



Executive Summary

Lawyers play many roles, acting as both counselors and advisors. For teens in foster care, having an attorney to act as both is vital. For attorneys acting as lawyers to teens, their job

is about being aware of the child's developmental level and relating to them there. It is about truly listening to them without judgment. It is about creating a safe place for them to talk.... It is about establishing trust. It is about getting to know what they truly desire to do, and what they want to become, and helping them get there.... Every lawyer who takes on a child's case needs to know it is OK to work with both their heart and their head and do things out of the ordinary that will help their client succeed in life.

- Pamela Bress, Senior Staff Attorney, Brevard County Legal Aid, Inc.

In Florida, there are nearly a thousand teenage girls in foster care in need of that person. Someone to listen with their heart not just to their legal concerns, but to their hopes and dreams as well. They need someone to help them reach those dreams.

Through *FAWL in Love with GAL*, attorneys will work with the GAL Program towards the best permanency outcome for these foster youth, an outcome that takes into consideration the child's legal needs as well as their views and aspirations. Volunteers will form a mentor-mentee relationship with the youth, enabling the youth to develop professional and personal relationships with the pro bono attorney who will guide them as they progress through not just the dependency system, but these critical years of their lives. Through meetings or visits to the mentor's office, the foster youth will be given the opportunity to get guidance, share their concerns and ask legal questions in a non-threatening environment. The volunteer mentor can identify both their legal and non-legal needs. Studies show youth with mentors achieve higher educational, social and financial success.

FAWL in Love with GAL is built on the concept of "episodic mentoring" - the notion that mentees can learn a great deal from mentors in as little as 20 minutes a month. It offers the foster youth, many of whom will soon be on their own, the advantage of learning how to ask questions and hold conversations to promote their own development, empowering them for the future. It offers pro bono attorneys an opportunity to volunteer with a shorter, more defined time commitment while still improving a child's life.

Come *FAWL in Love with GAL*.

What's your mentoring moment?



Project Description

The Guardian ad Litem Program (“GAL”) will work with pro bono attorneys, who will become a member of the GAL team, mentoring foster youth and acting as their counselor and advisor.

This episodic mentoring project is consistent with studies that show providing an opportunity for limited scope volunteerism increases participation in pro bono programs.¹ Episodic mentoring occurs when there are short-term developmental interactions between the mentor and mentee. They are also known as “mentoring moments.”

The project is designed for members of the Florida Association of Women Lawyers. It provides members the opportunity to be involved and share their experience and knowledge with at-risk youth.

The mentors will act as counselors and advisors to their mentees. This relationship is in keeping with The Florida Bar’s position that “[i]n representing a client, a lawyer shall exercise independent professional judgment and render candid advice. In rendering advice, a lawyer may refer not only to law but to other considerations such as moral, economic, social, and political factors that may be relevant to the client's situation.” Rule 4-2.1, R. Reg. Fla. Bar. By considering the whole child, the volunteer will help formulate best interests outcomes, which takes into consideration the child’s legal needs, their views and aspirations.

The mentors will work with a GAL Pro Bono Attorney Liaison who will coordinate the assignment of cases and provide support to pro bono attorneys. Pro bono attorneys will be asked to mentor at least one foster youth that are placed within their geographic region, enabling face-to-face meetings at a time and location of the pro bono attorney’s choosing.

The mentor will work with members of the child’s GAL team, including the Child Advocate Manager (CAM). Through this collaboration, once a youth’s needs are identified, the mentor will work with the GAL Program to formulate a plan to meet those needs.

The CAM will offer a wide variety of both substantive and technical support to the pro bono attorney. The GAL Program will offer CLE training including information about dependency law and practice, bias elimination, independent living and foster care outcomes. In addition, support will be offered through regularly scheduled conference calls, CLE courses, and practice aid materials. The GAL Pro Bono Liaison or a program attorney will be available to answer questions as needed.

If the pro bono attorney mentor wants to participate in a broader way, the GAL Program will provide the support needed to the mentor to achieve that goal.

¹ See, Supporting Justice III: A report on the Pro Bono Work of America’s Lawyers available at: http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/probono_public_service/lis_pb_Supporting_Justice_III_final.authcheckdam.pdf