

Training, Meetings & More

Keep in mind that GALs are required to attend a minimum of six hours of in-service trainings per year.

The in-service training with Dr. Lynne Katz formerly scheduled for Oct. 18th has been cancelled; it will be rescheduled.

Wed. October 18, 2006

Medicaid 101: Changes in Program Delivery as a result of managed care Medicaid reform will be presented by **Judy Rosenbaum** in the North Lobby, second floor, of the Juvenile Justice Center from Noon-1:30pm.

Wed. November 8, 2006

ICPC (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children) overview will be presented by **Tisha Hill** in the North Lobby, second floor, Juvenile Justice Center, Noon-1:30pm

Wed. November 15, 2006

Meet the Judges: What information Dependency Judges need from Guardians will be held from Noon-1:30pm in DJJ 1111. Please RSVP.

Wed. December 6, 2006

Ethics, the Ten Commandments of Professionalism will be presented by **Paul Lipton, Esq.**, in the North Lobby, second floor, of the Juvenile Justice Center from Noon-1:30pm

The **Downtown Support Group** meets at **Gordon Biersch**, 1201 Brickell Ave., 6pm. Please RSVP to **Andi Steinacker** at: andrea.steinacker@smithbarney.com or 305-376-8585

Oct. 24: Each agency will send a case manager; several are sending project managers as well. You can discuss services, referrals, privatization, communication, responsibilities, reports, etc.

Nov. 15: **Dr. Miguel Firpi** works with children/ families with chronic high stress situations. He teaches how the brain physically changes when children are constantly exposed to stress and how this manifests emotionally and behaviorally.

Advocacy Corner

By Rita Ugarte and Alexandra Rodriguez

NEW PERMANENCY GOALS

During the 2006 summer session the Florida Legislature made some changes to the dependency statute. As a result of these changes, the permanency goals applicable to your cases may have changed. Long term custody, long term licensed custody and independent living are no longer permanency goals in Florida. Effective July 1, 2006, the only permanency goals available under Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes, in order of preference, are: **Reunification; Adoption, if a petition for termination of parental rights has been or will be filed; Permanent Guardianship of a Dependent Child; Permanent Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative; or Placement in Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement.**

However, even after the changes to the

dependency statute, reunification and adoption remain the preferred goals to reach permanency. If the court determines that reunification is possible and is in the best interest of the child reunification must be the primary goal. However, if the court finds that reunification is not in the best interest of the child, adoption must be the primary goal.

The new permanency goals will be primarily used when the court determines that reunification or adoption is not in the best interest of the child. In these cases, the court will determine, based on the facts of your case, whether permanent guardianship of a dependent child, permanent placement with a fit and willing relative, or placement in another planned permanent living arrangement will be the primary permanency goal.

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From the Catbird Seat

by Executive Director, Joni Goodman

For the final quarter for 2006, we have an opportunity to look both forward and back to see how far we have come and where we are going.

Many of you can remember when we were a small grassroots volunteer program. Others may remember when we represented 50% of the children in the dependency court.

Today, together with **Lawyers For Children**, we represent 73% of the children needing a GAL.

Starting this month, we are opening a satellite office adjacent to **AME Church** in Liberty City and launching our **Kinship Project**. This expansion project will focus on children traditionally considered to be at lower risk who have been placed with relatives. Many of these children have not been our priority when we had fewer resources. By the first quarter of next year we hope to be at 80 to 85% representation of dependent children.

The goal of this project is to make sure that children in kinship placement arrangements receive appropriate services to ensure their stability and protection, while meeting the time frames and permanency goals of the **Adoption and Safe Families Act**. Research shows that children maintain closer ties with their birth parents and their siblings and that birth parents and siblings visit children in kinship care more frequently than children placed with foster parents. But research also shows that child welfare caseworkers provide less supervision and monitoring and fewer services to kinship caregivers and children than to non-kin foster families.

After so many years with the GAL Program, I still believe that the best way to impact a dysfunctional foster care system is to give EVERY child a guardian ad litem!

Speaking of impacting systems, the Fall is the time to gear up for the 2007 legislative session and the season of political advocacy. **MiamiCAN**, our child advocacy network of volunteers of the **Guardian Ad Litem Program**, **Foster Care Review Board**, and **Lawyers For Children America**, is planning an event-filled season, culminating with a trip to Tallahassee in April to meet with legislators and share our legislative agenda

for children. Leading up to that time, you can look forward to building that agenda through a series of advocacy workshops, a symposium for 0-5 children, networking, and newsletters that are geared to mobilize the power of our volunteer voices to impact legislative and policy change for dependent children. *Won't you join us?*

New National CASA Website

Following is an announcement from Jim Clune., Chief Communications Officer, National CASA:

I am very proud to announce that the new <http://nationalcasa.org> website is now alive and functioning. This major revision of our national website is dedicated to more effectively convert visitors to our national site into local program volunteers and donors. In addition to a major revamp of the website graphics and look, the site now features:

An ability to "Act Locally" by searching for a CASA/GAL program from most pages, including the home page

A new section with tools and activities for current volunteers <http://nationalcasa.org/volunteer/community.html>

Fresh content, including stories of children served by volunteers http://nationalcasa.org/volunteer/the_need.html

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Guardian Ad Litem GAZETTE

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GAL/VFC Website: www.voices4.org/
User ID: children
Password: kids2000
State Website: www.guardianadlitem.org

Joni Goodman, LCSW
Circuit Director

Joan (Joni) Kleinman
Editor

The GAZETTE is published monthly by the 11th Judicial Circuit Dade County Guardian Ad Litem Program.

The mission of the Guardian Ad Litem Program is to advocate for the best interests of children who are alleged to be abused, neglected, or abandoned and who are involved in court proceedings.

2006 Volunteer of the Year Award

Lucille Ulmer, *Volunteer of the Year for the 11th Judicial Circuit*, is a truly extraordinary GAL. She currently has seven cases with a total of 14 children, and each one is handled with dedication and compassion. Her cases are difficult and complex, emotional and time-intensive. Lucy sets a high standard for what her GAL children deserve and is always sensitive to their need for normalcy, from cheerleading and t-ball to summer camp and daycare. She will only accept the best for them when it comes to their placements and services. Lucy is also a regular attendee of GAL support group meetings and logs a great number of in-service training hours each year, seeking always to upgrade her knowledge and skill.

Lucy took her first case in February of 2003 and she has since represented 17 children as a GAL volunteer. She handles every person she deals with on her cases with genuine concern and offers her help to them. She works closely with case managers and tries hard to foster relationships based on cooperation. She is articulate in court and writes excellent reports.

Lucy truly goes above and beyond. She was assigned a case for only a few days when the mother absconded with the children. She made endless calls to public agencies such as the school board in an effort to find the children. Through her dogged efforts, the children were finally found. In another of her cases, she felt that the foster home was not a nurturing environment for a two year old little girl. She was a vocal advocate, convincing others of her belief that this little girl deserved better, and as a result was able to effect positive changes in the home.

Lucy is also the current President of Alumni Association for **Kappa Kappa Gamma**, which is taking over the handling of volunteers for the **Herwitt Crisis Center**. She is an active volunteer at the Center.

Community Advocate of the Year

The 11th Judicial Circuit Awardee for the Community Advocate of the Year 2006 is Fran Allegra, Esq., *Executive Director of Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc.* We can think of no person in our community who has made such a difference in the child welfare system over the last year as she led the agency that oversaw the transition of over 5000 children from the *Department of Children and Families* to *community based care*.

As a direct result of Fran's leadership Our Kids is proud to list impressive accomplishments in its first year of Start Up and Transition, including the implementation of several prevention programs to safely divert children from removal, increased parental visitation, worker visitation with children, and increased adoptions. This legislative session, she significantly contributed to the passage of legislation designating Our Kids as a pilot to take Florida's Community Based Care to the next level.

Fran has devoted her legal career to child welfare, first as a senior attorney for DCF, then representing indigent parents. She subsequently worked for **CHARLEE Homes for Children** as their General Counsel and ultimately Chief Operating Officer. While at CHARLEE, she worked with community advocates to develop a model of community based care for Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. Her successful efforts also led to the CHARLEE Program being designated a legislative model program, the fore runner of the successful system of care to be implemented by Our Kids as the CBC lead agency. The next logical step for her was to join the fledgling new agency as the Director of Field Operations. She quickly distinguished herself as a natural leader and team builder, able to bring the diverse and challenging sides of disputes together for the best interests of children and families. Within the first year of her employment, she was promoted to Chief Operating Officer and recently, the Board of Trustees named her Executive Director.

Fran Allegra is well-respected for her breadth of knowledge and expertise in child welfare. Fran uses her talent for

forging consensus among diverse groups, and perseveres in the face of tremendous odds to reach a goal that is "the right thing for children." Her commitment to the values and principles of cultural diversity and community collaboration are well known to those with whom she works. Her personal integrity and ethics are beyond reproach.

Presidential Award to Dorcas Piegari

In a [Miami Herald](#) article dated July 30, 2006, **Kathleen McGrory** wrote: "**Dorcas Piegari** woke up last Monday, thinking it would be an ordinary week. And then the White House called." The following week **President George Bush** arrived at Miami International Airport and presented the **President's Volunteer Service Award** to Dorcas. The President honors local volunteers all over the country to thank them for making a difference in the lives of others.

Definitely, not an ordinary week. But Dorcas, an executive assistant for Federated Department Stores, is not an ordinary person. In addition to being a volunteer in our **Guardian Ad Litem Program**, where everyone is very proud of her accomplishments, Dorcas also volunteers at: **Hands On Miami** and **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Miami**.

What is Dorcas' reaction to this honor? She explains, "I love volunteering so much and I never expected to be recognized, especially by the President."



Advocacy Corner

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Permanent Guardianship with a Relative or Other Adult: The Court may place a child in a permanent guardianship with a relative or other adult, if the child has been in that same placement for at least the preceding six months, the permanent guardian is ready and able to provide a safe and permanent home for the child, and is not likely to need any department supervision or services to ensure permanency. In addition, the permanent guardian has to make a commitment to provide for the child until the child reaches the age of majority, and to notify the court of any changes in his/her residential address or the residence of the child. Once permanency has been reached with a permanent guardian the court will close the case and will give the guardian an order establishing his/her authority to take care of the child. Under this goal, the parents may retain visitation rights if the Court deems it appropriate, and will be required to pay child support.

Permanent Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative: The Court may place a child in a placement with a fit and willing relative, when the child has been in that same placement for at least the preceding six months, and the relative is ready and able to provide a safe and permanent home for the child. In addition, the relative custodian has to make a commitment to provide for the child until the child reaches the age of majority, and to notify the court of any changes in his/her residential address or the residence of the child. Once permanency has been reached with a fit and willing relative, the court will give the relative custodian a court order establishing his/her authority to take care of the child. However, the case will remain open and the department must continue to supervise the placement. Additionally, the court must review the placement at least once every six months and conduct permanency hearings to reevaluate the possibility of adoption or permanent guardianship. Under this

goal, the parents may retain visitation rights if the Court deems it appropriate, and will be required to pay child support.

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement: When the court finds that reunification, adoption, permanent guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative are not in the best interest the child, the court may approve placement of the child in Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). In that instance, the court must make specific findings that a more permanent placement, such as adoption, permanent guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative, is not in the best interests of the child. The court must also find that the safety, health and well being of the child will not be put at risk by this goal. In addition, the department will have to document reasons why the placement will endure and how the proposed arrangement under APPLA will be more stable and secure than an ordinary foster care.

This goal is reserved for instances where there are compelling reasons such as the cases of: a parent and child who have a significant bond but the parent is unable to care for the child because of an emotional or physical disability, and the child's foster parent has committed to care for the child until majority and to facilitate visitation with the disabled parent; or a foster child who is 16 or older who choose to remain in foster care, and his/her foster parents are willing to care for the child until the age of majority. Other compelling reasons may exist in your case. Please discuss them with your supervisor and attorney if you believe this goal would best serve your guardian child.

If the court approves this goal, the department will continue to supervise the planned permanent living arrangement, and the court must review the placement at least once every six months. In addition the department and the **guardian ad litem** must provide the court with a recommended list and

description of services needed by the child, such as independent living services and medical, dental, educational, or psychological referrals, as well as a recommended list and description of services needed by the custodian.

Remember, the only acceptable goals to reach permanency are reunification, adoption, permanent guardianship of a dependent child, permanent placement with a fit and willing relative, and placement in another planned permanent living arrangement. If you have a case with a different existing permanency goal that is not listed above, please contact your supervisor so that this issue is addressed at the next hearing.

New National CASA Website

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Easier navigation for current volunteers as well as potential volunteers and donors

New scrolling "Updates" box makes it easy to find new content

Please visit this new site. It will significantly contribute to achieving our National CASA strategic goal of serving 100,000 more children by 2008.

Dates to Remember

October 12, Noon, at the Parrot Jungle- Voices For Children Halloween Luncheon. For more info call 305-324-5678

Dec. 14th is the GAL Holiday Party to be held at Grove Isle from 6pm to 8pm. An invitation will follow but please mark your calendars now.