

December, 2011

# GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM DISTRICT 11 NEWS

SERVING HARNETT, LEE AND JOHNSTON COUNTIES

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## HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO EVERYONE!

Happy Holidays to everyone!!! This is the time of year we give thanks, count our blessings and share with others. District 11 wants to thank all our volunteers, social workers, attorneys, judges and all the many others for everything they have done this year.

And what a year it has been! We've endured many changes and challenges, new staff, new regional administrator, several different attorneys in Harnett, and staff out on leave. However, we have lots to be thankful for. John Webster is healthy and doing a great job in Johnston County. Moira Conlon has been a great addition to the program and is doing a wonderful job working with the volunteers, social workers and attorneys in Lee and Harnett Counties. Marie Mobley, Attorney Advocate for Johnston County for the last 6 years accepted the attorney advocate position in Harnett County. What a great blessing to have, as she came with lots of GAL experience! Eddie Winstead, Attorney Advocate for Lee County, continued to provide the program some continuity through it all and for that we are very grateful. Cy Gurney, our Regional Administrator guided the program with her leadership and expertise along with Mary Jo Van Horne, District Administrator in District 9 stepped in to mentor us along the way. Each in their own way has blessed the program and we are thankful. And Vivian Holmes has managed to survive it all!

Someone said early on that this program is about advocating for the children and we have no program if we don't have volunteers. So the greatest blessing has been the **faithful volunteers** we have in this program. A special thanks to all the volunteers who stepped up and took on more. Thanks to those that visited the children, attended

meetings, helped with filing in the offices, who accepted new child cases to advocate for and especially for writing court reports and turning them in on time. You, the **volunteers**, are what this season is all about. Your giving of your time and energy all though the year has made a difference in the life of a child and for this we are extremely thankful!

*So thank you, thank you, and thank you!!!!  
Vivian, John & Moira*

### **Managing Administrator for District 11**

Greetings! My name is Mary Jo Van Horne and I have the pleasure of serving you as the managing administrator for District 11. When my former colleague, Nancy Cashion-Cameron left earlier this year, our Regional Administrator Cy Gurney stepped in to help Vivian and John build a plan for going forward. Cy brought in Moira Conlan as supervisor for Lee and Harnett Counties and called me to provide support and assistance for this wonderful staff.

I tell everyone what a great job I have. I've been the District Administrator for District 9 (Franklin, Granville, Vance and Warren Counties) for 7 years and will continue in that role in addition to my new role with you. As a wife of 26 years and mother of three ages 10, 20 & 23, being busy and family centered is my "normal". I had volunteered as a GAL for a year and worked with GAL volunteer advocates and staff throughout my 19 years of employment with the local mental health authority. Children and families have been the primary focus of my career. I strongly believe in the NC Guardian ad Litem mission "to provide trained independent advocates to represent and promote the best interests of abused, neglected and dependent children in the state court system and to work towards a plan that ensures that these children are in a safe, permanent home." I consider it a privilege to work for people that know the mission of the organization and work towards that mission daily! The NC model of GAL volunteer advocate and attorney advocate team is tried and true. D11 has committed attorney advocates for you to partner with. You keep the voice of the children in the forefront when courts and agencies are making decisions. You know that all of that work has a direct impact on the lives of our youth. Every GAL volunteer advocate I speak with is crystal clear that their focus is always on the best interests of the children. So much is accomplished by giving just a few hours each month. (1) See the children. (2) Talk with their network of involved individuals and get the facts. (3) Write a report and come to court. Simple tasks that change lives in the most positive ways. Thank you for stepping up to this challenge and your service. I look forward to meeting you over time. Moira, John and Vivian are terrific staff and will continue to be your contacts. I'll be in the district routinely but will not have an office. Should you ever need to reach me, my email is [mary.j.vanhorne@nccourts.org](mailto:mary.j.vanhorne@nccourts.org) and my phone number is 919-497-3010.

Mary Jo Van Horne, LCSW  
District Administrator  
Guardian ad Litem Program  
Louisburg, NC 27549

### **When is GAL No Longer in a Case?**

Over the past few months, we have had a number of cases where a parent's rights have been terminated. Does this mean we no longer are involved in the child's case? Nope! Here are the ways our cases can close:

1. the permanent plan has been achieved and approved by the court
2. DSS dismisses the petition

3. the child is deceased
4. the entire case transfers out of our county
5. the child is emancipated
6. the child turns 18 (also called “aging out”)
7. the case is considered a conflict for our program and the judge assigns representation for the child
8. an adoption decree is entered
9. the child is placed out of state and that placement is considered to be the permanent plan (exceptions sometimes occur)

If your case is closed, please return your file to our office ASAP. If your case involves a TPR, you still must advocate for your child. Are their needs being met? Is the adoption process moving along quickly? Is your youth in danger of aging out without a permanent plan in place? We have a wonderful new resource for volunteers with cases in the Post TPR stage – ask us if you would like a copy!

*Submitted by Moira Conlon*

### **WHAT DO I DO WITH THE FILES?**

Return files to the GAL office, when the volunteer is no longer appointed to the case, or the case closes.

So if you have files you are no longer involved with, please return them to the GAL office.

## **WELCOME NEW VOLUNTEERS**

The Guardian ad Litem Program in District 11 serving Harnett, Johnston and Lee Counties had a swearing-in ceremony November 9, 2011 in Johnston County for new volunteers. Each of the Guardian ad Litem volunteers completed the required training and will serve as court appointed advocates for abused and neglected children. The GAL Volunteer Oath was administered by the Honorable District Court Judge Robert W. Bryant, Jr. Pictured from left to right is Judge Bryant, Cecelia Weaver, Marilyn O’Meara, Marie Mobley, Attorney Advocate for Harnett and Johnston County and John Webster, Guardian ad Litem Program Supervisor.



Thank you all so very much for your advocacy on behalf of the children!

# COURT REPORT

1. Courts Reports are **due** in the GAL office **2 weeks** prior to court.
2. GAL staff needs 1 week to review report (remember staff is also reviewing other reports on for the same day as yours)
3. **"Local Rules"** require reports to be distributed to other parties (DSS, parent's attorney etc.) **5 days prior to court**. The GAL program is required to follow the "Local Rules" for distribution of reports.

Recently we've had several court reports **"objected"** to being submitted into evidence in a hearing, because the reports were not distributed to the parties in a timely manner. (less than the 5 day rule for distribution) When this happens then the judge is not allowed to review our report and take it into consideration.

Failure to submit reports in a timely manner may result in testimony on the part of the GAL volunteer in order to have report entered into evidence.

So please submit your reports to the GAL office in a timely manner. We desperately want your report to be read by the judge. It is essential to advocating for these children and you, the volunteer, need to get credit as you've worked so hard for these children and on your reports.

## NEW VOLUNTEER TRAINING

The next volunteer Orientation will be: January, 10, 2012 for Harnett, Lee & Johnston Counties. So please start recruiting now for new child advocates!

Orientations will be held at:

Johnston County Courthouse, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Grand Jury Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Entrance, Smithfield and at Harnett County Courthouse, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Grand Jury Room, 301 W. Cornelius Harnett Blvd., Lillington.

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## **IN SERVICE TRAINING**

The “Court Report Writing In-Service” training held on October 6<sup>th</sup> with trainer Ruth Kravitz was a great success!

### **Thank You to the Following Volunteers Who Attended Our Court Report Writing Workshop!**

Joyce Oliver, Joy Langdon, Sue Cochran, Judy de Jong, Monique Weathers, Cindy Wilson, Ann Holmes, Ed Greer, Donna Johnson, Gloria Overby, William Overby, and Angela Robertson.

Those in-training that attended were Cecelia Weaver, Lori Mosley and Marilyn O’Meara.

**GAL Office will be closed:**

**December 24 & 25, 2011**

**January 2, 2012**

**January 16, 2012**

## **RESOURCE CORNER**

### **Health Resources for Older Youth in Care**

*If you are advocating for an older youth, you may want to see if they are aware of these resources...*

Young adults who aged out of foster care at age 18 are eligible for Medicaid (also known as Health Check) services until the month of their 21st birthdays, without regard to assets or income. To become eligible, they must apply at their county DSS office. More info can be found at <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dma/medicaid/>.

Young adults who were in foster care but did not age out at 18 may still be eligible for Medicaid/Health Check until their 21st birthdays. Eligibility requirements can be found at <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dma/medicaid/who.htm>.

Those who are not eligible for Medicaid/Health Check may be eligible for Health Choice for Children (<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dma/healthchoice/index.htm>), a reduced cost comprehensive medical plan.

Your county health department can help young adults locate medical care for free or at a reduced rate. A list can be found at <http://www.ncalhd.org/county.htm>.

*If you have a resource or any suggestions for articles, you’d like to see in the newsletter, please contact the GAL staff.*