



The Gabbing Guardian

Guardian ad Litem

Mission of the Guardian ad Litem:

To provide trained independent advocates to represent and promote the best interest of abused, neglected, and dependent children in the state court system and to work expediently towards a plan that ensures these children are in a safe, permanent home.

Eyes and Ears



Greetings and salutations! For those of you who do not know me, my name is Richard Tanker and I am the Guardian ad litem attorney (GALA) for Henderson and Polk Counties. I have been the GALA in Henderson County since 2006 and in Polk County since 2012. I also have a private practice. Representing abused and neglected children is the most satisfying and rewarding part of my job as an attorney. One of the reasons I enjoy it so much is

the many wonderful and dedicated GAL volunteers with whom I get to meet and work. While I get to stand up in court and fight for those kids, the GALs are on the front lines, going out to all parts of the counties (and beyond) to visit with the children, make sure they are thriving, insuring that they are getting all the help they need from all of the resources at our disposal, and preparing written reports to keep the court informed. As a former judge used to say, the GALs are the eyes and ears of the court.

You as GALs are also my eyes and ears, as I do not get the opportunity very often to meet the children. I rely on you, much like the judge does, to communicate to me what is going on with these

children so I can advocate for their welfare in court. You all perform an invaluable service to those children and to the community at large and for that I personally thank each and every one of you. I know it is not always easy, particularly when you are often asked to sit in court, sometimes all day, in order for your cases to be heard. As your attorney, I strive to give a voice to your concerns for these children and a voice to their needs and wishes. I am available to speak with you or meet with you to discuss and strategize cases or explain points of law. We are a team, so let us work together to provide these children with the best chance we can for them to succeed in life!

- Richard Tanker

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Juvenile Case Statutory Timelines

- Day 0: Juvenile Petition Filed and Non-Secure Order
- Day 7: Court Hearing to determine the need for continued Non-Secure Custody;
DSS bears the burden to prove clear and convincing evidence that
Placement is necessary
- Day 60: Adjudication hearing to be held no later than 60 days from filing per NCGS 7B-801
Unless continued per NC GS 7B-803
- Day 90: Dispositional hearing should take place immediately after the adjudication, but if not
then it shall be concluded within 30 days of the adjudication hearing according to
NC GS 7B-901
- Day 180: Review of Custody per order according to NC GS 7B-906.1. A hearing must be held
within 90 days of the disposition hearing with a subsequent review within 6 months
- Day 365: Permanency Planning Hearing must be held within 12 months of the initial order
removing a child from custody per NCGS 7B-906.1 with a subsequent PPH at least
every 6 months thereafter

Termination of Parental Rights Timelines

- Day 0: TPR petition filed (note: if a permanent plan is adoption and reunification efforts have
been ceased, TPR has to be filed within 60 days of the Permanency Planning Hearing
order
- Day 90: TPR hearing has to be held no later than 90 days from filing of the TPR (A hearing may
Be continued for “good cause” to receive additional evidence, reports or assessments
That have been requested by the court, or any information that is in the child’s best
Interest and to allow reasonable time for expeditious discovery. Otherwise,
Continuances are only granted in “extraordinary circumstances.
- Day 270: TPR Hearing held no later than 90 days from filing TPR
- Day 450: Additional TPR hearing held every 6 months until adoption decree is entered





The Foster Parent’s View

Foster care is an emotional excursion that many children and foster parents navigate without a map and with much uncertainty on how the adventure will end. Personally, we have traveled this path many times over the last six years. Often we consider our guardian ad litem as our navigator for each adventure, helping us and the children navigate the path of the foster care system.

We have worked with many guardians ad litem over the years. They have not only provided us with support for this adventure but they have advocated and been a voice for our

children. Honestly, we can say that each of our children have had a happy ending to their adventure. Some of our children we have adopted and some have been reunited with their biological families. If it were not for the child’s guardian ad litem being their voice and advocate in the court system, I am not sure that any of our children would have had an adventure with a happy ending. We have seen firsthand that the work and dedication of our guardian ad litem has made a positive impact on the future of each child we have had in foster care.



- Randy and Megan Smith

A Word From Rutherfordton

I received the applications in February 2010. Little did I know that I was about to meet two of the most inspirational people I will ever know. In walked a husband and wife team and best friends, Britt and Christine (Doodle) Lowry. During the interview, I learned that they were once youth counselors and they had worked with youth to explore potential career paths. How they explained it, “it does not matter if you are a shoe salesman; do your best and care about your job because you never know how you might touch the life of someone”. They did not

just say this but live it in everything they do.

For the past seven years, Britt and Doodle have been strong advocates for many types of cases with the GAL Program. They take their role as an advocate very serious. Not only do they attend court, meetings, visits, and prepare reports, they also help the children realize and reach their potential. They helped one young man become top cookie dough salesperson with band, attended nearly every football game of another young man, advocated for a child dealing with sexuality issues, helped an illiterate family placement provider learn to read and

continued, after cases were closed, to be a resource of support for many families and children.

They volunteer for the GAL Program and many other organizations. They are highly respected by peers, community leaders, church family, and honestly anyone who meets them.

Britt and Doodle, you both inspire and bring hope to any one you meet. What a gift! Thank you both for sharing that with children and adults alike.

-Charity Robinson





Emily Shirley a Volunteer Spotlight

I've been a GAL child advocate for twenty children in McDowell County over the past eight years. Volunteering with GAL was an educational endeavor because I wanted to learn more about our court system and local child protective services. GAL is the perfect place for hands-on experience in those areas (actually, having just completed a Criminal Justice degree, I am positive I'm learning a lot more from my volunteer hours with GAL than I did in any classroom).

Several years ago at the annual holiday party, while discussing why we volunteer here, another GAL from our district said, "This work challenges every part of me". I quote her often, because I really can't express it any better! I also like investigating questions and figuring out the facts of a case, keeping focused on the child/children so their voice is not lost, and occasionally winning an argument with a blowhard attorney. (I guess you might want to edit that out, but it's true! Feels GREAT).

This is my second year as a grant-funded recruiter for GAL. Recruiting

more volunteers really begins with outreach and community education. Most people, when they learn about GAL, are surprised and pleased to know that such a program exists. However, it's definitely not typical volunteer work. Potential volunteers might keep it in the back of their mind for months or years before the time is right for them to take the next step. In recruitment and outreach work I try to support that process and make sure that when they are ready, they'll know who to call.



Emily with Daughter, Clara show off their GAL mugs at school together.

Current Unassigned Cases

Rutherford = 30

Henderson = 14

McDowell = 35

Transylvania = 1

Polk = 1

Melissa's Message

We want to welcome all of our new volunteers that are currently involved with our Flex Training! These new volunteers will be sworn in the first couple of weeks in July and we look forward to having them be a part of our program. If any of you "veteran" vol-

unteers are interested in being a mentor for one of our new volunteers please contact the office and let one of the program supervisors know. Being a mentor gives our current volunteers a chance to help the new volunteers navigate the process of doing a thorough

investigation with their first case. You could be a help and encouragement to the new volunteer as they learn all of the ropes of being a successful Guardian ad Litem Volunteer!





Monthly Meetings

Volunteers are encouraged to participate in monthly meetings. It is a great way to meet other volunteers and learn new things. It is also an opportunity to share your knowledge so that children can be better served.

Charity has meetings in Rutherford County at the Olive Tree beginning at Noon on 6/21, 7/19, and 8/16. Four children being served by the LINKS program will be speaking at the June Meeting.

No speakers have been assigned to the next dates.

Kevin has meetings in Polk County at 1:30 on the third Friday of each month. Meetings are at Open Road. He has meetings in Transylvania on the first Monday of each month starting at 9:30 at the Children's Center.

Jennifer has meetings at the Hendersonville office in the training room the second Tuesday of each

month. Volunteers are encouraged to bring their lunch or a snack. In June, the speaker will be Tonya Hughes from the Mediation Center speaking about the Family Visitation Program. Other speakers or topics are to be decided.

Michele has meetings in McDowell County as announced. Do consider joining Michele and Emily on one or both of the upcoming tours they are offering. They should be very interesting.

Upcoming Tours

There are two tours that have been planned and everyone is invited. First, on June 2nd at 1:00 there will be a tour of the Family Justice Center in Asheville.

A second tour is planned on August 3rd at 2:00 to tour Lily's Place in Marion. Lily's Place is the Child Advocacy Center in McDowell County. They offer forensic interviewing, forensic medical ex-

aminations, mental health counseling services and more. If you are interested in either of these tours, please contact Emily Shirley at emilyjfshirley@gmail.com.

Seeing Your Children Monthly

It is so very important that volunteers see their children at least monthly. The cases we see and the lives of the children change so rapidly that we must insert ourselves into the busy lives of these children and foster families.

As Guardians ad Litem we make very serious recommendations to the court that impact the lives of children and families. If we are not able to see the child for whom we make these recommendations, can we really say that it is in their best interest?



Guardian ad Litem Office Team

District Administrator
Lee Bradley 828-694-4218

Program Supervisors
Kevin Blackwell 828-694-4220
Jennifer Pittman 828-694-4217
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Michele Rink 828-652-4632

Program Assistant
Melissa Henson 828-694-4215

Recruitment and Outreach
Emily Shirley



Birthdays and Celebrations

Birthdays

May:

Cindy O'Connor
Amber Vess
Debi Miller
Carey Smith
Nancy West
Janet Spears
Anne Westbrook
Jodi Whisman
Connie Brown
Gewn Cradle
Laurel Ela

June:

Mary Snyder
Joyce Hannum
Frances Lockwood
Sara Baird
Micki Andrews
Gail Satz
Crystal Baker
Paul Nowicki
Robert Kromer

July:

Mindy Flynn
Doodle Lowry
Eleanor Whitworth
Regina Davis
Martha Callan
Kayla Byrd
Vicki Burton
Linda Sue Barnes
Anne Duncan
Clay Smith
Warren Spahr
Marilyn Smith
Ed Buckley
Sue Huffman

August:

Shelley Baluch
Britt Lowry
Lynne Taylor
Barbara Jamison
Elsbeth Luedi
Fran Li
Debbie Stout
Mary Ernst



Years of Service

10 Years: Jimi Moore

9 Years: Beth Brand, Debra Jacobs

6 Years: Rachel Keever, Luella Wishon

5 Years: Marion Cantwell, & Shelley Baluch

4 Years: Ed Buckley, Regina Davis, Steve Martin, & Warren Spahr

3 Years: Linda Critelli, Jennifer Dilemme, June Stacy, Simine Heise, Clay Smith, Connie Brown, & Patricia Jenkins

2 Years: Barbara Baker, Kayla Byrd, Arlene Wels, Sandy Marcotte, Debbie Stout, & Nancy West

1 Year: Penny Roller, Mary Snyder, Maralyn Yaple, Sally Collins, Samantha Lowery, Vicki Burton, Jennifer Grant, Kelly Motes, Robert Kromer, & Libby Morris