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Who will speak for me?®

Center for **Children's** Advocacy . Annual Report 2016



Life's most persistent  
and urgent question is  
'What are you doing  
for others?'

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Laser  
focus  
on  
**racial  
justice**

## Juvenile Justice Victories for at-risk youth

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.  
Martin Luther King, Jr.

### **Reformed Policies that Perpetuate Discrimination**

The Center for Children's Advocacy co-chairs Connecticut's Disproportionate Minority Contact committees to reform policies and practices that result in youth of color being treated more harshly by the juvenile justice system. Reforms in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury reduced suspensions and school-based arrests, reduced disparities in the time youth wait in detention for residential treatment, and reduced court referrals by handling minor behavior problems outside of court.

### **Created Restorative Justice Program to Prevent Re-Arrest**

The Center's Deep End Diversion project uses principles of restorative justice to reduce arrests in Connecticut's juvenile justice facilities. From 120 applications, Open Society Foundations awarded this project grant to the Center for Children's Advocacy, one of only four state-based organizations chosen.


Arrest is counter to the rehabilitative mandate of juvenile justice facilities, and behaviors that lead to arrest often stem from mental health problems. This year, Deep End Diversion focused on infusing restorative justice into the practices and procedures at Connecticut Juvenile Training School and Waterford Country School.

### **Reduced Stereotypes to Divert Juvenile Justice Involvement**

In Hartford and Bridgeport, the Center brought city police together with students involved with probation or parole to learn about trauma, mental health, adolescent development and decision making. Police-Youth trainings emphasized the importance of perspective and respect. Understanding is key to reduce bias and avoid escalated conflict and arrest.

### **Initiated Joint Project to Help Community Reintegration**

Future success for youth who have been involved with Connecticut's juvenile justice system depends on stability, housing, education and employment. The Center partnered with the Housing Authority of the City of Hartford to provide legal support that helps youth overcome obstacles and get back into school, get a certificate of employability, recover their driver's license, and more.



Marta was profoundly neglected by her drug-addicted mother.

When DCF stepped in, they removed Marta from her home and placed her in a congregate care facility.

Marta was frightened, anxious and depressed. She could not understand why she was there and there was no one she knew.

An attorney from the Center for Children's Advocacy pressed to have Marta moved to relative foster care. When DCF refused, we brought Marta's case to court and won. Marta was placed with her aunt.

Marta's emotional outlook improved immediately.

We worked with DCF and the school to address Marta's medical and educational needs. She was evaluated for special education support.

Behavioral healthcare helped address her fear and anxiety. With the help of a therapist, Marta began to feel safe.

The Center's legal representation helped secure a supportive future for this vibrant, vulnerable, resilient girl.

Systemic  
spotlight  
on  
**educational  
equity**

## Education Victories for vulnerable children

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Special Education for Children with Disabilities

The Center won a second complaint against Bridgeport Public Schools to rectify failure to identify and support students with disabilities. Special education must meet the needs of the individual student, foster academic progress, future success and self reliance. In response to the Center's complaint, the State Department of Education Bureau of Special Education issued specific corrective actions that Bridgeport must meet.

### Appropriate Education for Expelled Students

The Center for Children's Advocacy worked with the National Center for Youth Law and the global law firm K&L Gates to sue Connecticut officials over expulsion policies. Expelled students are offered substandard alternative education that disproportionately impacts youth of color and violates equal protection guarantees of the state and U.S. constitutions. Alicia B. names Bloomfield, Hartford and Manchester public school districts, the state Department of Education and state Board of Education. Settlement agreements have been reached with some of the defendants and negotiations continue with those remaining.

### Special Education at Alternative School Programs

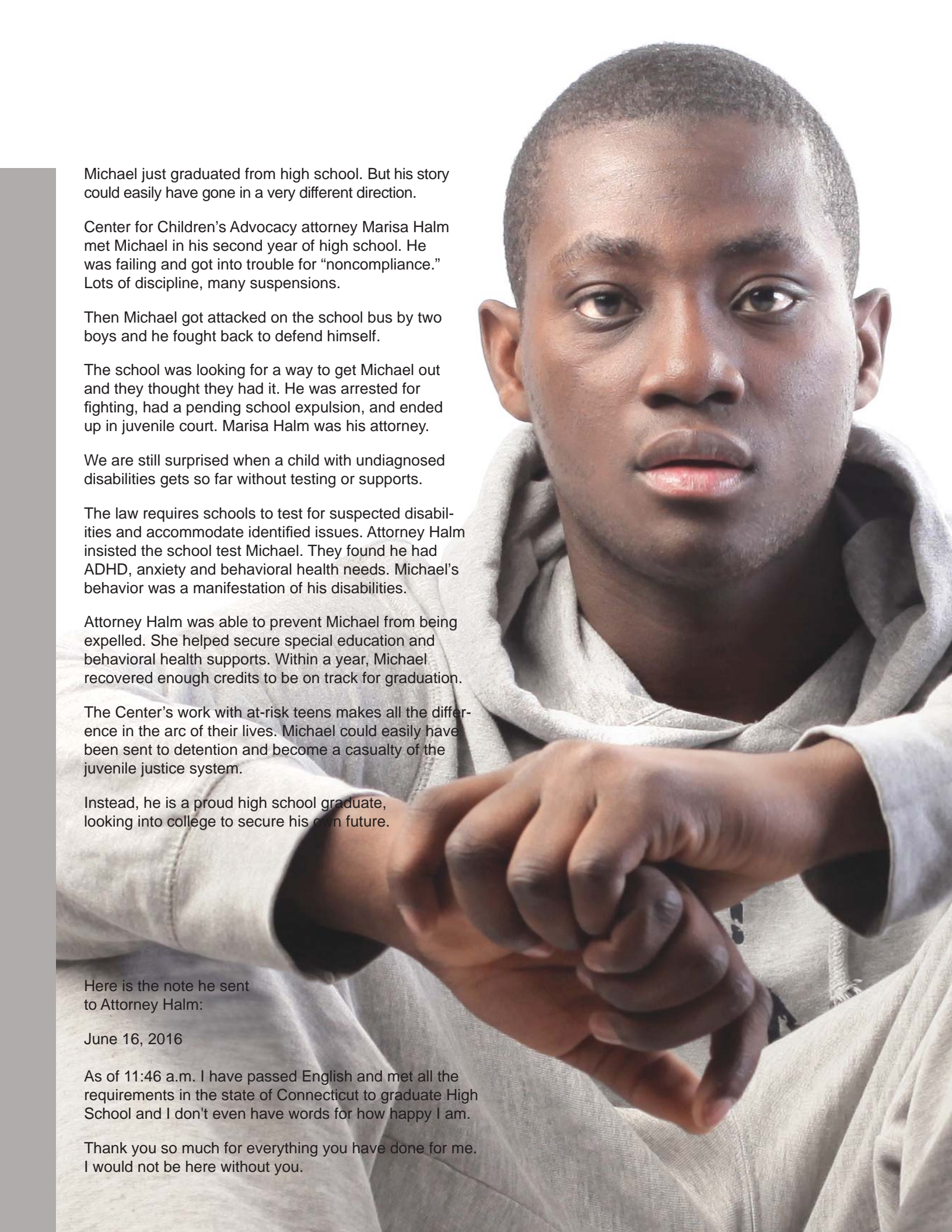
The Center for Children's Advocacy and Greater Hartford Legal Aid won a complaint against Hartford Public Schools for systematically and pervasively denying expelled special education students their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The State Department of Education directed the district to stop placing expelled students who receive special education at the New Visions program and develop and implement a plan for appropriate alternative education.

### Educational Equality and Reduced Isolation

Filed in 1989, Sheff v. O'Neill is a landmark civil rights lawsuit that seeks educational equality. The plaintiffs, led by attorneys including Center for Children's Advocacy executive director Martha Stone, continue to advocate for the State of Connecticut to uphold the constitutional rights of children to an equal educational opportunity. The Stipulation and Order issued by Hartford Superior Court requires forty seven percent of Hartford students to be in a reduced-isolation setting.

### Admission to Tech Schools for Students with Disabilities

The Center for Children's Advocacy and Greater Hartford Legal Aid filed a complaint against the Connecticut Technical High School System alleging that admissions policies are applied in ways that discriminate against and exclude students with disabilities. This is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.



Michael just graduated from high school. But his story could easily have gone in a very different direction.

Center for Children's Advocacy attorney Marisa Halm met Michael in his second year of high school. He was failing and got into trouble for "noncompliance." Lots of discipline, many suspensions.

Then Michael got attacked on the school bus by two boys and he fought back to defend himself.

The school was looking for a way to get Michael out and they thought they had it. He was arrested for fighting, had a pending school expulsion, and ended up in juvenile court. Marisa Halm was his attorney.

We are still surprised when a child with undiagnosed disabilities gets so far without testing or supports.

The law requires schools to test for suspected disabilities and accommodate identified issues. Attorney Halm insisted the school test Michael. They found he had ADHD, anxiety and behavioral health needs. Michael's behavior was a manifestation of his disabilities.

Attorney Halm was able to prevent Michael from being expelled. She helped secure special education and behavioral health supports. Within a year, Michael recovered enough credits to be on track for graduation.

The Center's work with at-risk teens makes all the difference in the arc of their lives. Michael could easily have been sent to detention and become a casualty of the juvenile justice system.

Instead, he is a proud high school graduate, looking into college to secure his own future.

Here is the note he sent to Attorney Halm:

June 16, 2016

As of 11:46 a.m. I have passed English and met all the requirements in the state of Connecticut to graduate High School and I don't even have words for how happy I am.

Thank you so much for everything you have done for me. I would not be here without you.

Protection  
against  
**blatant  
discrimination**

## Legislative and Administrative Victories

The Center's legislative and administrative efforts resulted in overwhelming victories for the most vulnerable children and youth in the state.

### Juvenile Justice Education

Public Act 16-147 implements the educational recommendations of the state's Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee, enhancing educational supports for juvenile justice youth.

### Child Abuse Foster Care and Congregate Care

Public Act 16-123 ensures that the voices of youth in DCF care are heard. The new law requires youth advisory councils at congregate care facilities, and requires the Department of Children and Families to give youth information on foster families and solicit feedback on care.

### Child Abuse Sexual and Physical Abuse

Public Act 16-188 requires public schools to post DCF Careline information in a conspicuous location and appropriate languages. This law helps children suffering from sexual and physical abuse by providing clear information on who to call.

### Medical-Legal Partnership Non Emergency Medical Transportation

Special Act 16-8 addresses non-emergency medical transportation for Medicaid recipients. The state's vendor, LogistiCare, consistently failed to meet performance standards. This law ensures that patients receive transportation that fulfills their medical needs.

In addition to this legislative victory, the Center won a complaint against the Connecticut Department of Social Services and LogistiCare for violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act that jeopardize the health and well-being of children who need non-emergency medical transportation. Although the contract requires that medical needs determine appropriate transportation, DSS and LogistiCare routinely failed to provide appropriate services, leaving patients without adequate transportation.

### Medical-Legal Partnership Mental Health Screenings

Mental health screenings, early identification, and timely provision of services are critical to children's well being. The Center's Medical-Legal Partnership continued work with the Department of Social Services and coalition partners to ensure that children insured by Medicaid/HUSKY undergo annual behavioral health screens. We continue to review data to monitor compliance.



Sofia lives in Norwalk. Her difficulties at school, which include ADHD, speech and language problems, are documented back to second grade.

With no evidence of services or special education supports, Sofia was promoted year after year. High school was a nightmare. Sofia was so frustrated with her inability to learn that she wandered the halls most days and eventually became truant.

Sofia was giving up. No one at the school was interested enough to find out what was wrong. She thought of herself as a failure.

School administrators tried to push Sofia out of the public high school and into an alternative program that certainly could not meet her special education needs.

When Center for Children's Advocacy attorney Leon Smith met with Sofia, her parents, and school staff, Sofia was so frustrated and ashamed that she cried.

Attorney Smith advocated for Sofia and encouraged the school to enroll her in a program that could meet her needs.

Sofia had a successful term in summer school and is excited to have found that she can learn and succeed.



## Reach and Impact improve legal advocacy

Increased  
scale  
and  
scope

### New Webinar Series Expanded Impact

The Center is small, but our arms are long. Our impact grows each year.

Our new webinar series reached greater numbers of professionals working with the most vulnerable children and youth. Topics included:

**Confronting and Countering Implicit Bias:** National and Connecticut experts discussed the impact of implicit bias in education, school-based arrests, and police-youth interactions.

**Help for Undocumented and Refugee Children:** Connecticut expert and CCA attorney Edwin Colon presented strategies for children's safety, access to education, healthcare and mental health services.

**Supporting Transgender Students in School:** The Center arranged a webinar with California attorney Asaf Orr on safeguarding the rights of transgender youth.

**Autism - Research, Diagnosis, Intervention, Services:** Dr. Fred Volkmar, Director, Autism Program at Yale University Child Study Center, presented with medical experts and leaders of community organizations.

**Suspension and Expulsion - Schools' Responsibilities:** The Center was instrumental in writing and securing passage of state law that bans out-of-school suspension for very young children. A panel of experts discussed the impact on schools, children and families.

### Prestigious Awards

Center attorneys were recognized for outstanding legal advocacy:

Zoe Stout  
CT Law Tribune  
2016 New Leader in the Law

Kathryn Meyer  
Fairfield County Business Journal  
40 Under 40 Award

Martha Stone  
CREC  
Community Partner Award

Stacey Violante Cote  
Women and Families Center  
Women in Leadership Award

Leon Smith, Edwin Colon,  
and Kathryn Meyer  
RYASAP Above and Beyond Award

Martha Stone  
UConn Law School  
Distinguished Service Award

Kathryn Meyer  
CT Law Tribune  
2015 New Leader in the Law

### Expansive Press Coverage

Broad state and national media coverage reflects the Center's growing impact.  
Online at [kidscounsel.org/news](http://kidscounsel.org/news)

### Champions of Children

Awarded at our annual Spring for Kids event, 2016 CCA Champions of Children:

Jose Colon-Rivas, PhD  
Barbara Hennessy, JD  
Scott Wells, MA

### First Annual Play for Kids!

The Center's new fundraiser at Chelsea Piers, Stamford, was a huge success. Energetic teams, friendly competition. 2016 winner:

CT Green Bank

2017 event information online at [kidscounsel.org/events](http://kidscounsel.org/events)



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## Center for Children's Advocacy makes great things happen

**978 children** in Connecticut's largest and poorest cities got the legal support necessary for healthy development and educational achievement.

Keep the Power On utility clinics provided legal advocacy, budget counseling and payment arrangements to help **131 families** maintain heat and electricity.

More than **700 youth** who will be expelled from school this year will receive alternative educational services that address social, emotional and behavioral needs.

**20,000 students** who would have become chronically absent will receive early and appropriate intervention to encourage academic success.

The Center's Deep End Diversion Project helped reduce arrests of youth inside Connecticut Juvenile Training School by **450 percent**.

In 2014, violation of probation was a frequent reason for youth to be sent to detention in New Haven. Our Disproportionate Minority Contact work reduced that number to **zero** by the end of 2015.

Led by our work on Disproportionate Minority Contact, changes in policies and practices in New Haven resulted in a **42 percent** reduction in the number of youth referred back to court for violations of court orders.

School-based arrests of students in Bridgeport decreased by **80 percent**, from 202 at the start of the Center's DMCC work to 38 in the 2015-2016 school year.

**306,000 low-income children** will have access to reliable, safe transportation to medical appointments.

**47 percent** of Hartford's minority students have the opportunity to attend 42 quality magnet schools.

As a result of the Center's Complaint, the Connecticut Department of Education Bureau of Special Education directed Bridgeport Public Schools to provide screening, special education evaluations and appropriate supports for **all school children** identified.

**97 percent** of the Center's teen clients who were homeless or at great risk of homelessness got help to improve and remove issues that increase risk.

**100 percent** of Hartford youth served by our TeamChild attorneys increased access to school and special education services.

**Over 90 percent** of the children and youth we served in Bridgeport, Norwalk and Stamford graduated or stayed in school and increased their access to educational supports.

Our Medical-Legal Partnership trained **140 parents, camps and afterschool programs** about laws that prohibit discrimination against children with disabilities.

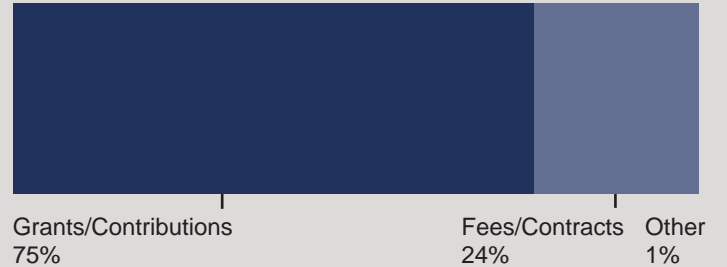
Educational provisions in Public Act 16-147, written by the Center for Children's Advocacy, are improving the education of **2700 youth** who enter Connecticut's juvenile justice system each year.

Our Immigration Project trained **40 attorneys** to provide pro bono representation for unaccompanied immigrant children who were abused, abandoned or neglected.

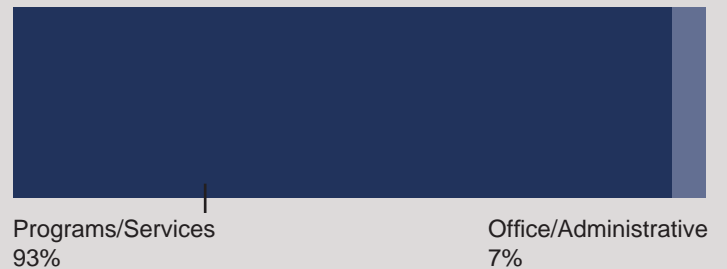
The Center's Mobile Legal Office traveled the state to help **85 youth** resolve issues of homelessness, immigration law, and other challenges.

<b>Income</b>	
Grants/Contributions	1,416,334
Fees/Contracts	450,686
Other	28,684

Total 1,895,704



<b>Expense</b>	
Programs/Services	1,907,209
Office/Administrative	132,641
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,039,850</b>



**Ninety three percent of every dollar raised goes directly to legal services for the poorest and most vulnerable children and youth.**

Juvenile Justice  
Homelessness  
Disproportionate Minority Contact  
Chronic Absenteeism  
Truancy  
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