

The Guardian Voice

Lift up a child's voice. A child's life.™



FALL 2014

Volunteer spotlight: Melissa Torres

Melissa Torres is a Chicago native who moved to Miami when she was 15 years old. Since a young age, Melissa knew that she wanted to make a difference. At 16, she decided to become a blood donor, and once given parental consent, Torres joined the Be A Match registry. Torres has also served as a youth counselor and, most recently, traveled to Brazil to teach high school students how to speak English. Her exemplary job as the advocate for a 12 year old girl earned her the Rising Star Award at this year's GAL Recognition Event.

This past August, Melissa was fortunate enough to see a happy ending to her case and supervision on the child was terminated. Melissa is certain that she will continue being part of the child's life. "We have established an amazing bond over the past year and we will continue to be close for years to come," she says.

Melissa recently received an AA in Criminal Justice. Come Spring, she will be pursuing her bachelor's degree and hopes that, upon completion, she will be able to find a career that lets her set her focus to children's issues. She also relishes in the fact that she knows her volunteer work is important. "I'm glad to be part of this program and that I get to do what I can to help make the life of a child better."



Volunteer Melissa Torres (right) poses with fellow volunteer Karla Acosta, and her son at this year's Child Abuse Awareness Prevention Picnic.

C-SAFE is the “new” GAL philosophy on how to engage even more directly than we already do in the ACTION necessary to advance the best interests of kids. I say “new” because its really not all that new. These are things we’ve been talking about, and doing, for years. But in some respects it is a “new” philosophy as it is designed to begin every conversation, on every case, with three simple questions leading us to decisive action in three critical areas. Many of you have received formal training on our C-SAFE philosophy. Some of you may not have. But I hope all of you have at least heard of this unifying approach.

So, in short, what is C-SAFE?

It is a unifying philosophy that insists that *every single one of us* ask three questions every time we look at, or discuss, a case. These three questions should be a part of your normal, standard operating procedure. We don’t need you to fill out a form, or hold a formal meeting, or make a production out of the asking of these questions, but we do need you to ask and answer the questions...every single time. Volunteers, CACs, Attorneys, Management should all ask these questions...every time any one, or more, of you begin a review or assessment of a case. (I should remind everyone that all decisions like this should be documented in a prominent location, somewhere in your file. Anyone who picks up the file should be able to start with prior answers on these three questions.)

OK, enough of the preliminaries... “*What are the 3 questions?*”. Hey, I’m glad you asked. They are:

Is this child safe in their current placement? If so, great! If not...“What do we need to do NOW to make sure this child is safe?”

You can also ask this same question about a future, planned placement.

Have we actually achieved ALL that we’ve advocated for in this case? If so, great! If not, what do we need to do NOW to make sure that what this child needs is actually delivered?

Is this case on track to expedite the right permanency plan for this child? If so, great! If not, what do we need to do NOW to get this case resolved with the appropriate permanency outcome?

That’s it? Does that cover every conceivable advocacy issue? Probably not. But it certainly focuses us on the three very important issues of safety, assuring that the child’s needs are being met, and getting permanency for the child as soon as possible. The whole point, really, isn’t the answer to the question, although the question is certainly the springboard particularly when the answer to the question is “no.”. The point is the ACTION necessary to change the answer to “yes” -- when the answer needs changing. Action orientation is the absolute, final assessment on the effectiveness of our C-SAFE philosophy.

So, here’s my challenge to you. Take 5 minutes today to practice this new philosophy on at least one file today. Ask and answer the 3 questions in concert with your advocacy team as a conscious exercise. Decide what needs to be done to get the answers you are seeking and get it done. (If the answers to all three questions are already YES, then celebrate where this case is heading and move to the next case.) And, to really cement this new philosophy in your mind, teach someone else how to incorporate the C-SAFE model in to your day to day work.

The immediate goal is to infuse C-SAFE into every level of the organization, and the only way to do that is to make the C-SAFE philosophy and the C-SAFE questions a part of your personal philosophy. I’ve challenged your management team to ask these questions themselves. If they aren’t doing that for you, ask them to help you integrate C-SAFE more effectively by modeling those questions in their own review of files

The longer term goal is to significantly change the answers to all three of these questions, where we can, to a resounding YES, every time. That will require ACTION...and lots of it. But the lives of the kids we serve will be better off for it. But it’s the action that will matter in the long run. “What can we do to change this, today!?”

C-SAFE applies to everyone who works with a child at GAL. It is the guiding principle for the entire GAL organization, regardless of your position. And, most importantly, our success (as individuals, teams, units, circuits, regions, and statewide) should largely be determined on how well we can change a “NO” to a “YES.” If we only advocate without achievement then our advocacy isn’t really very effective. So the measure is action and results, not advocacy in, and of, itself.

We’d love to hear of any stories that result from a C-SAFE discussion or analysis. Tell me a story about where you were able to change a NO to a YES with ACTION that arose from your C-SAFE questioning and collaboration. I’ll be happy to share some of those results with everyone. Good luck! Have fun with this, and make it happen! *Email: Charles.Nelson@gal.fl.gov*

you're invited to our
**Guardian ad Litem and
Educate Tomorrow**

Fall Family Picnic



Sunday, November 9th

11:30-3:00

Greynolds Park

17530 W Dixie Highway

North Miami Beach, FL

Rock Shelter

RSVP to: Christina.Ramirez@gal.fl.gov

(786) 469-3870

THANK *You*

IN APPRECIATION OF YOU, AND ALL THAT YOU DO.

Bill Masterson is a relatively new guardian but he is nothing short of amazing. On his very first appointment, the case was heading to TPR when we were appointed. Bill went in assessed the family, advocated for the child Chantel, worked out the discord between the parents and caregivers, and also encouraged the parents in their services. Needless to say because of his efforts and advocacy, the child was able to reunify and we closed the case last week! -Jessica Yates

Amira Hayes is new to our GAL team but she is amazing! She has an adoption case that has been through case manager and attorney changes that have resulted in delays both inside and outside of court. Last week Amira (through her pink sheet) was able to provide the adoption status information to the court when DCF was not prepared and resulting in the adoptions moving forward to help these girls achieve permanency. -Jessica Yates

Claudia Silva is helping two siblings who are in separate placements (with disputing caregivers) maintain their relationship. Claudia now arranges her GAL visits to allow the children to see each other. They are now able to at least see each other more than they were before. Thank you Claudia for helping these children maintain one of the most important relationships in life! -Jessica Yates

To say that **Kala Brown** goes “above and beyond” for the children whom she is the GAL for is an understatement! Before school began, Kala went down to each school to assist with enrollment for the children whom she is the GAL for. Without Kala, these children would not only attend inappropriate schools, but the wrong grade levels! This situation really shows how without a GAL, children can truly languish in the system...

Kala’s community health involvement continues to serve these children more than GAL attorney Meliza Frias, CAC II Melissa Martinez-Esteve, and myself could have ever hoped for or imagined! The complicated nature of these health concerns were truly difficult to handle before Kala joined our team! Looking back, the three of us were truly at a loss before Kala contributed her expertise and advocacy. Kala reminds us all that without the Volunteer, we cannot serve the child’s best interest at the optimum level.

Kala blew us all away this month when she drove to the ER at 9:00 on a Sunday when one of the children hurt his ankle in football. She wanted to ensure that the Doctors gave him the best possible care, and she of course, wanted to make sure that he was okay. Kala not only helped this child physically, but also emotionally in the sense that she showed her true commitment and care for his wellbeing.

Thank you Kala, words cannot express our gratitude for your compassion, expertise, and advocacy!

-Riana Maryanoff

Meliza Frias is more than an attorney; she's a mentor, an advocate, a GAL, a fighter, an enthusiast, a volunteer supervisor, and a true believer in serving the best interests of the children. Although "Staff Attorney" is her official title, she truly wears every hat. You will never hear Meliza say "that's not my job", because to her, this isn't just a job, it's a commitment to serving the children. Meliza always works as a team, and goes out of her way to support anyone in need. She speaks with the child, the therapist, the supervisor, the case manager, the psychiatrist, the teachers, the principals, and basically anyone who can contribute to a comprehensive view of what's best for the child. Meliza honors the GAL logo in the sense that she works closely with the team as a base of support to lift up the Volunteer's advocacy, and of course child's voice, and the child's life. Although fairly new, you'd think Meliza worked with GAL for at least two decades! She simply "gets it" and everyone in this organization knows how lucky we are to have her passion and diligence. Thank you Meliza for all that you teach us, and for your commitment to the children and our incredible Volunteers. -Riana Maryanoff

Ana Crucet has been apart of the Guardian Ad Litem program since November 1994, an amazing 20 years! She has advocated best interest for so many children in foster care over the years. I have only had the pleasure of working with Ana for one year and it has been great working with her. She is a great team player and never afraid to ask questions. Her current GAL child calls her "abuela" and absolutely adores her. Thank you Ana for all that you have done for the GAL program and the children we serve over the last 20 years. -Rosaly Fallas

After what seems like a lifetime **Lai-Ching Long** has realized the forever family for her darling child.. This past Monday her child was adopted!!!! It could not have happened without Lai-Ching's commitment to making sure this child was in the best placement possible not only for the time being but in the future as well; she now has the prospect of a bright future with loving and nurturing parents. It goes without saying that her attorneys, **Jorge Tormes and Michael Davis** had a huge impact on making this happen as well!!! Congratulations TEAM!!! Thank you for being so amazing and dedicated to "our" children!!!!

- Alex Falcon

MOVIE & BOOK SPOTLIGHT

Did you know that you can receive in-service credits for watching films and reading books that deal with foster care, adoption, abuse, substance abuse or any other issues we deal with in the dependency system? We'll be featuring movies and books you can read to gain in-service hours.

Our Fall picks are:

FILM: **FIRST CIRCLE**

A revealing documentary about Foster Care, family and healing in the Western United States. Shot over five years in Idaho and Oregon, the film follows families struggling to heal, administrators working for change, and the isolation of a western landscape responsible for both the manufacturing of and liberation from meth addiction.

In-service credit: 1.5 hours

Book: **Orphans of the Living**

For this eye-opening look at how America cares for its abused and neglected children, Toth traveled to foster-care homes, orphanages, and juvenile detention centers to record the poignant, often heroic voices of youngsters trying to survive in an overburdened system.

In-service credit: 3.5 hours

For information on other movies and books, please contact: Patricia.Abaroa@gal.fl.gov

ADOPT A FAMILY



OLD NAVY

has partnered with Voices For Children this Holiday Season!

OLD NAVY stores across South Florida are adopting families to fulfill their holiday wishes. Help us collect wishes for 38 families by Friday, October 31st!

Please contact Dorothy Marin at dmarin@BeAVoice.org or 786-469-3862 for more details.



WE AVE HEARD YOU

COMMUNITY OUTREACH by: Madelaine Volum and Rosi Alvarez

Please consider attending events where you feel there would be prospective Guardian ad Litem in attendance, such as Rotary Club Meetings, Women's Club Meetings, PTSA's and the like. Rosi Alvarez and Madelaine Volum have been attending City Council meetings such as Cutler Bay's and South Miami's monthly council meetings and have both been received very warmly. They succeeded in placing articles on these two City's home pages to recruit potential GALs.

In The City of South Miami's monthly council meeting, South Miami's mayor, Philip Stoddard was very courteous to Madelaine Volum who went to present the Guardian ad Litem Program. He placed Madelaine at the front of the agenda so that she didn't have to stay at the meeting for a prolonged period of time. As Madelaine was ending her presentation, South Miami's Vice-Mayor, Josh Liebman, volunteered to become a Guardian himself and proceeded to give Madelaine his business card. Two other people from the audience also came forward and all have since then been contacted by Patricia Abaroa whom, as most of us know, probably already has them all attending training classes.

Rosi attended a City of Pinecrest Education Meeting, where Mayor Cindy Lerner, who was previously a staff GAL attorney for 16 years, gave a wonderful introduction to the program. A representative from the local Rotary Club was also in attendance, and as luck would have it, she was also a GAL and was able to provide support. Members of the Region, whom Rosi knows from an Education Committee that she chairs, were present and have been very supportive about spreading the word about GAL.

There were about thirty people in attendance, including school principals, PTA members, community business partners and residents.

-Madelaine Volum and Rosi Alvarez, Volunteer Advisory and Recruitment Committee

If you are aware of meetings in your community and would like a recruiter or a Volunteer Advisory and Recruitment Committee member to join you, please reach out to: Patricia.Abaroa@gal.fl.gov

CIRCUIT NEWS

SAVE THE DATE:

Sunday, April 12th, 2015

Children's Week Kick-off:

Third Annual

Guardian ad Litem

Child Abuse Prevention Picnic

AD Barnes Park



Employee of the Quarter– Jessica Mancuso

I want to say that Jessica Mancuso is an amazing volunteer supervisor. She works well with her volunteers and she goes above and beyond on her cases. She does not complain about anything and is always willing and able to help. I am so honored to have her on my team. GO Jessica!!! You rock!!!

-Stacy Bromfield

Attorney of the Quarter– Brian Roffman

Brian has gone above and beyond almost on a daily basis to advocate for one of our most medically vulnerable children with true dedication and a lot of heart.

First, Brian has one of the largest caseloads in our office. It's not uncommon to see him caravan two carts loaded up with office files for one morning calendar. But in addition to that, in the last few months, his advocacy for one particular child has been nothing short of amazing. This child, with a host of physical and emotional issues, was admitted to Miami Children's Hospital in August. Since then, there were times when hearings were set every day, sometimes twice a day, multiple staffings every day, a team of medical doctors, nurses, therapists, hospital and court liaisons, lawyers, a hands-on GAL that Brian works closely with. And then, He regularly updated his team via phone or emails...he has taken phone calls and returned emails early in the morning, late at night, including Sundays and holidays! To say the least, it has been intense! This in addition to his crazy day calendars! Brian, this award is not only for your awesome and amazing attention to this particularly needy child and your teamwork with his GAL, but for all you do for your team and our Program.

-Susan Somers

EXTRA MILE AWARD– Eileen Suero

The GAL Program would like to recognize, Child's Best Interest Attorney, Eileen Suero with its "Extra Mile Award". Anyone that has worked with Eileen knows that she constantly goes above and beyond to make sure that all of our children are represented by someone who will fiercely advocate for them. Eileen does everything from giving GAL volunteer trainings to handling cases that involve human trafficking, all with a smile on her face. She never backs down from a challenge and always ensures that the children we represent have a voice. Eileen doesn't just focus on her "cases", it is clear that her focus is on "our children". She takes their needs seriously and is always willing to do anything to help. For this, we recognize Eileen for her hard work and dedication to the children that we serve.

-Nicole Robertson



Hello Guardian ad Litem family! After nine years as a Guardian ad Litem Program Attorney, I began a new journey in February at a non-profit called Educate Tomorrow. Educate Tomorrow has been an active partner with Miami's dependency system since 2003. Our mission is to create independence for foster youth and disadvantaged youth through education, mentoring, life skills training, and advocacy.

Current and former foster youth and homeless college students in Florida have a great opportunity regarding post-secondary education. According to Florida Statutes young adults who age out of the foster care system, are currently homeless, are adopted or are in the permanent care of a relative or non-relative caregiver receive, at the time of their 18th birthday, an exemption from paying tuition or fees at any Florida state university, college or technical center. For the vast majority of eligible young adults this opportunity is not being utilized. Educate Tomorrow was founded out of the desire to support these youth one-on-one to take advantage of this great opportunity for post-secondary education and to spread the word throughout the state of Florida that the opportunity exists.

According to the Florida College System and Florida's Children First, during the 2002-2003 academic year *only eight former foster youth* were taking advantage of the college tuition waiver. By 2005-2006, that number had only increased to nine students. Educate Tomorrow realized that high school administrators and counselors, foster care case managers and college admissions departments were unaware of the opportunity presented to these youth. Educate Tomorrow trained over a thousand high school administrators, counselors, college administrators and child welfare workers from 2003-2014. By the 2010-2011 academic year *1,224 former foster youth* were attending a Florida state university on the college tuition waiver (<http://www.floridaschildrenfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Tuition-Exemption-White-Paper-Floridas-Children-First.pdf>). Today *more than 1,600 college students* are using the tuition waiver state wide, more than 200 are in the Educate Tomorrow program. Educate Tomorrow is proud to have 52 college graduates, including 5 Masters degrees and two students currently in law school.

Educate Tomorrow believes that any youth that are mired in the cycle of abuse, abandonment or neglect, experiencing homelessness or poverty should have the support of their community to assist them in changing the course of their lives. We believe this is done by showing them the path to higher education and staying with them through high school, into college and into their first internships, jobs and adult responsibilities. We strive to create a lifelong continuum of support for our students, starting at 13 years old and never "aging out" of our program. We believe that as our students progress from teens to young adults they can become role models and mentors for our younger students as we cultivate a culture of giving back.

Educate Tomorrow addresses the issue of secondary and post-secondary educational attainment by integrating activities designed to support the physical, emotional, social, and academic needs of participating youth. This holistic emphasis on the interconnected skill sets of our youth serves to differentiate our program from more traditional mentoring programs, enabling it to be more effective in impacting the lives of our youth.

Educate Tomorrow employs staff, volunteers, partners (like the Guardian ad Litem Program) and volunteer mentors to work with Educate Tomorrow students one-on-one and in groups. To create an even stronger collaboration be-

tween the Guardian Ad Litem Program and Educate Tomorrow, I am reaching out for your assistance. If your case includes a youth who is 13 years old or older and believe would benefit from our services, please refer this youth to Educate Tomorrow. Alternatively, if you are already functioning as a mentor (we require five hours of communication between the mentor and mentee; it does not have to all be in person), then, together, you and your mentee can become a part of Educate Tomorrow.

The unique part of our program is that as a mentor you can continue working with the youth after the case closes and/or after the youth turns 18 year old. In addition to the mentorship piece, the youth/student will benefit from Educate Tomorrow's college readiness and goal setting workshops, life skills trainings, summer camps, and in-house resource center.

Both Programs are very excited about strengthening our partnership as it gives you the opportunity to formally stay involved in the youth's life, and it allows us access to an established, positive relationship that we will continue to promote and nurture.

-Marissa Leichter. Esq.

Please contact Marissa Leichter, Esq., Director of Community and Legal Affairs, Educate Tomorrow if you would like to become a mentor or to refer a youth to the program. marissa@educatetomorrow.org, (305)374-3751, www.educatetomorrow.org.

MEETINGS AND TRAININGS

October 28th, 6:00 pm

Carlos Villali and Saudi Simmons (Our Kids) will discuss MONEY- who is entitled to what, when and how is it accessed! Non-relative caregiver funds, relative caregiver funds, Medicaid, food stamps, PESS (formerly RTI) and extended foster care funds.

Grove Spot- 3324 Virginia St Coconut Grove, FL 33133

RSVP to: Andrea.Steinacker@mssb.com

November 17th, 12:00 pm

Educate Tomorrow in-service training

OTV- 601 NW 1st Ct., 10th floor Miami, FL 33136

RSVP to: Flora.Beal@gal.fl.gov

As you may know, the Guardian ad Litem Program hosted a first of its kind training in May – bringing together child welfare professionals from across the state in an effort to share best practices and learn more about advocating for dependent children with disabilities. The **Disabilities Training Conference** was a great success – we had over 400 attendees and truly wonderful workshops. If you were not able to attend, or if you did attend but missed some of the workshops – you can now view them and access the workshop materials on through our website at: http://www.guardianadlitem.org/Conferences_and_Training_Archive_2014.asp

Please forward any completed trainings to: Patricia.Abaroa@gal.fl.gov

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

Dear Advocates,

Fall is upon us and with it, cooler weather and lots of new initiatives and activities here in the 11th Circuit that we will continue to tell you about in upcoming months. Thank you to those volunteers who braved the traffic and met with me at Alaska Coffee for our second, "Coffee with the Circuit Director." I learned a lot from all of you and would love to hear from you whether it was worth the time and something we should do more often.

Our Fall Picnic will be held on Sunday November 9th at Greynolds Park. This is a wonderful opportunity to bring your GAL kids together for a fun day of food and activities. Volunteers are encouraged to transport the children on their cases if at all possible. If you need any assistance with getting your GAL kids there, please let us know so that we can help make it happen.

At the state level, hopefully you've heard about the "Keys to Independence" bill passed in 2014, which establishes a 3 year pilot program to promote safe driving, driver education and insurance reimbursement for youth in licensed foster care. The three-year program reimburses the costs associated with driver's education, driver's licenses and other costs related to getting a driver's license and insurance. You can learn more by visiting www.keystoindependence.org.

Finally, I'd like to announce the winners of our transportation raffle. These lucky volunteers were randomly pulled from all volunteers certified to transport the children on their cases and each will receive a gas card:

Phyllis Winnick

Lauren Gilbert

Maytee Rios

Winston Lippert

Carol Ballent

Lourdes Levy

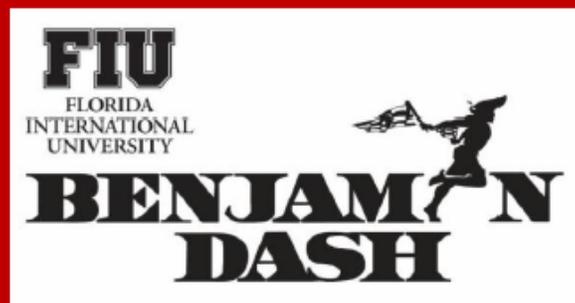
Thank you all for everything you do to better the life of a child!

Jessica



RUN AND BE A VOICE!

Help us raise funds for foster children
in Miami-Dade County.



OCTOBER 4, 2014

8:00am - 4:30pm

FIU Biscayne Bay Campus

3000 NE 151st Street

benjamindash.com

The Benjamin Dash 5k Mud Run will test your mental and physical limits. Use critical thinking to make your way through this obstacle course and try to **collect Benjamin Dash Flags, which have monetary value that can be donated to Voices!**

Get 25% off registration with promo code: BEAVOICE



NOVEMBER 2, 2014

6:00am - 3:05pm

Miami Beach North Shore Park

Collins Ave. & 73rd Street

5kparkfest.org

The 5k PARK Fest is a revolutionary event and fundraising platform. When you register to be a PARKticipant, select to represent Voices For Children and **\$20 out of your \$40 registration fee will be donated directly to Voices!** Run, jog, walk or just cheer at the finish line and Be A Voice!

For more information, contact
RAmador@BeAVoice.org