

THE FLORIDA  
GUARDIAN  
AD LITEM  
PROGRAM



25 YEARS  
1980-2005  
*of Child  
Advocacy*



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“ On behalf of the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program, I am proud to present our history in celebration of the Program’s 25th Anniversary. Thousands of volunteers and staff have dedicated themselves to building this Program over the past 25 years. We hope that the stories of the Program and the children we serve will move you to join us as we try to reach all 43,000 of Florida’s abused and neglected children. ”

— **Angela Orkin**  
*Executive Director*  
*Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office*

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JEB BUSH  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF FLORIDA

## Office of the Governor

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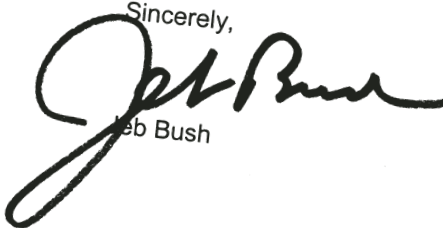
Dear Floridians:

Please join me in congratulating the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program on its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Few programs in our state have served so many for so long at such little cost to the taxpayer. The key to this program's success and longevity during these 25 years has been – and will always be – the volunteer. Volunteers like Guardian ad Litem Joan Lemosy, a volunteer in the Eighteenth Circuit for 24 years who takes books to the children every time she visits them or Rita Woodham, a Guardian ad Litem in the Fifth Circuit for 21 years who drives an hour each way every Sunday to visit the teen for whom she is a Guardian, are just two of the thousands of citizens who give selflessly of their time year after year as volunteer Guardians ad Litem. The positive impact volunteers have on these children is immeasurable and lasts a lifetime. I applaud all of them.

I encourage you to read this history of the Guardian ad Litem Program. Many of the early pioneers of the program are still involved and those interviewed for this retrospective all remarked that they will forever have a special place in their hearts for the program and the children it serves.

As the Guardian ad Litem Program has grown over these 25 years, so has our commitment to providing a Guardian for every abused, abandoned or neglected child. Recently, we established the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office. Now, more than ever, the Guardian ad Litem Program depends on dedicated volunteers. If you are a current Guardian, we thank you. If you were once a Guardian, we urge you to consider becoming one again. And if you have never been a Guardian, please consider volunteering. The future of Florida's abused and neglected children depends on us.

Sincerely,



Jeb Bush

Twenty-five years ago, before the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program was created, almost all of Florida's abused and neglected children went to court alone. Today, all of Florida's 20 judicial circuits have adopted and established local Guardian ad Litem Programs whose mission is to advocate for the best interests of children alleged to be abused, neglected or abandoned and involved in court proceedings. Approximately 4,600 individuals serve as Guardian ad Litem (GAL) volunteers and over 21,000 children are represented by the Program. The Guardian ad Litem Program performs many important functions, including:



**INFORMATION GATHERER:** Collects all pertinent information and interviews family, friends, neighbors and other persons involved in the child's life.

**COMMUNITY ADVOCATE:** Works with community partners to ensure that the child is receiving the assistance and support needed to be successful.

**COURTROOM ADVOCATE:** Makes independent recommendations to the court based upon the information gathered, advocates for the best interests and protects the legal interests of the child.

What has occurred over the past 25 years to make this once novel idea develop into a prominent and necessary role in our court system today? The following account chronicles the growth of the Guardian ad Litem Program in Florida and demonstrates why its impact has been so long-lasting and far-reaching.



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“ The GAL is the only one in the courtroom and in the case whose only job is the best interest of the child... I just think a lot of people misunderstand... the dire need for a GAL in every case and misunderstand what the Guardian ad Litem Program can do for children that are in the system. And they are not just nice to have; they are a must have. ”

— Circuit Judge Daniel Dawson  
*Ninth Judicial Circuit*

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In 1974, concerned about the alarming number of reported incidents of child abuse and neglect, the United States Congress passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, which was the first comprehensive federal legislation dealing with these issues. Among other things, this Act provided funds to states to appoint Guardians ad Litem to represent abused and neglected children. This federal Act supplied the impetus for the Florida Legislature to become the nation's leader in providing GAL representation statewide. As a result of both the federal law and the efforts of dedicated child advocates, in 1975, the

Florida Legislature passed legislation authorizing – but not requiring – courts to appoint a GAL in cases alleging child abuse.



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“ If we didn’t have a Guardian ad Litem Program, I can’t imagine what would be happening to children today. ”

— Audrey Schiebler

*Key advocate before the Legislature to secure funding for the Guardian ad Litem Program in 1980 and first Program Director in the Eighth Judicial Circuit*

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Around the time these developments occurred in Florida, Seattle Judge David Soukup came up with an idea that began a child advocacy movement and changed America's judicial procedure for over a million children. In 1977, Judge Soukup obtained funding to recruit and train community volunteers to advocate on behalf of children; these individuals were known as Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers and the movement spread nationally. The Florida Guardian ad Litem Program is now a member of the National CASA Association.

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“ We had a case where an eight-year old child was terminally ill. She was put into a home with a family that adored her... They were very devoted and wanted to adopt her, even though they knew that her death was imminent. She wanted to be adopted by them – that was her wish; she wanted so much to be part of this family and to have her name legally changed... With the appeals it seemed that there really wasn't going to be enough time to get her adopted. So, while she was in the hospital literally on death's door, the GAL had a pretend adoption ceremony. The child said that she was afraid that her adoptive parents wouldn't be able to find her in heaven because she wouldn't have their name. Now you know we were going to get this kid adopted if we had to do it – she had to die knowing that she was part of that family. ”

— Arlene Friedman  
Program Director – Fifteenth Judicial Circuit



In the late 1970's, Florida law changed from merely authorizing courts to appoint a GAL in child abuse and neglect proceedings to requiring them to do so. Because sufficient funding for GALs was not provided, some counties attempted to meet the need by using private attorneys, private foundations and other government agencies. In addition, there was an attempt to provide these services through the offices of Florida's public defenders. Because of concerns with all of these models, many state and local officials continued to explore alternatives for providing GAL services. Three specific areas began using lay volunteers:

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IN JACKSONVILLE, *the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) established a CASA Program based on the national model. The program began when, in 1979, the Jacksonville section of the NCJW, headed by **Arlene Friedman**, was awarded one of three NCJW grants in the country to start a CASA program. According to organizers, one of the key components working in Jacksonville's favor in receiving the grant was the tremendous support of its judges, particularly **Judge Dorothy Pate** and **Judge Louis Safer**. The first CASA office in Jacksonville was physically located in the State Attorney's office and it opened its doors in January 1980, only three months after the grant application was made. The grant mandated there be at least twenty volunteers and that they receive six hours of training. This project was led by **Helene Coleman**, who took the first case herself and told all of her friends that they had to attend the first training session. When the NCJW grant funding ended eighteen months later, the CASA program dovetailed into the Guardian ad Litem Program. The first director of this local Guardian ad Litem program was **Mary Ann Hazel**, who stayed until 1985. She was followed as director by Friedman, who remained in that position until 2001, when she became the program director in the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, where she continues today.*



IN GAINESVILLE, the Alachua County Coalition on Child Abuse began a Guardian ad Litem Program, led by **Audrey Schiebler** and **Carole Zegel**, both of whom got involved through the Junior League. When the program began, Schiebler volunteered to handle the administration of the program and worked from a room in the back of **County Court Judge Jeanne D. Crenshaw's** office. After the Legislature provided funding in 1980, Schiebler became the first director for the Eighth Judicial Circuit's program and Zegel became the first GAL in Alachua County. Schiebler stayed as the director until 1985, when she retired, and Zegel was chosen as the second director. Both Schiebler and Zegel helped spread the word nationally of Florida's success with the volunteer GAL model.

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IN MIAMI, volunteers from the Junior League and the NCJW organized a Children in Placement (CIP) program to monitor court files of children in foster care for the judges' information. The CIP volunteers found that in Miami, about 40% of the children had files opened in the Clerk's Office, but the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (the government agency who at that time was charged with the protection of abused and neglected children) did not have files on them or know their whereabouts. The CIP program thereby showed the need for a GAL Program in Miami. Accordingly, when the idea for a GAL Program was being considered in Tallahassee, two CIP volunteers joined the effort – **Nan Rich**, who had gotten involved through the NCJW; and **Berta Blecke**, who had gotten involved through the Junior League. The Program opened in Miami in 1981 and Rich and Blecke were both among the first volunteers. In 1982, **Joni Goodman** was hired as the Eleventh Judicial Circuit's GAL Program Director and she remains in that position to this day.



Based upon the successes of these early volunteer models, representatives from around the State came to Tallahassee in 1980 to lobby the Florida Legislature for funds for a volunteer Guardian ad Litem Program. That year, the Legislature provided \$200,000 to the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) to develop and evaluate a pilot program using lay volunteers to serve as GALs. In so doing, Florida became the first state to use general revenue funds to develop a statewide volunteer Guardian ad Litem Program. The first project director, Ellen Hoffenberg was hired to design training materials and oversee the implementation of the state Guardian ad Litem Program. Within the first year, the Program had been at least partially implemented in ten judicial circuits (First, Second, Fourth, Sixth, Eighth, Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth, Eighteenth, and Twentieth). The Program was organized under the judicial branch, with statewide oversight of the programs delegated to OSCA.

The local Guardian ad Litem Programs functioned independently, each under the local jurisdiction of the circuit court. At the end of the first year, the programs had trained 407 volunteers and had represented 1,026 children in abuse and neglect proceedings. An independent evaluation of this pilot project done in 1981 concluded that the volunteer model was likely to be the most feasible, the least expensive and the most effective means of providing representation to abused and neglected children. Based upon this evaluation, OSCA recommended, and the Florida Legislature funded, continued implementation of the lay volunteer model and the Legislature appropriated money for the eventual expansion of the program to the remaining judicial circuits.





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“ There were three girls; the oldest was 12 or 13. The kids were very despondent and upset; especially the older girl... Later, when the case was all over, I was in the mall and I saw the oldest girl. She had just finished high school and was going to college. She didn't know what she would do in life, but she said that one of the things that she was going to do was something for children. She said she wanted to do something like I had done because without me, she said she never could have made it. She also had told me that she had thought of taking her life and I helped her realize that she was important.”

— Dorothy Kinkey  
*Guardian ad Litem Volunteer  
in the First Circuit for 21 years*

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By January 1990, all of Florida's judicial circuits had implemented a volunteer Guardian ad Litem Program, including the Orange County Bar Association's program that utilizes pro bono attorneys. During the time period between 1990 and 2004, the program experienced tremendous growth as well as many challenges.

## Chiles vows Guardian Ad Litem program will not feel the budget ax

(Tallahassee, FL) – Gov. Lawton Chiles said Monday he will “guarantee that a \$3-million state program that represents abused and neglected children in court proceedings will not be affected by the state’s budget cuts.”

“I’m going to guarantee you are not going to be cut,” Chiles assured the hushed crowd of 250 workers and volunteers with the Guardian Ad Litem program.

Carrying candles, they had walked solemnly up Adams Street on Monday evening and waited 45 minutes under moss-draped oaks at the Governor’s Mansion.

The crowd was protesting the possibility that the state program – administered by

the court’s 20 judicial circuits – would end in light of a \$21.5-million cut the judiciary system was asked to make...

During a rally earlier Monday in support of the program, about 350 workers and volunteers marched to the Capitol courtyard carrying brightly colored balloons and strung-together paper dolls representing the children whom the program has helped.

– *Tallahassee Democrat*  
October 21, 1991

One of the areas in which the Program evolved during this time is with the addition of program attorneys and staff advocates. As the Department of Children and Families and the parents were given attorneys to represent them in court, it became apparent that the Program also needed attorneys to assist volunteers and staff in the representation of children. The program attorneys represent the best interests and protect the legal interests of children in all phases of court proceedings from trial through the appellate process. The increase in program attorneys has enabled the Program to participate more meaningfully in decision-making throughout the child's case. Around the same time that program attorneys were being added to the Guardian ad Litem Program, there was a recognition that when a volunteer was not available, a staff advocate should be appointed to represent the best interest of the child. These staff advocates work in conjunction with the program attorney to advocate effectively for the child.



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“ The biggest and probably the best change is most of the counties have their own lawyers, which is very good... We did a lot of things on our own... without a lot of legal help... we didn't have somebody to come and guide us through these hearings... Now we have our staff attorneys. ”

— Rita Woodham  
*Guardian ad Litem Volunteer in the  
Fifth Judicial Circuit for 21 Years*

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In May 2002, Governor Jeb Bush established a Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Protection to review the performance of the State's child protection system in Miami-Dade County and to examine the case of Rilya Wilson, who was discovered missing from state care. Following public testimony, the panel submitted its report to the Governor with recommendations for improving oversight and accountability of child welfare services within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Among other things, the panel recommended that the Florida Legislature set among its highest priorities the full funding of the Guardian ad Litem Program such that every child under the supervision of DCF could have a GAL. As the Panel concluded, “if there is any program that costs the least and benefits the most, this one is it.” In addition, the Panel found the Guardian ad Litem to be “an indispensable intermediary between the child and the court, between the child and DCF.”

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“Improvements to our Guardian ad Litem Program must go beyond the administrative functions — we must also help raise the awareness of community members... To benefit the precious children in our state, local communities and citizens should be made more aware of the state’s child welfare needs and more involved in the solutions. While government alone cannot replace a loving family, we all have a responsibility to provide safety and nurturing to each and every child who enters the foster care system.”

— Florida Governor Jeb Bush  
September 16, 2002

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Based upon the recommendation of his Panel, the Governor established a working group to recommend a plan of action for realizing the full potential of the Guardian ad Litem Program. In 2003, the Legislature provided both for the transfer of the Guardian ad Litem Program to the Justice Administrative Commission and also for the appointment of a full-time executive director to oversee the program statewide. On January 1, 2004, the Guardian ad Litem Program was transferred out of the state court system and a statewide office was established to oversee the 21 local Guardian ad Litem Programs. Angela Orkin was appointed by Governor Bush to serve as the office's first Executive Director.



Not only did the support of Florida's public officials for the Guardian ad Litem Program strengthen during this time period, but the community's support of the program expanded during this time, as well. One example of this increased community support was the development of non-profit organizations for each of the local Guardian ad Litem Programs. Today, almost every local Guardian ad Litem Program is affiliated with a non-profit that assists the Program. Non-profit funds are used for volunteer GAL appreciation events, reimbursing volunteers for certain case-related expenses, and financing an array of activities and emergency needs for children represented by Guardian ad Litem Programs (e.g., tutoring, counseling, summer camp, dancing lessons, eyeglasses, clothing). Following are some examples of the great things that non-profits are doing for children:

*A 17-YEAR OLD FOSTER CHILD was invited to her first Homecoming Dance. The foster parents could not afford to buy her a dress and so it seemed that she was not going to be able to attend. The GAL asked the local non-profit organization to provide the funds for the dress and the non-profit agreed. The caseworker and the GAL took her shopping and bought her a beautiful dress with long black gloves. Needless to say, she had the time of her life!*



*A 15-YEAR OLD FOSTER CHILD was embarrassed because she could not read on the level of her classmates. The local non-profit is paying for tutoring for her and since she started the tutoring, she has jumped two grade levels and, according to her teacher, her self-confidence has improved as well.*

A 17-YEAR OLD WAS GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL *and needed help purchasing her cap and gown package to be part of the graduation ceremonies. There was no other agency or means to pay for the package. The GAL requested the non-profit organization pay for her cap and gown package, and they agreed.*



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“ These children are so appreciative of anything you do for them. And when you see those eyes light up and they really are so grateful for little things that people do – or just the smile on their face. What more could you ask for? ”

— Jerri Davis  
Guardian ad Litem Volunteer in the  
Nineteenth Judicial Circuit for 16 years

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In addition to the development of the local non-profits, another way in which community support for the program expanded during this time period was with the founding of the Florida Guardian ad Litem Association, which was established as a statewide organization in 2001. The mission of this non-profit organization is to improve the lives of abused and neglected children in Florida by promoting the development, expansion and improvement of Guardian ad Litem Programs.



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“ There are so many cases when everyone else came and went in their lives but [as a guardian ad litem] I was the person that they could always count on to be there. ”

— Mag McGauley  
*Guardian ad Litem Volunteer and  
Executive Director of the  
Florida Guardian ad Litem Association*

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“ I have just been in awe over these years of the people that have come to work for the program and that have been the directors. I’m just so proud that we have younger people who are coming up through the ranks who will continue the program with that integrity, with that credibility, with that diehard center of what’s in the child’s best interest... that vision which I think the program has and I think that the directors have always had. ”

— Debbie Kinsey  
*Program Director – Third Judicial Circuit*

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Over the past 25 years, thousands of volunteers and staff statewide have selflessly dedicated themselves to providing high quality advocacy for the abused and neglected children of Florida. Everyone associated with the Guardian ad Litem Program in Florida should feel great pride in and satisfaction about the program's accomplishments. Despite these tremendous accomplishments, there is much left to do. Currently in Florida, over 21,000 children are still in need of a GAL. The program is working to ensure that every child in Florida is represented. This can only occur through the many efforts under way including achieving efficiencies among the circuits through the statewide office, establishing public-private partnerships, securing state funding, and increasing volunteer recruitment and retention.



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“ I think the Guardian ad Litem Program is really good and I think that anybody who has Miss Dot [volunteer GAL] in their life should feel very special and very privileged because she is a very special lady. I will always love her for the rest of my life because she helped me. If it wasn't for her, I don't know where I would be right now.”

— Tina Hines

Age 24 - represented by a GAL as a child

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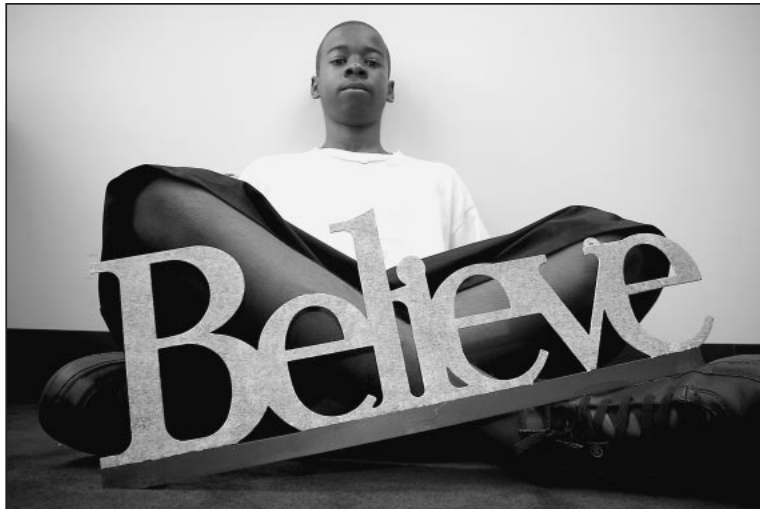


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“ In the beginning, it used to make me feel good because I felt like I was doing something. Its not about me anymore – its about the children. Somebody has to do it. I haven’t won all of my cases; I’ve lost a couple. But I keep trudging along. If I can help one child, I’ve made a difference.”

— Cynthia Crowe  
*Guardian ad Litem Volunteer  
in the Twelfth Circuit for 21 years*

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## Be a Guardian “Angel” to Make a Difference

(Pasco County, FL) – There is little notoriety in serving as a guardian ad litem, a court-appointed volunteer who looks out for the interests of children involved in judicial proceedings.

But, by and large, the volunteers toil in anonymity as they advocate on behalf of children. With that obscurity comes a dilemma. There are more children in need than there are volunteers to assist.

It's an ambitious task, but one worth helping the state try to achieve. Just ask Jody Mitchell of New Port Richey. She has been a Guardian ad Litem to 30 children over the past 10 years. A few weeks ago, she bumped into one of her former charges while shopping. The now young adult had been one of

her cases about five years ago. She didn't know if he remembered her, so she smiled, nodded and kept walking.

“A few minutes later I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the young man. He said, ‘I remember you. You helped me so much, you were my guardian angel.’”

“That's why I do it,” Mitchell said. “Guardians ad Litem can make such a difference in a child's life.”

– *The St. Petersburg Times*  
May 12, 2005

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“ Its been proven how important it is to have someone in the court who is specifically there to protect the best interests of the child... Every day when you read the newspaper... when you look at cases where children have fallen through the cracks, they have fallen through the cracks to a large degree because they haven't had one person there to represent their best interest. And that's what the Guardian ad Litem Program does. In representing the best interests, its clear that we actually save lives and ultimately help children become productive citizens. I think that its just one of the finest programs that we have in the state of Florida. ”

— **Florida State Senator Nan Rich**  
*One of the founders of the Guardian ad Litem  
Program in Miami and sponsor of the 2003 bill  
creating the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office*



Abused and neglected children in Florida need your help. The promise of a Guardian ad Litem is made by the Florida Statutes. For its entire history, the Program has struggled to fulfill this promise to Florida's children but has been unable to meet the need. In most local programs, not all the children have a GAL. In others, programs endeavor to reach more children by periodically discharging from cases before the child reaches permanency. We must do better for children who have had too many promises broken already.

*There are many ways you can join us:*



- Volunteer – we are seeking lay volunteers and pro bono attorneys
- Support your local non-profit organization
- Join the Florida Guardian ad Litem Association ([www.flgal.org](http://www.flgal.org))



- Become a corporate partner
- Talk to your elected officials about the importance of the Guardian ad Litem Program

The program has come so far in its first 25 years, but we have much work left to do for Florida's abused and neglected children. Will you join us? Please call **1-866-341-1GAL** or visit **[www.guardianadlitem.org](http://www.guardianadlitem.org)**.

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“ The importance of Guardian ad Litem cannot be overstated because its impact reaches far beyond just the individual children’s cases that they work on. Because of [the GAL program], we now have a surge of community interests and community involvement in advocacy... policy advocacy, budget advocacy, and community involvement. ”

— Jack Levine  
*President, Advocacy Resources*

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*We give special thanks to the following individuals for their time and contributions to the Guardian ad Litem Program 25th Anniversary Project:*

Cynthia Anderson

Patricia Arnhold

Chuck Auten

The Honorable Rosemary Barkett

Berta Blecke

Dot Binger

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Joni Goodman

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Tina Hines

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Debbie Kinsey

The Honorable Lawrence Korda

Susan Lamb

Joan Lemosy

Rosa Lombardi

Jack Levine

Mag McGauley

Nadine Miller

The Honorable Dorothy Pate

Marilyn Rhein-Kollar

The Honorable Nan Rich

Donna Rhodes

Ruth Santomassino

Don Schaffer

Audrey Schiebler

John Vanilla

Rita Woodham

Carole Zegel



*We also thank the following local GAL non-profit organizations for their support:*

**Circuit 1**

Child Guardians, Inc.

**Circuit 2**

Child Advocates II

**Circuit 3**

Voices for Children of the Suwanee Valley

**Circuit 4**

First Coast Child Advocates

**Circuit 5**

Voices for Children, Inc. (Ocala)  
Advocating for Kids, Inc.

**Circuit 6**

Suncoast Voices for Children  
Speaking Up For Children, Inc.

**Circuit 7**

Kids are First, Inc.

**Circuit 8**

Guardian Foundation, Inc.

**Circuit 9**

Friends of Osceola Children, Inc.

**Circuit 10**

Speak Up for Children

**Circuit 11**

Voices for Children Foundation, Inc.

**Circuit 12**

Childrens' Guardian Fund, Inc.

**Circuit 13**

Voices for Children of Hillsborough  
County, Inc.

**Circuit 14**

Advocates for Children, Inc.

**Circuit 15**

Foundation for Child Advocates of Palm  
Beach County

**Circuit 16**

Voices for Florida Keys Children

**Circuit 17**

H.A.N.D.Y.

**Circuit 18(s)**

Seminole County Friends of Abused  
Children

**Circuit 18(b)**

Friends of Children of Brevard County,  
Inc.

**Circuit 19**

Guardians for New Futures, Inc.

**Circuit 20**

Voices for Kids of Southwest Florida

*For further information, please call 1-866-341-1GAL or visit [www.guardianadlitem.org](http://www.guardianadlitem.org)*



To learn more about The Guardian  
ad Litem Program, please call  
**1-866-341-1GAL** or visit  
**[www.guardianadlitem.org](http://www.guardianadlitem.org)**

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