



CROSSROADS FOR FLORIDA KIDS

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Crossroads' Stars Shine Bright at the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Service Awards

On April 24, 2024, the 17th Annual Pro Bono Service Awards for the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit were held to recognize a Hillsborough County lawyer, law firm, or organization that made significant contributions of pro bono legal services in 2023. Awards were given to nominees for pro bono efforts during the year 2023 except for the HCBA Jimmy Kynes Pro Bono Service Award that recognizes an attorney who for many years has made significant contributions to ensure legal services are available to persons who otherwise could not afford them.

In 2023, Crossroads for Florida Kids reported to the Circuit that pro bono attorneys contributed 3,870 pro bono hours with the organization. The awards ceremony recognized all attorneys that contributed 20 or more pro bono hours in 2023 and 41 of those attorneys were Crossroads volunteers. Crossroads also submitted multiple nominations and letters of support to shine a light on certain volunteers that had gone above and beyond in their dedication to pro bono service.

Crossroads' Board Member, Gil Singer, was the recipient of the HCBA Jimmy Kynes Award due to contributing thousands of pro bono hours throughout his forty-four years as a member of the Florida Bar. Gil's pro bono experience started in 1979 interning at Legal Services of Greater Miami which transitioned into a long association with Bay Area Legal Services Volunteer Lawyers Program after moving to Tampa. In 2016, Gil began serving as a pro bono attorney for Crossroads where he has dedicated hundreds of pro bono hours representing disadvantaged youth by attending hearings and staffings, frequently visiting his clients to ensure they have adequate food, shelter, clothing, attend school and therapy—as well as providing legal advice and counsel. Gil addressed the importance of his pro bono work with Crossroads clients, "[w]e cannot give up on our 'at risk' children without giving them a voice, an opportunity to learn right from wrong, and to mentor and protect them at all times when needed. In working with our kids at Crossroads, success often is measured incrementally, and there are failures along the way, but every child and teen needs the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their past."

Crossroads volunteer, Michelle Lambo, was the recipient of the Outstanding Pro Bono Service by a Lawyer Award which recognizes an individual lawyer who provided outstanding pro bono services in 2023. Michelle earned many pro bono hours representing lawful protestors charged with criminal



offenses for exercising their First Amendment rights in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, including the "Tampa Five" students arrested during a protest at the University of South Florida. In addition, Michelle also found the time to contribute 32 pro bono hours with Crossroads while serving as a regular volunteer for our On Call program.

The recipient of the Outstanding Pro Bono Service by a Law Firm was awarded to Zuckerman Spaeder LLP. In 2023, Zuckerman Spaeder's Tampa Office contributed nearly 1,000 pro bono service hours which included four Crossroads volunteers—Samantha Gerencir, Lisa Kilbride, Jack Fernandez and Crossroads' Board Member and Treasurer Sandy Weinberg—accumulating 780 pro bono service hours in their representations of 7 Crossroads clients. Zuckerman Spaeder has been a strong supporter of Crossroads for Florida Kids since 2012 and they have provided over 3,581 pro bono hours representing more than 30 kids through Crossroads in delinquency, dependency, truancy, and criminal matters in Hillsborough County.

Regarding Zuckerman Spaeder's dedication to pro bono service, Board Member Sandy Weinberg said that "Pro bono is part of the fabric of the Firm and that representing Crossroads' kids over the past decade has been an incredibly rewarding experience for the lawyers in Zuckerman's Tampa Office."



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JO: Crossroads for Florida Kids Success Story

JO was 16 years old when Andrea Darling de Cortes and Joseph Bobo of Holland & Knight LLP were appointed to represent her as Attorneys Ad Litem (AALs), following a physical altercation between the teen and another child at their night placement which led to battery charges against JO. JO had a history of violent outbreaks, frequent marijuana use, and mental health issues. She experienced significant trauma and abandonment as a child, essentially growing up in the foster care system. Night-to-night placement was very difficult on JO as she did not always know where she would sleep, or whether she would have a bed to sleep in. On multiple occasions, JO slept on the floor in a room with three other children, with only two sheets and a pillow, and woke to an empty refrigerator. JO did not attend school regularly and was frequently "on the run" from her night to night placement. When Andrea and Joe began their representation in May of 2022, they were cautioned against spending time alone with JO due to her history of violence and anger management issues. JO was initially not open to engaging in therapy and rejected mental health treatment. Andrea and Joe recall the first time they reached out to introduce themselves to their client; she was wary of them and asked for proof of identification. In short, their initial representation could be characterized by caution on both sides and a reluctance of their client to trust her AALs.

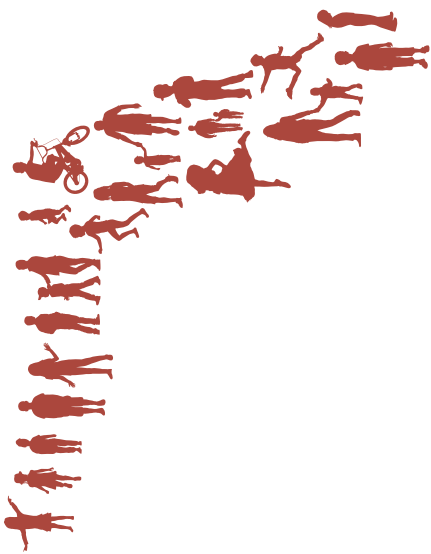
Andrea and Joe worked to gain JO's trust by engaging in direct and open communication with her, and working to understand her needs and desires, while also helping her to set goals and make better life decisions. Andrea and Joe regularly attended JO's court hearings to advocate on her behalf. JO asked the court and her case management team for braces "for years" before Andrea and Joe's appointment. One day, JO went to an orthodontist and secured braces for herself, financing them, and walked out owing over \$4,300.00 for the braces and up to \$180 per future orthodontist visit. Months went by after JO got her braces, while the orthodontist bills were not getting paid by the Department of Children and Families. Andrea and Joe raised this issue in court, and the judge signed an Order drafted by Andrea and Joe, requiring the Department of Children and Families to pay the cost of JO's braces in full and to pay for each orthodontist appointment until her 18th birthday, relieving their client of potential significant debt related to her braces. JO's braces were paid in full within 24 hours of the judge's execution of the Order.

As their representation continued, JO began looking to Andrea and Joe for general life advice and counsel, not just legal counsel. Andrea and JO began texting and calling each other on a (nearly) daily basis for routine check-ins, and Andrea

began to help her overcome daily hurdles, such as arranging transportation for work and diffusing potential conflicts between JO and her foster care case manager. Andrea was able to use this regular communication as a platform to encourage JO to make better life decisions. Andrea reminded JO regularly of the importance of engaging in therapy, remaining drug free, and not fighting with her peers. JO listened to Andrea and took her counsel to heart. In short order, JO began passing her court-ordered drug tests and Andrea and Joe began receiving positive feedback from the teen's therapist regarding JO's involvement in therapy. JO has not been in a physical altercation since Andrea and Joe's representation commenced.

JO turned 18 years old this past September, and moved on to independent living in extended foster care. Andrea and Joe worked closely with her independent living coordinator at Camelot Community Care to assist with the transition to independent living, and to ensure that JO met all the requirements for the independent living program upon her 18th birthday. Andrea and Joe made sure she had the necessary documentation to proceed to independent living, as well as a bank account and her learner's permit for driving, and that she met all other requirements for independent living at Camelot Community Care.

JO currently lives in a single-family home with three roommates and works full time at a car wash. She has her own bedroom and takes pride in keeping it tidy. JO is preparing to take the remaining math portion of the GED so that she can enroll in Hillsborough Community College. She has not firmly decided on a career path just yet, but she aspires to help other children in the foster care community. Andrea and Joe are currently working with JO's extended foster care case manager to help secure math tutoring for the GED and ongoing mental health therapy. Above is a photo of Andrea and JO at her client's graduation from Chamberlain Adult High School!



Introduction to Crossroads' Newest Addition to the Team

Crossroads for Florida Kids is happy to introduce our newest member to the team, Kelsey Broadhurst. Kelsey started with Crossroads on May 6th as a part-time Executive Assistant working with our Executive Director.

Kelsey comes to Crossroads as a seasoned Executive Assistant and real estate entrepreneur. Her exclusive background was the perfect fit for Crossroads; Philanthropy, Contracts, Calendars and Sales. She is ready to join Crossroads for a more compassionate, fulfilled career and to further Crossroads' mission to provide pro bono legal services for the disadvantaged youth of Hillsborough County.

Outside of Crossroads, Kelsey is the wife of the president of American Media Group, Charles Broadhurst, and a dedicated mother to their three children. She loves organic food, the rabbit hole of long-term health and supporting local businesses.



Crossroads' Attorneys Honored at HAWL Annual Awards Luncheon

On May 8, 2024, the Hillsborough Association for Women Lawyers (HAWL) hosted their Annual Awards Luncheon & Officer Installation. Crossroads for Florida Kids supports HAWL as a Strategic Partner. We were thrilled to learn that Crossroads' Vice President, Katherine Yanes, and Crossroads' Committee Member, Samantha Tomlin, both received awards for their incredible accomplishments and dedication to pro bono service.

Katherine Yanes was the recipient of the HAWL Achievement Award, which is given to a person who has demonstrated a commitment to the purpose, goals and mission of HAWL, and who has excelled in her career, overcome traditional stereotypes associated with women, and promoted the status of women within the profession and/or within the state of Florida. Among Katherine's many achievements mentioned in the award presentation was her dedication to representing disadvantaged youth since the inception of Crossroads for Florida Kids in 2012. We are honored and privileged to have Katherine in a leadership role passionately pursuing Crossroads' mission to help many disadvantaged youths achieve better lives through her zealous advocacy, which makes her an exemplary role model for our volunteers to follow. Katherine said, "My work with Crossroads is some of the most meaningful work I do. It allows me to help the children who need it the most to get on a path to the life that they deserve."

Samantha Tomlin was the award recipient of the HAWL Pro Bono Award which is awarded to a HAWL member for her selfless and inspirational donation of legal expertise to improve the lives of those assisted. Since her start as an Attorney ad Litem in 2022, Samantha has contributed hundreds of hours of pro bono legal services across more than 10 cases. Samantha also volunteers every month to be on call to assist on delinquency cases and has recruited and mentored several new lawyers to become Attorneys ad Litem through Crossroads to donate their own pro bono services. When asked why representing these children is so important to her, Samantha said, "it means giving a voice to those who desperately need one and helping to change the trajectory of a vulnerable child's life."

Congratulations to both Katherine Yanes and Samantha Tomlin!



Rosemary's Corner: Inspiration from Crossroads' Founder and Board President

In this edition of Rosemary's Corner, Rosemary recalls a memorable case representation:

"Co-Counsel Gil Singer and I were appointed to represent a 17 year old black teen with a severe intellectual disability, and a seizure disorder. The boy picked up a delinquency charge having to do with his mother, who had a bad gambling habit that often left the teen without food or shelter. August of 2022, the family was living in an inoperable van in sweltering heat when the boy called us because he had neither food nor funds to buy any. Stepping out of the van to take pizzas we brought, the boy's head was drenched with sweat. We learned from his teacher that he was hospitalized after being outside in extreme heat at school, and immediately contacted a Child Protective Investigator who transported him to a county respite facility. He stayed there until he was able to move into an APD group home. Notwithstanding all the abuse and neglect he experienced, this client always greeted us with a big smile and often a hug. One time he gave me the attached thank you note for school shoes he needed. We advocated for him in court many times, but what stood out to him was the shoes we bought him for his first day of school. It is this kind of experience that makes me and other Crossroads' attorneys say that helping poor kids in our community is the most rewarding legal work they have ever done."



Ms Rosemary
Thank you for my
shoes and your help
and checking on me

