



# FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM



## What is a Guardian ad Litem?

*A Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is a volunteer appointed by the court to advocate for a child because of alleged abuse, abandonment or neglect. The GAL advocates for the child's best interest, including physical safety and emotional well-being; permanent placement, a stable and nurturing home; and protection from further harm during the child's involvement in the system.*

## A "VOICE" FOR CHILDREN

When children get involved in the system, there needs to be someone there to speak for them and their best interests. That is where we (GAL Volunteers) come in.

- ⊙ The Court appoints us to these cases to speak for what we think is in the best interest of the child while they are in the system.
- ⊙ This includes input on placement of the child, visitation, school issues, counseling or anything else that may be important in the life of the child.
- ⊙ Judges respect our opinion and will take the time to listen.



- How do children enter the Dependency system?
- Where do children get placed once they are removed?
- How long do children stay in the system?

## Teens in care



**Research affirms that children who age out of the foster care system are at increased risk of poverty, homelessness, addiction, and re-entry into the public welfare system and adult criminal courts.**

## HELP CHANGE THEIR FUTURE

### Statistics for Children Aging Out of Foster Care

- ⦿ One in four (25%) will be incarcerated within the first two years after they leave the system.
- ⦿ Over one-fifth will become homeless at some time after age 18.
- ⦿ Approximately 58% obtain a high school degree at age 19, compared to 87% of a national comparison group of non-foster youth.
- ⦿ Less than 3% earn college degrees by the age of 25, as compared to 28% of the general population.

## How can we help?



## Not Enough Volunteers

We do not have enough volunteers to handle the cases.

- Our mission and goal is to have a “voice” for every child in the dependency system.
- We are a long way from that goal but we can get there with your help.

### VOLUNTEER AND SPREAD THE WORD!

- Maybe you or someone you know such as a spouse, neighbor or friend might be interested in volunteering with our program.



## **Roles and responsibilities of the Guardian ad Litem**



1. **Information Gatherer:**
  - **Visit the child and keep the child informed about the court proceedings;**
  - **Gather and assess independent information;**
  - **Interview appropriate parties involved in the case, including the child;**
  - **Review records;**



### **Community Advocate:**

- **Identify and advocate for services that the child might need.**
- **Work with community partners to ensure that the child is getting those services.**

### **Courtroom Advocate:**

- **Submit recommendations to the court.**
- **Attend and participate in court hearings and other related meetings.**

## **A Team Approach**

### **Volunteer Child Advocate:**

**The critical link between the child and the Court.**

### **Child Advocacy Manager:**

**Assists in preparing reports to the court and provides information on community resources and program policies and procedures.**

### **Program Attorney:**

**Provides legal guidance as needed and representation at court hearings.**

## **How do I become a Guardian ad Litem?**



- **Submit an application**
- **Attend an interview**
- **Submit to a criminal background check**
- **Complete 30 hours of pre-service training**



**Lift up**  
a child's voice.  
A child's life.

**I AM FOR THE**  
**CHILD** [children.org](http://www.children.org)



**GAL**

Guardian ad Litem

**A POWERFUL VOICE FOR**  
**FLORIDA'S CHILDREN**

**FLORIDA GUARDIAN AD LITEM**  
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