



JANUARY 2019



**GUARDIAN
AD LITEM
FOR CHILDREN**

NEWSLETTER

FEATURED

**A New Year!
Find out what's coming
up - as we welcome
2019.**

STAY INFORMED

Read the Newsletter and
get updated with Statewide
Program highlights!

WHAT'S IN THE ISSUE

- A MESSAGE FROM ALAN
- OPERATIONS
- STATEWIDE FOUNDATION
- LEGAL
- NORTHERN REGION UPDATE
- CENTRAL REGION UPDATE
- SOUTHERN REGION UPDATE
- BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVOCACY



“I’ve been traveling around the state... It’s one of my favorite parts of my job, and it really makes me realize how important it is to listen to your needs and relay them to the Legislature.”

A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ALAN ABRAMOWITZ **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

The New Year is a good time for reflection of the past year, and I have been doing that. I’ve been traveling around the state, visiting our 60 offices and their staff. It’s one of my favorite parts of my job, and it really makes me realize how important it is to listen to your needs and relay them to the Legislature.

My goal when I visit is to let all those who are invested in the work of protecting children understand they are appreciated by the State Office, by me – and by our state’s leaders, who truly respond when they hear what I learn on these trips. I try to learn about what is needed to represent and advocate for children from the true experts in this mission – those who interact with children – you. There is so much I learn that guides our strategic plan, legislative goals and vision for the future of the Program.

Legislative committees are already starting up in December, and we will be seeking more positions to better serve the number of children in foster care, board certification for our child advocate managers, and continued ability to support volunteers’ travel when needed. We are also proposing a measure to ensure all parties are accountable to the children we advocate for; it’s called the “Year is a Long Time in the Life of a Child Act.” And we will be fighting to expand Early Childhood Court, and for the best interests of children and multiple systems generally.

As we prepare for the upcoming year, I hope you will keep in mind how absolutely crucial your work is for the children and families of Florida.

Thank you for all that you do and Happy New Year!



“Because the role of the Child Advocate Manager is different from any other within the child welfare arena, developing our training for our staff and by our staff was a critical component.”

OPERATIONS

CHILD ADVOCATE MANAGER TRAINING

2019 promises to be a stellar year as our Regional Team is finalizing plans to provide training and support to staff, and to Child Advocate Managers specifically. A little over one year ago plans were made to provide much needed - never before offered - CAM training to assist new CAMs in becoming familiar with their roles as well as provide a refresher to those more experienced. Five topics were selected based on CAM feedback. These topics are: How to Manage Volunteers Effectively; Compassion Fatigue; Using Optima as a Resource; Time Management; and Best Practices for a Child Advocate Manager.

Because the role of the Child Advocate Manager is different from any other within the child welfare arena, developing OUR training FOR our staff and BY our staff was a critical component. We are fortunate that many of our staff are experts in these topics, so we asked them to research topics, assimilate the information, and design the training. Research Teams were formed and the teams worked together to generate the best training possible for our Child Advocate Managers - a role that volunteers and others remind us is the ‘heart and soul’ of the Guardian ad Litem Program.

As you can imagine the task has been daunting, exhausting, and sometimes frustrating; but we are happy to report that plans are now underway to begin scheduling! We look forward to rolling out this very important training soon, hopefully in February 2019. Be on the lookout for training in your area!

If you are willing and able to host training for a multiple county audience, please contact Kim DelGaudio or Teresa Ashcraft.

“The decision to separate siblings is never easy and has long lasting effects on children. Hopefully, by utilizing sibling separation staffing a decision that is in the best interest of the children will be reached.”



LEGAL SIBLING SEPERATION (PART 3)

Despite the desire to keep siblings together and to ensure permanency is achieved for all in one placement, there are the unfortunate occasions where separation must occur.

Take, for example, 3 siblings (GF, CF and MF) ages 5-10 years. The older two children were removed in 2016 and placed with their maternal grandmother. The youngest (MF) was born in 2017 and placed in foster care, as the maternal grandmother was not a viable placement. The older siblings were removed from the maternal grandmother in early 2018 and placed in a separate foster home from their sister as MF's foster parents were not able (though willing) to accommodate the siblings.

Parental rights were recently terminated. The foster parents of MF plan to adopt her, while an out of state relative placement is being pursued for GF and CF.

Pursuant to Florida Administrative Code 65C-16.002 (3) (b), which governs considerations of separation of the siblings, a sibling separation staffing shall be held for GF, CF and MF. The staffing shall consist of at least three members with adoption experience. The members must consider the emotional ties existing between and among the siblings and the degree of harm which each child is likely to experience as a result of the separation.

The decision to separate siblings who are in an open dependency case must be approved in writing and documented in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) by the community based care (CBC) or subcontractor staff charged with this responsibility. See Fla. Admin. Code 65C-16.002 (3) (c).

The decision to separate siblings is never easy and has long lasting effects on children. Hopefully, by utilizing sibling separation staffing a decision that is in the best interest of the children will be reached.



“Staffing children and youth with a team of people help those working with them understand their needs and how to address them in a more comprehensive way.”

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

CHILDREN’S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVOCACY STAFFING

Research shows, and we know that children in foster care have suffered adverse experiences that put them at higher risk of developing physical, social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties due to the trauma they have encountered throughout their lives. We also know that children and youth are resilient and the right circumstances can promote healthy development and wellbeing and help them heal. However, understanding their complex needs and effectively addressing them with the right services and supports at the right time is often very challenging.

Over the last 10 years, Florida’s child serving system has undergone major changes, to include the rollout of Medicaid managed care and the implementation of the Community Based Care (CBC) Lead agencies. Florida’s system of care serving children is complex, especially for those in foster care. Knowing what services and supports are available and how to access them are critical and challenging, especially in rural areas where local services and supports are limited or non-existent.

Staffing children and youth with a team of people help those working with them understand their needs and how to address them in a more comprehensive way. Many Guardian ad Litem Circuit offices have this best practice in place, which brings the experience and creativity of multiple people to help problem-solve difficult situations. However, given the complexity of Florida’s system of care and the needs of children and youth in foster care, there are times when additional assistance is required.

Elevating children and youth with the most challenging situations to a staffing that includes individuals with subject matter expertise and relevant experience may be critical in addressing their safety and wellbeing. The Guardian ad Litem State Office has sent guidelines out to all Guardian ad Litem staff and volunteers regarding what types of issues to staff with Laurie Blades, as your behavioral health resource. However, you can contact Laurie at any time you want to discuss the mental health and/or substance abuse needs of children, youth or their parents.



“The TRIUMPH Award represents qualities such as: determination, resiliency, aspirations, overcoming obstacles, and academic achievement.”

Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation **THE TRIUMPH AWARD**

The Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation is pleased to announce that the inaugural TRIUMPH Awards will be presented April 10, 2019 in Tallahassee.

The TRIUMPH Award is an opportunity for the Guardian ad Litem Foundation to recognize outstanding youth who have overcome tremendous challenges. Youth in foster care face incredible trials and need the support of friends, teachers, organizations, and the community. The Guardian ad Litem Foundation would like to be a part of this extended support system and recognize those youth who embody the spirit of the TRIUMPH Award. Each year, one exceptional young person in the state of Florida will be selected as the Guardian ad Litem Foundation TRIUMPH Award recipient.

The TRIUMPH Award represents qualities such as: determination, resiliency, aspirations, overcoming obstacles, and academic achievement. The recipient should be one that exemplifies these characteristics and is determined to succeed in the future.

All twenty Guardian ad Litem Judicial Circuits had the opportunity to nominate their most deserving youth (must be a high school junior, senior or college freshman). Three youth will be selected to attend the finalist competition in Tallahassee, Florida. A panel of distinguished leaders will interview the three finalists and select the winner and runner-ups. The winner and runner-ups will be announced by the Governor of Florida (or his/her designated representative).

The three finalists will all receive a laptop computer to help further their educational success. Additionally, the winner will receive a \$5,000 college scholarship and the runner-up will receive a \$3,000 college scholarship and the remaining finalist will receive a \$2,000 college scholarship.

The TRIUMPH Award is being supported through the generosity of the Guardian Trust Foundation and the Florida Blue Foundation.



“We ask each of you to join us in our resolution to recruit and retain the additional volunteers required to meet the needs of every child we serve.”

NORTH REGION UPDATE **NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION**

As we wrap up the activities and events of 2018, it’s a good time for us to look back and reflect on the accomplishments of the year. I’ve recently been in several Circuits and have seen many of our dedicated volunteers and staff working hard to ensure that the children we serve know that they are valued and cared for over this holiday season. Things are certainly busy and sometimes hectic, but very heartwarming to see. The advocacy our Program provides and the impact made in the lives of the children we serve could not be nearly as great if not for the thousands of dedicated and passionate volunteers and the great support they receive from our incredible staff.

Now is also the time to make resolutions and new goals for the New Year ahead. Everyone knows that having a Volunteer Child Advocate as a member of the child’s advocacy team makes a huge positive impact. It’s also a tremendous help in managing the workloads of our staff, allowing them to accomplish a lot more.

We ask each of you to join us in our resolution to recruit and retain the additional volunteers required to meet the needs of every child we serve. Beginning in January, we are reviving and revamping our statewide Volunteer Recruiter Go to Meetings to share ideas and provide training opportunities to our recruitment staff. With the additional efforts and initiatives being rolled out in Digital and Social Media, as well as the continued excellent PR stories and marketing through Conventional Media, we are able to reach more people than ever before. This is an exciting time ahead and I’m more optimistic than ever that we can add a huge number of new volunteers in 2019!

We know that one of the best recruitment methods is through our current volunteers and staff reaching out to the people that they know will make excellent volunteers. Please consider making one of your 2019 Resolutions to recruit and retain the volunteers needed so each child will have the benefits of a Volunteer Child Advocate on their team!

Best wishes in the New Year Ahead!

“Participating on the ACT review team is also an excellent opportunity to learn about best practices in other circuits and to have the opportunity to brainstorm with people you don’t see every day.”



CENTRAL REGION UPDATE ADVOCACY, COLLABORATION, AND TEAMWORK

The Central Region wrapped up their last ACT (Advocacy, Collaboration and Teamwork) last week for 2018. ACTs are a staff driven qualitative review of our best interest advocacy work with the children we represent.

Over the course of 2018, ACTs were conducted in Circuits 20, 10, 18 and 12. In Circuit 20, some very challenging cases were reviewed, with lots of brainstorming and highlighting excellent advocacy. Circuit 10 showed their amazing team spirit attending the ACT as a group to learn and show support for their coworkers. Community involvement was strong in the 18th Circuit, as case managers, case manager supervisors and even Children’s Legal Services attorneys participated in the ACT.

And just last week, in the 12th Circuit, the advocacy teams showed their dedication and passion for advocating for the children in every case that was reviewed. Listening to the advocacy teams present their cases, and reviewing all of the amazing work done by the Volunteer Child Advocates (VCAs), Child Advocate Managers (CAMs) and Best Interest Attorneys (BIAs) was truly inspiring and reminds us all of why we do this work. Congratulations to all on a job well done!

Participating on the ACT review team is also an excellent opportunity to learn about best practices in other circuits and to have the opportunity to brainstorm with people you don’t see every day. In each ACT, staff from other circuits joined the review team and all stated that they enjoyed the experience and learned something new.

Big thanks to the following staff for participating in ACTs around the region this year: Lynne Higgins (CAM2, 12th Circuit), Kasandra Philips (CD, 17th Circuit), Diane Agrusa (CAM2, 13th Circuit), James Phillips (SBIA, 19th Circuit), Eric Atherholt (CAM2, 20th Circuit) and Isabel Walker-Burgos (BIA, 6th Circuit).



“By creating a multi-level approach to awards, we are hoping to utilize a variety of ways in which our staff indicated they liked to be recognized...”



SOUTHERN REGION UPDATE AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

It is annual award time and this year we decided to change things up a bit. During our Circuit Directors meeting in September and then in Workplace poll, we solicited ways in which our staff preferred to be recognized for all their hard work, dedication and most importantly the impact they have on children’s lives.

As a result of this feedback, we developed a new approach to our annual awards. Each Circuit will select a Circuit award winner in the following categories: Volunteer of the Year; Community Advocate of the Year; Non-Profit of the Year; Daniel P. Dawson Award – Attorney of the Year; Barbra Sessa Award – CAM of the Year; and the Angela Orkin Dedication Award – Operational Support Staff of the Year (includes recruiters, trainers, and administrative support team members).

Each award winner should embody our 5 Core Values: Commitment to Children; Communication Built on Trust; Collective Empowerment; Collaboration; and Courtesy; and it is these characteristics that will be described in detail in the award nomination form (which will be submitted via Survey Monkey).

Circuits have until Jan 31st, 2019 to select their 2018 winners. Then the Regional Directors will review and choose a Regional winner in each category. We will recognize the Regional winners at a special presentation during our regional meetings in March 2019. These individuals will be sent up as the Regional nominations for the Statewide awards which will be announced and recognized at various times during this year’s Florida Guardian ad Litem Specialized Advocacy for Children Symposium (formerly the Guardian ad Litem Disabilities Conference) to be held May 30-31, 2019, in Orlando, FL.

By creating a multi-level approach to awards, we are hoping to utilize a variety of ways in which our staff indicated they liked to be recognized: personal notes, award ceremony with peers, attending training/conferences, etc. We are very excited to see how this process works this year and we encourage your feedback as we roll it out.

**HAPPY
NEW YEAR!**

