

# **Guardian ad Litem Program Thirteenth Judicial Circuit**

700 East Twiggs Street, Ste. 750, Tampa, FL 33602

813-272-5110

## **What is a Guardian ad Litem?**

Thousands of abused, abandoned and neglected children become the subject of judicial proceedings each year in Florida. Their voices are often unheard and best interests overlooked in the complicated and overburdened adversary process. Guardians ad Litem (GAL) are citizens who volunteer to become part of a court program to represent the best interests of an assigned child. The volunteer Guardian ad Litem is a representative for the child before the court, social service agencies and the community.

## **What does a Guardian ad Litem do?**

The Guardian ad Litem (GAL) represents the "best interests" of the child in a variety of ways. The Guardian ad Litem is an:

- Investigator:** The GAL independently conducts a thorough investigation on behalf of the child. He/she interviews many people; the child, counselors, pediatricians, psychiatrists and psychologists, mental health professionals, people from the neighborhood, schools, churches, law enforcement, and friends. The GAL also examines and collects records from many sources concerning the child. The GAL then takes this information to the experts in the community for recommendations on what is best for the child.
- Monitor:** The GAL serves as a monitor of the agencies and persons who provide services to the child. He/she assures that orders of the court are carried out, and that families and children in need receive the help that they should.
- Protector:** The GAL protects the child from insensitive questioning and the harmful effect of being embroiled in the adversary court process.
- Spokesperson:** The GAL assures that the child's wishes are heard and that the best interests of the child are presented to the Court and agencies dealing with the child.
- Reporter:** The GAL presents information to the Court and helps the Court determine what is in the child's best interests. He/she prepares a written report which becomes a permanent part of the child's record.

**Want more information: Contact Yvonne Marrone at  
813-307-3325 (Yvonne.Marrone@gal.fl.gov) or check out our website  
[www.guardianadlitem.org](http://www.guardianadlitem.org)**

# Every Child Deserves a Guardian ad Litem

**“...if there is any program that costs the least and benefits the most, this one is it”**

*2002 Governor’s Blue Ribbon Task Force*

The Guardian ad Litem Program’s sole responsibility is to represent the best interests of children who are involved in dependency court proceedings.

The GAL Program currently has more than 7,000 volunteers and represents the best interests of approximately 23,000 children.

In addition to a guardian, every child appointed to the Program has an attorney representing that child’s best interest.

## Guardian ad Litem Volunteers

**Guardian ad Litem volunteers are an “...indispensable intermediary between the child and the court, between the child and DCF.” 2002**

*Governor’s Blue Ribbon Task Force*

A time and mileage survey conducted in October 2009 indicated that volunteers:

- Spent an average of 10.1 hours working on a case;
- Drove an average of 87.13 miles per case;
- Collectively, they worked 32,747.84 hours and drove 281,158.07 miles

The estimated dollar value for an hour of volunteer time in Florida is \$17.78.

$$\$17.78 \times 32,747.84 = \quad \quad \quad \mathbf{\$582,256.60}$$

Florida reimburses its employees .445 cents a mile.

$$.445 \times 281,158.07 = \quad \quad \quad \mathbf{\$125,115.30}$$

$$\text{Monetary value for October, 2009} = \quad \quad \quad \mathbf{\$707,371.90}$$

When multiplied by the 12 months in a year, this savings equals almost \$8.5 million per year. This is 27.60% of our total annual budget.

A cut to the GAL Program, while minuscule to the statewide financial void will have long lasting negative effects on hundreds, if not thousands, of children by crippling one of the state’s most efficient programs.

**For more information on becoming a GAL in Hillsborough County please call:**

