



FEBRUARY 2019



**GUARDIAN
AD LITEM**

NEWSLETTER

FEATURED

*Our Leadership Issue!
How can we guide and
lead others?*

STAY INFORMED

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

WHAT'S IN THE ISSUE

- A MESSAGE FROM ALAN
- OPERATIONS
- TRAINING
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- MEDIA AND MARKETING

A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ALAN ABRAMOWITZ

LEADING THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORT

For our the Guardian ad Litem Program to succeed, everyone in it must be a leader – and not just in court. To achieve the outcomes children deserve, we must also lead in garnering the support in our community, with policy makers and the private sectors through education and a truly effective public-private partnership.

Volunteer child advocates can show others how the world looks through the eyes of a dependent child, and they may never see it the same way again.

It wasn't until youths aging out of foster care went to Tallahassee that lawmakers and state agency heads began crafting reform measures like the Road to Independence program, the Normalcy Bill, Keys to Independence, and extending foster care to age 21. I'm proud our Program was deeply involved in passing all those bills. But as you know, much work remains.



“When educating state and local officials, think about how you make decisions: you want the best information; you get advice from people you know and trust; you like to be treated respectfully; and you want people to appreciate limitations you face.”

When educating state and local officials, think about how you make decisions: you want the best information; you get advice from people you know and trust; you like to be treated respectfully; and you want people to appreciate limitations you face. Apply these same principles when talking with decision-makers.

- Teach people about Guardian ad Litem and what you do as a volunteer child advocate. Most people do not understand child protection. Explain how Volunteer Child Advocates, Child Advocate Managers, and Best Interests Attorneys work together to advocate and represent the children's legal interest. Avoid using acronyms such as CBC, CAM, or even GAL; you don't want someone to feel excluded or guess at your meaning.
- Policy makers are very supportive of Guardian ad Litem. Say thank you.
- Build trust. Provide objective information from your own experience without undermining other child protection stakeholders.
- Maintain the relationship. Staying in touch shows you respect the relationship and the importance of children's issues.

OPERATIONS

EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

Teamwork? It's the catchphrase of the day, but what does it really mean and why is it a good thing?

Effective teamwork is what makes organizations succeed and the characteristics of the team members make a team effective. Characteristics of highly effective teams have trust, debate positively, are mission-oriented, get results and have a culture of leadership among all team members.

Having different perspectives and coming together to meet a common goal is one of the foundations of the Guardian ad Litem Program. We have laid the groundwork to make teamwork look easy, but it's not, especially when it comes to multidisciplinary teamwork. Each of us has a unique ability to problem solve and view the world from our own perspectives. It's one of the biggest strengths of the Guardian ad Litem Program - but it can also be difficult to accomplish successfully.



“By being able to listen intently, respect the views of others, and remain steadfast in our commitment to children, our Program will continue to successfully advocate for children in Court and the community.”

The multidisciplinary approach to promoting best interest of children has proven to be successful in child welfare, much like it has in the field of health care. If we practice our Core Values consistently, we will see the best outcomes for children by bringing together all those who are invested in the children we serve.

However, by not practicing good communication and common courtesy, and when collaboration is not practiced, we will find team members who are frustrated, retention will begin to slide downwards, and permanency for children will be delayed.

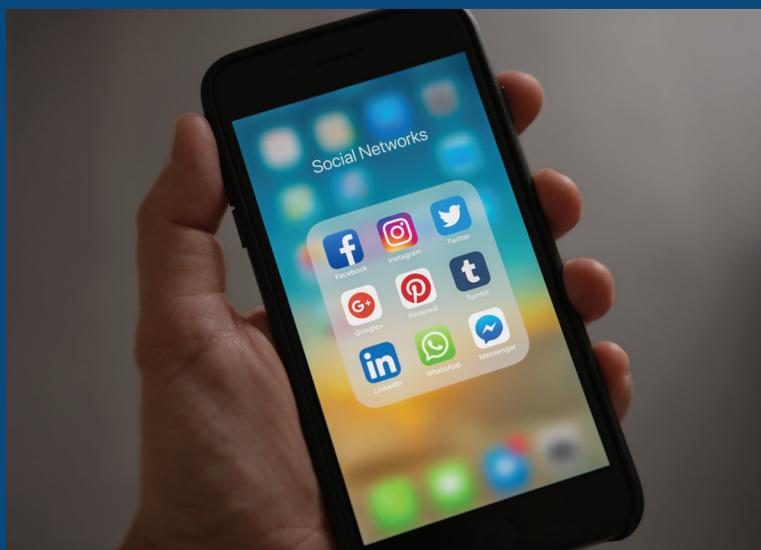
By being able to listen intently, respect the views of others, and remain steadfast in our commitment to children, our Program will continue to successfully advocate for children in Court and the community. This can only happen when each member of the team feels they have a voice and a safe place to express their viewpoints. We are our best when we come together and build on the many strengths our team has to offer.

MESSAGING LED BY A PHILOSOPHY

There are many ways in which leading can be applied: a person leading a team, a team leading a program, or even a program leading a group of different organizations. Leading can also be implemented other than through a person, leading can occur through the guidance of a philosophy.

As we continue to develop our Program's media strategy, we have established a philosophy to lead our marketing and messaging initiatives that will help our efforts – so that our Program's messages are clear and focused. The philosophy comprises of four strategic concepts.

1) Recruit Volunteers: we will make certain that our message will have a component to inform the public and our marketing audiences that volunteer involvement is essential to our Program.



“As we continue to develop our Program's media strategy, we have established a marketing philosophy to lead our marketing and messaging initiatives that will help lead our efforts in regards to our media efforts – so that it is clear and focused.”

2) Inform the Public: by including media messages that express the wonderful impact our Volunteer Child Advocates, Best Interest Attorneys and Program staff achieves, which helps Florida's communities through the Program's advocacy efforts.

3) Strengthen the Program's Community: by sharing the stories of the Program's diverse group of people that make up our organization, the activities we partake with community members and the mindful advocacy interactions we have on a daily basis.

4) Engage Floridians to Champion Guardian ad Litem: by showing individuals that they can support our Program beyond volunteerism – they can become champions and ambassadors of the program by sharing our messages with others, so that those who receive our messages can in turn support our Program and our goals.

We are excited to strengthen our Program's media and marketing messages with the inclusion of these concepts. Having a messaging and marketing philosophy will lead us to ensure that messages are not without a motivated commitment to Guardian ad Litem's advocacy mission and enable the public to connect with our Program.

LEGAL

LEADING DURING (AND AFTER) A HURRICANE

“The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to chance. The learder adjusts the sails.” -John Maxwell

Florida’s Fourteenth Judicial Circuit is comprised of 6 counties situated in the middle of Florida’s panhandle. The counties are: Holmes (Bonifay), Washington (Chipley), Bay (Panama City), Jackson (Marianna), Calhoun (Blountstown), and Gulf (Port St. Joe). Hurricane Michael made landfall in Circuit 14 on October 10th 2018. Michael clobbered the Program offices and the courthouses in both Bay and Jackson Counties. Immediately following the hurricane, Circuit Director Fred Hapner and Supervising Attorney Amy Thome attempted to communicate and maintain accountability of all staff from their shelter spaces in Chipley and Alabama, respectively.

The status of a few staff members was not to be verified for a full week following the storm. Several employees were (and continue to be) displaced by the hurricane. To identify needs during the weeks after the storm, all staff went about contacting volunteers, children, caregivers, and families.

“The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to chance. The learder adjusts the sails.”



Attorneys assisted in carting supplies to those in need throughout the circuit as well as making visits to children (on post-TPR cases). Only a few had access to Optima. Those who had functioning cell phones shared the information via text in order for it to be entered. In order to obtain internet, for weeks one attorney was working from a local Walmart parking lot. A makeshift office was set up in front of the heavily damaged GAL Program office building in Panama City so that staff and volunteers could come by.

The means for employees to work from home and other unconventional spaces (parking lots, relatives homes, etc..) was made available from state and county resources. At present, a temporary work space has been cobbled together on the Program office’s property in the Panama City Teen Court conference room. On the legal side, the First Circuit was extraordinarily helpful and conducted all C14 shelters in the initial weeks. As phone service returned, a conference line was set up to handle shelters. After some time, substitute spaces were identified to hold court in both Bay and Jackson counties. Only recently were Bay mediations able to be resumed by borrowing bits of space from the main courthouse. At present, Jackson County is holding court in the Agriculture Center in Marianna.

These last few months have been extraordinarily trying, draining, and exhausting, but with the strong caring leadership of Amy Thome and Fred Hapner, and help from Circuit One (Pensacola) and Circuit Two (Tallahassee) mighty Circuit 14 has adapted and overcome. We would call Fred and Amy and tell them how great they are but they are busy. They are too busy..... adjusting the sails.

A LEADER AND AN INSPIRATION

With this month's theme centering on leadership, it's very timely, and appropriate that we give honor and respect to Micheall Harris, Circuit Advocacy Manager (CAM) 1st Circuit (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton Counties) that recently passed away. For the many that knew and worked with Mike, we will miss his inspiring and uplifting presence.

One of the many leadership qualities he displayed was the ability to make some difficult and challenging situations, positive and sometimes even pleasant with his cheerful and good natured personality. He was definitely one of the people you looked forward to seeing knowing that it was going to be a pleasurable experience.

One of the most admirable traits of a leader is to lead by example. Mike not only was a dedicated employee, he also opened up his home as a licensed foster placement to so many children, before and during his time with the Guardian ad Litem Program. His family included nine children, seven of which he adopted.



“One of the many leadership qualities he displayed was the ability to make some difficult and challenging situations, positive and sometimes even pleasant with his cheerful and good natured personality. ”

He provided the highest level of support and assistance to his volunteers, not only did he have excellent technical skills, but he was the first CAM I knew of to have every one of his volunteers trained in OPTIMA and actively assigned to a case.

Being a leader doesn't always mean being in a position of formal authority over people and when I think of Mike the term Servant Leader comes to my mind. He would always jump in to help his fellow coworkers or children not even on his caseload, providing any assistance he could to help them succeed. He also received the Angels in Adoptions Award from the US Congress.

In many ways, Mike demonstrated the qualities that we all admire and hope for in our supervisors and leaders. Let's honor his legacy by striving to be the best possible leaders and of the most service to others.

RECOGNITION OF LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

Amber Padrick is a Child Advocate Manager (CAM) II working out of the Viera office. She started as a volunteer in the 9th Circuit (Osceola County), and was hired as a CAM in the 18th Circuit (Brevard County). Amber meets with her team monthly to review their cases and offer support and guidance. Amber is always looking for ways to develop her team's potential; she searches for learning opportunities in the community or within the Guardian ad Litem Program to offer her staff.

Amber empowers her staff to make their own decisions, to trust their knowledge and skills to resolve issues on their cases. Amber is always looking to learn and grow in her leadership journey. She is open to trying new leadership strategies and willingly takes feedback from her staff. Amber's leadership style is supportive and practical, she is always willing to help her team learn and grow. Thank you Amber for everything you do!



Sheila DelCastillo
Assistant Director - 13th Circuit



Amber Padrick
Child Advocate Manager II - 18th Circuit

Sheila DelCastillo has been with the Guardian ad Litem Program for 13 years. She started as a volunteer, but now holds the title of the Assistant Director in the 13th Circuit (Hillsborough County). During Sheila's tenure with the Program, she has earned a reputation of being passionate, trustworthy, and genuine to name just a few adjectives!

Sheila is known in the office for being creative, supportive, and proactive. Her creativity not only surrounds casework and exploring options to address stuck cases and expedite permanency, but she is the one who is known for coming up with creative ways to support our staff and volunteers.

She should have a "take a number" sign outside of her office due to the constant line of people wanting to talk to Sheila about a case or vent about something that may have happened that day. Sheila seems to always have the right thing to say and she makes anyone speaking with her feel valued. Thank you Sheila for everything you do!

SOUTHERN REGION UPDATE

LEADERSHIP ROLE MODELS

Leadership is not about a title or a designation. It is about impact, influence and inspiration. A leader has impact by achieving results, has influence by spreading the passion they have for their work, and has the ability to truly inspire their team to be their best. Leaders are not always the loudest in the group or the ones with highest title. Leaders can be found at all levels of our organization and their impact can be seen every day in our offices, our courtrooms and in our communities.

Our Circuit Directors are naturally considered one of the leaders in their office. They have been chosen to “lead” their teams through the ins and outs of the child welfare system. They are tasked with ensuring we have the resources needed to be effective in and out of the courtroom, that our team is well trained and supported, and that our Program is seen as a strong community partner and the go to organization on child issues.



Jessica Allen
Circuit Director - 11th Circuit Miami-Dade



Celia Garcia
Human Resources Liaison - 19th Circuit

Jessica Allen, Circuit Director 11th Circuit in the Miami-Dade office, is a prime example of what it means to be a leader. Jessica began as Best Interest Attorney and became the Circuit Director in 2011. She inspires her team of approximately 125 staff members and over 700 volunteers to zealously advocate for close to 2,000 children every day. Running such a large office is no easy task and she has been able to create a strong team that shares her vision for what is best for the children we serve. In addition, Jessica serves as co-chair for their CBC Alliance, sits on various committees to help improve the child welfare system locally and has previously represented the State of Florida as the Urban Circuit representative for NCASA.

Another critical role within our office is that of our Human Resource Liaisons. They are often behind the scenes making sure everything runs smoothly in our offices. From on-boarding to trouble shooting, they hold it all together. Paul Nigro, Circuit Director in the 19th Circuit, had this to say about their HR liaison: “Celia Garcia is one of the more remarkable leaders I have had the pleasure to work with. Celia is universally respected and loved by all of our team. She always thinks about how she can support others.

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SOUTHERN REGION UPDATE - LEADERSHIP ROLE MODELS (Continued)

Celia is a strong, determined individual with an unquestionable work ethic, a compassionate spirit and a devotion to the Guardian ad Litem Program, our children and our team. We are fortunate to have Celia as a leader of the 19th Circuit family.” In addition to the respect from within the 19th Circuit, Celia is highly regarded throughout the state and often helps mentor new HR liaisons when they join the Guardian ad Litem Program. Thank you both for being an inspiration to those around you everyday.

TRAINING: CHILD ADVOCACY AND PERMANENCY ***LEADING TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY***

As child advocates, we believe in and wish that the children we represent have a forever home whether that is accomplished through reunification, adoption or permanent guardianship. We also know “just hoping” that our children achieve permanency will not make it so.

Permanency is not about a place to lay your head at night. It goes beyond mere biology. Obtaining permanency means knowing that these people belong to you and you to them. It means that they love you unconditionally. Every member of the Guardian ad Litem advocacy team must lead the way to ensure that our kids do not linger in the dependency system one day longer than necessary. We need to constantly challenge each other to reach beyond what we are currently doing to find permanent connections for our children.

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With over 21,000 children in out of home care statewide, it is imperative that we move away from compliance based thinking and change our focus to parental behavior changes. If the reasons the child was removed have been remediated, then we need to get kids home. We have to change our perception from pursuing “the ideal” family to what’s safe.

If reunification is not possible, we must find relatives and other trusted adults through Family Finding. We can also talk to the child about the people in their lives with whom they have formed a connection. When talking to children, make the idea of permanency fit into their vocabulary and understanding. Empower them to create a picture of a family that they may not even know they need.

Every child deserves a home where they can grow, thrive and learn to believe in themselves. All of us need to think unconventionally, be fearless and lead the way in our relentless pursuit of permanency for our children.