

CAUGHT DOING SOMETHING GOOD

## Making a Difference for Children

Guardian ad Litem program benefits children now and in the future

Children in foster care for reasons of abuse and neglect are represented by court-appointed Guardians ad Litem (GALs), who are trained independent volunteer advocates that represent and promote the best interests of the children in the state court system. GALs strive to work expediently toward a plan that ensures these children are in a safe, permanent home. Volunteer GALs in our area are part of Judicial District 3B, which includes Carteret, Craven and Pamlico counties.

From October through the end of January, District 3B staff, volunteers, friends and supporters of the Guardian ad Litem program collected donations of jars of peanut butter and jelly as part of a state-wide service project to raise awareness for the GAL program and its ever-growing need for more volunteers. With the help of local communities and churches, 656 jars were collected to benefit children who rely on local food banks. The jars were donated to Martha's Mission Cupboard in Morehead City and Religious Services Community and the Food Bank of Eastern North Carolina, both located in New Bern. District 3B Administrator Gail Horne remarked, "The participation in the collection of peanut butter and jelly was a way to raise awareness about the need for additional volunteer advocates in our community and simultaneously impact the existing reality of hunger that many families face."

The children who are served by the local Guardian ad Litem program typically come from families that are struggling to make ends meet. Some of these families are not able to meet the needs of their children due to struggles with addiction—a crisis at record levels across our state and the country. Local Departments of Social Services step in to help these children—and in the event that the children are removed from the home for reasons of abuse or neglect, a Guardian ad Litem is appointed by the court to serve as an independent advocate.

Due to the increase in the number of cases filed, there are not enough GALs to serve. Currently in Carteret, Craven, and Pamlico counties, approximately 189 abused and neglected children are involved in the court system at no fault of their own. At least 15 of these children will have to go to court without an independent GAL advocate because there are not enough GALs to go around. Some of the local GAL volunteers have committed to as many as three cases to help ensure that as many children as possible are represented. Petitions continue to come in weekly with children who will need to be represented by a Guardian ad Litem.

This sad and incredible fact bears repeating. Right now, there is an abused or neglected child in District 3B who will go to court without the voice of a community volunteer advocate—unless someone steps forward to speak for the best interests of that child through the GAL program. And it's not just in District 3B. During 2016, there were 17,019 children represented by 5,075 GALs statewide, yet there were still many children who did not have a GAL.

Research supports that children who are abused are likely to become abusers. A trained Guardian ad Litem can be the catalyst to help stop the cycle of abuse in these children's lives. Volunteers can and do make a difference by serving as the voice and advocate for a child.

For information on how you can receive free training to become a Guardian ad Litem and represent a child in need, please contact the GAL Carteret/Pamlico office at 504-4525, the Craven County office at 639-3232 or visit the website at [volunteerforgal.org](http://volunteerforgal.org).

*Editor's note: Pine Knoll Shores has a tradition of volunteerism, and a number of residents have served as Guardians ad Litem over the years. A current GAL from our community shared information with friends about the peanut butter and jelly collection, which resulted in a generous response to the effort.*



Martha's Mission Manager Ginger Wade (left) receives the donation of jars of peanut butter and jelly from Guardian ad Litem District 3B Administrator Gail Horne.

—Photo by GAL Dawn Tolson

## Carteret Literacy Council In Need of Tutors

Changing lives by improving the reading and math skills of adult residents of Carteret County is the mission of the Carteret Literacy Council. Unlocking the student's world by learning to read—and reading to learn—is achieved by volunteer tutors who dedicate four hours a week with them. Students come from all walks of life, including those who wish to learn English as a second language (ESL) and become productive citizens. All have different goals and desired outcomes and are placed with a tutor trained to meet their needs. All teaching materials such as dictionaries, workbooks, citizenship books and phonics software are provided free of charge and become the property of the student.

Learn how to share your love for reading with others by being a volunteer tutor. The Carteret Literacy Council provides the training you need to be certified as a tutor to those who need assistance to improve their skills. A few hours of your time can lead to a lifetime of fulfillment for someone else.

The next 12-hour tutor training workshop is scheduled for noon to 3 p.m. on Tuesday, March 6; Thursday, March 8; Tuesday, March 13; and Thursday, March 15. Tutors must attend all four sessions. If you are interested in helping someone with the gift of reading, call 808-2020 or email [carteretliteracy@carteretliteracy.org](mailto:carteretliteracy@carteretliteracy.org) to register for the classes. We do ask for a \$20 registration fee to cover cost of materials.

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