

Who will speak for me?®

Center for Children's Advocacy · Annual Report 2010





Dear Friend,


2010 proved to be both a challenging and rewarding year for the Center for Children's Advocacy. We continued to face the problems posed by an economically weak environment, while remaining steadfast in our commitment to the critical needs of Connecticut's poorest children.

The cost savings efforts we made within the organization in 2009, along with your generous support for our work, enabled us to maintain existing programs in Hartford, Bridgeport, Stamford and other towns throughout the state. In addition, our legal trainings and systemic and legislative advocacy benefitted thousands of poor and vulnerable children throughout the state.

Some of our most recent accomplishments include:

- CCA provided individual and ongoing legal representation to over 500 children, improving their health and educational access and stabilizing their placements and living arrangements.
- CCA wrote and led an effort to pass groundbreaking new legislation that ensures that abused and neglected children who are removed from their homes by DCF and placed in foster care in another town can still attend their hometown schools. The new law, the Education Stability Act, helps abused and neglected children maintain educational stability and maintain the critical ties with teachers, counsellors, mentors and friends that are often the only constants in their lives. This new law is one of the most comprehensive education entitlement acts in the country and places Connecticut in the forefront of the movement to provide educational stability for youth in foster care.
- CCA wrote and advocated for the "Homeless Youth Act," new legislation which requires DCF to increase its oversight of services provided to homeless youth, extends the responsibilities of contracted providers to this population, and requires state agencies to collect data to identify homeless youth. CCA's efforts to educate the legislature about the incidence of youth homelessness and current systemic failures to meet the needs of these youth resulted in a legislative appropriation of \$1,000,000 to fund these efforts.
- CCA, with partners, filed an administrative class action complaint with the State Department of Education against Hartford's special education program at Main Street Academy. Based on its investigation of the findings in CCA's complaint, the SDE ordered that Hartford close the school and relocate and redesign the program to comply with state and federal law.

You have been our steadfast partners and have helped to make a difference in the lives of thousands of Connecticut's neediest children. With your support, we have continued to give the most vulnerable children a voice, and with them, we say "Thank You!"


Martha Stone
Executive Director


Mario Borelli
Board Chair



Center for Children's Advocacy

Improving the lives of Connecticut's most vulnerable children.

Our legal advocacy impacts thousands of children . . .

Medical Legal Advocacy **Medical-Legal Partnership Project**

CCA secured critical support for families whose medically-fragile children need full time care.

Teen Legal Rights **Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic**

CCA attorneys helped teens in group homes and shelters understand their legal rights and how to access services that provide support.

Tuancy Prevention **Tuancy Court Prevention Project**

CCA's truancy prevention work with students and their families secured services to resolve issues that keep children from attending school.

Education **TeamChild Project**

CCA filed two complaints against Hartford Public Schools' special education program to secure academic and behavioral supports required by law for special education students.

Abuse and Neglect **Child Abuse Project**

CCA's work with older teens led to systemic efforts to ensure continuing oversight for vulnerable youth who will age out of the foster care system.

Immigrants and Refugees **New Arrivals Advocacy Project**

CCA staff worked with immigrant and refugee families to help them access adequate healthcare and provided guidance on preparation for school and enrollment procedures.

Juvenile Justice **Girls' Juvenile Justice Project**

CCA's ongoing efforts led to the establishment of family support centers throughout the state to keep youth from involvement with the detention system.

Attorney Training **KidsCounsel Training Program**

CCA staff continued trainings for Connecticut's child welfare attorneys to ensure informed representation of abused and neglected children.

Legislative Efforts

CCA wrote and secured passage of new laws to provide educational stability for foster children and to require emergency shelter and support services for homeless youth.



Our legal intervention has made a difference for the most vulnerable children . . .

One morning, when Ephraim was eight years old, his mother put on her coat, lifted a bag filled with laundry, and told Ephraim to stay in the apartment ... she'd be back in a few minutes. When she didn't return in half an hour, Ephraim was worried. When an hour had passed, he was scared. By afternoon, he was crying as he knocked on neighbors' doors to see if anyone knew where his mother had gone.

A concerned neighbor took Ephraim inside. Together, they wrote a note and left it on Ephraim's apartment door so his mother would know where to find him. By eight o'clock that night, without any word from Ephraim's mother, the neighbor called police to report that she was missing. The police called the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Ephraim was placed in a SAFE home – a group shelter – while DCF looked for an appropriate foster home to care for him. Ephraim, who has significant mental health needs, was not an easy child to care for. At age nine, he was placed in a therapeutic foster home, and over the next five years Ephraim lived in a series of seven different foster placements. At age 14, DCF brought Ephraim to a hospital for psychiatric evaluation.

Ephraim lived in institutions for most of his teenage years. On his eighteenth birthday, Ephraim had “aged out” of DCF care. He was discharged to the community and struggled in a transitional placement. He was forced to move twice in the next few months, each time struggling to conform to the expectations of community life. Finally, when yet another transitional placement could not handle Ephraim's complex mental health needs, he was taken to a psychiatric hospital to be evaluated for admission. When he did not meet the criteria for involuntary admission, Ephraim was dropped off at a city homeless shelter.

The Center for Children's Advocacy became involved with Ephraim with a call received from the homeless shelter. We intervened on Ephraim's behalf and worked with DCF to find an appropriate placement for him instead of the homeless shelter. Our legal advocacy encouraged DCF to help Ephraim enroll in a vocational education program in a therapeutic environment.

With our legal help, Ephraim is making progress. He is working hard to earn his high school diploma, and is living in a DCF-supported apartment in the city. Ephraim's CCA attorney is in touch with him often to be sure that he is safe and receiving the support services he needs.

Ephraim's challenges are not unusual. Individual cases inform systemic advocacy and Ephraim's involvement with DCF highlights two critical issues that we continue to address.

Child development experts are virtually unanimous in their opinion that congregate care settings, such as SAFE homes, are not appropriate placements for very young children. We successfully advocated to have DCF withdraw proposed plans for a new SAFE home for young children, and achieved legislative backing for proposed law to prohibit these placements.

There are many teens aging out of DCF care with no place to go and no skills to depend upon. We continue to advocate for legislative initiatives that encourage continued support for this vulnerable population, providing vocational education and community support services as youth learn to live on their own. The Center's amicus brief submitted to Federal Court in the class action case of *Juan F.* stresses the necessity of continued federal oversight of DCF and the importance of careful attention as youth transition out of DCF care.



Arthur, born with spina bifida occulta, is a frequent visitor to the emergency room. Early surgical intervention resulted in the discovery of additional complex congenital abnormalities, referred to medically as VATER syndrome. Now thirteen years old, Arthur suffers constantly from shunt infections related to hydrocephalus, serious kidney and bowel dysfunction, and - most recently - a most painful and depressing awareness of how different he is from other 13 year old children.

Arthur's mother, Ana, has lovingly cared for him since his birth. She is terrified by his escalating depression and frequent threats of suicide. Recent dangerous behaviors, including precarious proximity to open upper floor windows and a fascination with knives and fire, have made Ana aware that she must not leave Arthur alone at any point in the day.

Despite Arthur's complex medical diagnosis, the family's application for children's disability was denied by the Social Security Administration. A social worker at Connecticut Children's Medical Center sought the help of an attorney from CCA's on-site Medical-Legal Partnership Project office. A hearing was scheduled to review Arthur's case, and the Center began the arduous process of assembling thirteen years of complicated medical history.

Preparation for the hearing was daunting. Social Security would examine Arthur's medical diagnosis as well as the factors in his life that impact the family and Arthur's daily functioning. CCA assembled medical records from primary care, neurosurgery, surgery, nephrology, gastroenterology and ENT providers. Mental health history and educational records were reviewed and analyzed. And the impact of the hearing on Arthur and his mother had to be considered: Social Security requires claimants, even children, to testify at their hearings.

Because of Arthur's sensitivity and depression, the Center advocated to allow Arthur's mother to testify on his behalf. The judge granted this request and Ana testified with grace and dignity about each of Arthur's painful medical conditions. Her tears began to flow as she described her concern over his mental health.

The judge agreed with CCA's legal position and ruled Arthur eligible for disability, enabling the family to continue the constant supervision and support Arthur needs each day. His condition continues to be fragile, but Arthur has many things on his side - a strong and loving mother, a talented medical team, and the commitment of the Center's Medical-Legal Partnership Project legal staff.

Arthur's problems are not unique. Many families face inappropriate denials of their social security disability claims. In the past year, our Medical-Legal Partnership Project has been successful in many other appeals, helping to procure the benefits families need to be secure in their housing and have access to food and basic needs.

Arthur's medical problems are ongoing and his condition is fragile. CCA continues to support Arthur and Ana in the overwhelming challenges they face.



Our legal work is recognized throughout Connecticut . . .

State Orders City To Overhaul, Move Transitional Learning Academy

HARTFORD COURANT
Steven Goode, June 3, 2010

An investigation by the State Department of Education has found that the city school system failed to provide an adequate education to 70 students with emotional problems and learning disabilities, and that the program should be shut down and reconstituted elsewhere. The investigation was conducted by the Bureau of Special Education as a result of a complaint filed in January by attorneys acting on behalf of students enrolled in the Hartford Transitional Learning Academy at 2550 Main St. . . (Hannah) **Benton, of the Center for Children's Advocacy, said Wednesday that the investigators' findings "will help these most vulnerable kids . . ."**

A Day After Mismanagement Charges, DCF Seeks End of Court Oversight

CT MIRROR
Mark Pazniokas, April 14, 2010

Accused of gross mismanagement one day, the state Department of Children and Families responded the next by asking a judge to end 18 years of court oversight . . . **"The timing is nothing short of astonishing," said Sarah Eagan, who has closely followed the case as the director of the Center for Children's Advocacy's Child Abuse Project in Hartford.** The number of children placed in institutions actually has increased . . . DCF still keeps more than 230 children age 12 and younger in temporary facilities, group homes and institutions. "For little kids, institutions are not appropriate," Eagan said.

Supporters Say Kids are Better Served by Traditional High Schools with Extra Supports

WNPR, Connecticut Public Radio
Diane Orson, March 8, 2010

Advocates for children joined students at the Capitol on Monday to talk about new proposals aimed at keeping teenagers in high school and out of adult education. **More and more under achieving students are being urged to leave traditional high schools and enter adult education says Josh Michtom, staff attorney for the Center for Children's Advocacy.** He says struggling kids who end up in adult ed rarely succeed. He'd like the practice stopped, except in extraordinary circumstances.

'At Night' Classes for Troubled Bridgeport Students Shut Down

CT POST, Bridgeport
John Burgeson, January 24, 2010

For several years, local high schools have had a so-called "At Night" program for students with poor attendance and behavioral problems. Now, these after-school classes will essentially be shut down beginning Monday after complaints about their apparent illegality, as well as lack of academic standards. **The Center for Children's Advocacy investigated At Night after concerns were prompted by teen clients in the program,** according to a statement issued Thursday by CCA. The agency contends the program was not meeting state academic requirements for high school instruction, and it also said that problem students were being shifted to At Night without due process. . . . "Most of the students referred to these programs did not believe they had any choice in the matter," said CCA lawyer Josh Michtom, "and they didn't know that they were not receiving the education they are entitled to by law."

Rethink Dangerous Utility Shutoffs

HARTFORD COURANT
Helen Ubiñas, April 25, 2010

. . . During a February hearing to discuss a bill that would prevent turning utilities off in households with children younger than 2, attorney **Bonnie Roswig of the Center for Children's Advocacy described the huge health risk for children who are denied this protection.** A 2008 pediatric study found that young children who live in households without heat and hot water have higher rates of medical and nutritional issues, including respiratory illness and developmental delays. There's a name for this: It's called the "heat or eat phenomenon," where families . . . have to make difficult decisions . . .

Sun to Shine on State's Juvenile Proceedings through Pilot Program

THE DAY, New London
Karen Florin, February 4, 2010

. . . Juvenile court proceedings . . . will be open to the public under a new pilot program in Middletown. Attorney Sarah Eagan, director for the Center for Children's Advocacy Child Abuse Project, said more than 20 states have opened juvenile proceedings and none have reversed their decision. "What goes on in the child-protection system is extremely important and extremely unknowable, not just to the public, but to stakeholders and a lot of people who are about kids and families," **Eagan said. "We are dealing with some of the most vulnerable children and families in the community. Opening the courts will give us a better sense of what's working and not working."** An advisory board made up of judicial officials, attorneys, social workers, representatives from DCF and child-advocacy groups . . . "worked hard to balance the access rights of the public and accountability of government with the rights of the children who are in Juvenile Court - not of their own volition, but because of the actions of the adults in their lives."



Our legal advocacy has helped children and youth throughout the state . . .

through legislation . . .

Homeless Youth Act Passed

CCA wrote and advocated for new legislation which requires DCF to coordinate services for homeless youth and contract with providers for outreach, emergency shelter and transitional living services. The Connecticut Legislature appropriated \$1,000,000 to fund the new Act.

Education Stability Act Passed

CCA led an effort to pass groundbreaking legislation that ensures that abused and neglected children who are removed from their homes by DCF and placed in another town can remain in their home schools. The Education Stability Act helps foster children maintain stability and critical ties with teachers, counselors, mentors and friends. This is one of the most comprehensive education entitlement acts in the country and places Connecticut in the forefront of the movement to provide educational stability for youth in foster care.

through systemic litigation . . .

CCA represented students at Hartford Public Schools' 2550 Main Street Academy, the city's school for middle school and high school students with special education needs. After lengthy observation, CCA's education consultant and attorneys concluded that Hartford students were being denied the appropriate education they are entitled to by law. **CCA filed a class administrative complaint with the State Department of Education (SDE)** in January 2010. SDE shut down the facility and instructed Hartford to redesign and relocate the special education program.

through administrative advocacy . . .

CCA's collaboration reduced the numbers of children in SAFE Homes – congregate care emergency shelters for abused and neglected children in the care of DCF. Clinical research of congregate care settings for children shows that these settings are inappropriate and produce poor outcomes for children. When DCF issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) stating its intention to fund SAFE homes for children under six, CCA was among those who wrote to the Commissioner of DCF advocating against these homes. DCF rescinded the RFP.

through task force leadership . . .

CCA **co-chaired the Connecticut Legislature's Families with Service Needs (FWSN) Advisory Board** until the Board's tenure ended in June. CCA submitted testimony to support creation of three additional Family Support Centers and expanded services to FWSN youth in six Juvenile Risk Reduction Centers. In March, 2010, The Justice Research Center of Florida published an evaluation of the new FWSN system that found that **"substantive system changes have occurred in Connecticut that have improved outcomes"** for status offenders. Connecticut's FWSN Reform was "accepted as a Best Practice" by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for their Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders initiative.

CCA continued to **co-chair the Juvenile Access Pilot Program Advisory Board**, created after passage of CCA-driven legislation that opens the juvenile courts to the public. The new legislation went into effect February 17, 2010, and the Advisory Board is overseeing a pilot program that allows members of the public and the press to attend previously closed proceedings. CCA held a statewide forum to educate attorneys, child protection staff and court personnel about the pilot project and the purpose of the Open Courts legislation.

through education and training . . .

CCA's KidsCounsel Project **improves the quality of legal representation of vulnerable children** by court-appointed attorneys. Educational resources include multi-disciplinary trainings held in Hartford, Bridgeport and Stamford that offer expert discussion of substantive and procedural aspects of juvenile law practice; KidsCounsel newsletters with articles on legal issues, case law updates, and practical advice for attorneys; ListServ; website (www.kids-counsel.org); state-mandated pre-service trainings for new attorneys who represent children and families in child protection cases; and a mentoring program for inexperienced child protection attorneys.

KidsCounsel's **community education programs provided training and materials to medical, education and child welfare professionals and parents** about the legal rights of children, including sessions for health care practitioners; residency training programs; Juvenile Probation Officers; and training for parents of special needs children.

Legal right trainings for youth were held at shelters and group homes throughout the state to **help youth become good advocates for themselves. Accessing support services is key to the education, health and future** of Connecticut's most vulnerable children.

New publications, including the fourth edition of *Adolescent Health Care: Legal Rights of Teens*, are available at www.kidscounsel.org/publications.

CCA contributed a chapter entitled **"Accessing Intervention Services for Status Offenders and Avoiding Deeper Involvement in the Court System"** for the American Bar Association publication *Representing Juvenile Status Offenders*.

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Tammy Gildea
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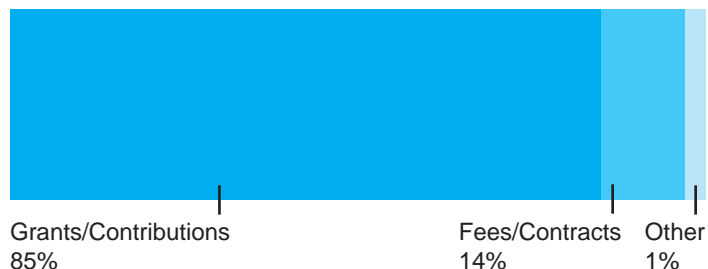
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July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010

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 Tracy Welling
 Marilyn Werner
 Patricia & Thomas White
 Dr. Felicia Wilion & Jay Frankel
 Alexis Williams
 Lee Williamson
 Jessica Wolf
 Catherine Zeiner

Income

Grants/Contributions	1,201,719
Fees/Contracts	195,728
Other	12,064
Total	1,409,511



Expense

Programs/Services	1,190,102
Office/Administrative	117,720
Total	1,307,822





Center for Children's Advocacy

Improving the Lives of Connecticut's Most Vulnerable Children

www.kidscounsel.org

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860-570-5327

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Ann Tremont
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Center for Children's Advocacy's first fundraiser, held April 29, 2010, was a great success. Supporters filled Barca Restaurant on Park Street, Hartford, gathering for the presentation of CCA's 2010 Champion of Children Awards to professionals whose tireless work improves the lives of the most vulnerable children in the state. Additional photos, including a moving presentation by some of the Center's clients, can be viewed on our website at www.kidscounsel.org/2010fundraiser.pdf.