



of Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast

JANUARY
WINTER 2022



Greetings

Gary Tenpas, President

Dear Friends of the Guardian ad Litem Program & Voices for Children,

December 25, 2021

I am writing this from a hotel room in suburban Milwaukee on Christmas morning. My wife and I flew here last week for a 10 day stay. While one of our daughters has moved to Sebastian with her husband, our younger daughter and her family and the rest of our grandkids still live in and around Milwaukee. While COVID remains in the minds of many, it has not dampened the Christmas spirit for most of us.

While I have been retired for 14 years, my working life was spent in sales. The end of the year was always a mixed blessing. While others were scurrying around buying gifts and groceries, I was usually working extra hard to make that last sale to appease my sales manager. This is my 7th Christmas as a Guardian ad Litem and 5th as a Voices board member, and I have discovered extra blessings each year. Most of us are not "from here", we grew up in other parts of the country. But I have seen how the love for the kids we work with is not diminished by the fact that we are not native to Florida or the Treasure Coast. This is shown not only with our fellow GALs but also in our communities. This year we had so many contributions from all 4 counties. Several of them came to our office to deliver their gifts. It was heart-warming to meet these people and talk about the program and the good things that are happening in Circuit 19. We sometimes get frustrated with "the system" so being able to observe the concern and generosity of others is all part of the holiday cheer that we anticipate and hope for at the end of the year.

December is always the busiest month for financial donations to non-profits. While we personally thank those who donated financially, we want to acknowledge those of you who made donations to both our turkey drive at Thanksgiving and our toy drive during the holiday season. We were able to provide 125 of our caregiver families with complete Thanksgiving meals. And every child under our advocacy was given at least one Christmas gift. While these two events are primarily managed by the GAL office, Voices is responsible for soliciting and managing the financial donations to assure that no one is left out.

December also saw Voices start work on our annual Be A Hero event. Again this year we will partner with the St. Lucie Mets organization and the Treasure Coast and Jupiter Jeep clubs. Major league and minor league baseball has signed an agreement with Marvel so the Be A Hero theme will be highlighted even more this year. Expect to see information from Voices during the coming months.

Event Updates

Susan VonAchen

We are excited to announce that we're in the planning stage of a **Marvel Superhero night event that will take place April 16th at Clover Park**. As you may have heard, Marvel Entertainment has developed a partnership with Minor League Baseball, and the St. Lucie Mets will be hosting Marvel Superhero night involving a surprise Marvel character -- complete with specialized jerseys, along with other Marvel-themed activities and promotions taking place throughout the game. We are sure fans of the Minor Leagues and Marvel are going to love getting to experience baseball in a whole other way. - - -

You don't want to miss this fun-filled event!

Ticket sales and sponsor packages will benefit Voices for Children, and as always we are so grateful for the generosity of the St. Lucie Mets.

Also in planning for March is a Musical Bingo Fundraiser which will take place at a local restaurant. Musical Bingo is a really fun experience and makes for an enjoyable night out for everyone.

Connect with our Facebook page to see event details as soon as they are announced.

<https://www.facebook.com/VOICESOTC>



Financial/Event Updates

Kim Corners, Treasurer

Happy new year!

I am ever grateful for the wonderful people who support the Guardian ad Litem program through Voices for Children. During the holiday season, they really came through for us. Thank you! We have a group of faithful supporters who contribute monthly. Some have given monthly for several years and VFC received over \$7,800 in 2021. Then there are the tried-and-true Clerks of Courts of Martin, St Lucie, and Okeechobee counties who give jurors the option of donating their stipends to Voices for Children. Many jurors choose to do this and as a result, over \$9,200 was donated last year!

Voices for Children is gearing up for a big event at Clover Park in April. This event benefits the Guardian ad Litem program which advocates for children in the dependency program of Florida's 19th Judicial Circuit Court. Being a sponsor of our events not only benefits the children but is also a great PR opportunity for you and/or your organization.

If you are interested in finding out more about sponsorship opportunities please contact Kim Corners at 772.291.8354 or via email: treasurer@voicesforchildrenotc.org or kimsue22@gmail.com.

ENJOYMENT BOOKS

You will enjoy many 2 for 1 and 50% off discounts with the Treasure Coast Enjoyment Book!

Dining, Fast Food, Recreation, Shopping, & More.

Available from any board member. \$35

Valid through 11/01/2022



• THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS WORTH OF SAVINGS •

Voices for Children of Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast is a 501 nonprofit organization, founded in 2013 to raise funds in support of the efforts and activities of the Florida state-funded Guardian ad Litem Program of Florida's 19th Judicial Circuit Court. We build relationships with the business community as well as private, public, civic, and faith-based groups to identify and develop additional resources and support. Our goal is 100% representation of abused, neglected, and abandoned children under our court's jurisdiction.

www.voicesforchildrenotc.org • EVERY CHILD WILL BE HEARD

Visitation Station Update and Observation

While it took longer than we had anticipated, we finally had our first family visit using the Visitation Station on October 10. From that date until December 15, we had a total of 19 family visits. Each of the 5 family support assistants (formerly "transporters") have had at least 1 visit.

Here are some things that we have learned:

1. The family support staff plans and coordinates the visits.
2. The assigned GAL is present for less than half of the visits.
3. The best venue for the visits is a city or county park. A park setting gives the children an opportunity to do things outside. I have been to Dreamland Park in Ft. Pierce and Sportsman's Park in Port St. Lucie. I have also been in a parking lot between a Winn-Dixie and McDonald's which also worked.
4. Visits have run from 30 minutes to 2 hours with the average being about an hour.



While we were somewhat concerned when it took so long to accomplish our first visit, I am convinced that the Visitation Station is a good investment for our program. I believe that these visits are more meaningful in a private setting than in an area with strangers present. The children can do things and interact with their parents much better in the Visitation Station than in the alternative settings. I have observed parents and children show emotions that might not have been evident in a more public setting. Parents can bring in snacks, water, craft items, etc. which would probably not be allowed

in your neighborhood fast food restaurant. We also have a nice supply of games in the RV.

I do believe that it would be beneficial for our GALs to observe these visits when possible. As a Guardian myself, I have observed things that would be relevant to the case and would be noted and recorded if the GAL was present.

While I am still the only driver, we have a couple of GALs that have shown an interest in helping. I am including my email address if you have any questions about the Visitation Station and its use.

If you'd like to see the RV upclose you can watch a short video here => https://youtu.be/C1y_JcwX388

Gary J Tenpas, GAL & Voices for Children President | tenpasgj@yahoo.com

CAN YOU HELP US?

You can **HELP** by donating your time, talent, or treasure.

✓ Individual Donations, Bequests & Estate Gifts

We can work with your estate and tax planning professionals.

✓ Corporate & Business Donations

Payable to: Voices For Children 300 Orange Ave, 2nd Fl, Ft. Pierce, FL 34950

✓ Become a G.A.L. PAL

Commit to a monthly donation of \$5 or more for 12 months.

✓ Activate Amazon Smile (at no cost to you)

Go to: smile.amazon.com - find Voices For Children OTC from list

more info: www.aboutamazon.com/news/community/how-to-sign-up-for-amazonsmile

WE'D LOVE TO BE A SPEAKER
AT YOUR NEXT ENGAGEMENT!

PLEASE CONTACT
GARY TENPAS IF
YOU OR SOMEONE
YOU KNOW MIGHT
WELCOME US.

414-588-3313



Thank
You!

Thank you to everyone who generously collected and distributed gifts for the 19th Judicial Circuit Guardian ad Litem program.

- Graves-Thomas-Rotunda Injury Law Group
- John and Robin Coburn, their St. James community, and local Jeep clubs.
- St. Lucie Cty Jurors who chose to donate their jury payment.
- Each and every donor who contributed cash that went towards a substantial shopping trip.



MOLD

DIDN'T STOP THIS TEAM!



The Guardian ad Litem program has many amazing staff and volunteer advocates. They are superheroes to the children of circuit 19.

We recently had a superhero moment in our Sebastian, FL community. There was a child living with a caregiver and our CAM (Child Advocate Manager) met the child at the caregiver's home to do her monthly visit. She thought this visit would be routine. It was far from it. When the CAM entered the home, she could tell right away that something was very wrong. There was a smell of mold and mildew, the house was dank and dark. There was very little light. Come to find out, this family was living in a rental and paying the rent but the landlord was not keeping the home livable. The CAM discovered leaks in the plumbing, leaks in the ceiling and just an overall mess. These leaks were causing some of the mold issues. The CAM and volunteer assigned to the case stepped into action. They worked with the local SAFE Families Co. group who helped pay for the family to stay in a hotel for a week while all of the mold was eradicated. Safe Families came in with volunteers and decluttered the home, fixed the plumbing and leaks. There was still the issue of the Mold.

The Volunteer reached out to the Circuit Director of GAL who informed Voices for Children of Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast that we had a crisis. **Voices stepped up to the plate and helped pay a portion of the mold mitigation. The mold company also donated his services so the cost was 50% less than it would be normally.**

It took a little over a week, but in the end, our staff, Volunteers and community partners were able to clean up the dwelling of this little boy. He can now breathe easy in a clean and safe home.

Sometimes the only thing standing between a child and being reunified with his or her parents is a unsafe dwelling. Affordable, safe housing is a problem in our country. Local organizations are working hard to find alternatives for families but in the mean time I am happy to be a part of such a wonderful organization.

CONTACT US

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