



GAL

Guardian ad Litem Foundation
FOR CHILDREN

**FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM
FOUNDATION**



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

July 28, 2017

Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation, Inc.

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Fiscal Year 2016-17 Citizen Support and Direct-Support Organization Report on the Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation, Inc.

THE FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM FOUNDATION WAS CREATED PURSUANT TO § 39.8298

Within the Justice Administrative Commission, the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office (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 20 judicial circuits, was authorized to create a Direct Support Organization pursuant to § 39.8298, Florida Statutes.

FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM FOUNDATION MISSION AND RESULTS

Mission

The Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation's (the 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

Advocacy and Generating Public Awareness of the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program

In order to assist in support of the Guardian ad Litem Program, it is essential that GAL Program is promoted in a manner that enables all Floridians the opportunity to understand the vital role that the GAL Program performs in our communities. With a reliance on attracting and retaining quality volunteers to advocate for foster care children it is imperative that the GAL Program is visible and promoted. The GAL Foundation has maintained and increased its public presence by supporting and participating in the Statewide Children's Week held each March in Tallahassee. The GAL Foundation is also very involved in the Children's Week Dinner which brings together over 400 leading child welfare professionals.

The GAL Foundation also developed a public service announcement (PSA) that features Florida University Head Baseball Coach Mike Martin and his wife Carol. Coach Martin is one of the most accomplished and revered college baseball coaches in the country. The Martins have graciously agreed to be the spokespersons for the GAL Foundation.



(L-R: Alan Abramowitz, Carol Martin, Mike Martin, Eric Clark)

Promoting Statewide GAL Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

Guardians ad Litem provide critical advocacy on behalf of children in the dependency system. For many abused children, a GAL volunteer is the only constant adult presence in their lives.

In addition to the 30 hours of required volunteer training that is conducted by the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Program, the Foundation has developed regional training events for GAL volunteers. These trainings sponsored by Sunshine Health gave GAL volunteers expanded knowledge on topics such as: Children's Healthcare and Eligibility, Information Regarding DCF Safety Methodology and the Hotline, A Judges' Perspective from the Bench, and A Mock Trial with GAL Attorneys. To date over four hundred GAL volunteers have attended these regional trainings. Two additional regional trainings are scheduled in October 2017 and should attract over two hundred more GAL volunteers.

As a small measure of the gratitude that the Foundation has for the GAL volunteers, a recognition program has been instituted for volunteers with twenty-five years of service. This initial event recognized forty-one volunteers who had twenty-five years or more of

service to the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program. Each award recipient received a GAL themed watch and was publicly recognized at a local GAL event. Through this initiative, the GAL Foundation not only hopes to recognize the tremendous contribution of our long-term volunteers but also increase retention of volunteers throughout the organization.

Increasing Size and Scope of GAL Foundation Board of Directors

Realizing the importance of a vibrant and diverse board of directors is an area of on-going focus for the GAL Foundation. The number of board members has increased in the past year as well as their geographic location. The board of directors has members located in Miami, West Palm Beach, Jacksonville, Gainesville, Orlando, Kissimmee, and Tallahassee. Candidates are currently being identified in Tampa and Pensacola.

Bringing Non-Profits Together

The GAL Foundation also serves as a resource for twenty local non-profit organizations (“non-profits”) that support the individual GAL Programs in the circuits. In the 2017 Legislative Session, the GAL Foundation worked to ensure issues important to the non-profits and GAL Program were represented in the Florida Legislature. Fourteen non-profits contributed to this initiative and began meeting to ensure their voices were represented during the legislative session.

Monthly conference calls are conducted to share information with the non-profits. Increased communication between the GAL Foundation and local non-profits has generated positive results and the GAL Foundation is viewed as a valuable resource for the local GAL Programs and the non-profits that support them.

A meeting of the Foundation and the twenty local non-profit organizations was held on May 3, 2017 in Orlando. Over sixty non-profit board members representing fourteen non-profits attended a half day event that focused on strategic planning. This will become an annual event and will focus on issues that are relevant to the success of all parties participating.



Providing Financial Support to Meet the Needs of Abused and Neglected Children

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 represented by the GAL Program.

The Foundation received and acknowledged donations from private individuals, corporations, foundations and bequests. Many of the donations received were derived through social media and networking within the community. The Foundation actively writes proposals for grants from foundations located in Florida.

When a child-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 medical needs and money for activities related to normalcy.

With funding from the Jim Moran Foundation, the Fostering Futures training will be offered to GAL volunteers in Duval and Nassau counties. The focus of this training is to improve outcomes for youth 14-21 years of age. The Fostering Futures Program is intended to train GAL volunteers to develop a professional relationship with older youth, investigate their needs, identify gaps and facilitate needed services.

The Fostering Futures initiative is a “blended” or two -part curriculum that includes 1) an e-learning experience and 2) an in-person training. Together, these modules are designed to give volunteers a solid base of knowledge and skills to advocate on behalf of youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who may be required to emancipate from (or “age out of”) the foster care system.

PLANS FOR THE NEXT THREE FISCAL YEARS

The Foundation’s plans for the next three fiscal years focus on 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 continue its partnership with Sunshine Health to provide Regional Volunteer Conferences through 2017. Additionally over the next three fiscal years, the Foundation has the following plans:

- The Foundation will assist the GAL Program with branding and public awareness of the GAL mission and recruitment of volunteers.
- The Foundation will strengthen the network of local Guardian ad Litem non-profits 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 seek funding to provide Fostering Futures training in all twenty judicial circuits.
- 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 resource to the volunteers on how and where to get the best information and required continuing education.

The Foundation will adhere to all applicable state and federal rules and regulations that govern IRS 501 (c) 3 non-profit organizations. The Foundation Code of Ethics and IRS Form 990 are attached to this report and will be available online at the Foundation website, www.flgal.org.

Sincerely,



Eric Clark
Chief Executive Officer
Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation