

Newsletter

Guardian ad Litem
13th Judicial District

February 2012



From the State Office... Our New Leader!

Before taking on the role of State Administrator for the North Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program, Cindy Bizzell administered the Organizational Development Division of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts. Cindy has worked in college administration, owned a small business and served as a Guardian ad Litem volunteer before joining the staff of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts in 1986. She worked as regional and assistant administrator in the Guardian ad Litem Program, providing technical assistance to district programs and managing the operations of the statewide program. During her tenure with GAL, she designed and implemented a volunteer curriculum that became the model for the National Court Appointed Special Advocates volunteer training program.

Cindy earned a Master of Education degree in Counseling from North Carolina State University and an undergraduate degree in Music Education from Meredith College. She holds certificate as a Public Manager and Integrative Coach.

For fun after hours, Cindy puts her musical training to use as artistic director of a 40-voice women's community chorus that performs two concerts each year. She also enjoys weddings and working in her yard, and is trying her hand at organic gardening.

A Child's Advocate
In Court



"I love facilitating the transfer of knowledge and expertise from a few individuals to the whole organization. It strengthens our capacity to provide consistent excellent service across the state."

-Cindy Bizzell

Brunswick County News



Tribute to one of our finest: Mark Dowd

It is great regret coupled with profound gratitude that we announce that Mark, who has been with our program for ten years, will be retiring in March. Mark joined the Guardian ad Litem Program 14 years ago in Tampa, Florida. When he and his wife, Maryann, relocated to North Carolina ten years ago, he joined our program.

One social worker recently told me, "He can drive me up the wall as he works his cases, but –if I had a child in DSS custody - I would want him to be his guardian ad Litem." That pretty much says it all. Mark attends all meetings related to the child/ren assigned to him, seeks out the tiniest detail during his interactions with those associated with the children – adding these to his repertoire of information about them, attends and participates vigorously all meetings related to the children, joins them when they have birthday parties or at other events that are important to any child, is available to the foster parents 24/7 – and, a surprising number of them are in constant contact with him, collaborates freely with the social workers on each of his cases, and –as you might guess- has been asked to take the really tough cases simply because we know that he will be fair, work with the parties involved (and, yes, that includes parents), and in the end will make recommendations to our judge that are well thought out and always reflect what he feels are in the best interest of the children he represents.

He may leave our program, but not Brunswick County. I know that I will always be able to ask his advice on a tricky case –and, although I haven't mentioned it to him yet- I will be asking him to mentor our new volunteers. It would be most surprising for him to not say, "Of course, Jane, anything that I can do to help."

~Jane Cassidy, Guardian ad Litem District Administrator

WAVES 4 K.I.D.S. (DSS and GAL 501(c)(3)), are working on their first fund-raiser for the year – the First Annual Philip Cook Golf Tournament, to be held this spring. All funds are intended to be used for expressed needs of our children in foster care for whom DSS does not have allocated monies for.

Welcome!

During the month of January, the Honorable Judge Tyler swore in the following Guardian ad Litem Volunteers:

Jane Britt, Mildred McDermott & Judy Morehouse!

Happy GAL-anniversary!

Carol Byrnside (7 years) and Richard Bowie (1 year)!!



Bladen & Columbus Counties



Bladen & Columbus Counties are “persistently poor”

According to a press release from the North Carolina Budget & Tax Center, a new report released on January 25, 2012 details why 10 North Carolina counties were classified as “persistently poor” between 1970 and 2000. For a county to be considered “persistently poor,” it must have high poverty rates annually for three decades. “Persistently poor” is also defined by the percentage of people who live in poverty in addition to the period of time that they poverty rate has stayed high in a given geographic region. The 10 counties included in the report include Bertie, Bladen, Columbus, Halifax, Martin, Northampton, Pitt, Robeson, Tyrell and Washington.

Welcome!

On January 9, 2012, the Honorable William Fairley swore in Diana Garcia, of Tabor City, as a Guardian ad Litem Volunteer! Diana volunteered with the Guardian ad Litem program from 2004 until 2007 when family obligations forced her to resign. We are thankful Diana has chosen to return to her role as child advocate with the Guardian ad Litem Program in Columbus County!



Yard Sale!!!!

Old Dock United Methodist Church has chosen the Guardian ad Litem Program as their mission project for Vacation Bible School 2012! The church plans to provide back to school supplies for the county’s foster children. A Yard Sale is scheduled for Saturday, February 4, from 8am until noon. All proceeds will benefit this mission project! The church is located 15 miles east of Whiteville off Highway 130 in Old Dock.

GAL-anniversaries!

Cynthia Jones has been a child advocate in Bladen County for 7 ***YEARS*** (2/8)!

Happy 1 year anniversary to Daria Buccilli (2/17)!

Be sure to pick up your copy of *Living Out Loud* magazine! There is an article featuring The Guardian ad Litem Program and you might even see some of your fellow GALs mentioned!

February Court Dates
Brunswick: 2/1, 2/15, 2/16, 2/28
Bladen: 2/9, 2/27
Columbus: 2/8, 2/16, 2/17

The mission of the Guardian Ad Litem Program (GAL) is to provide trained, independent advocates to represent and promote the best interests of abused and neglected or dependent children involved in the court system and work toward a plan that ensures that these children are in a safe, permanent home.

Reminders & Notices...

- Please remember to submit your monthly work logs to the GAL office if you are otherwise unable to keep staff informed of your current case status.
- As a child advocate you must visit the child you are appointed to represent at least once per month in person. Monthly visits ensure that the child is safe and healthy and that the current placement is going well.
- A court report must be submitted for every hearing (except non-secure and adjudication). If you are unable to submit a report for a scheduled hearing, please notify staff as soon as possible.
- All information you obtain as a child advocate must be kept confidential.

Contact Us:

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“When you have got an elephant by the hind legs and he is trying to run away, it is best to let him run.”

-Abraham Lincoln

Happy Presidents' Day!