

127 YEARS
GUARDIAN
AD LITEM
1882-2009



The Register

Twelfth Judicial Circuit

Summer 2009

NEW!

Dinner Meetings

Be sure to put Thursday, July 9, down on your calendars for the start of a new series of dinner meetings that also provides in-service credits. Check the details out on page 7 of this newsletter and sign up before July 3.

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Free Coffee, Anyone?

The Twelfth Circuit GAL Program is looking for a few volunteers to help with recruiting. Once a month we are having an information session for prospective volunteers at several different Starbucks shops. We need two volun-

teers at each location to host the information session. (It involves free coffee)

Please let Pam know if you might be interested in hosting your local Starbucks on a once-monthly basis.

Upcoming Training Events

July 9:

In-service, 9:30–noon, Fruitville Library. What's it all about? Everyone is talking about the new report format and the new Advocacy Review Form. Join Melissa Dunlop and Bea Carlson to find out how these new processes will elevate our advocacy for children.

July 9:

Dinner meeting, In-service credit, 6 pm, Primo Restaurant, \$20. Judge Haworth and Laura McIn-

tyre on Family Safety Alliance.

July 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24:

Entry Level Training, 5:30–8:30 & 9–4, Manatee Community College.

September 16, 17, 23, 24:

Entry Level Training, 9–4, Manatee Community College.

Important! Please RSVP by email to Pam Hindman at pam.hindman@gal.fl.gov if you are planning to attend an event.

The Director's Corner

Pam Hindman



Isn't it amazing how fast things can change and, yet, stay the same? The past few weeks have had the program staff in a whirl. Our circuit director, Chuck Orchowski, accepted the position of director of operations for the statewide program and began his job immediately. Chuck intends to do, for the rest of the state what he was so successful at here.

Chuck spent the past four years ensuring that the children in our circuit receive the best advocacy possible and, at the same time, he molded the Twelfth Circuit into one of the most innovative (*the* most innovative in my opinion) in the state.

Chuck's departure left a vacancy to be filled, and I am proud and honored to report that I have been selected to be your new circuit director. As Chuck moves forward to help the other circuits in the state, you know that we have a huge challenge here to keep our circuit at the top of the list. I know we are up to the challenge, and I am counting on

your continued support to keep us there.

Some of you may know that we didn't totally miss the axe that fell with the budget crunch. The statewide program lost dollars, and in the process of making sure all circuits have equal staff allocations, we lost one volunteer supervisor.

Many of you had the opportunity to work with Jeff Spranger, and I know you will wish him well in his quest for a new beginning. Attorney Jaime Molbreak is also beginning a new adventure in Belgium as a student of international law, and Attorney Andrew Chiang is going to be working on the other side of the aisle for CLS in Sarasota. We are grateful for the time we had with each of these fine people and wish them great success.

We also get to welcome three new attorneys. Jill Grivas will be working in the Sarasota office; Nicole Griffin and Jeff Smith will be working in the Manatee office. I encourage you to stop in

to welcome them on board.

Some of you are starting to see the new report format and learn about the Advocacy Review Forms, both of which are on the new website www.12gal.org. Many of you may have had your first advocacy review with your supervisor and the attorney on the case. Feedback has been very positive from those of you to whom I've talked. We feel that our advocacy is going to vastly improve as a result of this process. It's hard to believe we could get any better, but this process will keep us from overlooking critical issues. I hope you embrace this as we have.

I'm very excited about our future. Please know that I am never more than a phone call away. I'll be working between the Manatee and Sarasota offices, so stop in any time. I love to hear what's going on out there—the good and the bad. The Twelfth Circuit has the best GALs, and I feel very proud.

“...you know that we have a huge challenge here to keep our circuit at the top of the list. I know we are up to the challenge, and I am counting on your continued support to keep us there.”

Keeping Children Safely In Their Homes: THE DIVERSION PROGRAM

**Tina Wagner,
Volunteer**

The Diversion Program is funded by Safe Children's Coalition in an attempt to keep children out of the formal system of care, thereby preventing cases that could last six months to a year in the courts. During abuse reports, Child Protective Investigators can recommend, in lieu of removal, the Diversion Program. This is when the level of abuse doesn't legally warrant removal, but a form of intense in-home services is necessary to allow children to remain safely in the home.

The dictionary definition of "diversion" is a detour or turning aside. As a guardian ad litem you may be concerned that the Diversion Program is just that— *turning aside the children*. On the contrary, even though its goal is to divert the case from ever reaching courts, thus resulting in significant financial savings, the children's safety remains the focus. GAL's are not appointed, but

Manatee Glens resource specialists work with and monitor regularly the progress of these families who are required to attend specific services such as in-home therapy, marriage counseling, parental classes or various other services within a 60-day time frame.

If the parents fail to comply, legal action can be taken, at which time the children will be removed or a request to extend the plan can be submitted to the Safe Children's Coalition for review.

Brena Slater, operations manager for Department of Children and Families, shares, "In these economic times diversion is critical. We are seeing more abuse of prescription pills, loss of jobs, and co-habiting families. We would rather take care of these families, who could possibly come into the system, upfront—not only for the lower costs involved (\$500 to \$600 for

boarding each month per child), but also because statistics indicate children do much better in their own home than in foster care."

Since the Twelfth Judicial Circuit Court of Manatee added its program one and a-half years ago, there has already been a 42 percent decrease in shelter rates. Slater predicts that the Sarasota program, which began less than one year ago, will be on target for achieving a 30–40 percent decline in shelter rates within its first year.

"Since the Twelfth Judicial Circuit Court of Manatee added its program one and a-half years ago, there has already been a 42 percent decrease in shelter rates."



Sarasota staff and volunteers meet with Judge Titus. L to R: Jan Sirota, Judge Becky Titus, Jeff Weaver, Lynn Inganamort, Milford Inganamort, Toni Mills, Marilyn Pratt, Gina Krinsky, Candice Miller, Barbara Rosen, Marvin Rosen, Milessa Dunlop, Sara Herrera.

Ask an Attorney

Jaime Molbreak
Program Attorney



The lesson here is always to do your own information gathering.

Q:

My volunteer supervisor asked me to check on the child in his placement with his non-offending mother before disposition, at which time the case management team plans to ask the court to terminate supervision and jurisdiction. The mother has not returned the several calls I made in an attempt to schedule an appointment to talk with her and see the child. I have spoken to the case manager and she indicates that the placement is a good one and I have nothing to be concerned about. Can I just take the case manager at her word and recommend closure at the upcoming hearing?

Gullible GAL

A:

Dear Gullible GAL,
See me after court—there's a piece of the Brooklyn Bridge I'd like to sell you! Many case managers and guardians ad litem have wonderful relationships, and we have to rely on case managers for information in many instances. However, we need to always be mindful of our role as an independent voice in the courtroom. We are most beneficial to the judge and to the system as a whole when we have done our research and can therefore be confident of our recommendations.

A situation as important and final as the one you have described, in which the case could be closed at the hearing, demands that we conduct our own analysis of the placement to offer to the judge.

For example, a review of the mother's criminal history could reveal substance abuse issues. As a condition of placement, upon good cause shown, the court may order the mother to submit to a substance abuse evaluation by a qualified professional.

If the results of the assessment reflect that the mother needs treatment, there might be a better course of action than case closure. Having the Department supervise the placement for at least six months after the disposition hearing and the judge oversee the mother's treatment compliance would ensure the safety of the child.

The lesson here is always to do your own information gathering.

NEXT STEP WILL JOIN CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN FUND

Next Step, the Bradenton-based children's mentoring organization for foster children coming out of foster homes, has become part of the Children's Guardian Fund, the fundraising arm of the Guardian ad Litem program.

Magistrate Susan Maulucci, founder of Next Step, was elected to the Children's Guardian Fund board at its May meeting. Next Step, with 40 volunteers, had been a committee of the Family Court Professional Collaborative and a partner of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit Family Law Advisory Group.

Foster children, who at age 18 strike out on their own, frequently need help," said Magistrate Maulucci. "Few are prepared to make it on their own. We know that these children from foster homes have a far higher rate of homelessness, incarceration and unemployment than the population as a whole. Many do not

graduate from high school and only about one percent graduate from college."

Commenting upon its new organizational strength, Judy Sharple, president of the Children's Guardian Fund noted that "for the past 15 years CGF has provided, on a case-by-case basis, money for computers, rent down payments, electric utility deposits, new interview clothes—all under our program called Bridge to the Future.

Together, the complementary programs of CGF and Next Step will provide coordinated mentoring services and direct support—at an unprecedented level—to this underserved but critical group of teenagers."

"Foster children, who at age 18 strike out on their own, frequently need help..."

The First Annual Children's Guardian Fund Golf Tournament will be held on April 12, 2010 at the Laurel Oak Country Club. Start practicing your golf swing!

KUDOS to....

Marilyn Pratt received a heartfelt compliment from the teenage girl she represents. The young lady has been through a lot lately, including the closing of Bowman and relocation to a Manatee Group home. When completing a survey she answered the question, "who is the most influential person in your life," by replying, "the GAL—Marilyn." It made the effort on her behalf all worth while. *Lynne Bowen*

Alix Morin for conducting a scrapbooking class for foster girls so they could create their own life books. Many girls attended with whatever pictures, letters, etc. that they had. Alix provided the materials, and the event was attended by case managers and supervisors. It was a very rewarding and positive experience for all who attended. *Milessa Dunlop*

Desoto County would like to recognize **Jean Evoy** for her diligence on a tough case. She advocated for a placement that the child had been telling her he did not want. However, she felt it was in his best interest and recommended the relative placement despite his

objection. He has now been in that placement for several weeks and is thriving and doing great. Thank you for that tough, but right, decision. *Sandee Woods*

Judy Sharple for her tireless advocacy in getting a very sweet child with significant special needs (Down Syndrome) adopted by his caregiver. She educated herself on the subject of adoption subsidies and advocated for the caregiver to receive a subsidy she felt would provide for the child's extensive needs. The smile on his face and the big hug he gave Judy after the adoption said it all! *Jan Vestal*

Fred Brothers, "GAL extraordinaire," who advocated for his child not to have contact with the step-father until an international background check was completed, due to the step-father's foreign citizenship. He was instrumental in contacting Interpol and making sure that the Safe Children's Coalition was following up with this issue. Concerned for the child's safety, he has gone far beyond the call of duty by making every effort to speak

to all parties, including grandparents, therapists, parents, physicians, and the mother's ex-husband. Fred's preparation allowed the Guardian ad Litem Program to have many different views and perspectives to advocate for the child's best interest. *Manny Hernandez*

Kim Herbel for advocating for the best interest of her child who was close to his eighteenth birthday. Though only assigned as a courtesy GAL for this child, Kim successfully advocated for a court order to ensure that the child receive his Master Trust account monies when he celebrated his eighteenth birthday. Kim also made sure that the child's Independent Living stipends were being addressed and that the child understood the meaning of extended jurisdiction. She also helped to find employment for this child and helped him get his driver's license. She was present when this child received his Juvenile Justice Achievement Award, and Kim's advocacy for this young man's best interest as he was transitioning into independent living was awe-

some. *Manny Hernandez*

Bob Merrill is the energizer bunny GAL. He not only visits and cares for all the children on his cases here in the Sarasota area, but he checks if they are receiving the services they need in another state. This spring he went to Kentucky to assure that the three children on his case were well cared for. He met with the family, the children, the Kentucky case manager, the guidance counselor and teachers. He brought back excellent progress notes which are very helpful to the case. Bob is not just dedicated, he cares deeply for these children, and I am grateful for it. *Karen Trautman*

If you take a look at the new website for GAL (www.12gal.org) you will see the result of another one of **Bob Merrill's** passions. Because of an offhand remark I made, he created a very interactive website for the Twelfth Circuit GALs. Please visit the site where you will find pictures, directions, things to do, etc. In the future we may even have trainings available on line. Thank you, Bob. *Pam Hindman*

New Dinner Meeting Program

The GAL Program is kicking off a series of dinner meetings with a presentation by Chief Judge Lee Haworth and Child Welfare Systems Analyst Laura McIntyre

In addition to receiving in-service credit, this will provide a very nice venue for guardians to have the opportunity to meet with other guardians. As we all know, once you put a few guardians together, watch out! What stories we have to tell, and how much we learn from the experiences of others. And what is the result? We become so much more adept at the varying situations we encounter; we meet people we can reach out to for advice and suggestions; we continue to

learn more about the various programs and the perceptions of administrators—and, we make new friends with something very important in common.

So, please attend; show your support for the GAL Program. Get to know some of the people we can't talk to during court. We plan to hold this every other month at the same dinner venue, and we hope people arrange to sit with GALs that they do not already know so that we may broaden our reach and exposure to program participants.

Please RSVP to Pam Hindman by July 3 and include your choice of entrée. There is a limit of 100 people.

Below are the details:

- When:** Thursday, July 9, 2009 beginning at 6 pm
Where: Primo Restaurant 8076 N. Tamiami Trail (just north of the airport)
Who: Judge Lee Hayworth, Chief Judge of the Twelfth Circuit
 Laura McIntyre—Ombudsman and Child Welfare Systems Advocate
Subject: Family Safety Alliance, the oversight board for dependency
Why: Discuss how they are trying to improve the dependency system
Dinner: Primo Salad, Muffalato Bread, a soft drink, and a choice of:
 Fettuccini Alfredo with Chicken, Lasagna Julian, or Eggplant Rollatini

Dinner is \$20 per person, which includes gratuity. Money will be collected at the door.

Please reserve by emailing pam.hindman@gal.fl.gov by July 3.

The ADVOCACY FRAMEWORK—What Is It?

We all want to be the best child advocates possible, and the introduction of the Advocacy Framework (AF) into our case planning will help us be just that. This process is part of a statewide initiative to help us examine the advocacy of our children. The Advocacy Framework has been a part of our planning that the volunteers have not been exposed to prior to now. This is a simplified, concise roadmap that will be at our fingertips to refer to in court or staffings and provide us with correct answers and information when there is a question raised or an issue discussed.

Looking at this from a volunteer's perspective, the Advocacy Framework will be comprised of priorities for meeting the child's needs; actions needed for that to occur; permanency goals and case plan compliance; placement of the child; the child's

needs in regard to medical, dental, mental health, educational and developmental requirements; and the legal needs of the child. It covers every possible issue.

An informal meeting with the GAL, supervisor and program attorney will be scheduled prior to each judicial review, and the Advocacy Framework will be the guide to issues and solutions in the case. This will be a team effort for the purpose of providing maximum advocacy toward the road to permanency. The AF will allow the GAL to be part of an important decision-making difference in the life of a child. All volunteers should start seeing this with their next judicial review.

Meet Stefanie Babb, MPA

Stefanie Babb became the child welfare director for Manatee Glens/Safe Children Coalition in November, 2006. Before this appointment she was employed by Children's Home Society of Florida. During her time with this organization she supervised contracts for the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Healthy Start, Targeted Case Management, Prevention and Substance Abuse Mental Health (SAMH). Stefanie is a graduate of the Children's Home Society Leadership class of 2006.

Stefanie has a master's degree in public administration from Bowling Green University in Ohio, and she has over 14 years of child welfare experience. She was employed by Sandusky County Children's Services unit for eleven years, holding positions of case manager, investigator, on-call worker, investigation and on-call supervisor. She also has over 400 professional training hours in the area of child welfare.



The Register
 Guardian ad Litem Program
 Twelfth Judicial Circuit

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 2071 Ringling Blvd. Ste. 625
 Sarasota, FL 34237
 941-861-4875

Manatee County
 1201 6th Avenue W, Ste. 510
 Bradenton, FL 34205
 941-744-9473

DeSoto County
 223 East Oak Street Ste. 2
 Arcadia, FL 34266
 863-993-4638

www.12gal.org



Above are Guardian ad Litem supervisors from all three offices—what a terrific group!

Notable Anniversaries—Third Quarter 2009



Three Years Plus

Bak, Genevieve	4
Del Savio, Joseph	3
Durst, Leigh	3
Flynn, Judith	3
Frankart, Leslye	3
Hunter, Vicki	4
Janik, Patricia	3
Kirkpatrick, Judy	3
Kremer, Rita	3
Lavelle, John	3
McCluskey, Ronald	3
Montgomery, Elsie (Bunny)	4
Neeley, Judie	3
Otterman, Dale	4
Peltier, Doris	3
Proctor, Carolyn	4
Reese, Gary	3
Schuyler, Marcella	3
Shapiro, Sylvia	4
Sharple, Judith	3

Simmons, Karen	3
Summerton, Darlene	3
Wedderburn, Peter	3

Five Years Plus

Anapol, Sara	9
Anderson, Cynthia	19
Bean, Andrew	8
Belcher, Shelley	6
Evoy, Jean	6
Giacobbe, Maxine	6
Gladziszewski, Jean	7
Harvell, Tena	7
Mayo, Fern	6
Miley, Mary	6
McDowell, Melissa	12
Szymanski, Carole	10
Tryon, Barton	6
Uranga, Jose	6

The anniversaries listed are for those GALs whose anniversary occurred in the third quarter of 2009.