

May 18, 2021 – Goodbye to Alan Abramowitz

- Alan feels he has been effective as the Executive Director because he listens to the people who do the work every day.
- The agency is driven by those who are the closest to the children.

- The legislative session ended well for the GAL program:
 - There was a 6% holdback which the program will be receiving. It feels like we received an enhancement.
 - The Governor supports the volunteer model and did support 6 additional positions, but they were not included in the Senate budget.

- In Dade and Broward Counties, the number of kids in out-of-home care has decreased by 3,000 children. DCF receives additional funding when the number of children increases.
- The GAL program has not received any additional funding for enhancing representation for the last 5 years.
- When the legislature gives money to the program, legislature designates how those funds must be spent.
- Alan has been very loyal to caseloads: 35 volunteers per CAM; an average of 2 children per volunteer; and 150 children per attorney.
 - Quality of advocacy is a priority.

- Other items taken up during this legislative session include:
 - **Senate Bill 80** -- this relates to children that have been in a placement for 9 months.
 - There will be a presumption that caregivers of the child have priority.
 - It will be assumed that the children not be moved and will assess bonding and attachments that have formed between the caregiver and the child. This will avoid further traumatizing the child.
 - If you have siblings who are separated or other family members to consider, do this early!!
 - We cannot have cases turn into a family-law custody battle.
 - **Senate Bill 52**-passed in session -- teens in DCF custody can get the tuition waiver, even if they have not yet reached 18.
 - **Batterer's Intervention Programs** – passed in session – will re-establish state certification of these programs by DCF.
 - They tried to get rid of Chapter 120 hearings in adoptions, but it was never heard in the Senate.
 - During the **Bill 1920** hearings, argument was presented that the child is a party and should have an attorney advocating for their expressed wishes.
 - **Federal law states that representation of best interest is the law-- not expressed wishes.**
 - There was a 2 ½ hour HHS hearing – the House was very supportive, and there was also much support in the Senate for the GAL-Program model of representation.
 - For those who haven't listened to the hearing: <https://thefloridachannel.org/videos/4-14-21-house-health-human-services-committee/>

- Shutts and Bowen prepared a legal opinion stating that the GAL program qualifies for IV-E dollars. The GAL program is currently on 77% of cases and after the holdback in October, it will be 80%. IV-E funds are federal dollars which would enable us to be on every case. We just need state support for this source of funding. It doesn't require any additional funding from the State.
- GALs are the people on the case from beginning to end.
- The best days for the GAL program are ahead, and we have the support of both President Biden and Vice President Harris.
- The Governor will appoint a new Executive Director of the GAL Program.
- Alan will be the CEO of ARC of Florida -- a nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Guardians must make independent decisions.
- Inclusion is very important.
- We all have implicit bias and must be very careful our bias doesn't interfere with our judgement or opinion.
- The GAL Program is a great public/private partnership.
- Florida led the country in adoptions for the last 5-6 years.
- Alan appreciates all the GALs and the work they do. We wish him much success in the future.