



DECEMBER 2018



**GUARDIAN  
AD LITEM  
FOR CHILDREN**

**NEWSLETTER**

### FEATURED

*What should we  
call our Newsletter?  
We are asking **YOU**  
to name it!*

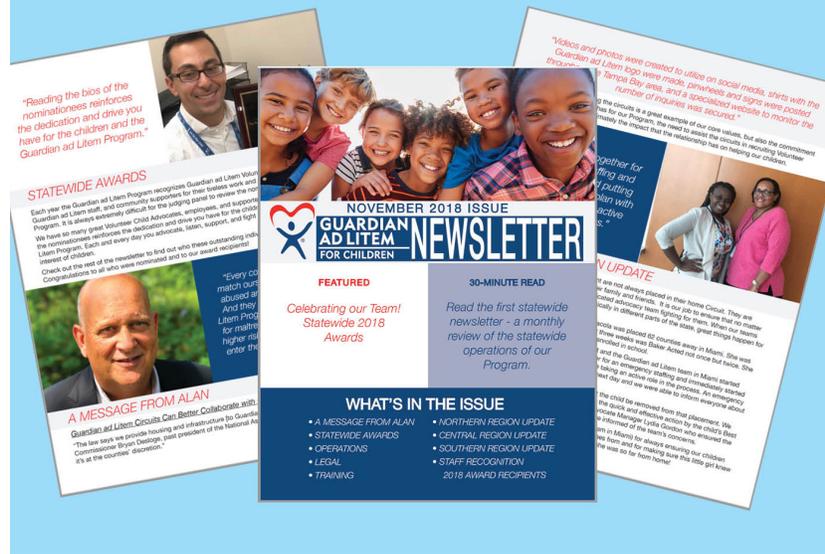
### STAY INFORMED

*Read and get updated  
on what's happening  
Statewide!*

## WHAT'S IN THE ISSUE

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*“We appreciate your feedback (regarding the Newsletter) and we could not produce this newsletter without each of you.”*



## **STATEWIDE OFFICE NAME OUR NEWSLETTER!**

Welcome to the second issue of the Guardian ad Litem Newsletter. We have received great comments from quite a few of you about how much you enjoyed reading the newsletter. We appreciate your feedback and we could not produce this newsletter without each of you.

So, while we continue to “travel down the road” of trying new things, why stop?

We want to name our newsletter and we need YOU to help us!

Before the next newsletter is published we would like to select a new name for the newsletter. Please send your newsletter name ideas to [Kelly.Razzano@gal.fl.gov](mailto:Kelly.Razzano@gal.fl.gov) by close of business Friday, December 14 and be sure to title your email subject line: Newsletter Name Submission.

There will be a panel to select the winning name and that person will receive a \$25.00 gift card courtesy of the Guardian ad Litem Foundation (thank you Eric!)

Go ahead and submit your newsletter name today! We are looking forward to your creative and fantastic ideas!

*“We want to name our newsletter and we need YOU to help us!... Go ahead and submit your newsletter name today!”*



*“The Program has three budgetary priorities... We also have two substantive bills...(and) The Program is also refiling the “Year is a Long Time in the Life of a Child Act””*

## **A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ALAN ABRAMOWITZ** **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Legislative session begins in March, but we’re already working on a legislative agenda to provide high quality representation to more children and change the laws so kids reach safer, permanent homes sooner.

The Program has three budgetary priorities. First, we’re seeking funding for additional staff to represent children. Our request targets circuits that have experienced the most dramatic increases in children coming into care.

Second, we’re seeking funding for a certification program for Child Advocate Managers. Under the auspices of the Florida Certification Board, we will develop a certification program akin to that required by DCF and the CBCs. The idea is to create uniform quality and ethical standards, competency testing, and professional development on child welfare issues. We’re hoping to increase professional development opportunities and retention among current staff and attract qualified, capable applicants in the future.

Third, given the importance of providing children with a steady advocate and consistent adult in their lives, we’re asking for the funding to reimburse travel for Volunteer Child Advocates to be a “recurring appropriation.” Currently this funding must be requested and refunded annually.

We also have two substantive bills. The “Charting a Positive Path for a Child’s Future” bill addresses dependent children involved in multiple court proceedings, particularly those in different circuits. The goal is to ensure judges have the best information and can tailor services to the community where the child will return.

The bill allows guardianship petitions to be filed either in the county where the child resides or a dependency case is pending. For dependency/delinquency crossover youth, we’re suggesting the dependency court and Guardian ad Litem get notice and a chance to provide input in the delinquency proceeding.

The Program is also refiling the “Year is a Long Time in the Life of a Child Act” which revises Chapter 39 to improve communication among stakeholders and hold all parties accountable for taking proactive steps toward permanency and meeting deadlines established in the law.



*“Be proud of what you are accomplishing for the children in your community! The work is difficult and exhausting, but the benefits are life changing. ”*

## **OPERATIONS** **MEASURING OUR IMPACT**

The Guardian ad Litem Program has positively impacted the lives of children in Florida – this is an undeniable truth. But how do we measure the impact? Can data tell the story of our advocacy for children? When asked, Guardian ad Litem staff responded that the following top data points could tell our advocacy story:

- Number of Children we Represent
- Number of Volunteer Child Advocates representing these Children
- Number of Children reaching permanency and not re-entering the system
- Number of Miles and Hours donated by our Volunteer Child Advocates
- Savings to the State of Florida

Here is what this data tells us:

10,157 Volunteer Child Advocates represented 25,254 children with the help of staff  
[Representation Report 9/30/18]

95.7% of children reaching permanency did not re-enter the system within 12 months  
[PASS 9/2018]

Volunteer Child Advocates drove 242,496 miles and spent 27,759 hours  
advocating for children  
[Optima Report 9/1/18-9/30/18]

Conservatively our Volunteer Child Advocates saved the State of Florida \$550,842<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Based on State of Florida mileage reimbursement rate .44 per mile and wages \$16 per hour

Be proud of what you are accomplishing for the children in your community! The work is difficult and exhausting, but the benefits are life changing.

Take time to review your story:

[Click here to view data for your County or Circuit](#) - To view Volunteer Child Advocate miles and hours go to the Volunteer Child Advocate Mileage/Expenses/Hours Report in your Circuit.



*“Our strategic goal: For the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program’s brand to be consistent and to be understood effectively and efficiently.”*

## ***MEDIA AND MARKETING***

# ***EXCITING NEW PROGRAM INITIATIVES***

During the recent Media-Marketing Circuit visits, extensive public, staff and volunteer feedback and analysis have shown that the public has a difficult time engaging with our Program’s messaging, which leads to misinterpretations regarding what we do as a Program.

As we develop our new media, marketing and messaging strategic plan, we will be rolling out several initiatives prior to the plan presentation and implantation in 2019. The first of those initiatives are changes to our Program’s messaging and media language. Our strategic goal: For the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program’s brand to be consistent and to be understood effectively and efficiently.

Our new language strategies and initiatives include:

### **A. Transitioning from using “GAL” to Guardian ad Litem**

Reasons: Because the word ‘gal’ means woman; to clarify the public’s (who do not know about our Program) perception that we are a program that seeks to recruit only females; so we don’t have to explain what the acronym GAL represents; for our Program to have name recognition and consistency.

### **B. Transitioning from using “GAL Volunteer” to Volunteer Child Advocate**

Reasons: Allows for a clear understanding of what our volunteers do: they are advocates who represent the child; empowers the word “volunteer” and not just used as a passive noun.

### **C. Withdrawing the use of “I am for the Child” from public messaging**

Reasons: To stop public’s confusion concerning the term “I am for the Child”; the phrase misinterprets our Programs purpose (ex: as a teacher’s organization and/or as an infant’s rights organization); National CASA is shifting away from the “I am for the Child” messaging.

Moving forward with these and upcoming initiatives will allow everyone involved with our Program: The Staff, Community Partners and our Volunteer Child Advocates to easily speak about our Program needs instead of spending extended time to explain who we are as a Program.

*“For children entering care, being with their siblings can enhance their sense of safety and well-being and provide natural, mutual support.”*



## **LEGAL**

# **THE IMPACT OF SIBLING SEPARATION (PART 2)**

In the prior article in this series, we explored the importance of the sibling connection. In this article, we examine what happens to children when they are separated from their siblings. Siblings may be separated after removal from their familial home for a myriad of reasons ranging from not enough placements, a caregiver’s inability or unwillingness to care for the entire sibling group, or the protection of one sibling from another.

Whatever the reason, the separation may have both positive and negative consequences though in most cases, the latter. For children entering care, being with their siblings can enhance their sense of safety and well-being and provide natural, mutual support. This benefit is in contrast to the traumatic consequences of separation, which may include additional loss, grief, and anxiety over their siblings’ well-being.

Where siblings have a shared history, maintaining their bond through shared placement provides them a continuity of identity and belonging\*.

\*Link: [Center Welfare Information Gateway, Sibling Issues in Foster Care Adoption](#), Page 5, January 2013

If separation cannot be avoided, here are three tips to minimize the negative impact on the children.

1. Obtain an order on the frequency of sibling visits.
2. Encourage telephonic communication among the siblings.
3. Request a sibling separation staffing.

In the next article, we will examine the utility of Sibling Separation staffings.



*“The goal is to fully understand and respond to these dynamics and ensure they are fully integrated into the strategic decision making process of the Guardian ad Litem Program”*

## **DIVERSITY**

# **ENHANCING ADVOCACY THROUGH DATA, CONVERSATIONS AND CULTURE**

In 2017, Alan Abramowitz affirmed the importance of awareness and action by our Program in the area of diversity, equality and inclusion with an emphasis on the impact of poverty as a priority for Guardian ad Litem.

The goal is to fully understand and respond to these dynamics and ensure they are integrated into the strategic decision making process of the Guardian ad Litem Program. This effort will enhance Program effectiveness, help achieve mission goals and to meet the challenges that lie ahead in the often complex and dynamic communities our work with children takes us into.

To meet this challenge we will jointly review relevant research, and most importantly circuits will soon be introduced to a unique and robust framework of data for analysis and focusing on critical metrics, highlight the narrative and key numbers, increase effective community engagement and actively support our public education and recruitment efforts.

The new diversity and inclusion awareness initiative will result in additional tools that Circuits can use to conduct facilitated focus groups, provide narratives promoting awareness and to make our data more dynamic with deeper meaning.

Our first step is collecting and presenting data regarding our child, Volunteer Child Advocate and community populations, our next step will be to fully analyze that data with you.

Lastly, it is our hope that this initiative will provide a clear roadmap that will help guide recruitment and retention activities as well as lay the groundwork in many areas including public outreach, community education, staff and Volunteer Child Advocate training, and better understanding of the impact and importance of diversity and inclusion in the lives of children and families.

Thanks to everyone that participated as a Review Team Member or part of the Advocacy Team being reviewed for making this a successful year!



*“Nearly one third of all annual gifts are made during the month of December.”*

**Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation**

## **A HAPPY AND GENEROUS HOLIDAY SEASON**

From Thanksgiving to New Year’s Eve, generosity skyrockets causing people to be more generous with their time and money and to make donations, volunteer, and help raise support for causes they care most about.

Donors get involved with nonprofits over the holidays for four primary reasons:

1. To be happier by helping others
2. To feel good about themselves by making a difference
3. To be connected to something positive
4. To take advantage of tax deductions

While the end of the year is a hectic time it is imperative that we reach out to Volunteer Child Advocates and donors. Nearly one third of all annual gifts are made during the month of December.

As the New Year approaches it is also a time that people make New Year’s resolutions. How about sending out an email blast that promotes volunteering as a Guardian ad Litem? This may be the final push that a person needs in deciding if they are going to become a Volunteer Child Advocate for our Program.

*“The Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation wishes each of you a happy holiday season and a most prosperous new year.”*



*“I’m happy to see how these ACT Reviews have evolved over the past years to the point where we are including our community partners.”*

## **NORTH REGION UPDATE**

# **NORTH REGION ACT’S WRAPPED UP FOR 2018**

We have finished off the ACT Reviews for the 2018 Year, ending on a very high note in the 5th Circuit (Ocala).

This year, we selected cases in advance of the reviews that had complex or difficult issues, such as multiple placements, children under 5 years old in group homes, and abused while in care. The 5th Circuit selected some very challenging cases, some heartbreaking; some had reached the point where a fresh set of eyes was needed to inspire some innovative thoughts about best advocacy for these children.

The openness and willingness of both, the Advocacy Teams and Review Team members to brainstorm for additional and different ways to move these cases closer to permanency was excellent. It is a display of teamwork that embodies “the 5 C’s” at their true best!

We are so impressed at the high level of Advocacy being provided for the children we serve. In 2018, we reviewed Circuits 4 (Jacksonville), 5 (Ocala), 7 (Daytona Beach), and 8 (Gainesville), the East side of the Northern “Kingdom”. We had the opportunity to meet some of the most committed and passionate Volunteer Child Advocates you can find. Our staff’s commitment to the highest level of advocacy for the children shows in each of the 2018 reviews. We are glad to have the opportunity to work along with them.

We are happy to see how these ACT Reviews have evolved over the past years to the point where we are including our community partners. They are very collaborative with everyone and truly focused on finding solutions for the children in our most difficult cases.

With 2019 just around the corner, we will be starting the ACT reviews on our West side of the Northern Kingdom, Circuit’s 1 (Pensacola), 2 (Tallahassee), 3 (Live Oak), and 14 (Panama City). Looking forward to seeing some more outstanding advocacy ahead!

*“My Guardian ad Litem and I have built a bond. She hasn’t only been a person who looks out for me and advocates for me, she’s also been my friend... She has been a tremendous positive influence in my life.”*



## **CENTRAL REGION UPDATE** **VOICES OF HOPE GALA**

Voices for Osceola’s Children along with the Guardian ad Litem Program for the 9th Circuit – Osceola County joined together for the 3rd Annual “Voices of Hope Gala” to raise money for the Guardian ad Litem Program. Over 450 people attended for a fun and exciting evening of dinner, dancing and playing casino games at the Omni Resort. There was also a huge silent auction and many raffle prizes for everyone to win.

The highlight of the night was a moving speech by one of our Guardian ad Litem children, Hanna, who recently turned 18. She spoke of the importance of her Guardian ad Litem Volunteer Child Advocate in her life and the difference she made for her. Hanna stated in her speech, “My Guardian ad Litem and I have built a bond. She hasn’t only been a person who looks out for me and advocates for me, she’s also been my friend. She convinced me to go to my senior prom and also to walk the stage to receive my diploma at graduation. She has been a tremendous positive influence in my life.”

Another highlight of the evening was the Guardian ad Litem Kid Art Project. Voices purchased a canvas and art supplies for any child who wanted to do a painting. These paintings were displayed the night of the event. The paintings the children created were moving and beautiful and showed off their tremendous talents. All the kids who participated were awarded a gift card and it was a great way to personalize our children to the community.

The 3rd Annual “Voices of Hope Gala” was a tremendous success by not only raising much needed funding for our children but also raising community awareness for the Guardian ad Litem Program and our children.



*“The most rewarding part of it all was one of the CAMs commenting...it was a great reminder that we’re all the same team and we all support each other.”*



## ***SOUTHERN REGION UPDATE*** ***COLLABORATIVE STAFFING***

In 2018 the Southern Region created “business plans” in each Circuit. The Circuits established their own initiatives for the year and they have done a great job at meeting a lot of their goals. The team in Circuit 19 (Martin, St. Lucie, Okeechobee and Indian River counties), called theirs a Focus Plan and one of the objectives was to enhance their best interest advocacy and permanency outcomes.

They outlined several action steps to help them reach their goal throughout the year. At the end of October, they held their first internal peer review staffing which was based on the Permanency Roundtable model. They selected 4 cases, one from each county, and the staff all came together to staff the cases together.

The staff collaboratively discussed options for these cases that had some pretty significant challenges with permanency and they were able to leave with clearly established advocacy plans to help move the cases forward.

Staff members respectfully challenged and brainstormed ideas and everyone walked away excited for the next time they were going to staff cases in this format. Paul Nigro, Circuit Director, said “the most rewarding part of it all was one of the CAMs commenting that the thing she appreciated the most was how she felt that even though we work in our individual teams all the time and we get so wrapped up in our own cases, it was a great reminder that we’re all the same team and we all support each other.”

As we move into 2019, Circuit 19 is going to continue to build upon this process as a way to collaboratively work as a team to help our children achieve permanency and ensure their best interests are kept as the focus of our advocacy.

*Each and every one of you gives so much of yourselves on a daily basis to the children and the families we serve. Every day through your efforts you create new beginnings for the children we serve.*

*You truly live and represent the spirit of the holidays throughout the year. Thanks for all you do to make our world a better place!*

*We also would like to thank your families for allowing you to share so much of yourselves with us as we strive to make children and families lives better. Have a wonderful holiday season!*



**GUARDIAN  
AD LITEM**  

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**FOR CHILDREN**