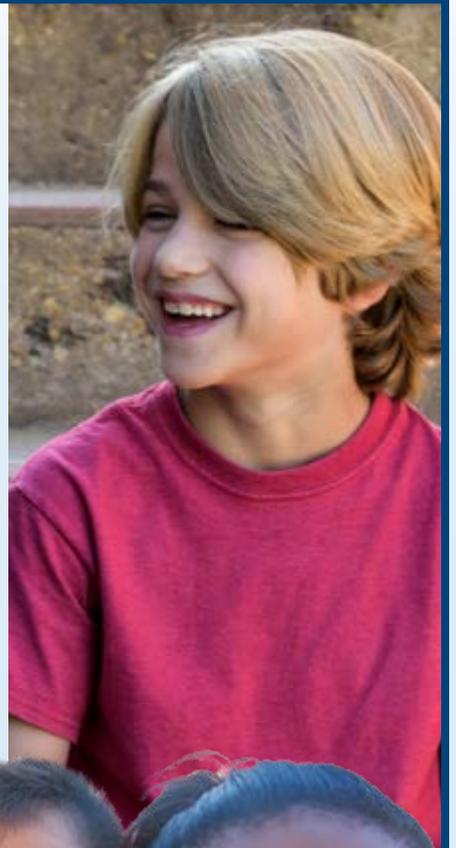
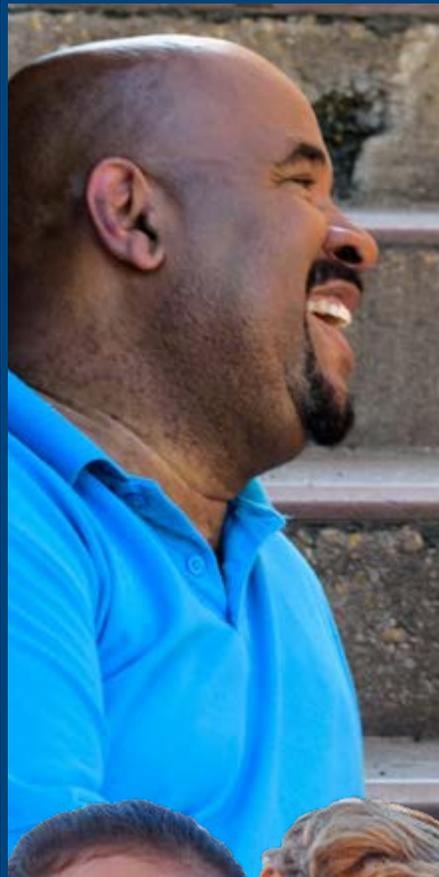




**GUARDIAN
AD LITEM**

FOR CHILDREN



Guardian ad Litem Program

2019 Annual Report

Who is there for an abused or neglected child who may be separated from his or her family and put in the child welfare system?

A Guardian ad Litem.

When a child is abused, abandoned or neglected and cannot remain at home in a healthy, safe environment, he or she may be removed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and a dependency court case begins.

The Guardian ad Litem Program is appointed by the judge to represent these children and advocate for their best interests. We do this by recruiting and training volunteers from the community to become child advocates and work with Program staff and attorneys to represent the child.

Guardians ad Litem focus exclusively on the child and advocate for the child's best interests.





We help children reach home.

No one knew why, but the little boy's case had stalled. The process to find him an adoptive home was not moving forward.

The Guardian ad Litem Team kept investigating and asking questions, and they found his relatives in another state. The relatives were frustrated, wondering what happened to the nephew who might come live with them, but they didn't know who to contact. The child began calling them on the phone, which led to holidays together, and now the child is on a path to his forever home.

Our Impact—2018

39,792 total children represented

10,000+ Floridians volunteered as Guardians ad Litem

439 Pro Bono Attorneys donated legal services

340,000+ hours donated by Volunteer Child Advocates

2,836,000+ miles driven





We believe every child belongs in a safe, loving and permanent home.

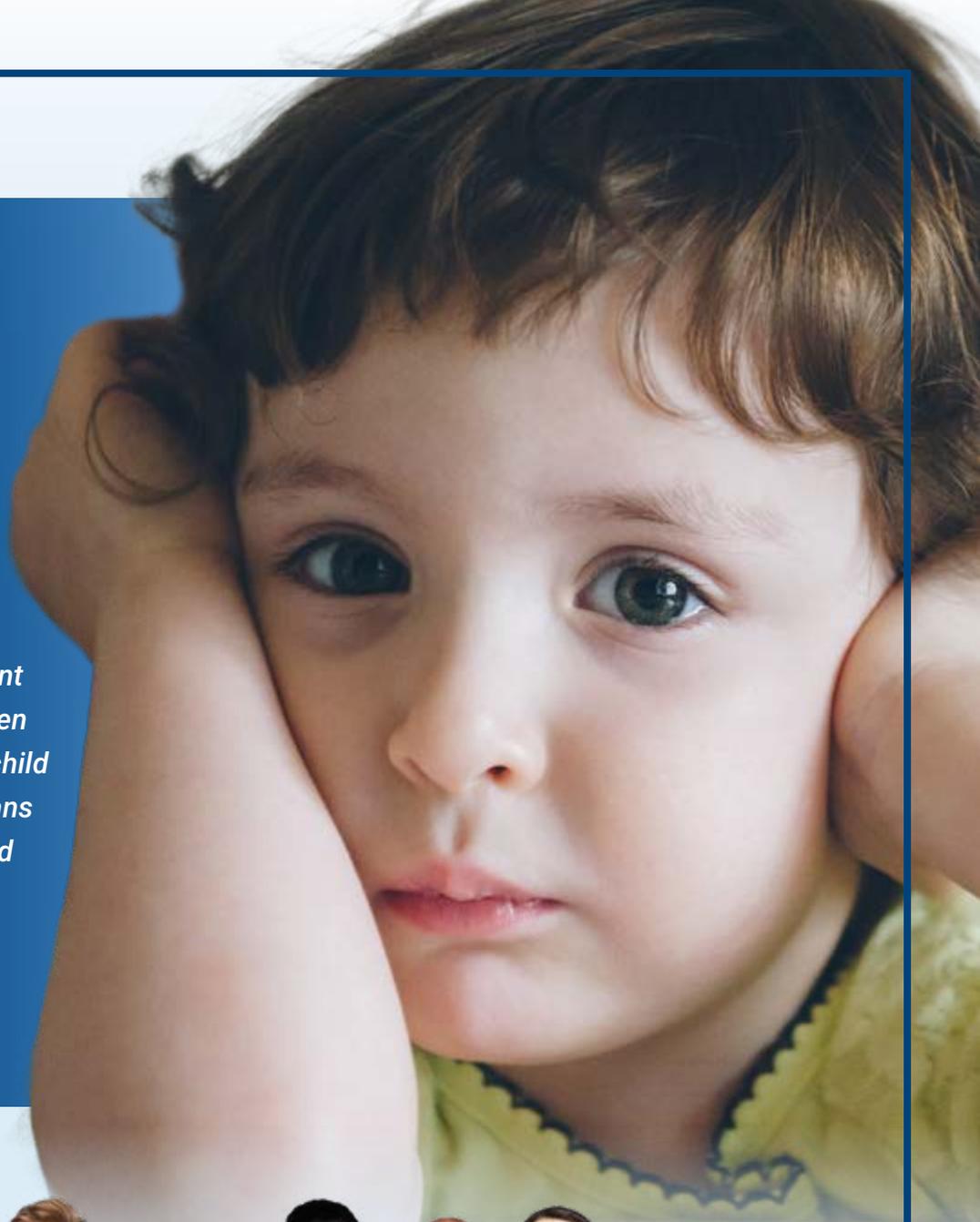
Guardians ad Litem are people like you

Volunteer Child Advocates serve two children at a time on average. They visit children's homes and schools regularly and develop a relationship with each child.

Volunteer Child Advocates give children a voice and are the eyes and ears of the court. They provide judges with first-hand accounts of the child's situation and make recommendations about what is in the child's best interests.



Guardian ad Litem Volunteers are best interests advocates, but they are so much more to the children they advocate for. Volunteers are many times the only stable adult in the child's life. This is critically important to children who have been traumatized and in the child welfare system. Guardians ad Litem become trusted friends, mentors, and can be a link between the child and his or her community.



The Guardian ad Litem Program *advocates* for the child *as a team*



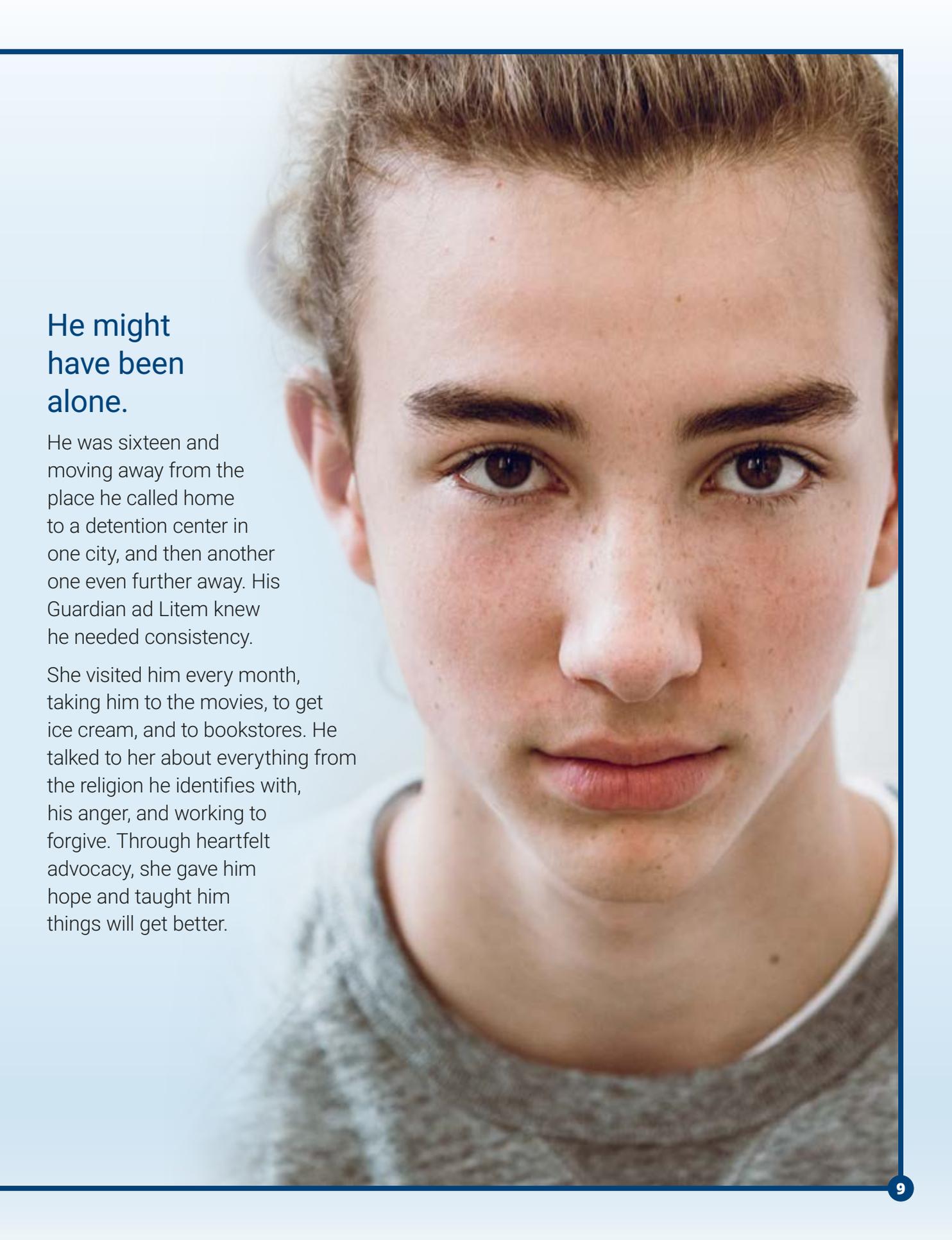
The Program uses a multi-disciplinary team approach where Volunteer Child Advocates, Child Advocate Managers, and Best Interest Attorneys collaborate to represent children. Volunteer Child Advocates bring a community based, common sense approach to children's cases. They are supervised and supported by Child Advocate Managers who help them navigate the complex dependency system. Best Interests Attorneys provide essential legal counsel, attend hearings and depositions, negotiate outside of the courtroom, and take on appeals. The unique perspective and expertise of each team member complements the others and all are critical in advocating for the best interests of children.

The Program's 170+ lawyers

ensure every abused and neglected child has independent representation at every court hearing. Best Interests Attorneys advocate for things like expedited permanency, compliance with statutory timeframes, stability in placements and schools, appropriate healthcare (including mental health treatment), visitation, involvement in court hearings when it's in the child's best interests, and normalcy activities.

Best Interests Attorneys advocate for children in all of Florida's trial and appellate courts, in administrative hearings, and have fought on behalf of children all the way up to the United States Supreme Court.





He might have been alone.

He was sixteen and moving away from the place he called home to a detention center in one city, and then another one even further away. His Guardian ad Litem knew he needed consistency.

She visited him every month, taking him to the movies, to get ice cream, and to bookstores. He talked to her about everything from the religion he identifies with, his anger, and working to forgive. Through heartfelt advocacy, she gave him hope and taught him things will get better.

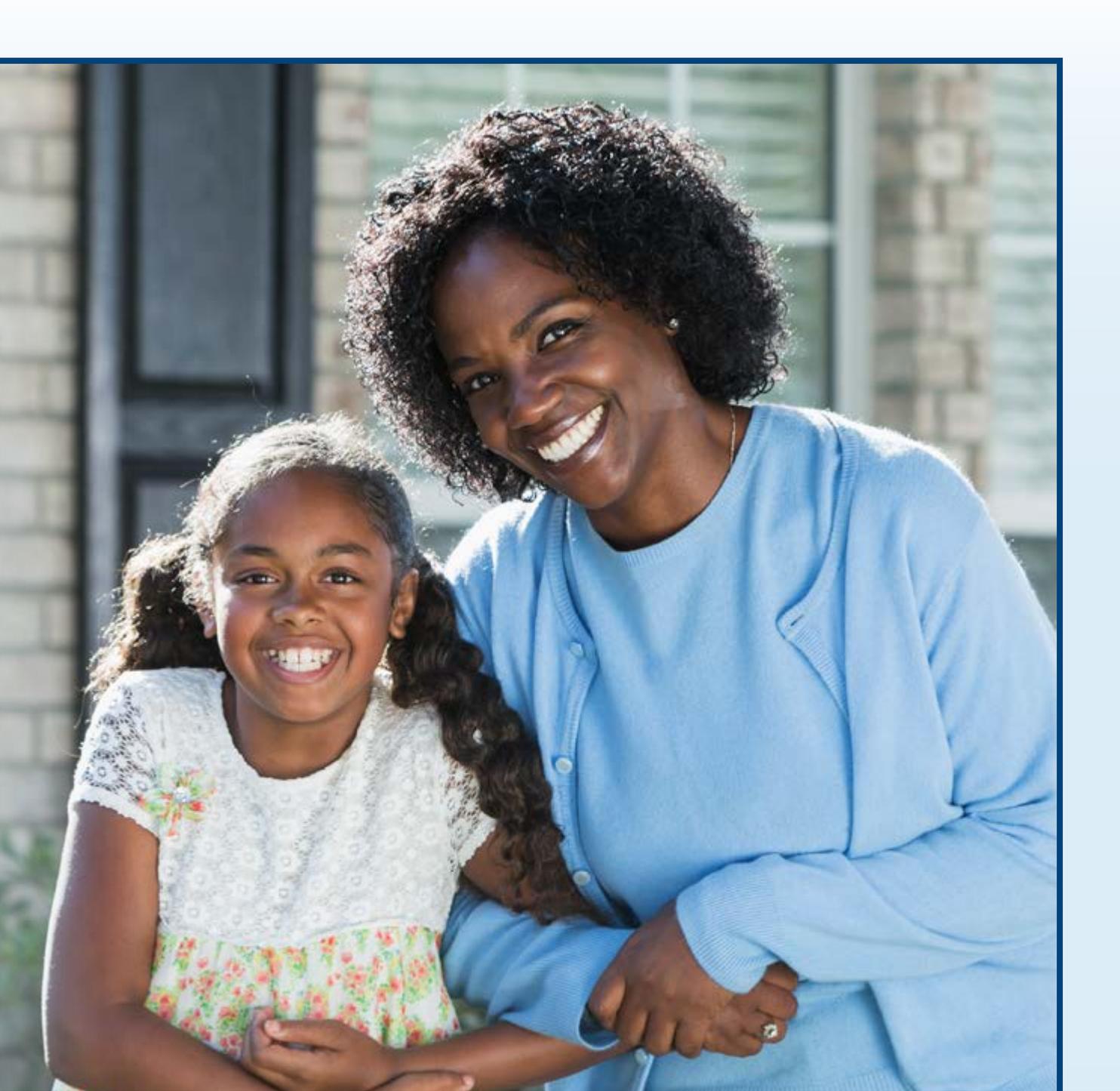
Best Interests is our only interest



When children have an advocate of their own, they spend less time in care, get reunified or adopted sooner, and have better educational outcomes. The Guardian ad Litem Program needs the support and commitment of people like you to advocate for them and help build stronger and more resilient children, families, and communities throughout Florida.



Guardians ad Litem are the child's advocate in court and in the community



This report was prepared by the Florida Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office pursuant to section 39.8296, Florida Statutes.

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