

# IMPROVING THE LIFE OF A FOSTER CHILD



**More than 37 percent of Texas foster children drop out of school and never receive a high school diploma or GED.**

**IN 2012, THERE WERE 30,571 TEXAS CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.**

Studies show that less than 2 percent of foster children receive a bachelor's degree after high school. More than 37 percent of Texas foster children drop out of school and never receive a high school diploma or GED. Sadly, these foster children often experience seven or more school changes during their formative years, and more than 54 percent of these children have one or more mental health issues.

To help combat these matters, the Texas Young Lawyers Association, the Dallas Young Lawyers Association, and Texas Lawyers for Children are partnering with Dallas County's Special Guardians/Attorneys Ad Litem, assigned by the Honorable Cheryl Shannon of the 305th Dallas District Court, to implement a pro bono pilot project to advocate for children in foster care.

This pilot project will utilize pro bono attorneys in Dallas and surrounding cities to serve as education advocates to help enhance the scholastic outcomes for children in foster care. The education advocate serves as co-counsel to the child's court-appointed attorney and works to ensure that the child has the best opportunity to succeed in school by providing services, including:

- Appropriate evaluations to identify any learning or psychological issues;
- Services and accommodations for any identified issues;
- Adequate support from school personnel and foster parents;
- Access to programs, resources, and services necessary to help the child succeed both academically and socially; and
- Support and resources necessary to adequately prepare the child for graduation and acceptance into a college or vocational school.

Background information about the child will be provided to the education advocate at the onset of service, and the advocate will also gather information from the child, the Department of Family and Protective Services file and appointed caseworker, the Child Protective Services' education portfolio, the foster parent(s), and necessary school personnel. A minimum commitment of one year is expected of each volunteer; however, volunteers are encouraged to continue representation of the child until he or she leaves foster care. The advocate will develop a basic plan to help address the child's educational needs and provide a written monthly status report to the court and special guardian, including the child's educational status and any action taken on behalf of the child.

As an education advocate, an attorney must be in good standing with the State Bar and participate in 6.75 hours of free CLE training provided by Texas Lawyers for Children. TYLA members who join the project will be covered by the State Bar pro bono malpractice insurance. All other volunteers are eligible for malpractice coverage through the Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program.

The next CLE training session for this project will be held on Jan. 9, 2014, from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. at the Belo Mansion, located at 2101 Ross Ave, Dallas 75201. To sign up for the free training in January, or for more information about this project, contact Patricia Hogue at [patricia.hogue@texaslawyersforchildren.org](mailto:patricia.hogue@texaslawyersforchildren.org) or call toll free (800) 993-5TLC (5852).

There are plans to expand this initiative to other areas of the state if this pilot program is successful, so please give us your support! You can make a difference in the life of a foster child.

**KRISTY BLANCHARD**

President, *Texas Young Lawyers Association*