I am pleased to announce that GAL Volunteers, Dot and Ken Conklin, will be receiving the Community Hero Award from the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday, January 3rd at 7:30pm! Dot and Ken have been volunteers for 19 and 14 years, respectively and have advocated for 80 children!

In addition to volunteering as Guardians ad Litem, Dot also delivers for Meals on Wheels. Ken plays in a band and has worked with the Sertoma Youth Ranch for disabled children for fifteen years. Dot and Ken are honored to receive this recognition and donating some of their winnings to Voices for Children in order to provide for some of our children’s needs.

Please join me in congratulating Dot and Ken for their work and recognition as some of our community heroes!

Have you ever sat down and really thought about why you choose to be involved with the Guardian ad Litem Program? What drives you to keep going in the face of the challenging child welfare system? Essentially, why do you do what you do? We want to know, “WHAT’S YOUR WHY?”.

Below is a submission by GAL Volunteer, Ginger Rockey-Johnson:

I have volunteered in the Tampa community for years. Active in my church, women’s groups, leading and mentoring of other less fortunate, working at Metropolitan Ministries and on and on I could go. The paling on my life is to speak for the invisible and stand up for those who can’t speak for themselves. I am a survivor of domestic violence. I am a survivor of sexual abuse from a parent. I know what it is like to lose innocence, grow up, and take responsibility for a dysfunctional family at a very, very young age. As a mom, I fought everyday for my kids to have fun being kids even when it meant it was uncomfortable for me because it was unfamiliar to me. I fought hard to have no cycle of abuse ooze into my family’s future only a distant out of focused memory if a memory at all. Family became those who cared about me and my family enough to help when I saw none.

As I healed in my twenties, became aware in my thirties, and on a mission in my forties; I am focused in my fifties to be that voice for the people, children, teens and adults, that I come in contact with, that they can’t be for themselves...yet. To believe in them when they don’t know how to believe in themselves. To give them hope that there doesn’t feel like a way out of their circumstance, but we are here for them. It’s not about what we are going through, it’s about where we are going to. A loving place. A place of hope. A space of freedom from fear surrounded by good friends and a caring family. Confidence is growth in hope when surrounded by people who care.

I joined Guardian ad Litem, because that is where my calling led me. I am a proud defender for my kids, proud to provide an optimistic viewpoint that they can’t image at the moment. I am hopeful that the healing of these families can start with hope, love and care of a new type of family that they have in GAL.

We want to hear your “why!” Please send your answers to Liza Ricci for publication in future newsletters.
Sue Griffin has been a volunteer with our Program since Spring 2011. Since then, she has advocated for dozens of children on at least 34 cases! Sue is currently a Master GAL, as well as one of two GALs who are currently participating in the Early Childhood Court (ECC) Project in our County. She also assists our Rapid Response Team. I am so incredibly thankful to have Sue on my team, and I have enjoyed working with her over the past two years!

Sue was born in Michigan and raised with an older sister and older, special needs, brother in Burton, Michigan. She graduated High School in 1979, which was the year her mother passed away. Sue started college at Michigan State University. When she lost her mom, she moved with a friend to Tampa to attend USF.

Sue received her Bachelor of Science in Business Management from USF. She met her husband and got married in 1985. Sue pursued sales in business technology and worked selling copiers, fax machines, imaging systems as the Sales Manager.

Sue has 2 children. Her daughter Ashleigh is a graduate from Auburn University and resides in Georgia. Ashleigh works as a Banquet Manager at a private country club. Her son Christopher is a Freshman at Full Sail University in Orlando and pursuing a degree in Computer Animation and Game Design.

Sue learned of the GAL Program when she moved to Tampa, but was too young to pursue it then. Having a special needs brother and also a love of children drew her to the GAL program. Sue states she remembers being in 6th grade and her teacher asking Sue to spend time daily with a 1st grader. He just told her to do anything with her for the hour. To this day, Sue does not know what that girl needed or why she was picked but she knew then that she had an ability to reach young people.

When her daughter reached high school, Sue states that she started thinking about her future. She revisited the GAL Program, interviewed, trained and graduated April 2011. Since then, she has been blessed to become a Master GAL and most recently to become a part of ECC Pilot. She states she feels blessed to be able to offer an ear to the families in dependency. First we lend an ear and then we lend a hand. She can also be a squeaky wheel when needed!

Working with the families in dependency is quite a challenge. There is no greater satisfaction then to see a parent grow and change to better help themselves and their children. She has also had many children that did NOT have parent grow or change. Showing people with difficulties and challenges that there are people who want to help is key to the success.

So when Sue is not traveling to see her kids or brother, she enjoys spending time with her friends in town. Sue loves to hike and bike, as well as really enjoying reading early in the morning. Sue lives on a lake in Lutz and describes the nature as very calming. During the time from Thanksgiving to about March Sue’s brother lives with her in Florida. He brings his dog Daisy. He loves to walk his dog and he always says that it is so much nicer in Florida. No Snow! He loves to paint and draw and does art classes here. So during those months Bobby and I do a lot of running around. We do art classes, go to movies, go to church and many more things.

Thank you Sue for your devotion to the GAL Program! We are lucky to have you on our GAL Team!

~Submitted by Marymarie King, Sr. CAM
# GAL Event Calendar

## January 2017

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<tr>
<td>Happy New Year!</td>
<td>Office Closed</td>
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<td>Information Session @ Higgins Hall; 6pm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>New GAL Volunteer Training begins; 6-9pm</td>
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<td>In-Service: Evidence and Appearing in Court by Dave Gould 6-8pm Information Session; 6pm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Office Closed</td>
<td>New GAL Volunteer Training; 6-9pm</td>
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<td>In-Service: Kinship Care; 12pm Information Session; 6pm New GAL Volunteer Training; 6-9pm</td>
<td>Brown Bag Lunch; 12pm</td>
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<td>New GAL Volunteer Training; 6-9pm</td>
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<td>New GAL Graduation; 6:30pm</td>
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*All events offered at the GAL Office unless otherwise indicated*
Thank you to all of you who came out to the Toy Shop this year! This event would not have been possible without all of our AMAZING community partners! If you know anyone who is affiliated with any of these organizations, please reach out and say thanks! If you were unable to attend, please stop by the Guardian ad Litem office. There are still plenty of high quality toys available. Thanks to all who made this such a great success!
**Crossover child:** A child who is under the dual jurisdiction of the delinquency and dependency courts.

Research has shown that victims of physical abuse/neglect are at an increased risk of becoming crossover children and engaging in delinquent acts. There are over 3,600 children in the system of care in Hillsborough County. The Guardian ad Litem Program is able to represent approximately half of the number of children in the dependency system. According to the Department of Juvenile Justice, for the fiscal year of 2014-2015 there were 279 arrests made of children in Hillsborough County who were in out-of-home placements.

The most common offense for juveniles was Battery/Assault. Burglary and Violation of Probation were tied with the second highest offense rate. While 279 may not seem like a large number compared to the number of children in care, the fact that the second highest offense was a violation of probation shows that the same children are getting arrested repeatedly. Children who are arrested and placed on probation often have a difficult time completing probation. Behavioral issues that go unaddressed can lead to school suspensions and continued arrests which are violations of probation. The children we represent often have behavior issues that start out as problems in school or at home and escalate to criminal charges. There becomes a pattern of children getting arrested, placed on probation, and then violating their probation with continued behavioral problems. The punishment becomes extended probation causing children to become trapped in the delinquency system.

These children may often have unique needs that a Guardian ad Litem can advocate for in both dependency and delinquency. One of the preferred options is for children who have dependency and delinquency cases, is to have all of their cases transferred to Unified Family Court Division M. Unified Family Courts serve to coordinate judicial efforts in cases involving the same family regardless of the type of case and will provide one court that will hear the variety of cases facing a family in a consolidated, coordinated fashion. *In re Report of the Commission on Family Courts, 633 So.2d 14 (Fla.1994)* at 17.

Juvenile probation is often the sentence juveniles receive in delinquency after there is a finding of guilt by the delinquency judge. The terms of probation vary depending upon the charge, but may include tasks such as: community service hours, letter of apology to the victim or a short essay to the court, curfew, forfeiture of driver's license, avoiding contact with co-defendants, substance abuse counseling and/or mental health counseling. Although still under the age of 18, a finding of guilt can have a significant impact on our children's future. Some consequences for a finding of guilt or a guilty plea are:

- A child can be required to be on probation until he/she is 19 years old.
- A violation of probation can result in being placed in a Juvenile Residential facility until the child turns 21.
- The child may not be able to work in several professions including joining the military, teaching, nursing, law enforcement, child care worker, doctor, lawyer, cosmetology, barber, and massage therapy.
- If there is a finding of guilt for a sex crime, the child may not be able to live in public housing, which could have a significant impact on reunification with family.
- The child may lose their learner’s permit or driver’s license.
- If there is a finding of guilt for a sex crime, the child may have to register as a sex offender and there may be many places where he/she cannot live or work.
- There may be fines associated with the charges such as court costs, fees, and restitution.

The impact of probation and the violation of probation can have significant affects on a child’s life for years. A goal we can have as a Guardian ad Litem is to advocate for our kids to enter into diversion programs rather than enter a guilty plea or be sentenced to probation. Diversion programs are typically available for children who are first time offenders. The most common diversion program is called a Walker Plan which is an agreement in writing entered into by the state attorney, the child, the judge and the child’s attorney. The terms of a Walker Plan are almost identical to the terms of juvenile probation. The child may be required to complete community service hours, write a letter of apology to the victim, pay restitution to the victim, attend substance abuse counseling or mental health counseling. In addition the child will not be allowed to have any school suspensions or any new law violations.

If the tasks are completed, the charges against the child are dismissed. It is important to note that the Walker Plan requires a plea in abeyance. This means that if the task is not completed, the child will not have an opportunity to dispute the charges and will be automatically found guilty. However, in most cases, the punishment for not completing the Walker Plan is probation with a finding of guilt. Although the terms for a Walker Plan and probation may not seem strict, they can be difficult for children in foster care to adhere to. The children we represent may not have the opportunity to have a meaningful conversation with a family member regarding the terms of the Walker Plan and the significance of completing it.

As a Guardian ad Litem, we can advocate for our kids by recommending they be provided a Walker Plan and help support them in complying with their Walker Plan. Having a child offered the Walker Plan may require some convincing of the Judge and the State Attorney. Letters from teachers or caregivers discussing the child’s previous good behavior can help mitigate the charges and allow for the opportunity of a Walker Plan. Children with transporta-
tion issues or who have been removed from traditional school will often have a hard time finding places to complete community service hours. We can work with case management to help them think of creative ways for the child to complete the required number of hours. Additionally, some judges will allow for the child to do extra community service hours if the family does not have the money to pay restitution or any associated fines. Children often don’t have anyone to help them write their letter of apology and it can be the one thing holding them back from a clean record.

A less common option for children with criminal charges is a Judicial Warning. A Judicial Warning is when the judge dismisses the case against the child and gives the child an official warning. Some judges may give Judicial Warnings to children when they begin working on community service hours, complete letters of apology, or have done any other task that they might be required to do as part of probation or a Walker Plan before they appear in court to enter a plea. Judicial Warnings can be requested of the court for minor charges and when the child has never been in trouble before.

When advocating for children with criminal charges, it is important to remember not to discuss the details of the incident leading to the arrest with the child. This could make you a witness against the child in a criminal proceeding. Additionally, while we can help our kids navigate the consequences of being charged with a crime, we cannot give legal advice. Most of the children we represent will be appointed an assistant public defender who will advise them on their criminal case. If you have mitigating information or think the child you represent could qualify for a diversion program, make sure you contact your assigned attorney who can then contact the public defender.

~Submitted by Kelley Flournoy, Esq

Who do you know and Where do you go?

We are looking near and We are looking far
We travel on foot and We travel by car
We are looking high and We are looking low
There just is not a place that we won't go!

There are some that we know and some that we just met
But with everyone’s help there are many to get
You know them and see them, you call them your friend
It just takes a minute for an ear to bend.

You are very special, you are truly great
So please don’t keep what you do caged up in a crate.
Speak it and sing it or shout it out loud
We need volunteers to come in a crowd.

If you want to share and tell what you do
Then the VRC is the place for you!
We meet each month to develop our plan
Our next meeting falls on the 23rd of Jan.