

Devereux

COMMUNITY BASED CARE OF OKEECHOBEE & THE TREASURE COAST

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News & Media

Couple gives voice to children without any

Port Saint Lucie – Fay and Bill Clark don't sweat the small stuff. But they know how important it can be.

Like the napkin they taught a little girl to use.

Or how to order in a restaurant.

How to have a picnic.

What to do at the beach. Or just getting there at all.

That's because the small stuff is often out of reach for children entering the dependency system.

"It's the things you don't realize kids don't know," said Mrs. Clark, a retiree from the Broward County School District who has been an advocate for children in the Circuit 19 Dependency Court System in Martin County for 10 years.

Mrs. Clark and her husband, a retired general contractor, are Guardian ad Litem volunteers. Guardians with the program are appointed by the dependency court to represent the best interests of children who have been abused, abandoned or neglected.

In their decade of service, the Clarks have invited children into their home, taught them how to cook a meal, taken them on their first picnics, introduced them to the beach, to the park and to the theater.

They've advocated for them in court, fought to keep them connected with siblings, and represented their interests in school.



The Clarks, pictured here in Norway, have volunteered in the Circuit 19 Guardian ad Litem Program for nearly a decade.

Most importantly, they've provided what is often the only constant presence in their lives.

"So many of our children don't have a positive adult support or role model in their lives," said Denise Natalizio-Waninger, Martin County Director for Devereux Community Based Care, the nonprofit organization that oversees child-welfare services in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties.

That was the case for one sibling group of five children, whose mother was deceased and whose father lived outside the country, Natalizio-Waninger said.

The Clarks became their constant.

They've been in their lives for 10 years, introducing them to new experiences and allowing them to "fail safely," Natalizio-Waninger said.

"They continue to support these kids even when they make the wrong decisions," she said.

For the Clarks, it's been a decade of affirmation.

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