

School Administrator Continues Helping Children as GAL Volunteer



For more than 30 years, Missy Klopfer has been in a field she loves. As a teacher, assistant principal and principal, she has worked for the education and well-being of children across the globe. Although retired from federal service, she has continued her passion of helping children.

As a volunteer advocate with the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem program in Lexington, S.C., she and other volunteers provide an invaluable service to the abused and neglected children in our community by advocating for their rights and welfare in the family court system.

During her career in education, Klopfer lived and worked in Turkey, Italy, Japan, Korea and Portugal. After leaving federal service in 2010, she worked in China as the director of instruction at a large international school. Although she received GAL training during a sabbatical year, she was unable to utilize it because of a new position and subsequent relocation to Naples, Italy. Klopfer was determined to become a GAL when she returned to the United States.

Klopfer is now making a difference in children's lives as a volunteer GAL advocate. Although new to the program, she has already seen the value a GAL can bring to a child.

During one recent case, "through some extended engagement with each and every member on the family tree, doctors and school staff, I was able to help facilitate a change in residence that has turned the child around. This fellow is loving life this year, is seen as a positive behavior model in school and has better nutrition," Klopfer said.

Indeed, research has found that a GAL advocate can make a tremendous difference in the life of an abused and neglected child. Once a GAL volunteer is assigned, approximately 95 percent of children do not languish in long-term foster care and 90 percent of children never re-enter the child welfare system.

Advocates get to know the children they serve and the adults in their lives, working closely with service providers, school staff and others to ensure the children are provided for, and their needs are met. GAL volunteers also make recommendations to the court regarding what they feel to be in the child's best interest to ultimately find the child a safe and permanent home.

Klopfer notes that connecting in small ways with children can have a huge impact on their lives.

“A small investment in time can contribute to large outcomes,” she said. She added, “Validating and appreciating our youth is so very important if we expect to raise children that turn into resilient, empathetic and contributing adults.”

Training, support and supervision are offered to assist volunteers as they work to make a difference for children. Learning to advocate for children is an ongoing process. “While no two cases are the same, taking one case at a time allows you the opportunity to learn to advocate in new and different ways for the next child,” Klopfer said.

Her experience as a GAL volunteer has also brought about moments of personal reflection. “I have had the opportunity to reflect on my own upbringing, bringing a greater appreciation for the home in which I was brought up in and the values that we shared,” said Klopfer. “Parents were strong in sharing their high expectations, and a small network of adults—with good moral compasses—helped to raise us.”

If you are compassionate and have a desire to help children in need, please consider serving as a GAL volunteer. To volunteer, you must be at least 21 years old, be able to pass background and reference checks and successfully complete the free 30-hour training. The next training session for Lexington County is [dates and times].

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a GAL volunteer, please contact [your contact info]. You can also visit www.sccgal.org.

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