



## INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

**Gator TeamChild** is based on a model of interdisciplinary representation:

- Children are referred for **Gator TeamChild** services by courts, guardians *ad litem*, school personnel, public defenders and prosecutors, state agency case workers, Children's Medical Services, and/or other agencies.
- Law students work in teams with graduate students in social work to determine the needs of each child client, assess strengths and weaknesses of the child and family, and then advocate for the provision of services.
- Student teams collaborate with other professionals in the community -- caseworkers, psychiatrists, physicians -- to access a broad range of services for child clients.
- The teams also prepare treatment and dispositional plans that address the needs of the child and the family.

## FUNDING

**Gator TeamChild** is funded by the Levin College of Law, a grant from the Jesse Ball duPont Fund, and from individual contributions from law alumni and friends. To help, contact Director Claudia Wright or send a tax-deductible gift to the address shown.

*Gator TeamChild is staffed by Claudia Wright, Director; Karen Keroach, MSW, social worker; and Judy Boyd, Administrative Assistant.*

*"Much to my surprise, I had multiple clients and hearings. Now that judges and attorneys recognize the quality of work done by the clinic, it appears there will never be a shortage of cases."*

**-Matthew Slingbaum**

**Gator TeamChild** Juvenile Law Clinic has operated since Fall 1998 as an integral part of the Virgil Hawkins Civil Clinic and the Center for Children and the Law at the University of Florida Levin College of Law. It is one of many innovative hands-on educational programs organized for benefit of students and the community.



## Gator TeamChild

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# UFLAW

## GATOR TEAMCHILD



Juvenile Law Clinic • Virgil Hawkins Civil Clinics

UFLaw's **Gator TeamChild** Juvenile Advocacy Clinic, founded in 1998, provides free legal service to indigent children and trains lawyers, social workers and other professionals in skills necessary to be advocates for children. Law students are certified by the Florida Supreme Court to practice law under supervision of faculty who are licenced attorneys. Students work in teams with graduate level, supervised social workers from various Florida universities.

**Gator TeamChild** students learn and practice fundamental advocacy skills, including interviewing, counseling and negotiation. They are trained to operate effectively in a law office setting. They learn to navigate bureaucracies, agencies and court systems.

By representing real clients with real problems, students sharpen their understanding of professional responsibility and learn to work effectively with professionals from all disciplines for the benefit of their juvenile clients. Students are exposed to and address the full range of issues confronting children and families.



*Gator TeamChild* Founding Director Claudia Wright, supervising attorney, oversees students representing juvenile clients in court.

## INNOVATIVE APPROACH

**Gator TeamChild** has a substantial, positive impact on the children it represents as well as on the law students who receive front-line education in advocacy, mediation, fundamental legal skills and values. The program operates from the core principle that adults can work together to create environments in which children can succeed. Lawyers and social workers together in specially trained teams can access benefits and services to improve the lives of their young clients. Law students using this team approach perform valuable service to their communities while gaining unique experience.

Children who are clients have encountered legal problems and issues ranging from delinquency and dependency to emancipation, guardianship, school suspension and expulsion, and Social Security and Medicaid issues. Children rarely are able to advocate effectively for themselves, their rights are often ignored, and the consequences can be devastating.

**Gator TeamChild** provides lawyers for children while developing a pool of trained and skilled attorneys to provide legal services to children in the future. The program, an integral part of the law school's Center for Children and the Law, provides:

- resources, research and training for lawyers throughout Florida who represent children and need support to carry out their advocacy, and
- clearinghouse for ideas, center for coordination and collaboration for professionals who work to improve children's lives.

*Student teams, made up of law and social work interns, collaborate to address the needs of children and their families.*



*Client-centered skills, such as interviewing and counseling, are the focus of **Gator TeamChild** program curriculum for law students.*

## CURRICULUM

The **Gator TeamChild** advocacy program is a two-semester, third-year elective. Participating law students must successfully complete a semester preparation course before certification, followed by a semester of representation and advocacy.

The preparation course combines a client-centered skills approach with in-depth classroom analysis of substantive juvenile law. Skills are taught through interviewing, counseling and negotiation sessions with child actors. Methods include extensive use of video during simulation exercises and classroom critique. Materials are updated regularly to familiarize students with current practices, policy and legal issues that affect their clients. Students are certified to practice under the Florida Student Practice Rule at the end of the preparation semester.

Participants meet and work with judges, lawyers, caseworkers, mediators, guardians *ad litem*, psychiatrists and psychologists, physicians and service providers involved in helping children. They also are eligible to participate in judicial externships with juvenile court judges.