

# *THE FLORIDA PUBLIC INTEREST JOURNAL*

A publication of The Florida Bar Public Interest Law Section

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## *Message from the Chair*

The Executive Council of The Public Interest Law Section is pleased to bring back a revamped version of the newsletter for our membership. This special feature is a multi-generational collaborative effort of high school students, law students, and attorneys who have a passion for public interest law and serving members of our community who otherwise would not have representation or an advocate.

For more information about membership or becoming involved in a committee or workgroup please visit our website:  
<https://www.flpublicinterestlaw.org/>.



Martha Pardo, Esq.  
2020-2021 Chair  
Public Interest Law Section  
The Florida Bar

# *Parental Rights in Dependency Cases*

BY: HILLARY HARBAUER

Mr. Joyce is an attorney based out of South Florida who practices in the area of dependency, specifically with cases involving the termination of parental rights. Mr. Joyce grew up in Eastern Pennsylvania and before becoming an attorney, he worked at Eastern Air Lines; however, after realizing the airline would not survive, he and his wife decided he would apply to law school. Mr. Joyce attended the University of Miami in the evenings as he continued to work full time during the day. Mr. Joyce started practicing as an attorney in 1992; ten years later, he started representing parents in dependency and termination of parental rights (TPR) cases. Since then, he has found a niche representing parents in dependency and TPR cases in the trial and appellate courts. Then in 2017, he obtained board certification in Juvenile Law.



**Mr. Joyce tries "...to improve advocacy for parents by bringing people together in the public law service section."**

Mr. Joyce recognized that many of his cases can be difficult in different ways; he explained that this is a consequence of being a defense attorney in the dependency field. "In many dependency trials, the prosecution tends to have more than one attorney representing the child and the situation can go all over the place when not dealt with correctly." Mr. Joyce then compared dependency trials to criminal trials: "...for example, in criminal trials you will most likely not find such situations because criminal trials usually consist of one attorney per party." Mr. Joyce also mentions that, "after working in a few high-profile dependency cases representing parents, I have had to be careful to avoid the press with pressing questions." When you are a dependency attorney, you can find yourself under the eye of the press and the public if you are not careful. Although publicity is effective on spreading awareness of child abuse cases, defense attorneys in TPR face most of the negative effects of publicity, as the public can misjudge the person behind the attorney job and believe they are "bad persons" for representing parents in such trials. On the topic of publicity, Mr. Joyce said you need to be able to separate work from your personal life. He emphasized the importance of being able to balance work-life lives because publicity can become intrusive in your personal life and possibly affect your mental well-being, as you can find people who will misjudge you for doing your job.

Despite all the difficulties as a defense attorney representing parents in dependency cases, Mr. Joyce continues to stand for what he believes in and has "...picked up the banner..." when it comes to advocating for parents' rights to representation in court. Mr. Joyce also tells us that "... because most defense dependency attorneys are lone wolves, no real network for advocating for parents' rights had been created until a few years ago." Through the Parents Advocacy Workgroup, Mr. Joyce and other defense dependency attorneys advocate for creating a broader forum where members can exchange ideas through workgroups and meetings that discuss past trials. Mr. Joyce tells us the purpose of such workgroups is to "... [try] to improve advocacy for parents by bringing people together in the public law service section." After many years without a network for defense dependency attorneys, Mr. Joyce and his newly formed network have fostered discussion of issues regarding parents' rights and to spread the word of all the obstacles that defense dependency attorneys have achieved for parents through such workgroups. Mr. Joyce intends to expand and reach more people, in an attempt to raise awareness for parents' rights in dependency cases.

# *A Life Dedicated to the Service of Others*

BY: ESTHER RODAS

Service is defined as work performed by one to benefit the welfare of others. The act of supplying others with aid, as well as the act of being at another's disposal. For Ms. Sally McArthur supplying others with services was an incredibly important aspect of her life. She was born into a family which believed in the importance of servitude. Both her parents were incredibly involved in the community and contributed what they could to assist others, even if that meant sharing their home. McArthur followed this example throughout her college years, contributing however she could to her peers.

In 2011, Ms. McArthur received a grant for the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) program. A program focused on the best interest of children, they help children who have experienced neglect, abandonment, as well as abuse. Their overall goal is to help children find a safe and permanent home. She was assigned to the children in Pine Hills, a section of Orlando which had many children being removed from. Without disrupting their lifestyle, the GAL would provide the required services to get them back up to speed and to give them a better outlook on their future.

Throughout the course of this job, she acted as a liaison for over 200 children. McArthur went to visit one of her GAL kids, attempting to rebuild some rapport on the child, and she asked the child if there was a book, she wanted them to read together, the young girl pulled out a cd case, flipping through the empty slots as pages as she produced a story. McArthur sat there in amazement, fascinated to see the child's intelligence at the mere age of 3, the child's mother soon entered the room, questioning why she had chosen an empty cd case as opposed to one of her three books. McArthur then reflected onto her childhood, remembering how she always had the luxury of having access to books so she decided that she would bring the young girl books whenever she visited. As a result, she started a book program at legal aid where she received donations and provided low-income children with pieces of literature. Within those eight years over 10,000 books were handed out.

Now that Ms. McArthur is semi-retired, she is starting a non-profit organization called Facilitating Learning for Youth (FLY). In this program she will be getting and giving books to children in underprivileged communities, and she hopes to expand this program further and supply tutoring, mentoring, supply handouts, and other learning services.

McArthur produced the idea while she was interviewing for a director job at NAMI (National Association for Mental Illness).

One of the questions the interviewer had asked her was "What's the best thing you've done in your life?" and Ms. McArthur's mind immediately reverted back to the project previously conducted at legal aid, while reminiscing on the matter she thought, "that's something I can do now, why not widen that up to the whole community and help all kinds of kids." When asked why she thought others should get involved with this organization McArthur said, "Right now I see even a greater need than ever." With the current epidemic, many students and teachers are forced to remain in their homes and attempt to teach and learn new material electronically. Although the students are given an electronic device, it does not compare to the glory of being able to turn a page in a book or to draw. McArthur continued by stating that, "if we want our communities to thrive, we have to place an emphasis on education and providing children the tools they need as adults so that they can go out and do something good themselves for the community." She believed that doing so will allow the children to pay it forward as they age since children have a self-fulfilling prophecy of growing into what they see.

Ms. Sally McArthur stated that "Education opens things up for people, for hope." Education is the movement from darkness to light, as stated by philosopher, Allan Bloom. It is that through education where one can successfully restore the faith and confidence lost due to the troubles of life. Education can make an enormous difference in the lives of the youth. This message is conveyed throughout the course of this interview and it dramatically touched my heart. While hearing this story I felt moved, the amount of inspiration I felt was continuously exemplified as I heard more. The effort put into learning things is like a light bulb, once it's turned on everything will be seen differently, in a brighter and clearer perspective. By prioritizing education, one is rewarding youth a promising future.



Sarah "Sally" McArthur, Esq.  
Chair Elect  
Public Interest Law Section  
The Florida Bar

**"Education opens  
things up for  
people, for hope."**

## *A Leader in Helping Those in Need*

BY: BAKLIS ALDAZABAL

Leah Dual, who's been the Guardian Ad Litem Director at the Legal Aid Office of the Orange County Bar Association for a year and four months, has spent her twenty-year career standing up and caring for those who needed it. Ms. Dual has worked in disaster assistance, public defense, and finally, dependency law. Ms. Dual started out corporate, then worked for the State of Florida until she joined the Legal Aid Office, a non-profit located in Orange County.

When asked how non-profit legal aid differs from previous professional positions, Ms. Dual states there is more freedom, particularly because she has the ability to refuse cases if she wishes. While there are definitely fewer resources readily available to her and her colleagues, she explains that she chose dependency law fifteen years ago because, "...it's rewarding, keeping children safe. The hardest decisions I've had to make are based on whether I should terminate parental rights - it gets really intense. But helping teenagers find opportunities they never knew they had and helping younger kids find loving families make every hard choice worth it."



**"I believe [the] law is a winding path, but you end up where you need to be."**

Afterward, she's asked if she always planned on dependency law. Ms. Dual replies that, curiously enough, even though she'd wanted to be a lawyer, she originally wanted to do prosecution. She talks about her years in disaster relief and public defense, her current job, and the volunteering she's been doing in housing to help out. Then, she chuckles, saying that "Law is law because you learn and practice as you go. Keep an open mind!"

Ms. Dual offered her recommendations for students and teachers alike, and both for law and for life. For law students, she emphatically recommended, "Volunteer often, especially at legal aid! Have an open mind and enjoy learning new things. Also, lots of kids want to be lawyers because they think we make a lot of money. I work non-profit, so that's not exactly true for me, but honestly, I'm very happy. Remember though, law costs money, so be sure that this is what you want." Her tips for professionals are similar: "Be open and engage in differences that arise in your plans."

**SINCE THE WRITING OF THIS ARTICLE LEAH HAS ACCEPTED A POSITION WITH THE LAW FIRM OF GOBEL FLAKES. SHE REMAINS AN ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC INTEREST LAW WORK AS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE PILS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.**

# *Public Interest: The Speciality That Gives Back*

BY: DAVID BROWN

Humans often recognize one another for the good that they commit amongst each other to make the world a better place, but what about the people who go unrecognized? That is the purpose of this article, to let you know a little bit about good people whose good work has gone unrecognized. Those people are Walter Honaman and Simone Chriss. They are amazing unsung heroes that deserve everyone's respect. These two individuals have positively impacted all the young people around them. They also have the resolve to keep going even when it's rough, but ultimately they both just want to make sure their clients are at their best.

I'll begin by telling you about Walter. Speaking with Mr. Walter taught me many things about him, like the passion he has for the job he is in and how much he cares for affecting positive change in his community. He oversees the Kinship Program and is involved with Hope Court. When I asked him about what inspired him to become active in his community, I was surprised to find out it was a tv show. A television program was the reason for the tremendous amount of effort and work he put into his community service. As a result, I began to wonder what he would do or say to someone else he didn't personally know of to ask for his assistance. As a result, the idea was put to the test. He was asked a certain amount of questions on how to better someone's self. Some people would have taken the conversation a different way by completely turning down the questioner automatically, but this was surely not the case this time. Mr. Walter told gave the best steps that should be taken at the current stage the questioner was at, and he helped give them information for the future. But not only that he opened them to other opportunities that could better them and make their dream of becoming a lawyer more of a reality. It can be said that they are a step closer to fulfilling their dream because of this one man.

Now it's time for the one, the only, Simone Chriss! Simone Chriss is an amazing proud woman part of the LGBTQ community. The amount of effort she puts into her work and the value she has within it is awe-inspiring. She also has several projects she is working on, these include [floridanamechange.org](http://floridanamechange.org) and her work as a civil rights attorney. She was inspired by her family. Growing up her family worked with foster care children as social workers and Mrs. Chriss saw the flaws in the system so she decided to make the change to become a civil rights attorney.

For that reason alone she deserves 10 gold medals but it did not stop there. She also made a website name [floridanamechange.org](http://floridanamechange.org) that helped the people who are transgender change their name on specialized documents so their gender identity is properly identified on their legal documents. In addition to that, she went to federal court to sue for healthcare for the value of her entire community. At the start of career she was viewed as a nice woman that valued children but now you see a side of her that can be described as a strong woman that values her entire community and most importantly her family. But this does not mean her job is easy, there are some disadvantages that come with the job she took on. This includes the limited amount of time she gets to spend at home with her family and the limited pay. Even after all of that she still decided that it was the best idea to take on this job and do her best to help her clients.

You might think that she only has a business professional-client relationship with the people she takes on as cases but that is incorrect. She tries and makes the effort to put forth an amazing feeling of comfort which allows her clients to feel safe. For this very reason, she believes the pros outweigh the cons in this job and she will continue to help people with their civil rights violated to the best of her ability. "This job can be time energy and emotionally draining and it would have been easier to have been a different attorney that gives me more time with my family and more money, but no one still wouldn't change a thing." What a person she is.

There you have it folks two of the most heroic people you've ever seen. They not only inspire young people, they are also examples of some of the best people in their communities. They are everything anyone ever hopes to become and one day someone will take their example and will get there.

**"...it would have been easier to have been a different attorney that gives me more time with my family and more money, but [I] still wouldn't change a thing." - Simone Criss**



## *Passion Turned Into a Career*

BY: CHARLOTTE OPRIS

Who is Martha Pardo, and why should she be recognized as an outstanding person in her community and workplace? Ms. Pardo is not just a regular lawyer. Her already honorable profession of helping Lady Justice is taken a step further. Seeing much inequality and injustice in the world from a young age, Martha Pardo decided to go to Florida Coastal School of Law, as she believed that law would provide her a "platform to eliminate some of those inequalities."

Her passion for justice was helped through law school with the help of many mentors, especially when transitioning from her education to actual practice. An unexpected opportunity knocked on her door one day, and Ms. Pardo is now Senior Manager of Pro Bono Development. In her own words, her mission is to recruit "volunteer lawyers to provide pro bono services for low-income clients in Central Florida." She also ensures a good volunteer experience by providing any necessary tools and support. Pro Bono has proven to be a life-changing experience, making enormous differences in individuals' lives.



Martha Pardo has handled a multitude of civil cases over her career. When asked if there was a particular type of case that had affected her, Ms. Pardo answered the following: "Defending tenants definitely had an impact. Despite the challenges, it was so satisfying when people were able to keep their homes especially individuals that received government housing assistance." With more than a decade of experience, she continues fighting for what is right and provides legal assistance to those who need it the most.

Ms. Pardo also has some advice for anyone who would like to be a lawyer someday or who is currently in law school: Getting as much practical experience as you can before diving into the professional world (it is crucial) and your life will be much easier. Additionally, while in school, try to build connections and find people who are willing to support you through your journey, as they may open the door to some opportunities or give you some invaluable advice.

Thanks to her profession and her passion, there is a glimmer of hope in a dark world for reducing the enormous inequality gap present in our country. With Martha Pardo's help, a true fair and equal due process can be applied to everyone.

**"Getting as much practical experience as you can before diving into the professional world and your life will be much easier. Additionally, while in school, try to build connections and find people who are willing to support you through your journey, as they may open the door to some opportunities or give you some invaluable advice." - Ms. Pardo's advice to future lawyers**

## *This Issue Brought to You By...*

THE PUBLIC INTEREST LAW SECTION IS PROUD TO PARTNER WITH THE NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY SHEPARD BROAD COLLEGE OF LAW AND THE FORT LAUDERDALE HIGH SCHOOL PRE-LAW AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS MAGNET SCHOOL TO BRING YOU THIS ISSUE.

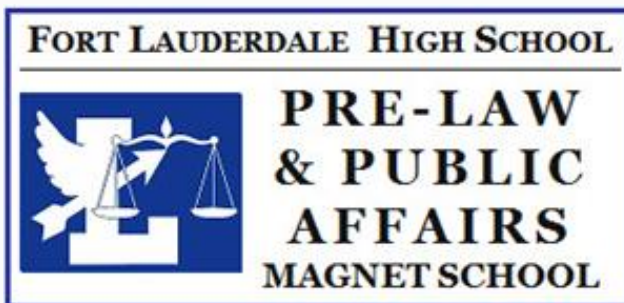
The articles in this issue were all written by students at Fort Lauderdale High School in the Pre-Law magnet program, with the help of mentors from NSU Law's Public Interest Law Society.

### Authors

Baklis Aldazabal, 10th grade  
David Brown, 9th grade  
Hillary Haubauer, 11th grade  
Charlotte Opris, 12th grade  
Esther Rodas, 9th grade

### Mentors

Maria Burbridge, 2L  
Linda Harris, 3L



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