

August 12, 2011

Aloha Guardians!!!

No, I'm not writing from Hawaii; but with the weather hovering at heavy, record-breaking heat, I thought conjuring an exotic, tropical venue might make it momentarily more bearable!

I am sending along some updates to you about events and information; I do have a range of news to share from disappointing to encouraging and will get right to it. The good news always begins and ends with your dedication. As I write this note today we render our advocacy to 400 children with 139 volunteers in Pender and New Hanover Counties. Your incredible good work continues to enrich our court processes and child outcomes in myriad and valuable ways (these are highlighted at the end of this letter).

From this strength though, we have a disappointing note: we do have 39 children (10%) who are without a volunteer assigned to them. Accompanying this unfortunate news is that our hopes to secure continued grant funds to support our recruiter, Cherie Couse, did not materialize. Another round of grants will open in January and I intend to submit another proposal. I was encouraged by feedback that our proposal was worthy and well thought out. The reality is that funding cuts continue and the number of grants that could be funded was reduced. The numerous ways that strained economic resources inhibit the services to children come in countless ways.

However, starting in January 2011, we began to prepare for this potential loss. A recruitment cadre of volunteers has formed together to ensure that our children and our program have the safety net of local Guardian volunteers needed. This group is comprised of the following people: Rosa Best, John Brunelle, Cherie Couse, Lynne Fender, Jim Hynes, Hunt Leavitt, Emily Peoples, Sarah Reamer, Heather Smith, and Gail Widholm. They have been working on various projects, outreach and awareness efforts. Please contact any one of them if you have an idea, a place where we can promote GAL or a way to help out. In addition, we've had the benefit of student interns over these months. Today though is our final day with Ashley Nesbitt, our summer intern. She now returns to complete her senior year at Winston-Salem State College and finalize her law school applications! Ashley has been a help to us and a pleasure to work with; we wish her all the best.

With that segue, I shift to inform you that already there's one way everyone can assist with an event that is being planned. **Please mark your calendar for October 6th, our GAL "Bring a Friend to Lunch" event.** This is akin to the Each One, Reach One campaign. We know that YOU know who would (and wouldn't) be a good fit for GAL work. We are reaching out for your insight to identify and "sponsor" a person to a lunch with you to learn more about being a Guardian ad Litem volunteer.

Our district goal is to ensure that no child ever has to wait for a volunteer GAL. To achieve this, we'll need to increase our roster to 185-195 volunteers; and realistically, I think we can do this by December 2012 (a 33% net increase!). Further, we must more

strongly convey our value for diversity as we network in the community. These are reachable goals that will require constant effort and help. You will be receiving more information from the recruitment cadre on *Bring a Friend to Lunch*. In the meantime, *please start thinking about one person (or more is good too) you know to join this effort.*

I thank many of you for your response and support to tend our information booth at the *African-American Heritage Festival this weekend (Aug 13-14) at the William Murphy Athletic Complex, 401 S Eighth Street*. We are warmed by this ongoing support. Also, on *Sat, Aug 20 we will have our information booth at the Farmer's Market downtown*, and we'll also have a table at the *UNCW Involvement Fair on Aug 31*. **If anyone is willing to help with staffing events like these, please let me know.** I will pass your name along to the recruitment cadre for further coordination.

More good news is in the number of volunteer applicants we are getting. This is truly a direct result of the recruitment cadre's intensive work to keep our name in the community. As we prepare for our upcoming September training we have 22 people in various stages of screening/intake. It is encouraging to think that we'll have 10-15 in this group. We offer 4 trainings annually and we'll need at least 80 trained by December 2012 to offset any attrition and meet our goal. Using our format of volunteer-staff paired training we have the voice of volunteers conveyed throughout our interactions.

Our program is blessed with strong, committed staff and attorneys to whom I am thankful daily for their intellect, skills, spirit and humor! Among their credits are their ability to adapt to diminished resources in-house and simultaneously retain quality volunteers by helping you navigate difficult, critical moments as well as finding success through your advocacy over time. We are finalizing details for our annual social and volunteer appreciation (date in October to be announced soon). I can tell you that 100 of our 139 volunteers have served for 2 or more years with our program! **We have one volunteer, Aggie Chamberlin, celebrating 15 years. In addition we have 4 volunteers celebrating 10 years: Tom Carnes, Judy Hartz, John Taggart & Glancy Thomas.** Another 17 are celebrating 5 years and 15 more are celebrating 2 years as GAL volunteers! You are really absolutely great! From all of us - know that your dedication is truly appreciated! The single most important contribution you offer to our children is stability in your advocacy and your ongoing presence with each child. *Please join us at the social as we recognize these achievements.*

Our local GAL program also has the advantage of our Cape Fear Guardian ad Litem Association (CFGALA) which works diligently behind the scenes to raise and disperse funds to enhance the experiences of our children. CFGALA board members are volunteers and supporters. They promote awareness of GAL volunteerism and they ensure there are always funds for requests - so please make them! Funds cover so much - from cultural tickets to camps, outings and tutoring. Thanks go to them for their sponsorship of various, valuable efforts. *Remember you can get fund request forms and lots of other info off the website at www.cfgala.org.*

Other upcoming events to watch for are our networking luncheons and in-service trainings. Luncheons are not scheduled every month anymore as participation had started to wane. Our plan is now to coordinate luncheons in months where we do not

have an in-service event planned. We will also not schedule luncheons in December or August as these tend to be busy months for travel and various time conflicts. Our next luncheon will be in September and you will receive notice of this when it is closer to that time. In-service events are being formalized now and we'll offer one before the end of 2011. In addition, in early 2012 we will be hosting a statewide in-service event on cultural competence called "Knowing Who You Are." All of our staff have completed this training. We found it to be relevant and very useful. You'll be getting more info from me as it nears. *If you have in-service topics you'd like us to offer, please let me or your supervisor know.*

In closing, I want to share with you some data that reflects the work we collectively have been assigned and executed since January of this year.

Consider this:

We have had 140 new children assigned to our program

21 of these children are re-opened (15%).

We have had 150 children closed from our program with the following outcomes:

55 children were returned or placed with parents

48 were placed with relatives or caregivers through custody or guardianship

21 were united to families in adoptions

15 of our youth aged out (10%)

The remaining 11 were released to other jurisdictions or dismissed

And 54 youth appeared in court.

Encouragingly, two-thirds of children are placed with parents, family or committed caregivers. Conversely, we continue to be concerned about the rate and precipitants of re-open cases as well as youth who age out at eighteen. We strive to improve these numbers. The number of children entering foster care overall is decreasing - locally and nationally- yet the number of teens coming into care is rising. Trends show that teens tend to have longer foster care stays than their younger counterparts. The number of youth who age out speaks volumes as they silently exit to "adulthood" without achieving a sense of permanency. We will continue to explore and collaborate with all our local, state and national partners to better assist and prepare our youth in this life transition. Further, we'll do our best to share information, strategies and resources with you who are working with teens and with children who have returned to our program.

Please know we all appreciate the numerous ways you help our children have futures that provide permanence, safety and love. We ask for your help often in a variety of contexts and you generously give it. We will continue to ask - we simply must. We'll ask for help with recruiting and training and mentoring and CFGALA and older youth and office support and even getting a newsletter launched - and beyond.... But mostly we'll ask for your advocacy, your commitment and your compassion for our children.

I am inspired daily by your commitment. **Thank you!!! Mahalo!!**

All my best, Liz



2011 Volunteers Taking their Oaths!

Top: Jane Ramsey, Ann Kelley, Jayne Smith, Marco Locco, Lynne Pendse, Marvin Fineman, Judge Corpening, Sandy Moskowitz, Jenna Willis, Tiene Shattuck, Ashley Nesbitt
(not pictured: Bill Cooper)

Below: Leah Leighton, Julie Oliver, Adair Ellis, Dawn Mackley, Patty Jenkins, Judge Noecker, BJ Walter, Michelle Leonard, Rosalind Fuller, Dianne Connor, Rex Crippen