



Guardian ad Litem Southern Region Newsletter

Welcome to the Southern Region!

The Southern Region is comprised of the 11th, 15th, 16th, 17th and 20th Judicial Circuits and are supported by a Regional Director and Regional Legal Counsel. The leadership teams came together and decided to put together a newsletter to inform the community about the inspiring stories that we hear everyday here in the Southern Region. The Southern Region is made up of a very large task force of both staff and volunteers that work tirelessly every day to ensure that the children we are appointed to are safe, happy and healthy. The children that the GAL Program are appointed to have been abused, abandoned and/or neglected due to no fault of their own. Our staff and

volunteers advocate for appropriate and timely services, safe placements, necessary and timely medical care, proper educational services and normalcy because no matter what a child has a right to be child!

We hope that you will join us in our efforts to support all children that have been appointed to the Program so that we can provide our children the most comprehensive best interest advocacy possible. We need your support to help us reach our goal of representing EVERY child that has been abused, abandoned or neglected and has an open judicial dependency case.

Sincerely,
The Southern Region Team



First 1,000 days...

The first 1,000 days of a child's life are so critical to their overall development and wellbeing, and the effects of abuse and neglect during this time period can have a life long impact. The Florida Children and Youth Cabinet voted on Aug, 27th, 2015 to send a letter to

state leaders urging them to prioritize this age group. In response, the GAL Program is submitting a legislative budget request of 1.36 million dollars and 25.5 full time employees so that the GALP can represent dependent children that are 3 or younger and remain in

the home. These young and vulnerable children, make up 25.5% of the children that have an active dependency case in the court system yet remain in the home. They have limited visibility in the community and they have limited ability to communicate about their needs.

Southern Region GAL Programs

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Special points of interest:

The Southern Region:
Is comprised of **5** Judicial Circuits
Represents a total of **7,585** children in dependency court
Has **2,357** dedicated volunteer GALs

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Volunteer Spotlight: Rosi Alvarez 11th Judicial Circuit

Rosi Alvarez began her tenure as a Guardian ad Litem in Miami-Dade County in November of 2000. In that time, Rosi has advocated for more than 40 children. Rosi is an active member of her community and is always on the look out for opportunities that allow her to help society. This year, Rosi was appointed the chair of Miami-Dade's GAL Volunteer Advisory Committee, which promotes the circuit's retention by motivating and supporting existing volunteers and also assists with ongoing recruitment efforts.

In addition to her dedication to the Guardian ad Litem Program, Rosi has supported the Miami Coalition, Drug-Free Youth in Town, Boy Scouts of America, Boys Club of America and the Jackson South Hospital Community Advisory Council.

Earlier this year, Rosi was honored at a city of Cutler Bay council meeting because she "tirelessly lent her time and talents to the Town of Cutler Bay in countless ways, including chairperson to Town of Cutler Bay Education Advisory Committee, Municipal Advisory Committee, Cutler Bay Clerk/Communications Committee, WiFi Committee, Founder of Cutler Bay Steering Committee, and Representative to Let's Incorporate Now." On November 6th, Rosi will be honored as a Mujeres Giving Back Time Treasure Award Recipient, for her philanthropic impact as a Guardian ad Litem.



How did you become involved with the Guardian ad Litem Program?

Rosi Alvarez: While my sons were still in elementary school, I came upon a tiny advertisement in the neighbors section of the Herald. The moment I read it, I knew it would be the most meaningful way to volunteer—I knew the opportunity "had teeth." And that's saying a lot for the program, since I volunteered for many good causes since I was 14 years old. Yet I knew I had to wait because of ongoing commitments. So I did. I waited and gathered information. Six years later, I became a G.A.L. because that was my **GoAL**.

What makes you so passionate about the cause?

RA: The sheer inequality of being so young and helpless in the face of abuse drives and inspires me to be a relentless advocate.

What's the best compliment one of your GAL Kids has ever paid you?

RA: They honor me every time they greet me with a smile; every time they share their thoughts; and every time I receive a call from them years after they have aged out of the dependency system. I am complimented and humbled when children allow me into their world.

What 's the best experience you've had as a Guardian ad Litem?

RA: My best experience is always simple. It is clear in my mind's eye, and there have been many: a child, face lit up with trust, running to give me a hug, and the teen-age version of a trusting look that I know lets me in the inner circle.

I am complimented and humbled when children allow me into their world.

-Rosi Alvarez



August 2015 Volunteer Statistics

<u>11th Circuit:</u>	<u>15th Circuit:</u>	<u>16th Circuit:</u>	<u>17th Circuit:</u>	<u>20th Circuit:</u>
18 New GALs	6 New GALs	1 New GAL	25 New GALs	16 New GALs
563 Total GALs	537 Total GALs	92 Total GALs	694 Total GALs	471 Total GALs
2,230 GAL Kids	1,328 GAL Kids	158 GAL Kids	2,766 GAL Kids	1,125 GAL Kids

We Are for the Child!

We had a young child that was in the custody of her father after her mother passed away. A dependency petition (in-home case) against the father was filed and it is at that time that the Guardian ad Litem Program got involved. During one of the court hearings, the child disclosed to the Guardian ad Litem Attorney and her Attorney-ad-Litem that she was thinking of killing herself. Her GAL attorney asked her if she had disclosed this to her Father and she replied in the affirmative. She then asked if her Father had sought help for her to which the child said that he had not.

The Judge was informed of this information and the child was Baker

Acted. The GAL attorney and the AAL then called the Abuse Hotline to report the on-going emotional abuse and excessive corporal punishment as well as the Father's neglect evidenced by his refusal to act when the child reported she was suicidal. The Department opened an investigation, but it soon became apparent that they were not going to shelter the child.

Prior to the child's release from the mental health facility, the GAL attorney filed a Shelter Petition which was granted by the Court. The child was placed with a maternal aunt and was prescribed anti-depression medication by the treating facility. Since that time, her treating physician has taken her off of the anti-depression

medication feeling it is no longer necessary. She is an intelligent, articulate 13 year old who is now thriving with her aunt. If it had not been for the GAL attorney advocating for this child's best interest and filing the Shelter petition, this child would have been released to her Father. Considering her fragile emotional state coupled with the on-going abuse, she may not be here today if the GAL had not been involved in her case.



Because we care....

This is a story of 5 girls who were in a home in which Domestic violence was a regular part of their life. Their father was the perpetrator, their mother the victim. As a result of the domestic violence in the home, the Department opened up a judicial in-home dependency case (aka- in-home case or non-shelter petition). The father moved out of the home and the maternal grandmother moved into home to be safety manager and assist mom with the girls. The GAL Program was appointed to represent the children's best interest and Janet was designated to be the girls' GAL. She was very active with the girls' education: she assisted in

arranging tutoring for the girls, and helped one of the girls get into a school that would allow her to participate in credit revival. Their GAL would take each of them individually to the mall to shop for clothes and go to lunch. This gave the girls the opportunity to have one on one attention for the afternoon which is something they never really had. Their GAL got them bikes so they could play outside and go on bike rides with their mom. She was emotionally supportive to the mother especially when she would become overwhelmed with caring for 5 girls. Unfortunately, the family had a fire in their home right after

Christmas and they were unable to live in their home. The GAL was able to secure gift cards to get clothes, groceries, necessities, and funding to assist with housing expenses from various community partners. She supported the family emotionally through this tough period of time and ensured the family unit stayed together after the fire. Janet not was only these girls advocate in the courtroom, she was their support, mentor, and confidant. She helped their family become stronger during a time when most would give up.



Southern Region
Guardian ad Litem Programs:

11th Circuit: 155 NW 3rd St., 6th Floor, Miami, FL 33128

15th Circuit: 205 N. Dixie Hwy, Suite 4.1100, WPB, FL 33401

16th Circuit: 5503 College Rd, Suite 206, Key West, FL 33040

17th Circuit: 612 S. Andrews Ave., Suite 1000, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301

20th Circuit: 2075 W. First St., Suite 300, Ft. Myers, FL 33901



You can make a difference in the life of a child today!

Please support our advocacy for abused, abandoned and neglected children by supporting our 2016 Legislative Budget Requests so that we can provide best interest representation to a 100% of the children that need a voice. Without your continued support our children will be less likely to graduate high school, will be less likely to find a safe and permanent home and will remain in the dependency system longer.

If you or someone you know would like to learn more about the GAL Program and how to get involved in a mission that literally changes lives, please visit us at www.guardianadlitem.org.

Together our children have a fighting chance at life, a life in which they thrive not just survive!

"I am for the Child"

Faces of GAL: Phyllis Mitchell

Mrs. Mitchell currently lives in Islamorada, Florida where she is an active and dedicated volunteer in her community. She was one of the founders for the not-for profit organization that supports the GAL Programs mission and goals; The Guardian ad Litem Guild (1989) and later changed to Voices for Florida Keys Children (2000), serving many years as president, and still remains as an active board member. Phyllis has dedicated her life to helping others, both in her chosen profession as an educator and as a volunteer child advocate for the GAL Program. She has handled some of our most challenging cases and simply does not quit! Phyllis currently sits on the 16th Circuit GAL Directors Volunteer Advisory Committee, as well as Mentors new volunteers. Phyllis is active, past and present, in many community initiatives and boards: She is the Vice Chair for Friends of the Islamorada

Area State Park board, Secretary for The Florida Keys History and Discovery Foundation (FKHDF), Chairman for Villages of Islamorada Landscape Committee, a member of Islamorada Chamber of Commerce, Alumni of Leadership of Monroe (class of XV) and a Monroe County Master Gardener.

In her role as a volunteer Advocate she has helped children reunify with their parents, testify in trials, assist in locating relatives, finding homes for families, tutoring, ensuring that whatever is needed gets done! Phyllis has demonstrated her tenacity, dedication and untiring advocacy for over 30 children. Her kind heart and positive outlook helps



ease the minds of children and inspires hope through some of their darkest hours.