developmentally Delayed Parent
Administrative Appeals
Parentage in Dependency

To advance the mission alignment and operational relationships among and between the Office of the Executive Director, the Circuits, the local Non-Profit Boards, and the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Foundation...

- **Memorandums of Understanding.** The Program is in the process of developing new Memorandums of Understanding with many of our local non-profits to encourage their growth and support of the Program and the volunteers and children we serve.
- **Success Stories.** The Program has several great success stories of support from our local non-profits that we believe can serve as models of support for others.

Voices for Children of Tampa Bay, Inc. provides three additional staff members for the benefit of our Program through private funding. This example of private/public partnership is what we believe the non-profit alignment is all about.

Miami's Voices for Children, Inc. provides support in the way of staff, marketing, and support for our volunteers.

Several non-profits provide gas cards to help volunteers offset the price of gasoline. Since many of our volunteers are on fixed incomes, this can be of great relief.

- **Volunteer Advisory Councils and Volunteer Recruiting Councils.** All circuits have either formed, or are in the process of forming both Volunteer Advisory Councils and Volunteer Recruiting Councils. These councils help to assist Circuit Directors in office management with emphasis on Volunteer Retention and also help to assist Circuit Directors in bringing in new volunteer resources. Both of these initiatives tap into the tremendous breadth of experience our current volunteers bring to our Program.

16 year-old Hector, desperately hoped to be reunified with his father in North Carolina, but child service's in North Carolina returned a negative home study on the father. It looked as if placement wasn't possible. Our volunteer learned that many of the facts used by North Carolina to produce their home study were in error, and working with our staff attorney, filed a motion to overrule that home study based upon the facts. Now Hector is living with his father. He is doing very well, getting to know his father's family, and is enrolled in school. This is one volunteer who did not give up.

About the Foundation

In 2007, the Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation (Foundation) was recognized in Florida Statutes § 39.8298, as the Direct Support Organization (DSO) for the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Program. The Foundation works to support the Program through private fundraising. The Foundation is wholly dedicated to providing additional resources sufficient to assure that 100% of Florida's abuse, abandoned, and neglected children served by the Program continue to receive the highest quality representation. The Foundation advocates for the Program, as well as promotes volunteer recruitment and retention. The Foundation hosts events like Guardian ad Litem Day and the Guardian ad Litem Awards Reception. These events encourage volunteers, staff, child welfare professionals, and stakeholders to come together for a luncheon and/or dinner, to celebrate the Program and its volunteers and to raise awareness as to the needs of dependent children.



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Conclusion

We are very excited about the future of the Program. We believe we can represent the best interests of all dependent children. In five years, we have a goal of representing 100% of Florida's abused and neglected children. We can reach this goal through better and creative approaches to volunteer recruitment, continued support and training of our volunteers and staff, and focusing on improving outcomes for dependent children. The Program will reach these goals while adhering to our mission, core values and long-range goals. We know that we need the help of our legislators, our community partners, our staff, and volunteers. Florida's children deserve our hard work and dedication toward the goal of 100% representation and nothing short of this is acceptable.



“WE CAN ALL WORK TO PAVE A POSITIVE PATH TO A CHILD’S FUTURE OF HOPE AND EMOTIONAL SECURITY. MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD IS ONE DEFINITION OF LEGACY.”

Alan F. Abramowitz

Florida Guardian ad Litem Program

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We would like to thank the Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation for funding
the cost of producing this report.