South Carolina Department of CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY
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MONTHLY UPDATE

Department of Children's Advocacy Monthly Update

Connecting with and updating our community

A Message from the State Child Advocate

This edition of *The Advocate* focuses on building internal capacity within the Dept. of Children's Advocacy as well as building our external system of care's capacity for a robust service and placement array. We are highlighting our ongoing advocacy for a state-operated Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) for seriously mentally ill, justice-involved youth as well as the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program's work, under the leadership of **GAL Program Director LaDara Josey**, to improve the recruitment, training, supervision, and retention of volunteer who provide best-interests advocacy for abused and neglected children,

It is also my pleasure to introduce **Foster Care Review Division Director Lindsey Taylor** and **Investigations Unit Director Laurie Pineau Davidson, J.D.**

Lindsey received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Georgia in 2005 and is certified in Child Welfare. She has more than a decade of diverse experience in the areas of child safety, permanency and wellbeing including supervising DSS's Intake Unit and providing direct services to youth in residential settings in Georgia and Pennsylvania.

Laurie and I were law school classmates at the U of SC School of Law, and she is in her 27th year of practicing law. She was formerly employed with the Foster Care Review Division and most recently worked with Richland School District 2. She has formed relationships with DSS, DJJ, Department of Education, Clerks of Court, Judges, and other members of our state's child-serving community.

We have a great team at the Department of Children's Advocacy. and we appreciate the opportunity to share our work with you.

Thank you,
Amanda Whittle, J.D., CWLS
State Child Advocate and Director

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LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR AGENCY HERE

Congratulations on Retirement: Paula Lance

Congratulations and thank you to Paula Lance on her retirement!

Paula served as the Region II Program Manager for the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program since 2013. She was an experienced manager, with expertise in volunteer recruitment and retention.

Paula led Region 2 (Pee Dee) and ensured the mission of the Guardian ad Litem Program was met with consistency and fidelity. She played an important role in the decision and policy making process for the statewide Guardian ad Litem Program as an active member of the Senior Management Team. Paula previously served as the Circuit Coordinator for the 6th Judicial Circuit. She led as a manager with the Guardian ad Litem Program for over twenty-two years and has a well-established, twenty-eight-year professional history with the State of South Carolina.

Paula received her B.S Degree in Business Management from the University of South Carolina and has extensive knowledge in training and public relations. In addition to working with the Guardian ad Litem Program, she has served as case manager with the South Carolina Department of Corrections and Site Administrator for the Lancaster County School District where she implemented and managed the GEAR UP Program—a school-based initiative to promote college readiness for at-risk students.

Giving back to the community is a deep commitment for Paula. She has served on the First Steps Board of Directors, the Adult Literacy Board and the Coalition for Healthy Youth Council. She served on the Task Force to develop Palmetto Citizens Against Sexual Assault Child Advocacy Center and was appointed by the Governor of South Carolina to serve on the Lancaster and Chester County Disabilities and Special Needs Board.

Paula is a native of Kershaw and is married to Gene Lance. They have one daughter, Lauren, who works with the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division. Paula enjoys spending time with her family at the beach. She is an avid Gamecock fan.

"It has been such a pleasure to work under Paula. Paula has always been dependable, professional and considerate. She truly empowered us as staff to grow and challenge ourselves. Paula always reminded us that Region II rocks! Paula keep rocking in your retirement!"

~ Jennifer Burch, Chesterfield County Coordinator (GAL Program)

Words from Paula ~

"It was an honor to work with the wonderful volunteers who volunteer their time to help children and also the talented staff who dedicate their lives to children advocacy."

GAL Guardian ad Litem FOR CHILDREN
CASS ELIAS McCARTER GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM SOUTH CAROLINA

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Advocacy for a State-Operated Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility

DJJ Director Eden Hendrick presented DJJ's budget requests to the Senate Criminal Justice Subcommittee hearing on February 9, 2022.

DCA Director Amanda Whittle testified at DJJ's House subcommitee budget hearing on February 8, 2022.

Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Director Eden Hendrick' fanned the flames of mental health advocacy for justice-involved youth when she requested $20 million during DJJ's House and Senate budget subcommittee hearings during February 2022. Director Hendrick requested non-recurring funding to build a Department of Mental Health (DMH)-operated Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) for seriously mentally ill, justice-involved youth.

S.C. Code of Laws Ann. Section 63-19-1450 prohibits seriously mentally ill youth and intellectually disabled youth from being committed to a DJJ institution and authorizes DJJ to transfer these youth to the state agency which is best qualified for the care of the child. The two designated state agencies for transfer are DMH for seriously mentally ill youth and Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN) for intellectually disabled youth.

The last state-operated PRTFs were operated by DMH and closed in 2015. Children and youth who need this level of care are currently placed at private PRTFs, but the array of private PRTFs does not meet our state's placement needs, particularly for justice-involved, seriously mentally ill youth. Due to a lack of appropriate placement, seriously mentally ill youth are not being transferred to an appropriate DMH facility and are continuing to be committed to and confined at DJJ.

This gap in service and placement must be filled by the state in order to place children appropriately and to place them in South Carolina near their homes, communities, and continuum of treatment providers.

Read more about this issue: Zac Koeske's article in The State Newspaper; the Dept. of Children's Advocacy's 2021 Annual Report; and the Legislative Audit Council Report: "A Review of Children's Behavioral Health Services" (September 2019). Listen to the WVOC iHeart radio interview with Director Whittle here.

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Congratulations: Guardian ad Litem Recruiters!

Sharhonda Dillard
Recruiter/Trainer Region 1
Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program

The Department of Children's Advocacy welcomes Sharhonda Dillard as the Recruiter/Trainer in the Upstate. Sherhonda is a native of Greenville, South Carolina. She received her B.A. in Communication/Public Relation with a minor in Marketing from Johnson C. Smith University. She received her MBA form Strayer University. She has been employed by the Guardian ad Litem Program for almost three years as a Case Worker in Greenville County. She is excited about her new role as Region I's Recruiter/Trainer and is looking forward to recruiting volunteers for the program. In her spare time, she enjoys drawing and painting. She also works with the homeless and the underserved children in the community in her free time.

The Department of Children's Advocacy welcomes Lindsey Loparo as the Recruiter/Trainer in the Midlands. Lindsey is a South Carolina native. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Mass Communications from Lander University in 2019 and her Master's degree from Florida International University in Global Strategic Communications. While at Lander, Lindsey was in Zeta Tau Alpha sorority, President of the University Program Council, Vice President for the College Panhellenic Council, a Student Government Senator, a member of the Blue Key Leadership Honor Society, a Lander equestrian team member, and an Orientation Leader. Lindsey is super excited to begin this new career with the Department of Children's Advocacy and can hardly wait to meet everyone.

Lindsey Loparo
Recruiter/Trainer Region 3
Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program

We are recruiting volunteers to advocate for children!

In FY20-21, the Guardian ad Litem Program served a total of 14,392 children. The program was serving an average of 8709 children monthly with 5163 being served by volunteers and 3546 being served by staff. The GAL Program has committed to recruiting 935 additional volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children.

"It's a sense of satisfaction that you were able to help the family improve and be reunified, be placed in good care (foster or kinship care), or adopted. I love to see how happy the children are to see their lives normalize."

~Elaine Flannery, volunteer GAL

Learn more about best interest advocacy here.

Congratulations: Career Promotions!

Jennifer Burch
Program Manager I
Regional Administrator, Region 2

Congratulations to Jennifer Burch who was recently hired as the Regional Administrator for Region II. Jennifer has been with the Guardian ad Litem Program since June 2014 as the Program Coordinator II for Chesterfield County.

Jennifer is a graduate of Coastal Carolina University where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. She resides in Mt. Croghan with her husband and two sons: Mason (6) and Charlie (6 months). She is passionate about the Guardian ad Litem Program and applauds the hard work of the staff and volunteers advocating on behalf of abused and neglected youth. She is excited to take on this new role as the Regional Administrator for Region II.

Consuelo "Connie" Legare
Orangeburg/Calhoun
Program Coordinator II
Guardian ad Litem Office

Congratulations to Consuelo (Connie) Legare who was recently hired as the Program Coordinator II for the Orangeburg/Calhoun Guardian ad Litem Program. Connie began as a volunteer Guardian in 2014 and became a Program Coordinator I in 2015. Connie has worked with the Family Court throughout her career. She has worked as a paralegal for Charleston and Berkeley Counties. She has also worked for a family law attorney.

Connie graduated from the University of South Carolina in 1993 with a Bachelor of Science, Criminal Justice. She later obtained her paralegal certificate from Trident Technical College. She is a native of Charleston where she has resided her entire life. Connie is the proud mother of one son, Jari, who is a sophomore attending Early College High School.

Congratulations: Career Promotions!

Bailee Prather
Georgetown County
Program Coordinator II
Guardian ad Litem Office

The Department of Children's Advocacy welcomes Bailee Prather to her new role as Program Coordinator II in Georgetown County. Bailee is a native to Conway, South Carolina. She has been involved in the Guardian ad Litem Program for the past 9 years. Bailee started out as a student intern for the Horry County office and spent evenings in training to become a GAL. She graduated from Coastal Carolina University with a Bachelor's of Arts in Sociology. As soon as she completed the volunteer guardian training and turned 21, she began volunteering as a GAL. Bailee's experience also includes working with pregnant women with the Bethany Christian Services Adoption Agency, as a pregnancy counselor, as well as 7 years of case management with the Horry County Guardian ad Litem Program.

Bailee is grateful for this opportunity and is pleased to continue to serve the children of South Carolina.

The Department of Children's Advocacy welcomes Iseral Johnson to her new role as Program Coordinator II in Aiken County. Iseral has been with the Guardian ad Litem program for 6 years. She started as a volunteer for the program. Iseral has an MBA in Business Administration and Human Resources. She has been married for 28 years and has 2 children (1 son & 1 daughter). Iseral also has 4 grandchildren (2 girls and 2 boys). She came onboard with the program to advocate for children.

Iseral loves what she does for children and being a voice for them. She is always pushing for the best outcome possible for the children we serve.

Iseral Jonson
Aiken County Program Coordinator II
Guardian ad Litem Office

Join the DCA Team!

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SOUTH CAROLINA careers
careers.sc.gov

We have career opportunities at the Department of Children's Advocacy.

To learn more or to apply, click here.

Welcome New GAL Program Employees

Jaleesa Frazier
Program Coordinator I
Berkeley County Guardian ad Litem Program

Welcome to Jaleesa Frazier as Berkeley County's Program Coordinator I! Jaleesa is a native of Charleston, SC and has been employed in the field of social services since 2016. Jaleesa has a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master's degree in Human and Social Services. Jaleesa enjoys working with people in the community and feels that social services is her calling. Jaleesa enjoys experiencing different islands for vacation. In Jaleesa's spare time she loves being around family and friends. Jaleesa believes that meeting people where they are is the best way to start a positive relationship. Jaleesa has a really big heart and she empathizes with others very easily.

Laura Waller-Crim
Program Coordinator I
Anderson County Guardian ad Litem Program

Welcome Laura Waller-Crim to the GAL program in Anderson County! Laura has experience as a foster care case manager, manufacturing recruiter, and restaurant manager. Laura has a degree in Psychology and has experience with children on the autism spectrum. She is familiar with Special Education, IEPs, psychotropic medications and therapy techniques. Laura recently relocated to Williamston, South Carolina to be closer to Anderson. She loves animals, especially her six cats.

Sarah Faye Towe
Program Coordinator I
Pickens County Guardian ad Litem Program

Welcome Sarah Faye Towe as the new Program Coordinator I in Pickens County. She feels very excited and blessed to start working with the Department of Children's Advocacy. Previously, Sarah worked as an addiction counselor for five years. Her passion has always been to serve and help others, especially those in need. Sarah was born and reared in Oconee County and graduated from Clemson University in 2015. She loves spending time on the lake, hiking with her dogs, and spending time with family and friends.

Join our Investigations Unit!

Dee Robinson of the William J. McCord Center holds an Investigations Unit poster

We are searching for an Investigator to join our Investigations Unit.

Laurie Davidson, J.D. leads the Investigations Unit which has offices on the Statehouse grounds in Columbia. Excellent customer service, understanding of the law and policies regarding other agencies, and strict adherence to confidentiality are among the knowledge, skills and experience required for a Department of Children's Advocacy Investigator. To learn more and/or to apply, visit careers.sc.gov; filter for "Department of Children's Advocacy;" and search for Program Coordinator I-60007378.

The Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA)'s Investigations Unit (IU) receives, refers, monitors and/or investigate complaints regarding services provided to children by nine specific state agencies:

(1) Department of Social Services;
(2) Department of Mental Health;
(3) Department of Juvenile Justice;
(4) Department of Health and Environmental Control;
(5) Department of Health and Human Services;
(6) Department of Disabilities and Special Needs;
(7) Governor's School for Agriculture at Jo de la Howe;
(8) School for the Deaf and the Blind; and
(9) Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School

Mission:
The Department of Children's Advocacy champions advocacy, accountability, and service to improve outcomes for children served by state agencies in South Carolina.

Vision:
Growing a community where children thrive.

"I just wanted to send a thank you your way...within a few days of you getting involved we finally saw immediate action and response on this case. This could not have been done without you or your efforts ...."

~ Catherine Donnelly
Winchester DSS, Virginia

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