



Leon Smith, Director of the Center's Racial Justice Project, Offers Solution to Improve Police-Community Relations

Leon Smith, Hartford Courant Op-Ed, July 27, 2016

As the nation takes a hard look at racial profiling and use of force by police, we must focus on how often these issues impact our young people.

It is well documented that negative encounters with law enforcement - even those that seem not to have immediate consequences - do real harm to youths. I've had these experiences and, as a criminal defense attorney in the juvenile and adult systems over the past 15 years, I've worked with hundreds of young people for whom these encounters are a regular, unfortunate reality.

Connecticut took a significant step 17 years ago with the Alvin W. Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act, which requires the collection of data and bans racial profiling in traffic stops . . .

Connecticut should extend the Penn Act to collect data on **all** law enforcement encounters with citizens.

[Read Hartford Courant Op-Ed](#)

CCA Racial Justice Project Tackles Discrimination

The Center's [Racial Justice Project](#) tackles issues of justice for children of all races and backgrounds. Our work includes individual cases, systems reform, seminars and workshops.

Our legal advocacy for individual children empowers youth to speak out and advocate for themselves. We propose systemic and policy changes at city and state levels, and bring local and national experts together with our annual seminar series.

Our [Youth-Law Enforcement Workshops](#) help law enforcement understand adolescent development, traumatic stress reactions and the experiences of youth of color in interactions with officers. Day-long training workshops with youth and officers have been held in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. These sessions, supported in part by the Judicial Department's Court Support Services Division, help officers and youth learn to defuse interactions that could escalate into arrest.



Speakers from the Center's recent seminar, "Confronting and Countering Implicit Bias," included state and national experts. Watch the recording and presentations [here](#). The Center's next seminar/webinar on these important topics will be announced soon.

Center Wins Grant to Help Youth with Criminal Records Successfully Return to the Community

According to the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, one in three youth between 16-24 years old has no high school diploma, is not in school, is unemployed, and faces hurdles such as homelessness, food insecurity, domestic violence, mental and physical health problems and incarceration or a criminal record.

The Center's new Juvenile Reentry Assistance Program (JRAP) is working in partnership with the Housing Authority of the City of Hartford to remove barriers created by a criminal record or the consequences of that record. These can include access to education, employment, housing and other important activities. Target youth are 24 or younger and live in the North Hartford Promise Zone, comprised of the Clay Arsenal, Northeast and Upper Albany neighborhoods.

Our JRAP can help with:

- Expunging, sealing, and/or correcting juvenile or adult criminal records
- Reinstating revoked or suspended driver's license
- Legal rights and obligations in searching for employment
- Guidance for readmission to school

The JRAP is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

For more information or to refer a youth in need of assistance, email [Stacey Violante Cote](mailto:Stacey.Violante.Cote), director of the Center's Teen Legal Advocacy Project.



CCA Holding Raffle Fundraiser - Raffle Tickets Just \$10 Each!

**1st Prize: 2 Tickets for Yankees v. Red Sox with Roundtrip Limo!
Yankee Stadium, Thurs, Sep 29 at 7:05 pm**

[Email to get tickets!](#)

Victory for Our Clients and Many More State to Issue RFP for Medicaid Transportation

Center for Children's Advocacy attorney Bonnie Roswig was instrumental in submitting legislation to address the concerns of our clients and the medical and advocacy communities regarding medical transportation for Medicaid patients. The state's current vendor, LogistiCare, consistently failed to meet standards outlined in their contract.

Unanimously passed by the legislature, the bill directed the Department of Social Services (DSS) to issue an RFP with stronger performance standards and meaningful sanctions for noncompliance.

Governor Malloy vetoed the bill but ordered DSS to prepare an RFP. The legislature overrode the Governor's veto to ensure that Medicaid patients will have reliable transportation.



Center's **Speak Up** Group for Low-Level Juvenile Offenders Empowers Girls to Meet and Advocate with Superintendent of Hartford Schools

The Center's Speak Up project works with girls involved in the justice system to educate them about their legal rights and teach them how to advocate for themselves to address critical issues that interfere with education and academic achievement, health and mental health concerns, living situations and future opportunities for success.

Past Speak Up programs have worked with girls living in residential treatment and hospital settings to help improve issues such as discharge planning, AWOL (running away from foster care), and youth voice in the DCF system.

In recent months, Kathryn Meyer, director of the Center's Speak Up initiatives, and facilitator Christina Cicero met weekly with a group of girls at The Village for Families and Children. This program involved girls who were participants in the state's Juvenile Review Board, a diversion program for low-level juvenile delinquency or status offenders (youth who are truant or run away from home). They did not live in residential programs, and this provided a unique opportunity to develop ways school and community could support this population.

The girls built advocacy skills by identifying their strengths, learning their legal rights and how to problem-solve and create an action plan. They shared their challenges each week: one was bullied and got into fights, one needed support for emotional issues, one was angry at the racist climate at school. They shared collective dissatisfaction with the way girls like them experience school - academically, socially and emotionally.

As the sessions went on and advocacy skills were built, the girls began to share successes: I stood up for myself!
I advocated for help and it worked!

The group's focus on school climate resulted in a list of recommendations:

- require schools to implement restorative justice practices instead of suspension
- require staff to undergo trauma-informed training and know how to work with students to de-escalate a situation
- implement after school gender-specific strengths-based groups to support students and improve school climate



Great Outcome!

Attorney Meyer arranged for the girls to meet with Hartford Schools Superintendent Narvaez and Chief Academic Officer Kate England. The girls shared stories and presented creative solutions.

"We didn't just want to complain, we wanted to offer suggestions," said one of the girls. Superintendent Narvaez and Ms. England were impressed and have promised to look into the girls' recommendations.

For more information, [email Kathryn Meyer](#), director of the Center's Speak Up initiatives.



On June 21, 2016, RYASAP honored CCA's Bridgeport office with an Above and Beyond Award for their work on behalf of youth in the Bridgeport area. Left to right: CCA attorneys Edwin Colon, Kathryn Meyer, and Leon Smith; RYASAP CEO Bob Francis.

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Help Connecticut's most vulnerable children and youth.

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