

# GUARDIAN AD LITEM NEWS

18<sup>TH</sup> Judicial District  
Guilford County

FALL 2009

*Christy Alexander, Editor*



Dear Guilford County Staff and Volunteers:

I want to thank you for the extra work that you all have been doing in this time of budget pressures and cut-backs. Your dedication has really been inspiring, as you have been "doing more with less" – and you have continued to advocate so successfully for children. I know that it was difficult to lose the leadership of Patti as District Administrator, and the inability to fill that leadership position has intensified the loss. I wish that I could tell you when we will be able to hire another District Administrator; unfortunately I don't know how soon that can be.

The GAL Program lost 1.5 vacant positions (the Assistant Administrator and .5 of a Program Supervisor position in Wake County), and we currently have 5 additional positions vacant. AOC has established a quota system for the various divisions in the judicial system to maintain vacant positions in order to generate "lapsed salaries" that will keep the court system running. We have not met the quota, and I have been advocating for an exception since our GAL Program is already understaffed. But, AOC leadership wants to be fair, and to date there have been no exceptions to this quota system.

Cy Gurney, your Regional Administrator, has been keeping me informed of how the staff in Greensboro and Kathie Petry in High Point have really pulled together as a team and managed to keep the GAL Program going forward remarkably well in the absence of a District Administrator. As you may know, Michelle Wright is the team leader for the Greensboro office and Kathie Petry is the team leader for the office in High Point. Cy will rotate office hours in both office at least once a month to provide support, consultation and staff supervision in the district until we can fill the District Administrator position.

Patti Hanna's legacy of leadership is strong. Recently McKinley Wooten, Deputy Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, and I visited the Greensboro office, and we heard first hand the work of the GAL staff and volunteers. Your work is so impressive, and I know that you all are putting in many extra hours in your commitment to serve your child clients. You are making significant and positive differences in the lives of your child-clients. The work that you are doing gives me confidence that our program can and will meet the challenges of this difficult economic time. Thank you

Jane Volland, J.D.

Guardian ad Litem Program Administrator

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## SPOTLIGHT on ROBERT LUDWICK

### MY GAL JOURNEY

By Robert Ludwick

I became a Guardian ad Litem in 1997. Sam Parrish, the District Administrator back then, spoke to my Sunday School class about becoming a GAL. It just so happens at the time I was looking for something to volunteer for. This seemed right down my alley because I was at the Baptist Children's Home in Thomasville for about eight years when I was a child. At that time, the place was called an orphanage. I spent the last two years of my custody at Wingate Junior College, where I finished high school and two years of college at the same time.

I promised myself when I retired that I was not going to do much of anything that was not fun or if I was not getting a lot of pleasure from doing it. Here I am after all these years still volunteering as a GAL. I have anywhere from 5 to 10 cases at a time and sometimes a case will involve a sibling group. I do my best to see my cases through the system and the children placed in a permanent home either through adoption or reunification.

I have had a lot of challenging cases but the more challenging they are, the better I like it. There is no feeling like it when you have helped get a child placed in a good and safe home and find success. Sometimes when you have a problem case and don't know quite what to do, you have to rely on your instincts and do what you think is right and hope you are right.

I have met a lot of wonderful people as a Guardian ad Litem. I try to go to all the functions that the office sponsors because I enjoy talking to other volunteers, especially about how each of us handles differences. The girls in the office like to kid me about going to Yum Yum's for lunch on court days. (Those hot dogs sure are good!)

The first year or two as a volunteer can be pretty tough because there is a lot to learn and you are put into situations that you have never been in before. Do your best to stick it out and learn what you need to do. If you do, there is no way to put into words the feeling you get from helping a child get into a good, safe home.

Remember, children don't ask for much - home, food and love.

*"Each child is an adventure into a better life—an opportunity to change the old pattern and make it new."*

*~Hubert H. Humphrey*

# TIPS FOR ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND CHRONIC ILLNESSES

By Krisan Walker

Volunteer advocates and care providers frequently have questions of how to best advocate for children with disabilities and/or chronic illness. Working with children who have many service providers and multiple needs may be daunting. Here are a few tips to best assess the needs and services of these children.

**1. Familiarize yourself with the child's diagnosis:** It is important for everyone to have a basic **understanding** about the nature, diagnosis, cause, and prevention of any disability or chronic illness. With a basic understanding of the diagnosis you will be prepared to advocate for services, technology, medical care and education needs. Any national web site can get you started.

**2. Watch for physical and behavioral changes:** Ask about disturbances of eating or sleeping. Watch for confusion or fear produced by unfamiliar events and situations. Look for interference with daily routine or repetitive activities. Watch for behavioral changes such as, hiding, biting, crying or any change in behavior. Observe how the child communicates needs and feelings. All of these can be signals for you to gauge how the child is adapting to any situation.

**3. Seek out the perception of those who know the child best:** You may not understand or be able to communicate with the child you are representing. In this case it is best to try and locate the person who has known this child the longest. It may be a relative, a teacher or a school social worker who can explain to you how your child reacts in different situations. Ask them what can be expected and what would show signs for concern.

**4. Educate yourself about local resources as well as your child's team of service providers.** The child you are representing may already have a team of service providers or you may need to familiarize yourself to what is available in your community.

**5. Know the education rights:** The IDEA law requires states to provide a free, appropriate education to all children with disabilities regardless of the severity of their disability. Under the law, each child has an individualized education program (IEP) that indicates what kinds of special education and related services the child will receive. The IDEA covers children with disabilities from ages 3 to 21 years

**6. Know the role of the care provider: Provide love and support.** The primary need of a child with a disability is the same as that of all children: love and support. **Foster independence.** The care provider's goals are to foster independence and to help the child develop a sense of self-worth and personal fulfillment.

As you see, there is much to do when advocating for a child with a disability or chronic illness. Breaking down your challenges into pieces can help you develop a strong workable plan for effective advocacy.



*"We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget he is someone today"*

*~Stacia Tauscher*



## OBTAINING INFORMATION

By Kathie Petry

Have you ever been frustrated by not getting important information from a social worker? (Did you say, DUH?) We are working to improve that, and you can help. Please let us know if you do not get information on a fairly regular basis from the social worker on your cases.

More and more social workers are doing a good job of sending emails (some of them call GALs directly!) to the whole treatment team whenever there are developments in a case or with a child. Unfortunately, this isn't the case with all the social workers. It is the law that DSS must inform us when a child is moved, and it is *best practice* to inform us of major developments.

Sometimes in Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings, it seems the decision has been made prior to the meeting. If that happens to you, let us know. Everyone should have the same information beforehand, or everyone should get the information at the meeting.

Here are some tips for meetings:

- Introduce yourself as the Guardian ad Litem for the child(ren)—you are not “just” a volunteer.
- If you anticipate that the meeting will be contentious, and you'd like back-up, call your supervisor and ask for someone to go with you.

- If you are in a meeting, and they are making a decision with which you disagree, or if you need more time to think about it and/or talk with your supervisor, say so. Sometimes you can step out of the meeting and call.
- If you disagree, ask them to write it on the form.

We can obtain most information without the social worker; so be sure to do your part by working your case independently. You represent the child and are a valuable member of the team.

## DSS HAS NEW CLINICAL UNIT

Submitted by Angelique Hamlet

Guilford County DSS became an anchor site for the Annie E Casey Foundation in 2007. This provides funding and technical assistance. They are addressing trauma issues and disrupted placements for children. They developed the Youth Development Unit with a specific focus on teens a couple of years ago. They have been able to minimize disruptions and focus on reunification and/or permanency for the child. They have a Memorandum Of Agreement with outpatient providers they work with as well. DSS currently has 3 outpatient therapists on staff that screen, provide assessment and trauma interventions. They identify what the child needs and match that with treatment services. Their staff has just completed a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) training. As of August 2009, Guilford County DSS had 22 children in custody in Level III and PRTF treatment programs. They had 55 – 60 children in therapeutic foster care at that time.

**You may call 641-3019 for further information about DSS Clinical Operations Unit**



## KNOWING SIGNS OF TRAUMA IN OUR CHILDREN

Submitted by Mary Coyne Wessling

There are few children in foster care that could be identified as having no trauma in their life. Indeed, the act of separating them from their family and familiar surroundings is traumatic in itself, even if the child has little or no memory of this event.

Here is a definition mental health experts give to trauma: *an experience that threatens life or physical well-being in such a way that it overwhelms an individual's ability to cope.*

A youth's subjective response to a traumatic event depends upon a number of factors including individual temperament, coping style, prior trauma, social and family support, and the culture and environment. What is devastating to one youth may be less so for another.

### Traumatic stress often causes these reactions:

- ⇒ Nervousness, jumpiness, and a heightened startle response to any loud noise, sudden movement, or other surprise;
- ⇒ re-experiencing of the event as intrusive memories, images, sensory impressions;
- ⇒ trouble sleeping or nightmares;
- ⇒ withdrawal from others and avoidance of activities, partly as a way of avoiding trauma reminders that can bring back distressing images and memories; and
- ⇒ difficulty concentrating or paying attention in school.

### Other common traumatic stress reactions include:

- ⇒ Excessive worry about the safety of self and others
- ⇒ Angry outbursts, aggression and/or defensiveness
- ⇒ Indifference or emotional numbing; acting as if nothing matters or has an emotional impact
- ⇒ Defiance of authority or rules
- ⇒ Negative belief systems such as; the world is violent, unfair, and/or unsafe
- ⇒ Change in academic performance

- ⇒ Hypervigilance – constantly surveying the environment for danger or threat
- ⇒ Repeated discussion of the event and the details of the event
- ⇒ Increased impulsive and risk-taking behaviors
- ⇒ Attempts to alter feelings through substance abuse

Here are some examples of potentially traumatic situations:

- **Physical/sexual abuse**
- **Witnessing community or domestic violence**
- **Neglect or abandonment by a parent or caregiver**
- **Automobile or other types of accidents**
- **Physical violence, including bullying**
- **Witnessing police activity or having someone close arrested**
- **Witnessing another person being killed or seriously injured**
- **Death or loss of someone close, especially in an unexpected or violent manner**

Trauma in the Lives of Gang Involved Youth: Tips for Volunteers and Community Organizations  
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org)



### Ensure your child's presence in court

If your child is 12 or over ask them to attend their hearing. When a child is not present, attach a current photo of the child to your court report. This helps the Judge appreciate the impact of each and every decision they make.

## THE HOPE PROJECT

Submitted by Angelique Hamlet

The Hope Project focuses on youth involved with or wanting to leave gang activity. The Mental Health Collaborative was able to provide seed money for the program originally. Then Darryl Kosciak, project coordinator, was able to obtain grant funding from the Greensboro Grasshoppers and The Weaver Foundation for two more years. There are 3 Outreach Staff with the program. They are able to provide education to the schools, provide case management, and also connect the youth and family with services that already exist in the community. They serve youth that are 11 - 17 years old. Information and Referral - 373-4673

Email: [HopeProjectHotline.com](http://HopeProjectHotline.com)

## ATTORNEY ADVOCATE WISDOM

By Michelle Wright

Please make sure that you visit your child at least once a month. Also make sure that any information you receive from the social worker or foster parent, you conduct an independent investigation to ensure the information is accurate!!! Remember it is amazing how two people can sit in a room, hear the same words and come away with completely different interpretations!!

Always be prepared to speak when your case is before the Judge because there are times when the Court wants to hear directly from you!! You are the most neutral person in the room regarding what is in the best interest of the child!!! Your only agenda is what is in the best interest of the child!!! You are the child's voice!!

## PAYMENTS TO FOSTER PARENTS

As of September 1, 2009, Foster care/adoption board rates are the following:

Childs Age	Board Rate	County Share
0-5 years	\$475 per month	\$237.50 per month
6-12 years	\$581 per month	\$290.50 per month
13 years & over	\$634 per month	\$317 per month

### GAL STAFF

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## WELCOME

Natasha Dorris,  
Shanetra Washington,  
and Christal Herbin  
who are interning at  
the Greensboro GAL  
office. We are  
excited to have you  
working with us!!

## KNOWING WHO YOU ARE TRAINING

Submitted by GAL Bob Williamson, Krisan Walker & Angelique Hamlet

### Racial, Ethnic, Sexual and Cultural Identity

Someone once said, "You only ever grow as a human being if you're outside your comfort zone." Our staff and two volunteers did that in June. They joined other GAL staff, administrators and attorney advocates in a 2-day Racial and Ethnic Identity (REI) workshop called "Knowing Who You Are." Our state office sponsored and facilitated the workshop.

Today, we challenge you to step outside your comfort zone and grow with us. Although it is not possible to share everything we experienced during the workshop, we decided that much of the information was important enough to pass on to you. Indeed, some of you may have an opportunity to attend a future REI workshop.

The REI workshop did not cover sexual orientation. However, we plan to address both sexual and cultural identity in the future. What we are striving for is an understanding and a tolerance of differences. We want to achieve a multicultural and identity competence within ourselves, which in turn will benefit the children we serve as they fight to retain their identities while in foster care. Our hope is that a series of information sheets will begin to let you grow and see what we experienced.

#### Know that:

This will be uncomfortable

The outcome will help you grow as a human being

You will be better prepared to do what is in the best interest of the children we serve

#### Why is it necessary?

All of us need to move from a point of ignoring or not acknowledging differences in others versus not judging based on differences in identity.

#### What is Racial, Ethnic, Sexual and Cultural Identity?

A complex set of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that come from one's identification to a particular racial, ethnic, sexually oriented or cultural group.

#### Where to begin?

We invite you to look in a mirror and answer the following questions:

1. What is your racial identity?
2. What is your ethnic identity?
3. What are your religious beliefs?
4. What is your sexual orientation?
5. What do you see other people use to identify who you are?

#### *Try an exercise online*

[http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)

Once on the site, click on one of the eyes.

Then click on Sorting People on the right side of the page.

More information to come.....

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO GAL

### ADVOCATES WITH 10+ YEARS

Peggy Adelman	Sue Anderson
Sylvia Austin	Lisa Bodenheimer
Frankie Boerema	June Coyle
Deborah Donnell	Jerry Eagle
Diana Goodchild	Becky Hunnicutt
Helen Lowry	Robert Ludwick
Jimmy Mack	Eric Medlin
Jan Moore	Susan Nisbet
Elaine Parker	Louise Richardson
Kay Sparrow	Kara Ruffin
Alfred Waddell	

### ADVOCATES WITH 5 YEARS

Nancy Borjes	Carol Dodd
Elizabeth Greer	Pam Howe

### ADVOCATES WITH 2 YEARS

Mary Goodman	Martha Harris
Cristin Hassell	Oneil Johnson
Rhonda Kitchen	Erin Leach
Mary Mather	Cynthia Schaub
Regina Schamberger	Karen Smith
Larry Ward	Paula Ward
Donna Willis	



## COURT DAYS

### Greensboro

Tuesdays	TPRs/Special Hearings
Wednesdays	Initials/Adjudications & Dispositions/Reviews
Fridays	Initials/Adjudications & Dispositions/Reviews

### High Point

Mondays	TPRs/Special Hearings
Thursdays	Initials/Adjudications & Dispositions/Reviews



## Guilford County July & August Statistics

Children Represented by GAL	305
Children That Entered Care	19
Children Adopted	8
Youth That Turned 18	2
Children Reunified With Family	21
Guardian ad Litem Advocates	143
Court Hearings	174

## EACH ONE REACH ONE

Please encourage a friend, neighbor, or co-worker to contact our program about becoming a volunteer. Our next training will be offered in January. They can visit [ncgal.org](http://ncgal.org), [volunteermatch.com](http://volunteermatch.com) or call our office for more information.

## BOOK SUGGESTION

### *Learning to Live: A Black Woman's Journey Beyond Foster Care*

By Theresa Cameron; Townsend Press: West Berlin, NJ, 2009; 278 pages; Nonfiction [townsendpress.com](http://townsendpress.com)

Theresa Cameron's first book, *Foster Care Odyssey: A Black Girl's Journey*, detailed her early years as a foster child schooled by Catholic Charities. This sequel begins with Cameron leaving foster care with little more than her high school diploma, a shabby suitcase of well worn clothes and a burning desire to prove that she is somebody.

*THE CONNECTION, Summer 2009, CASA*