

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-1
March 28, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Angie Chirino, Voices for Children

Agenda Item D-1 [10:09:41a.m.]

Presentation by Angie Chirino, Donor Relations Manager for Voices for Children regarding Voices for Children and how it works with the Guardian ad Litem Program to help children in foster care in Miami-Dade County and specifically the City of Coral Gables.

Mayor Cason: Next we have, is Angie Chirino here?- Donor Relations Manager for Voices for Children is going to talk about Voices for Children, how it helps with the Guardian ad Litem program to help children in foster care in Miami-Dade County and specifically the City of Coral Gables.

Ms. Chirino: Good morning Mr. Mayor, good morning Commissioners. Commissioner Keon thank you for allowing me the space to come and speak to you. I'm very honored to be here today to see all the touching tributes and see all the progress the City has made. Not only is it a beautiful City on the outside, but I can see that it has a heart. I was an autism teacher for eleven years before I came here, so I am especially proud of the work you are doing and I think it's

wonderful and it also makes me very optimistic coming off the heels of what I'm going to speak to you about, which is another very vulnerable population with children, which is children in foster care. Before I do that, I'd like to play you a small little video if you can direct your attention to the screen and I hope my IT people are ready for the video.

[Video Presentation]

Ms. Chirino: So, just like every child, children in foster care have dreams to be doctors and lawyers and BMX bikers, and even have their house, but the reality is one in five of them will end up homeless; one out of three will live at or below the poverty level; one out of four will end up in jail within the first two years of aging out of foster care; and one out of four will be diagnosed with PTSD and that's twice the number of veterans in the United States of America. Another staggering statistic, three out of four young women will be pregnant by the time they are 21, and unfortunately they don't have the resources to take care of these children, so those children end up back in foster care. It's a cycle that repeats itself over and over and over again. In the Village of Coral Gables there are approximately 43 children currently in foster care according to our kids. Only 28 of them have a Guardian ad Litem volunteer recruited and trained by Voices for Children, like me. A Guardian ad Litem make sure the children are not lost in an overburdened legal system, they are the voice in court, they are a mentor, and they are a constant responsible adult, possibly the only responsible adult that will ever be in their life. A child with a Guardian ad Litem spends less time in foster care and is more likely to be adopted, is more likely to have a consistent responsible adult, more likely to go to school, finish school, go to college, just have that constant person to be responsible for them to be present, to care for them, because children are removed from homes every day, because of abuse, neglect, violence, drug abuse, all these things. But, forget about the sentiment; let's talk about it in dollars and cents. On average for every young person who ages out of foster care, taxpayers and communities pay \$300,000 in social costs over that person's lifetime, between public assistance, jail and other community costs. Voices for Children Foundation raise funds to recruit and train Guardian ad Litem. We actually staff and support over 50 percent of the Guardian ad Litem program. It is a four star charity and we've been in operation since 1984 and helped over 40,000 children. So, how can this community help? Offer incentives to City employees to become Guardians ad Litem and directly assist the members of the community who are vulnerable and are in need of that person – that person to be responsible for their life, that way they can directly benefit their own community just within the community 43 children, well half of them are in need of a Guardian ad Litem. Also, encourage community businesses to offer those incentives to their employees to become Guardians who give back to that community. There are a lot of businesses in this community who can not only be Guardians, but offer resources. Some of these children have never been to a movie theater, to a bowling alley, to a restaurant, to a summer camp, anything that the community can provide to give these children positive experiences where they can

visualize themselves in a different reality than the one that they are currently in, something that gives them something to wish for. I saw the part of “Mayor for a Day,” how great would it be if a foster care could come and be the Mayor for a day and see themselves in a position different completely than anything they’ve ever known, and possibly reinvent what they could be. It’s a race against time really. When you think about it, an adult is already set in their way, but up to the age of 6, from what I know being a teacher, anything is possible with a child, and you give them that foundation, they could imagine themselves into anything they want to be. Any investment whether it’s time, money, or resources, can make the difference between a child that can grow up and come back and give back to their community or a child who will end up begging for change at a red light, like we see all over this City. So, I thank you very much for your time. That’s all I have to say for now. If there is any information you would like, this is our website, www.beavoice.org If you have any questions I’ll be happy to answer them now.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: I served on the Board of Charlee Homes for Children for a long time until the organization dissolved, but these are really truly children in need and it goes to the same issue of children with disabilities, we need to think of all children as our children.

Ms. Chirino: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you. Thank you very much for the presentation, appreciate it.

Ms. Chirino: And congratulations, thank you for your service.

Mayor Cason: Thank you, appreciate it.

City Attorney Leen: Mayor, Commissioner Keon suggested to me and I think it’s a good idea. The County Attorney’s office, a number of them serve as Guardian ad Litem; I used to actually serve as an Attorney ad Litem for Voices for Children. I was thinking of doing a pro-bono program with my office where maybe we could do that. She just suggested it, so I think I will look into that.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you. I think there are other things we can do too. We have resources, recreational resources and things in the City for children that are living here in the City of Coral Gables in foster care that maybe we can make available to them, but we’ll talk with

the City Manager and see what type of things we can do. Would we go through our kids or will we go through Voices for Children?

Ms. Chirino: Through Voices for Children. I'll give you my card as I leave and contact me and we can basically, weave all their dreams, children that are in this City, I'd be happy to continue that conversation with you and see what we can do together.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Great. Thank you very much.

[End: 10:17:12 a.m.]