

2016

## Guardian Ad Litem Clinic

Legal Clinic Program

*Florida A&M University College of Law*

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## FAMU LEGAL CLINIC PROGRAM:

### MISSION STATEMENT

*To provide free legal services in civil matters of the highest quality to low income residents and the under served community in the Ninth Judicial Circuit in the most beneficial, proficient and professional manner.*



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The *Guardian Ad Litem* Clinic is committed to serving the community. We are comprised of law students who volunteer time and services, and are committed to “Excellence with Caring”. We advocate for the “best interest” of children adjudicated dependent by the court in Orange County as a result of alleged abused, abandonment or neglect. In this clinic, our students interact with all the “players” in a dependency case, including, but not limited to, the caseworkers, investigators, attorneys, judges, caregivers and appropriate medical and school personnel.

### FAMU COLLEGE OF LAW MISSION STATEMENT

*To provide a law program with high academic standards that produces excellent legal professionals, who demonstrate professionalism, provide public service, enhance justice and promote scholarship; to provide a program that offers both full-time and part-time learning opportunities to students; and, consistent with the enabling legislation, to increase representation of minorities within the legal profession.*

## FLORIDA A & M UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW

### GUARDIAN AD LITEM CLINIC



*Excellence With Caring*

**FOR INFORMATION  
PLEASE CALL:  
[407] 254-4000**

# GUARDIAN AD LITEM

## WHAT IS THE GAL CLINIC?

The *Guardian Ad Litem* (GAL) clinic represents the “best interests” of children involved in dependency proceedings in the Juvenile Justice system in the State of Florida. We are designed to give students an overview and working knowledge of all aspects of representing children in dependency proceedings. The GAL Clinic addresses constitutional, statutory, and common laws impacting children, including the legal interests of parents and the government and the law’s evolving conception of children’s rights.

## WHY WAS THE GAL CLINIC CREATED?

Every year, the jurisdiction of the courts is imposed on hundreds of children who have allegedly been abused, abandoned and/or neglected. The alleged abusers (oftentimes the parents or caregivers of the child) and the Department of Children and Families are normally represented by counsel. The children usually have no representation. Attorneys in Orange County and volunteers in other counties offer their time on a pro bono basis to represent the “best interests” of the children in these dependency proceedings. Juvenile Justice Judges and participants have consistently complained that there is a dire need for more *Guardian Ad Litem*s. FAMU College of Law decided to assist in

fulfilling that need, while simultaneously providing a learning experience of the proceedings in dependency courts for future lawyers.

## THE GAL STUDENTS’ ROLE INVOLVES THE FOLLOWING:

- Acting as an independent gatherer of information whose task it is to review all relevant records and interview the child, parents, social workers, teachers, and other persons to ascertain the facts and circumstances of the child’s situation.
- Ascertaining the interests of the child, taking into consideration the child’s age, maturity, culture and ethnicity consistent with providing the child with a safe home, and the need for family preservation and permanency planning.
- Seeking cooperative solutions to the child’s situation within the scope of the child’s interest and welfare.
- Providing written reports of findings and recommendations to the court to ensure that all the relevant facts are before the court, and that appropriate motions are filed seeking child-centered relief.
- Appearing at all hearings to represent the child’s interests; providing testimony, and ensuring that appropriate witnesses are called and examined.

- Explaining the court proceedings and the role of the GAL to the child, when appropriate, in language and terms that the child can understand.
- Asking that clear and specific orders are entered for the evaluation, assessment, services, placement, and treatment of the child and family.
- Monitoring implementation of service plans and dispositional orders to determine whether services ordered by the court are actually provided in a timely manner, and are accomplishing their desired goal. Monitoring the progress of a case through the court process and advocate for timely hearings.
- Informing the court promptly if: services are not available to the child and/or family; the family fails to take advantage of such services; services are not achieving their purpose; any violation of court orders has occurred; and, there are any new developments or changes in the child’s circumstances.
- Advocating for the child’s interests in mental health, educational, and other community systems.

