

## LOCAL PEOPLE

# Lawyer is guardian, stands up for vulnerable children

Attorney Tamera Shanker has three kids of her own and an expanding list of those 5 to 17 years old who rely on her to champion their interests.

As a Maricopa County court-appointed guardian ad litem, Shanker serves as a legal voice for as many as 65 foster children at a time as they are shuffled through the state's foster care system.



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For the court, she is an extra pair of eyes and ears to peer into the troubled home lives of a delinquent child or abused toddler. At times, she has put her own life at risk to save a child.

"Once when I was pregnant with my 4-year-old son, I was court-ordered to visit the home of an 8-year-old delinquent who failed to show for his hearing," Shanker recounts. "When I arrived, I walked through an open door to the apartment and saw the mother incoherent and strung out on drugs. Lurking in



Tom Tingle/The Republic

"Foster children are not a voting constituency," attorney Tamera Shanker says, so she tries to be a voice for them.

the shadows was a man with bloodshot eyes glaring at me from the hallway. The 8-year-old wasn't in the apartment but an infant was sitting on the floor surrounded by debris, broken glass, carpet nails and other garbage. I told the mother I was taking the baby outside to find her brother. She offered no resistance and I quickly grabbed the baby, left the apartment and called the CPS (Child Protective Services) hotline."

She turned the baby and her

brother over to CPS.

In her 12 years of representing Arizona foster children, she has stood up to CPS and other branches of government to ensure a child's legal, medical, financial and educational needs are met.

"Foster children are not a voting constituency," she said. "Consequently, they don't have a voice in our society. Our most precious resource, children, are forever being dismissed or overlooked. Somebody must stand up for them."

## Tamera Shanker

**Age:** 44.

**Family:** Husband Howard and children Rachel, 16, Samara, 13, and Ethan, 4.

**Education:** Undergraduate degree from University of Southern California, 1984, law degree from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1994.

**Business:** Practices child advocate/adoption law for The Shanker Law Firm in Tempe. Her law partner and husband, Howard, focuses on environmental/natural resources law, community and tribal rights, and personal injury.

**Associations:** Shanker is executive director and scholarship chairwoman for the Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation, a member of the Arizona State Bar Juvenile Law, National Indian Child Welfare Association, National Association of Children's Counsel, American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. She authored *A Citizen's Guide to Fact Finding and Action in the Juvenile Justice System*.

**Words she lives by:** "If not me, then who?" and "Lest we be judged by how we treated the most vulnerable of society."

Separating children from families who endanger them is a grim but essential facet of her job. As an adoption attorney, however, Shanker also has the joy of creating new families between foster children and their adoptive parents.

One former foster child,

whom Shanker represented, found the lawyer also makes a good employer. Shanker hired her as an assistant for The Shanker Law Firm in Tempe.

Local People appears Tuesdays on this page. Contact freelance writer Susanne Tso at [sctso@fastq.com](mailto:sctso@fastq.com).