



Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation, Inc. Report to the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Program

Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation, Inc.

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THE FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM FOUNDATION WAS CREATED PURSUANT § 39.8298

Within the Justice Administrative Commission, the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Program (GAL Program), which has oversight responsibilities for and provides technical assistance to all guardian ad litem and attorney ad litem programs located within Florida’s twenty judicial circuits, was authorized to create a Direct Service Organization pursuant to § 39.8298, Florida Statutes.

FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM FOUNDATION MISSION AND RESULTS

Mission

The Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation’s (Foundation) mission is to provide additional resources for the GAL Program, its volunteers, and its affiliated circuit non-profit organizations in order to promote Guardian ad Litem representation for abused, neglected and abandoned children in Florida’s dependency system.

Results

Advocating and Creating Public Awareness of the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program

In an effort to support the GAL Program, it is essential that Floridians understand the importance of the GAL Program, as well as its reliance on volunteers to provide a voice for



Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation Report to GAL Program 2014

children in dependency court. The Foundation has maintained a public presence by supporting and participating in the Statewide Children's Week and Guardian ad Litem Day held annually in Tallahassee. Children's Week brings together organizations concerned with children's issues throughout the state of Florida.

The Foundation also supported the placement of billboards throughout Florida promoting the GAL Program and its mission.

The Foundation makes it a priority to support the GAL Program's legislative agenda through attendance at relevant committee and legislative staff meetings. This year the Foundation supported the passage of the *Keys to Independence Act*. The Bill, signed into law by Governor Scott, enables foster children who are at least 16 years of age to obtain automobile insurance and a driver's license through state support. The Foundation attended many committee meetings and organized 40 teams of child welfare supporters, including Youth SHINE, to meet with their legislators to discuss the bill as well as other legislative issues crucial to children in Florida's dependency system. Youth SHINE members also testified to the importance of the passage of the Keys to Independence Act.

Promoting Statewide GAL Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

Volunteers are crucial to the GAL Program. GAL volunteers represent the best interests of a child involved in Florida's dependency system. With ever changing social workers, schools and even foster parents, often times a GAL volunteer is the one constant in a dependent child's life. The Foundation supports the GAL Program's goal of 100 percent representation of all of Florida's dependent children. The Foundation supports GAL volunteer recruitment and retention by:

- supporting the Statewide GAL Recognition and Awards Banquet at the Department of Children and Families Annual Summit;
- conducting a survey of all Circuit Directors and the Statewide Volunteer Advisory Committee on additional volunteer training topics and events to be held throughout the state;
- attending volunteer recognition events throughout Florida to support the non-profit organizations located in the circuits;
- providing feedback to the GAL Program on resources that support ongoing volunteer training, opportunities and tools; and

Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation Report to GAL Program 2014

- supporting the placement of GAL Program billboards thorough the state.



Providing Financial Support to Meet the Needs of Abused and Neglected Children Who Are Represented by GAL Volunteer

Supporting the needs of Florida’s dependent children is a critical part of the Foundation’s mission. Whether through grants, individual or corporate donations, or time, the Foundation has continually worked to provide support to children involved in the GAL Program. One way the Foundation has supported such financial backing is by providing training sessions on engaging philanthropy for circuit directors. The Foundation met with over 100 people at the Department of Children and Families Dependency Summit last year to discuss how to effectively research and approach philanthropic entities. The Foundation also trained the attendees on estate giving – an essential tool in fund raising.

The Foundation also received and acknowledged donations from private individuals, corporations, foundations and bequests. Many of the donations received were through social media and networking within the community.

Finally, when a specific need was identified, the Foundation provided targeted support for unique and unfunded needs of children who are represented by GAL volunteers. The Foundation funded such things as clothing, school supplies, medical needs and money for activities related to normalcy for children represented by GAL volunteers.

FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM FOUNDATION PLANS FOR FISCAL YEARS 2014-2017

The Foundation's plans for the next three fiscal years supports the mission of the Foundation as well as the GAL Program. The Foundation will continue to develop statewide partnerships with private and philanthropic supporters to enhance GAL training and improve advocacy across Florida. These partnerships within the community not only will lead to a better understanding of the GAL Program but also the needs of Florida's abused and neglected children.

The Foundation will also assist the GAL Program with branding and public awareness of the GAL mission and recruitment of volunteers. The GAL Program has almost 10,000 volunteers but still needs more to ensure no child goes to dependency court without a voice. The Foundation will continue to fund billboards and continue to network within the community to raise awareness of the need for more GAL volunteers and of the importance of the GAL Program's work.

The Foundation will strengthen the network of local Guardian ad Litem foundations across the state, in support of a unified mission. Whether through shared conference calls, the Foundation website, emails, or meetings the Foundation will communicate with local non-profits to share best practices concerning fundraising, training and volunteer retention.

The Foundation will continue to sponsor events that recognize the leadership and the success of GAL Program staff and volunteers. The Foundation will also support statewide GAL volunteer training events ensuring GAL volunteers have the latest and best information. The Foundation will serve as a voice to the volunteers of how and where to get the best information and required continuing education.



Jane Soltis

CEO Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation