

Wake County
Guardian ad Litem Program
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Wake County Guardian ad Litem Program March, 2018 Newsletter



On Wednesday March 7, 2018 22 new Volunteer Guardian ad Litem Advocates were sworn-in by the Honorable Judge Keith Gregory. We welcome these new volunteers to the Wake County Guardian ad Litem Program and thank them for their commitment and desire to help improve the lives of abused and neglected children in our community.



We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to Dee Hord and Mellonee Kennedy, Wake County Guardian ad Litem Attorney Advocates for facilitating our February in-service training, "Legal Issues Facing GAL's". We also would like to express our thanks to those who attended this informative training.

Spotlight on Margaret Barham Volunteer Child Advocate Since 2002



It is hard for me to believe that it has been 16 years since I began working with Wake County GAL! Time really does fly when you are having fun, and I am grateful for this journey. One of the hallmarks of a great organization is the longevity and stability of its staff. Wake County GAL has this in abundance, from our wonderful director, attorney advocates, supervisors, support staff, and even us volunteers. The work is rewarding but so are the relationships. Thank you!

About sixteen years ago, I was working for the State as a psychologist at NCCIW (Women's Prison). My previous work had been at least partially working with children, and I missed it. Also after many years of benefiting from others giving to me in the form of school and training, I was interested in doing something to give back to my community. I was very busy in my work, so I was not looking for another professional opportunity. Instead, I was looking for something I could do as a concerned citizen. I was tangentially familiar with what a guardian ad litem did through my work in OH and some work I had been doing in Chapel Hill, and I had been very impressed with the work by the GALs in at least two different cases. I had also had some very positive experiences working with DSS investigations and foster care in Orange County. With that exposure, I decided to look into working as a GAL myself.

From the standard GAL training to my very first (and very complicated) case, I have felt supported, engaged and a part of large network of folks that really do have the children's best interests at heart. Seeing how individuals from a wide variety of disciplines work together is interesting and eye-opening. Certainly, there are lots of inefficiencies and more than a few frustrations as well as an occasional failure. But for the most part, the system of care we have in place in our community is impressive. I have thoroughly enjoyed seeing how children are responding to their environment and changes in their environment first hand, out of an office, where the child actually lives. Meeting and talking to so many different people (parents, foster parents, teachers, therapists, social workers, lawyers, doctors, etc.) has been invaluable in helping me see things from as many perspectives as possible.

The window that a GAL has into the life of a child and the perspective of a child is unique and in many ways more expansive than most of the other professionals working with them. It is an amazing learning opportunity, but mostly it is an honor and a privilege. And just think, the only credentials needed are an open heart and an open mind.

Spotlight on Mary Jane Koch Volunteer Child Advocate Since 2015



Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress in every society, in every family.

Kofi Annan

Each client I advocate for I gain a better understanding of my GAL role. A few times I thought I wish I could go back and start again with my first case. Not because I didn't do the job but because I understand better the decisions I advocated for and the decisions other agencies advocated for as well. In each case the health and safety of the child is first and foremost. That's a no brainer. But the progress of each case and the impact a GAL can have on a positive outcome for each child is a series of serious interactions with agencies, caregivers, families and the child. I have gained confidence in asking investigative and clarifying questions of social workers, therapists, lawyers, parents, relatives, caregivers and children. I have had to fight the urge to tell them what I think they should do. I have had to fight the urge to try and fix things. I have had to learn and practice my role as advocate.

I started the GAL program in August of 2015 shortly after retiring from my career as a school counselor for 27 years. I met my first GAL while in this career and I was immediately impressed that there was such a person involved in a foster child's life. This person listened, asked questions and shared their role of as a guardian ad litem. It was at that time I thought when I retire I am going to look into that volunteer job. Fast forward 20 years and here I am: Amazed even more at the resiliency of children. Thankful for the services available to support children in foster care. Humbled by the foster parents and social workers who plan, care, and implement interventions for foster care children. Awed by the parents who are able to do the hard work to reunify their families. Appreciative of the GAL staff of supervisors who train, listen, guide and support me in this role.

"Children are like cement. Whatever falls on them makes an impression."

Haim Ginott

Sitting at the Middle Table



“As a Guardian ad Litem, sitting at the middle table in the courtroom clearly defines my role and responsibility - to keep the child as the central point, the focus, of the case. It’s not about being on one side or the other, it’s all about being there for the child.”

Marla Dorrell, Advocating since 2005



“Being a part of the team at the middle table in the juvenile courtroom means using my life and my voice for a purpose bigger than myself. I truly do believe that "children are the messages that we send to a time we will not see" (John W. Whitehead). Sitting at the table means having a hand in positively impacting a child, a message, for the future.”

Dr. Connie Shipman, Advocating since 2014



To me, sitting at the middle table means shouldering the burden of court for children. Advocating for a child who's voice must be heard when they cannot always speak for themselves lets the court know their wishes and best interests without requiring anything more of these children who already endure so much."

Reagan Neville, Advocating since 2017



“When I sit at the middle table, I am there as an advocate and not as an adversary. I know I am there to truthfully and accurately relate what I know and have observed. I am there to make recommendations, not decisions. The Court and the children can only be served if I am informed and truthful, and base my recommendations on observation and not speculation or wishful thinking.”

Fred Ames, Advocating since 2003

What is Foster Care 18-21/Who is Eligible?

Foster Care 18-21/Who is Eligible?

Foster Care 18-21 is a program that offers extended foster care to youth who have aged out from foster care. This program became effective on January 1, 2017. A juvenile who is in foster care when he or she turns 18 may enter into a voluntary foster care agreement with a county department of social services and continue to receive foster care services and benefits until turning 21. The young adult who has aged out of foster care may enter into a voluntary foster care agreement at any time prior to his or her 21st birthday. The purpose of this program is to help the young adult to successfully transition from foster care to adulthood. The young adult and county department of social services are required to sign a contract called Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA). The VPA is executed in the month the foster youth turns 18 or when the young adult opts in to the program after his or her 18th birthday.

Eligibility Criteria:

To be eligible for these extended benefits, the young adult must satisfy one of five criteria:

- . Completing high school or another educational program that leads to an equivalent credential,
- . Enrolled in an institution providing post-secondary or vocational education,
- . Participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment,
- . Employed at least 80 hours/month,
- . Incapable of complying with the educational or employment requirement because of a medical condition or disability.

Foster Care 18-21 provides the young adult with ongoing case work that includes a Transitional Living Plan, placement in a home approved by the county department of social services (the placement is not required to be a licensed foster home. The placement could be an approved dorm, or semi-supervised housing arrangement where the agency provides monthly supervision to young adult), Medicaid coverage, foster care maintenance payment to pay for food, shelter, clothing, transportation expenses, educational grants and scholarships to pay for tuition, fees, and books at a NC public community college or university. The NC Department of Social Services' policy requires termination of services when the young adult does not meet the goals of the Transitional Living Program, violates the VPA (including being involved in criminal activity), or has left the placement for more than 14 days without prior approval and the court has terminated services.

Reminder:

We want our Attorney Advocates to be as accessible to volunteer Guardians ad Litem as possible, especially leading up to contested court hearings. Therefore, our attorneys are setting aside Thursday afternoons to meet with and prepare GALs for their court hearings coming up the next week. This can be done either in person or by phone.

So, if you want to meet with or speak with the assigned attorney in preparation for your hearing, please contact them to schedule a time. Their direct contact information is:

Mellonee: 919-792-5356, Mellonee.A.Kennedy@nccourts.org



Dee: 919-792-5354, David.F.Hord@nccourts.org



Thank you so much for your advocacy!



Fostering Bright Futures Fellowship Program

Teens aging out of the foster care system in Wake County can face overwhelming challenges. Many youths that graduate from high school while in foster care do not pursue a secondary education or job skills training. Many struggle to earn enough income to live independently.

The Fostering Bright Futures Fellowship (FBFF) program works in conjunction with Wake County Human Services and Wake Technical Community College to provide a comprehensive support structure that encourages participants to develop a plan and pursue education beyond high school. The objective of the FBFF program is to eliminate the barriers that prevent foster care youth from meeting their life goals. The FBFF program helps young adults attend college and earn a degree. The program provides financial, academic and social support to help these youth learn skills and get the education needed for meaningful employment and independence as adults.

Program participants are mentored and supported by a Life Coach. They attend life-skills training and have access to tutoring when needed. These young adults can earn a diploma, certificate, or degree at Wake Tech. Some students choose to transfer into bachelor degree programs.

To find out about edibility requirements for the program or academic expectations for participants, visit their website at www.fosteringbrightfutures.org or contact Michelle Blackmon, Program Coordinator at 919-866-5504.

The 100 Black Men of Triangle

The 100 Black Men of Triangle East, is an organization devoted to improving the quality of life for African-Americans-particularly young males through programs focusing on health and wellness, economic empowerment, mentoring and education. Their wellness programs focus on education, awareness and public policy issues that disproportionately affect African Americans. Their trained mentors work with youth grades 6-12 and serve as role models for this age group through their mentoring the 100 Way Program. Their educational programs are designed to help youth meet their academic goals and reinforces the importance of academic success. In addition, their economic programs promote financial literacy, wealth building within families and a sense of entrepreneurship

March

LINKS Academy Events



March 1
Ages 13-15:
4H Work Force
Ages 16-21:
Resume/Interview
Workshop

March 3
SaySo Saturday
Youth Drop off 6:30
am
Pick Up 6 pm at
WCHS Swinburne
location



March 8
Ages 13-15:
4H Work Force
Ages 16-21:
Resume/Interview
Workshop



March 15
Ages 13-15:
4H Work Force
Ages 16-21:
Healthy Snacks:
Pushti



March 17
Hurricanes Hockey
Game Youth Drop
Off: no later than
5:30 pm
Pick Up: 10 pm
@Swinburne



March 22
Ages 13-15:
4H Work Force
Ages 16-21:
Grocery Store
Tour: Pushti

March 29
Advisory Board
Meeting

Advisory Board
Members Only

*** Making Proud Choices (a Referred Group Only) takes place on March 1, 8, 15, and 22

***Social Workers MUST refer youth for SaySo Saturday and Hurricanes Hockey Game



6:00-8:30 ~ 220 Swinburne St. Raleigh, NC
Tori Marshall ~ (919) 212-8415



March is the Social Work Month:

March is the National Professional Social Work Month. Social Workers confront some of the most challenging issues facing individuals and families and make important contributions to our society. We would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to the Wake County Human Services Social Workers for their work on behalf of the Wake County families and to wish them a Happy Social Work Month!!!!



Confidentiality and the Guardian ad Litem Volunteer



As a Guardian ad Litem Volunteer Advocate, you have access to confidential information about children and people involved in those children's lives. Please keep in mind that as GAL advocate you may not release this information except to the child, GAL Program staff, the social worker, the court, and others as instructed by law or local court rules.

There are strict guidelines about who can have access to confidential information. By law, GAL volunteers must keep all information regarding the case confidential and make no disclosure, except by court orders or unless provided by law.

When in doubt, discuss any confidentiality concerns with your Guardian ad Litem Program Supervisor.

Free Books for Children

Wake County SmartStart is providing a year of free books for preschool children. However, books are available for a limited time. For more information please visit:

<http://www.wakesmartstart.org/program/imagination-library/>.



Up-Coming Events

Wednesday, March 14th Guardian ad Litem Supper Club, The Guardian ad Litem Supper Club will be held at **Seasons52 at 6:15PM**. Seasons52 is located in the Crabtree Mall in Raleigh. If you plan to attend, please email Fred Ames at his email address: fredames@nc.rr.com. Please let Mr. Ames know if you plan to attend, and if you plan to bring someone with you. Please respond to Mr. Ames no later than Tuesday, March 13th.

Friday, March 23rd Guardian ad Litem In-Service Training Practicum for GAL Volunteers on the Guardian ad Litem Guide. 9AM to 12PM

Friday, April 23rd Guardian ad Litem In-Service Training: In Home Services Available to Children and Families in Wake County. 10AM to 12PM

Friday, May 11th Guardian ad Litem In-Service Training: Role of the GAL Volunteer in Child and Family Team Meetings as Well as Permanency Planning Mediation. 10AM to 12PM

Thursday, May 17th, Wake County Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner will be held from **6:30-8:30PM**. Please don't forget to RSVP to Carrie Stopka 919-792-5353 or carrie.e.stopka@nccourts.org



Special thanks to the Friends of Wake Guardian ad Litem Association for their continuing support of families and children of Wake County. www.friendsofwakegal.org

Happy Birthday to Our Volunteer Child Advocates!

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|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Keith | Marissa | Sidney | Heather | Susan |
| Robert | Nancy | Gina | Sarah | Douglass |
| Shari | Rosalind | Lashanda | Tammi | Deborah |
| Ryan | Lesley | Jennifer | Rachel | Jeannie |
| Kourtney | Luvenia | Jade | Robin | Sharice |
| Gail | Angela | Gabriela | Sharon | Thomas |
| Mary Jane | Anita | Elin | Geoffrey | Austin |
| Teresa | Laura | | | |

