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Guardian ad Litem Program Urges Hillsborough County Residents to Act Against Child Abuse

Tampa, FL – During National Child Abuse Prevention Month in April, The Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program challenges residents of Hillsborough County to take a stand and take action to support children who have been abused or neglected. GAL volunteers can make a difference for these children by being a voice in court, ensuring they receive needed services, and helping to work toward family reunification or finding a “forever family.”

There are more than 3,400 children in foster care in Hillsborough County. These children come into the child welfare system through no fault of their own. Providing a voice for a foster child is a significant part of successfully navigating the system, and provides a positive role model for a child who may never have had one.

“The number of children coming into care continues to grow and we aim to meet the need for each to have an advocate,” said Tabitha Lambert, Guardian ad Litem Circuit Director. “Every child deserves the support of a caring, consistent, trained adult to help them find a safe, loving home where they can heal and thrive.”

Throughout April, the Guardian ad Litem program is calling on members of the community to help serve more of Hillsborough County’s most vulnerable children. Information Sessions are held weekly on Thursday evenings at 6:00 p.m. Locations can be found on the website, www.galtampa.org.

Without intervention, the odds are stacked against children in foster care. A child with a Guardian ad Litem, however, spends about 20 percent less time in foster care as compared to a child without a GAL volunteer. Studies show children with a GAL volunteer also receive more services that are critical to their well-being, and are four times more likely to find a permanent home.

“GAL volunteers are a constant for the child in a time of chaos,” explains Lambert. “A child may have multiple social workers, attorneys, therapists and foster placements throughout the life of the case but only one GAL volunteer, which can make all the difference for the child’s future.”

In Hillsborough County there are currently 686 volunteer advocates fighting for the best interests of 3,468 children, but almost 1,000 more children still need the care and support of a GAL volunteer.

For more information how to become a Guardian ad Litem volunteer or supporter, visit www.galtampa.org or call 813-272-5110.

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