

## 2011 Volunteer Guardian ad Litem Conference: *Permanency Planning for Children*

October 7, 2011

### Speaker Bios

#### **Tammy L. Besherse**

Ms. Besherse graduated from Ohio Northern University College of Law. For her first four years as a lawyer, she was a public defender. While working as a public defender Tammy represented numerous Latino (Hispanic) clients. While representing them she encountered many of the issues that immigrants face about health care, public benefits, and their rights in general.

Tammy currently works SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center to improve immigrants' rights in the areas of public benefits, housing, domestic violence, and health care, through policy efforts and legal trainings. She also works with SC Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault to assist immigrant crime victims. Tammy routinely conducts trainings for agencies on immigration laws and policies.

She co-authored "Ten Biggest Myths About Immigrants and the Law in South Carolina", which was published in *The South Carolina Lawyer* November/December 2005. She also co-authored "South Carolina Court Interpreters and the Rules of Professional Conduct". This article was published in the July 2007 edition of *The South Carolina Lawyer*. An article she wrote titled "The DREAMers: America's Undocumented Youth" was published in the Fall edition of the American Bar Association's Children's Rights Section. On April 17, 2008, she received the Excellence in Legal Services Award for the Southeast Region by the Mexican American Legal Education and Defense Fund. In March of 2011, she received the Award of Excellence from the SC Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault for her advocacy for better domestic violence laws in the state.

#### **Jen Braun**

Jen Braun, MS, LPCC, is the co-founder and co-executive officer of Ampersand Families, an adoption agency in Minneapolis, Minnesota that focuses exclusively on finding and supporting families for the oldest and longest-waiting kids in the public foster care system, as well as provides extensive community outreach and education. Jen has spent 18 years working with older youth and families in child welfare and adoption, and found success with the Minnesota Department of Human Services' federal demonstration project The Homecoming Project, working closely with teens under state guardianship and promoting innovative practices in the recruitment and retention of permanent families for the most 'hard-to-place' teens. Jen has provided consultation, training and podcasts on adoption and youth permanency nationally to workers in the child welfare field, as well as to community and governmental agencies, and has helped educate the community at large about teen adoption by participating in the National Public Radio/American RadioWorks documentary "Wanted: Parents." Jen's experience also includes working closely with birth and adoptive parents, as well as providing supervision in family and teen crisis intervention. On a personal note, Jen is also the adoptive parent to her son, now 21, who joined her family during the summer of 2006.

#### **Honorable Jan B. Bromell Holmes**

Judge Holmes was born in Horry County, South Carolina on August 17, 1970. She is the eldest child of Paul Bromell and Maxine Floyd Bromell. She has three siblings: Shawn Quincy Bromell (police officer in Durham, North Carolina), Felicia Renea Izzard (registered nurse in Durham, North Carolina) and Derrick Bromell (student at MMI). She married Cleveland B. Holmes in Georgetown, South Carolina on September 20, 1997 and they are the proud parents of two children.

In 1988, Judge Holmes graduated number three in her class at Choppee High School in Georgetown County. She graduated magna cum laude in 1992 from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee where she received Bachelor of Art degrees in English and Political Science. While at Fisk University, Judge Holmes became a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. and the Political Science Honor Club. She obtained her Juris Doctor degree from North Carolina Central School of Law in Durham, North Carolina in 1995. While in law school, she was a member of the Moot Court Board and her two member team won the Moot Court Board Championship in 1994.

Upon graduating from law school in 1995, Judge Holmes returned to Georgetown, South Carolina and entered private practice with her father's high school classmate, Johnny Morant and his brother, Louis Morant, at the Morant and Morant Law Firm. In 1997, she formed her own practice and was a sole practitioner. As an attorney, Judge Holmes handled cases in various areas of law until her election to the position of Family Court Judge for the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, Seat 1 on February 7, 2007.

Judge Holmes is a member of Saint Paul AME Church where she serves as a Steward. She is also a member of the Palmetto Conference Women's Missionary Society of the AME Church (Third Vice President) and the Palmetto Conference Pageant Director for Debutantes and Masters Commission of the AME Church. She has been a member of South Carolina Bar Association, Georgetown County Bar Association and South Carolina Black Lawyers Association. She has served as Past Board Member of the Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce (Treasurer), Salvation Army Advisory Board (Past Treasurer), Board member of the Friends of the Kaminski House, School Improvement Council for Kensington Elementary School and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (Mu Phi Omega Chapter). Judge Holmes is admitted to practice in all South Carolina Courts and the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina.

### **Isabel A. Blanco**

Isabel Blanco is considered to be the architect of the child welfare reform that took place over the last six years in Georgia. She provided leadership for unprecedented reforms and performance improvements in their Child Welfare System, reducing the re-abuse rate from 9.2% to 2.1 and the re-entry rate from 7.9% to 3.3% (both those rates are among the lowest in the nation).

Isabel is not a newcomer to large system reform. As the Chief of Social Services for the Chicago Housing Authority she led the Human Capital Plan for the largest housing transformation in the country. She achieved the largest employment outcome for former welfare recipients in Cook County Illinois. She headed the third largest state refugee and immigrant service program, and one of the most complex child support programs in the nation. She has also been recognized for the creation of nationally recognized child welfare and family support programs with a community based focus.

She is the mother of three young men. One of her sons is a Navy Officer, another is in training to become a Marine pilot and the third a successful Executive in the field of Wealth Management. Isabel comes from a long line of ministers, teachers and social workers.

Her humor, chatty style and commitment around values and transparency have won over many advocates and staff to her leadership objectives. She is a dynamic communicator and facilitator.

### **Michelle Chalmers**

Michelle Chalmers, MSW, LISW, has worked with youth in out-of-home care since 1989. Currently she is the co-executive officer of Ampersand Families, a Minnesota nonprofit with the mission to *recruit and support permanent families for older youth, and to champion practices in adoption and permanency that restore belonging, dignity and hope*. Prior to co-founding Ampersand Families in October 2008, Michelle directed the very successful Homecoming Project, a Children's Bureau-funded, Minnesota Department of Human Services effort to increase rates of adoption of teens. Michelle has developed and led workshops nationally and internationally for foster and adoptive parents, social workers, CASA volunteers, and others. She has authored professional articles and two books (in partnership with youth). Her leadership was integral to the development a permanent supportive housing program in St. Paul, Minnesota that is home to youth who became homeless upon leaving a residential placement. Her career has also included front-line staff positions in residential settings, a home-based intensive supervision worker, and youth development work in a therapeutic foster care agency. Michelle's first education into the world of child welfare came in high school when she was placed into foster care in Colorado. As a 'graduate' of foster care, Michelle is passionate about the need for system reform and the essential role that young people can take to do this. Since 1998, Michelle and her partner have provided a home and extended family to a number of otherwise homeless young people, and is currently parenting a 16-year-old girl who recently joined her family.

## **Robert A. Clark**

Robert has lived in Greenville his entire life. He grew up in the Gower area attending First Baptist Church, Sara Collins, Beck and J.L. Mann. He went on to attend the University of South Carolina and graduated in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. After college, Robert came back to Greenville to work in his family's heating and air conditioning business. Robert has two older brothers, so his father split company up and Robert took over the service and replacement company while his brothers ran the new construction company. Just a few short years later, Robert's father passed away in 1995.

Robert got introduced to the Guardian ad Litem Program by serving as a volunteer. After successfully owning and running the company for ten years, Robert decided he wanted to help the GAL program and children even more by becoming an attorney, so he applied and was accepted to the School of Law at the University of South Carolina. He graduated in December of 2003 and was sworn into the bar in May 2004.

Although Robert still owns his heating and air conditioning company, he also runs a solo private practice concentrating in family law and is the contract attorney for the S.C. Guardian ad Litem Program for Greenville County. He is a member of the South Carolina Bar, Greenville County Bar, South Carolina Trial Lawyers Association, the American Bar Association; is a board member of the Upstate Mediation Center; holds a S.C. Unlimited Mechanical License and was a volunteer State Constable for over ten years. Robert enjoys teaching at CLEs and to Guardians about family court and abuse and neglect cases.

Robert is married to Mary Fretwell Clark from Anderson and Greenville and has three great kids, Mary Myers, Alex and Christopher. Christopher was their foster child who they adopted in 2011. His kids also attended or will attend Sara Collins, Beck and J.L. Mann. As a family, they enjoy going to the mountains, going on RV trips all over, bike riding, and just hanging out together. Although Robert formally held a fixed-wing private pilot's license, his dream is to fly a helicopter – one day. Oh, and world peace.

## **Dottie Cronise**

After graduating from the University of South Carolina with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology, in 1974, I began my law enforcement career in August 1974 as the first female juvenile investigator with the Richland County Sheriff's Department. In October 1977 I resigned from the Sheriff's Department to take a position with the Midlands Head Start Program as their Director of Social Services.

In 1979, I was hired as an agent with the SC State Law Enforcement Division. My first 8 years at SLED was on Governor Richard Riley's Executive Protection Detail, which involved working with agencies across the US and out of the country. In 1986, I was awarded the Order of the Palmetto by Governor Riley. My last 12 years was as Supervisory Special Agent. During that time, I had the supervisory responsibilities for the Missing Persons Clearinghouse, D.A.R.E. Unit, Intelligence Unit, and Case file section of SLED. My work involved victims and families, serving on numerous committees and task force for both statewide and nationwide interests. I retired from SLED in January, 2001.

I returned to the Richland County Sheriff's Department in August of 2003 and now work as an investigator in the Missing Persons' Unit. I served as president of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Victim Advocates Association from 2006 to 2008. I have also served on various other victim and child related committees and boards. As an Investigator, I work cases involving missing persons and families in crisis. I am certified through the SC Criminal Justice Academy as an instructor. I developed and currently provide training to officers on missing persons/children cases. I also teach a five-hour course on diversity and law enforcement. I have instructed at the invitation of the professor at Springfield College in Charleston and Troy University in Sumter. I have assisted in writing grants, policy, and other training programs. As liaison for the RCSD and the Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) community, I conduct training sessions specific to this area and serve as a point of contact for hate crime reports to our agency.

## **M. Christina "Tena" Hardee**

Ms. Hardee provides technical assistance to child protection professionals. Ms. Hardee previously served as an Assistant Public Defender for Richland County and also as a Staff Attorney for the Department of Social Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement.

Ms. Hardee received a BA in Political Science from the University of South Carolina and a Juris Doctor from the USC School of Law.

## **Jody Henry**

Jody Henry is the President and CEO of ARCpoint, the industry leader in Drug, Alcohol, DNA and Wellness testing. He is married with 3 beautiful girls. Mr. Henry is a Certified Professional Collector and Trainer and a Breath Alcohol Technician and Trainer. He works closely with several DSS agencies, attorneys, schools, employers and concerned parents across the Southeast to educate and help facilitate proper and accurate drug and alcohol testing. His company is recognized as a community partner in helping to create a drug free South Carolina.

## **Harold "Pat" Patrick**

Harold "Pat" Patrick, MSW, LISW is the Director of SC Families First, a movement within the SC Department of Social Services implementing family group decision making models statewide for families involved in child welfare. He has extensive experience in children services including child sexual abuse prevention, program development and service delivery in both residential and community based settings.

Mr. Patrick has served on a number of national and international committees and coalitions advocating for child sexual abuse prevention campaigns along with family centered approaches and services. He is presently a member of the National Fatherhood and Child Welfare Network and serves on their planning committee.

He received his BS from the College of Charleston and his MSW from the University of South Carolina. He is licensed as an Independent social worker in the state of South Carolina.

## **John F. Prescott, Jr.**

John grew up in Indiana, having moved to South Bend when he was in the first grade, and then moving to Indianapolis after high school graduation. He traveled back and forth between Indianapolis and Flint Michigan while he pursued his undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering at General Motors Institute in Flint while doing his cooperative work phase at Detroit Diesel Allison Division in Indy. In August of 1972 he married Betsy, and then the two of them moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan where he completed his Masters in mechanical engineering at the University of Michigan.

Returning to work full time at Detroit Diesel Allison in August of 1973, John quickly grew bored with being a GM engineer, so on the urging of some social friends he took the LSAT the summer of 1974 and applied for the night law school program at the Indiana University Law School at Indianapolis. He began that program in 1975 and completed it in May of 1979. Deciding that the practice of law had to be better than being a GM engineer, John left GM and joined the law firm of Ice Miller Donadio & Ryan as an associate on June 1, 1979, eventually becoming a partner January 1, 1986. John practiced primarily in the area of civil litigation, with the litigation practice of the firm trending strongly to exclusively large case civil litigation. After the firm decided to add an Intellectual Property practice by the addition of a lateral partner experienced in patent litigation, John sat for the patent bar in 1990. By 1995 he had transitioned to an exclusively IP litigation practice and continued to practice in that area until his retirement at the end of 2007.

John and Betsy semi-retired to their new home on Lake Keowee, with John moving down in April of 2008 and Betsy following after sale of the Indiana home. John now practices law in Walhalla, and Betsy practices optometry in Seneca.

John's initial exposure to GAL practice in South Carolina occurred when he received a letter from the Oconee County Clerk a month or so after he moved to the new home notifying him that he had been appointed to be a GAL pursuant to Rule 608. Having no idea whatsoever what that meant, he called the local GAL office and spoke with a person who told him there was a training class ongoing that he could attend. He did so, and fumbled his way through his first and only case as a GAL in a DSS case. Deciding being the lawyer for a GAL was much easier, he accepted the contract position as the GAL attorney in Oconee County when that opportunity was presented to him effective July 1, 2009.

### **Rick McWhorter**

Mr. McWhorter received an undergraduate degree (BA) in Government and International Studies from the University of South Carolina in 1977 and an undergraduate degree (BS) in Sociology from Francis Marion University in 1978. He received a graduate degree (MS) in Applied Psychology from Francis Marion University in 1982.

Mr. McWhorter was a Child Protective Service Caseworker for the S.C. Department of Social Services. After that, he was the Staff Psychologist and Area Supervisor for S.C. Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation in Greenwood, SC. He was adjunct instructor for psychology courses at the local technical college.

In January of 2011, he joined the S.C. Guardian ad Litem program as a Finding Families Coordinator.

### **Tracey Waters**

Tracey Waters completed her Master's in Social Work at the University of South Carolina in May 2001 and became a Licensed Master Social Worker in July 2001. During her Master's program she completed internships at Palmetto Aids Life Support Services and at South Carolina First Steps. Tracey has worked as a mitigation investigator for The Center for Capital Litigation and as a Family Support Coordinator at Hospice Care of Tri-County. Prior to receiving her Master's Tracey was a Clinical Counselor at the South Carolina Department of Corrections.

Tracey has accomplished training and supervision in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. She completed Child First South Carolina forensic interview training in March 2010. Tracey became certified in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy in April 2011. She is the clinical director and a forensic interviewer at the Dickerson Center for Children in West Columbia, SC. Tracey is currently receiving clinical supervision in order to become a Licensed Independent Social Worker. Tracey resides in Columbia, SC with her husband Creighton Waters and their five year old son Cade.

### **Brooke Wymer**

Brooke Wymer received her Bachelor's in Social Work from Columbia College in May 2009. She completed an internship during her senior year of study at the Dickerson Center for Children in West Columbia, SC. Brooke completed the Advanced Standing Master of Social Work program at the University of South Carolina and received a Master's in Social Work in May 2010. During her Master's program she completed an internship at the Assessment and Resource Center in Columbia, SC. Brooke became a Licensed Master Social Worker in the state of South Carolina in May 2010. Brooke has accomplished training and supervision in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. She completed Child First South Carolina forensic interview training in October 2010. Brooke became certified in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy in April 2011. She is a therapist, forensic interviewer, and outreach coordinator at the Dickerson Center for Children in West Columbia, SC. Brooke is currently receiving clinical supervision in order to become a Licensed Independent Social Worker. Brooke resides in Irmo, SC with her Chihuahua, Baby.

