

Our Children Need You

Nobody wants to believe that a parent could neglect, abuse or abandon their children, but they do. These children need a voice; more importantly, they need a friend. If you have some free time and care about children, you can help. The Seminole County Guardian Ad Litem Program recruits, trains and supervises volunteers from the community to represent these children in court. A Guardian Ad Litem, or GAL, can positively change the life of a child forever. Being a GAL can also change your life for the better, just as it changed the life of these volunteers.

Roles & Responsibilities

Investigator: gather information about the child's circumstances

Monitor: keep track of everyone providing services and caring for the child

Advocate: appear in court and recommend what is in best interest of the child

Reporter: provide written reports on your recommendations and the child's wishes

Friend: visit the child regularly; listen and keep the child informed of court

Judith Wasserman

became a GAL volunteer 8 years ago because of her interest in the judicial process and because she wanted to make a child's life safer and better. She has been a friend and confidant to 30 children under the age of 10 and served as interviewer, investigator and reporter to the courts. Her most encouraging moment was helping grandparents adopt three young siblings who were neglected by their parents. The GAL program made Judith aware of the great needs of children, has given her a sense of satisfaction for even the smallest improvement made, and taught her to be

persistent and patient in addressing issues and getting things done. She now has a better understanding of how difficult it is to change a person's behavior, which laws pertain to child abuse, and how child advocacy agencies operate. Judith encourages those considering becoming a GAL to try it because "the children need you and you will feel rewarded."

An Orange County judge influenced **Marc Lovett** to become a GAL three and a half years ago. Marc has served as a legal, medical, and academic advocate to a total of seven children ranging in age from infant to 14 years-old. He considers himself a

friend to these children, responding to them in some ways like an uncle, and serves as a resource to the children's caregivers. He has been successful in finding permanent placements for six of these children. Being a GAL volunteer has taught Marc how serious and extensive the problem of child abuse is. Those close to Marc professionally know he is passionate about the GAL program and have shared their own community service commitments more openly with him. Marc says that because "the job can be terribly frustrating as well as rewarding ... it's important to pace [yourself] and not take on too much responsibility too soon."

Lawyer, mother, aunt, godmother, friend, counselor, boss, thorn-in-side, advocate, researcher, and truth-teller are the roles **Anne McReynolds** assumes as a Guardian ad Litem. "People would be appalled if they knew what really goes on with children who are removed from their homes," says Anne, a volunteer since April, 1999. For her, nothing beats a case closed with a happy ending, and being really successful at helping the "forgotten" foster children is the most valuable thing she's learned as a GAL. "Bad parents have more rights than good children," is the way she puts it, and "[volunteering] has made me more patient and able to look at both sides, and it has caused me to be grateful for my many blessings." She has represented almost 30 children of all ages.

Guardian Ad Litem Program Eligibility

- Be at least 21 years of age
- Have good judgment
- Have common sense
- Present favorable references
- Consent to background check
- Complete 30 hours of training
- No legal experience required

For more information and to apply, visit

The Seminole County Guardian Ad Litem Program needs you to help represent our abused, abandoned and neglected children in court. Volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and do not need legal or other special experience. If you are committed to improving the lives of children, you can be a GAL. Visit the GAL Program site at <http://www.gal.fl.gov/> to learn more and apply today!