

Serenity Binder:

Well, I've been in foster care since I was 12. For me, I wasn't big with going to court so for me to go up there and speak myself was not going to happen. Your world is just pretty much evolved around everybody else's opinions and not your own opinion, so you're pushed to here and you're pushed there and if you don't have somebody advocating for you, then you're just stuck.

I ended up having Carmen Edge as my guardian ad litem during that time. So they read your file just like everybody else, but they don't strictly read it and then that defines you. They actually ask you, "How are you? What are your plans in life? What do you want?" She would speak on my behalf of how I'm doing in school, or if there was anything that I needed. There was a time, a period, when I was at a group home and I was 17 at the time and I wasn't sure... I knew when I turned 18, I was leaving the group home. I didn't know where I was going or what I was going to do.

And then these people came. They were church members at the time, volunteering at the Florida Baptist Children's Home and we ended up having a close bond. And at the time my case manager did not think that that was a good idea, which I'm not the type of person to just go and move in with people. So my guardian ad litem definitely was like, "Yes, I'm here for this," and when I move did with them, at first I was like, "There's no way I'm getting adopted. I'm too old. This is not something that I want to do," and eventually my heart softened and I let them adopt me. What helped me make a decision to stay in school, to pursue my career, to do something with my life. I am in classes for paralegal and then wherever it takes me is where it takes me.

If we didn't have the GAL program, things would not turn out to be the best interests of the child. It's definitely important.