



Family Court Judge Michael S. Holt

“The Guardian ad Litem needs to feel that they are the person who stands before the child. They are the child’s protector. The Guardian ad Litem always finds all the relevant information and is always a zealous advocate. The Guardian ad Litem is looking out to make sure the children are taken care of. These Guardians are saving children one at a time and in turn they are saving the world.”

In many instances, Family Court Judges are asked to make decisions regarding the best interest of abused and neglected children in less than 15 minutes. Judge Michael S. Holt states that he relies heavily on the Volunteer Guardian ad Litem report as he makes his decisions. “The Volunteers help bring the child to the forefront of the case. Because the Guardian ad Litem is there to be a voice for the child, the child becomes the center of every case.”

To help find out what is in the best interest of the child, the Guardian ad Litem listens to what the child has to say. The Guardian ad Litem looks into both the needs and wishes of the child and then writes a court report to summarize what is in the best interest of the child. The court report is then given to every party involved in the case including the Judge.

“The first thing I look at is the Guardian ad Litem report. It is always clear, concise and reads well.” “The most important information from the Guardian ad Litem in that report is where the child will be stable. The Guardian can tell me where the child will be stable and I always count on that. I want to put the children where they will have stability and be loved. The Guardian always provides me with that angle of the child.”

Judge Holt goes on to say, “The most important thing a Volunteer Guardian ad Litem can do for their child is to know the child. If they have a connection with the child, everything else will fall into place.”



CONNECTING FOR KIDS

Family Connections Program

Notes from Louise

It's not what you take with you, it's what you leave behind.

Working with our children we create memories that inspire us to keep serving or even warn us to do better. Guardian ad Litem volunteers and staff learn from each case and use their knowledge to help another child. Sometimes we get very wrapped up in the things that don't work. This can lead to cynicism about being an advocate in family court and a desire to focus on changing the system.

We should try to improve the process so that it is child-sensitive; it needs to work both more quickly and effectively to provide safety and permanence, but that is a by product of our work. The purpose of a volunteer GAL is to serve the child or children for whom he or she is appointed in the immediate case. These little people are relying on us.

Staff and volunteers reap many blessings from being advocates through administration or casework, but the lasting measure is what we leave behind - the care that a child felt, the one time that trust was upheld, a child's memories of you. These acts you leave behind are treasures in a child's life.

Louise Cooper

State Director

*South Carolina Volunteer
Guardian ad Litem Program*

The odds would seem to be stacked against young people as they leave the foster care system at age 18. Statistics show that two years after leaving foster care, less than 50% had completed high school or had current employment, and 1 in 7 had been homeless at least once. In addition, 87% reported having contact with their birth family after leaving foster care.

As advocates for the best interest of a young person, we need to identify strategies that will allow young people to thrive and be successful. The Family Connections Project is a way to meet that need. We know the impact that one caring adult can have on a child's life. This project can make that same impact for older youth, and reduce the risks of homelessness, incarceration, and poverty they are currently facing.

How can volunteer Guardians ad Litem be involved in this project?

If you are the volunteer for a young person that meets these qualifications, you can make a referral to the Family Connections Coordinator for your area:

- Age 13-18
- Not being considered for reunification
- Not in an adoptive placement
- In one of the project counties listed below.

Welcome to new Family Connections Coordinator Rick McWhorter! Rick will work with referrals from Spartanburg, Greenville, Greenwood, Newberry, and Oconee counties. He can be reached at 864-223-4681, rmcwhorter@oepp.sc.gov

Twofeathers Martin is based in the Orangeburg office, and can be reached at 803-531-2217, tmartin@oepp.sc.gov. She will continue working with Orangeburg, Calhoun, Dorchester, Aiken, Bamberg and Barnwell counties.

CHILD FOCUSED, CHILD FORWARD.

Celebrating our Dedicated Volunteers!

Nell Stewart Receives Hometown Hero Award



Nell Stewart has been a volunteer Guardian ad Litem in Greenville County for over 20 years. She was recently honored by the Modern Woodmen of America. "You believe in volunteer service, and so do we. As a fraternal financial services organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for families and communities, we recognize your accomplishment and appreciate your contribution to your community. You're truly a hometown hero!"

Nell feels strongly about her work as a volunteer GAL. When asked why she continues to spend time as a volunteer GAL, she replies:

"Because I care about children! Because I feel a responsibility to those whose parents are unable or unwilling to be good parents! Because I believe that God gave me the ability to properly investigate and make good decisions on their behalf! Because I want them to enjoy life as I have! And, if I want to be perfectly selfish about it, these children we represent will have an effect on the quality of life that I, my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren experience."

TSgt. Jackson Receives Military Award



Presenting the award to Ms. Jackson was Maj. John R. Vickrey, Commander, 20th Communication Squadron.

TSgt. Shadrine J. Jackson received the Military Outstanding Volunteer Award at a ceremony held Friday, July 23, 2010 at Shaw Air Force Base.

Ms. Jackson received the award for her work as a Kershaw County Volunteer Guardian ad Litem. In her two years as a GAL, Ms. Jackson has been the voice for an abused or neglected child in eight cases.



Do Good: Staci Britt Volunteer in Aiken County for 10 years, was recently featured in the Augusta Chronicle.

She spoke about her experience as a volunteer.

"I go to court for kids that are Department of Social Services cases, abuse and neglect cases. You spend a lot of time with (the child), wherever they are. They could be at Helping Hands, they could be at school, they could be in foster care, or at a relative's. The older kids I work with, they know the situation. They'll tell you exactly what they want to do. They're always going to want to go home, but they can understand what the parent has to go through so that kid can go home. The younger kids don't understand."

<http://chronicle.augusta.com/things-do/applause/2010-12-08/do-good-staci-britt>

CHILD FOCUSED, CHILD FORWARD.

South Carolina News

GOING GREEN:

This will be the last issue of the "Child Focused, Child Forward" newsletter that will be distributed by mailing list. Our first issue in July, 2007, was mailed to 1274 volunteers. This issue will be mailed to almost 2200 volunteers. This reflects the extraordinary growth of our program over the last 3 years. More importantly, we have accomplished something amazing for children: Since July 1, 2010, all abused and neglected children entering the Family Court system in South Carolina received a volunteer Guardian ad Litem.

We feel in the current economic climate, the cost of producing and mailing this publication has become prohibitive. The environmental impact of printing such a large quantity is also a consideration. In light of these factors, we have made the decision to convert to a digital format. This will allow us to produce the publication more often, and serve our volunteers better with more timely and relevant information.

At this time, we do not have a statewide email list. Even if you receive email from your county office, we have not yet compiled that information for the state. If you are interested in receiving this publication as an email instead of a printed version, please email me at cwalker@oepp.sc.gov. You can unsubscribe at any time. You can also contact your county office and ask them to pass that information along to me. This publication can also be viewed on the web at SCGAL.org.

If you prefer to continue receiving a printed copy, you can request that at my email address, or contact me by phone at (864) 878-0861.

Thanks to those of you who have already subscribed by email!

Cherie Walker

We are looking for stories about volunteers and the young people you represent. If the young person involved is over 18, please contact me about setting up a personal interview with both of you. We are very interested in hearing what young people think about their time in the foster care system, and how we can encourage other young people and their volunteers as they transition into the adult world. Please call me at (864) 878-0861 or email to: cwalker@oepp.sc.gov

Foster Children's Help Line number: 1-800-645-9789

This help line was established to answer calls 24 hours a day from children and youth in foster care. The number was changed earlier this year, and some foster children may not have the current number. Volunteers may want to check with their children to make sure they have this number for emergency assistance.

On The Road Again!

This South Carolina Foster Parents Association project helps provide foster youth ages 18-21 with used cars as they travel the road to independence. These young people often leave the foster care system without needed transportation making it difficult to succeed in life. The project accepts donations of used cars, and matches them with youth who are actively employed, pursuing a GED, or engaged in a post-high school educational program. For more information about this project, contact Brian Marion at 803-665-9225 or visit their web site at scfpa.com

If you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito. Betty Reese.

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Welcome to our new Volunteers!

Judge Alvin Johnson welcomes 9 new Pickens County Volunteers!

*Pictured here from left to right:
David Strickland, Kelly Williams, Tina
Golightly, Jamie Russo, Harriet Nash,
Bobby Watkins, Judge Johnson, Susan
Oliver, Linda Abegg, and Jane Chance.*



Anderson County Swearing In Ceremony

*(L-R) Front Row: Amy Jared and
Jackie Hogberg. Second Row: Donna
Potts, Jackie Zasadny, Jill Holter,
Mona Moseley, Denise DeMartini,
Pam Smith and Kim Randolph.*

*Third Row: Hugh Sackett, Kim Ellison, Natasha Smith, Betty Hill, Barrie Tinsley, Joy Brown, Katy Goforth
and Tina White. Fourth Row: Clara Harrison, Joe Reppar, Barbara Blaney, Cherrelle Rainey, Jody Usher,
Mary Orem, Marilyn Martin, John Hogberg and Doug Duncan. Back Row: Judge Edward*

York and Union Counties Celebrate with a "GAL Roundup!"

This event featured a BBQ, country music, karaoke and a swearing in ceremony for new guardians. There was a contest for the best dressed cowboy and cowgirl, and a beautiful story told by a former "guardian child" of her life in foster care and the love and support she received from her GAL. Sponsored by the Friends of York-Union Guardians.



*Pictured left to right: Madelyn Bowser, Heather Rice, Aubrey Erschen, Pam Curry, Debra Peele, Judge Henry Woods,
Judge David Guyton, Jackie Chapel-Hardy, Susan Mace, Jill Bigham, Marsha Gaulden, Shirley Hamilton*

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National News



2011 National CASA® Conference

March 19-22, 2011, Chicago

Discounts available for members, volunteers, groups and youth. Learn more and register now.

Each year, more than 1,400 CASA and guardian ad litem staff, board members, volunteers, judges, attorneys and other child welfare professionals gather to connect with peers and learn from leaders in the field.

As one CASA volunteer recently said, people who come to National CASA's multi-disciplinary conference are "people who believe that kids count."

NEW!! National CASA® Blog!

National CASA's new blog features topics dear to the heart of our volunteer advocates. Stay in touch with what is happening from a nation perspective. This month's articles:

"Homeless for the Holidays"

"Congress Reauthorizes Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)"

"It's a Wonderful Life - Thanks to CASA Volunteers"

"Amid Economic Deluge, America's Future Struggles to Stay Afloat"

<http://blog.casaforchildren.org/>



Text BABY to 511411

New and expectant mothers can use this service to get free messages each week on their cell phones to help through the pregnancy and the baby's first year.

Brief text messages will be sent to new and expectant mothers three times per week to promote healthy births, especially among traditionally underserved populations.

For volunteers with cases involving young mothers, this is a great resource to teach important knowledge in a way that young people can embrace.
www.text4baby.org

National CASA® joins forces with National Safe Place.

National Safe Place supports youth shelter agencies across the county that provide access to immediate help and safety for youth in crisis. Businesses and community buildings are designated as "Safe Place" sites. Any youth in crisis can walk into one of the nearly 16,000 Safe Places across the county and ask an employee for help.

Carolina Youth Development
5055 Lackawanna Blvd.,
N. Charleston, (843) 266-5202

Sea Haven, Inc.
North Myrtle Beach, (843) 399-4045
GreenHouse Runaway Shelter
529 N. Wise Drive, Sumter
(803) 775-3311



www.nationalsafeplace.org

CHILD FOCUSED, CHILD FORWARD.

Volunteer Spotlight



*Lillie Walker
Hampton Volunteer
Guardian ad Litem*

“If a friend asked me why I volunteer, I would say because it is a great challenge and a good inspiration to your life to be able to help someone else. It is fulfilling work.”

For 22 years, I drove a school bus and interacted with young children every day. Those years were instrumental in helping me relate to the children I represent as a volunteer Guardian ad Litem. Never have I worried about becoming too attached to a child as I learned early how to set boundaries and still care deeply about them.

Since my retirement with the school system, I have gone back to school myself and will graduate with a Master's degree in Divinity next year. My goal is to complete my doctorate. Before I go visit the families in my cases, I spend time in prayer.

The most difficult situation for me is a case where the children have been removed from their home. It also becomes my favorite situation and I have the feeling of accomplishment when the child is returned to the home, safe and happy.

I have learned a lot about people with drug and alcohol problems and have been surprised with the character of some of the parents involved. People that you would never suspect have problems that affect their children.

Legal Update

Mandated Reporters

There were several major legislative changes in 2010 that impacted the Guardian ad Litem Program. One of the most important was a change to the section of law dealing with mandated reporters of abuse and neglect. Effective immediately, volunteer GALs are “mandated reporters” of child abuse and neglect. A GAL who suspects additional incident(s) of abuse or neglect, such as when the child discloses them, must notify DSS or law enforcement (as required by the mandated reporter law) and the GAL Program. If the information indicates abuse or neglect by someone other than the parent, guardian or other person responsible for the child's welfare, the GAL must make the report to law enforcement. There is protection from civil and criminal liability with respect to making a report in good faith. Knowingly failing to make a report is a misdemeanor.

Save the Date!

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

2011 Volunteer Conference

Contact your county office for more information and registration forms in February.

It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference. Tom Brokaw

CHILD FOCUSED, CHILD FORWARD.

GAL Program Connects with Social Media!

Facebook, Twitter, and other social media have transformed the way our society communicates. This has major implications for the Guardian ad Litem Program. Through a series of staff and volunteer trainings, we are exploring how to safely use this opportunity to spread our message of advocacy and permanency for children.

Our mandate to provide a volunteer advocate for every abused or neglected child entering the Family Court system has increased the need for volunteers in some areas. Facebook currently reaches over 1.6 million users in South Carolina. We know that many of our volunteers learn about the program through friends, neighbors, or relatives who are already volunteers. It makes good sense to use this resource that touches so many lives at so little cost.

Our staff and volunteers take very seriously their duty to protect the privacy of families and children involved in our cases. Our volunteer trainings have focused on the proper uses of social media for spreading our message, without violating our confidentiality requirements. Trainings have emphasized the reasons for not contacting families and children through social media.



If Facebook was a country, it would be the worlds' 4th largest!

35% of South Carolina's population uses Facebook.



*Visit the SC GAL Facebook page!
County pages coming soon!*



Twitter has over 100 million active users! Join the conversation at [Twitter.com/GALVolunteersSC](https://twitter.com/GALVolunteersSC)



YouTube videos exceed 2 BILLION views a day. That's two BILLION, which is nearly double the prime-time audience of all 3 major U.S. broadcast networks combined. Stay tuned to see SC GAL videos on YouTube soon!

The South Carolina Volunteer GAL Program will have our own Facebook Page starting January 1, 2011. It's a great tool for staying on top of child advocacy issues throughout the state, and across the nation. Facebook will feature current information on volunteer trainings, continuing education, and spotlighting the great work of our volunteers. County pages are also being added as quickly as possible, with Chester and Fairfield being the first counties to join us on Facebook. We hope you will "Like" our pages and "Share" them with your network!

Another new and exciting tool is Twitter! You can follow us on Twitter @GALVolunteersSC. Our Twitter page is updated daily with news and information from around the state. We follow current news, as well as alerting our followers to special events such as the "Home for the Holidays" Special on CBS December 22, and the airing on December 24 of Dr. Phil show about youth in foster care, featuring National CASA CEO Michael Piraino.

Coming soon: Our own GAL video profiles on YouTube. Our public relations staff is hard at work producing our first video, featuring Family Court Judge Pogue and volunteers from Marion County. Contact your county coordinator if you'd like to be a star in one of our video profiles!