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*Who Will Speak For Me?*<sup>®</sup>

Center for Children's Advocacy  
Annual Report 2011



Dear Friend,

Your generous support has made an enormous difference this year in the lives of thousands of Connecticut's most vulnerable children.


Your dedication to the Center for Children's Advocacy supported our fight for the legal rights of individual children who were desperate for help – and our work on systemic issues that affect the lives of thousands of children throughout the state each year.

Every child deserves justice and equity under the law. And so many children would not have access to legal advocacy and support services without your ongoing support.

**In just this past year, the Center has achieved tremendous statewide impact:**

- increased kinship care for abused and neglected children who would otherwise have been placed in the care of strangers;
- secured school systems' compliance with state and federal law to assure special education students the support services they are entitled to;
- prevented schools from pushing students out of regular academic programs and into inappropriate alternative education classes;
- won disability benefits for families who were in critical need of support;
- passed legislation to require DCF's involvement with young victims of sex trafficking;
- passed legislation to address issues of disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system;
- required schools to expeditiously address attendance and truancy issues to help struggling children re-engage in school.

We hope you'll read the stories included about some of the children we have represented this year. They desperately need our help, and would join us in thanking you for making this possible.

  
Martha Stone  
Executive Director

  
Mario Borelli  
Board Chair

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## Center for Children's Advocacy

Fighting for the legal rights of Connecticut's most vulnerable children

### Our attorneys spoke out to fight for individual children and correct systemic injustice –

Bonnie Roswig, Senior Staff Attorney with the Center's Medical-Legal Partnership, won five complex Supplemental Security Income cases this year, **to provide security for desperate families** whose benefits had been wrongly denied.

Kathryn Meyer, Center for Children's Advocacy Staff Attorney in Fairfield County, worked with the Stamford Public School system to structure the reorganization of their Alternative Education program **to benefit hundreds of students** who now have the supports needed for academic success.

Jay Sicklick, Director of the Center's Medical-Legal Partnership (MLPP), and Sarah Schlegel, MD, Medical Director of the MLPP, introduced an innovative approach to improve health outcomes by working with clinical partners **to attack specific diseases through legal intervention.**

Sarah Eagan, Director of the Center's Child Abuse Project, led the effort **to reduce group home care for young children**, reduce the number of children placed out of state, and increase kinship (family relative) care for children in DCF custody.

Martha Stone, Executive Director of the Center for Children's Advocacy, worked with Manson Youth Institution and the Department of Correction to secure appropriate education and discharge planning for incarcerated juvenile offenders, **to support a successful, productive return to the community.**

Hannah Benton, Staff Attorney with the Center's Juvenile Justice and Truancy Prevention Projects, filed a complaint against Hartford Public Schools **to improve learning conditions for students with disabilities.** The State Department of Education found that the District failed to meet its legal obligations and must provide evaluations required by law.

Stacey Violante Cote, Director of the Center's Teen Legal Advocacy Project, wrote and secured passage of legislation **to help youth who are victims of domestic minor sex trafficking**, requiring police to report them to the Department of Children and Families to help secure support services.

Edwin Colon, Staff Attorney with the Center's Team-Child and Teen Legal Advocacy Projects, successfully advocated **to close a chaotic and substandard alternative education program** for students at Harding High School in Bridgeport.



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**We are a consistent voice for children who desperately need help –**

**Six year old Niko, an adorable bundle of energy, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as an infant.**

Niko's mother, Mari, was referred to the Center for Children's Advocacy when her application for disability on Niko's behalf was denied – another blow to Mari, who spends her days caring for her son. Their lives are a series of appointments, treatments, tests and surgeries. A special walker helps Niko navigate their small apartment.

Caring for a child with such complex needs is time consuming, emotionally straining and resource draining. The Social Security Administration has a program call Supplemental Security Income (SSI) that provides financial support for disabled children whose families have limited income.

Mari was at a loss when Niko was denied benefits. **He was clearly disabled and the financial support was desperately needed** to provide for him.

Attorney Bonnie Roswig, with the Center's Medical Legal Partnership Project, represented the family in their benefits appeal. She compiled Niko's medical and education records and recruited Niko's social worker – who was outraged when she learned that Niko had been denied benefits – to testify about Niko's special needs. Mari's testimony conveyed the impact of Niko's diagnosis on his daily functioning.

The Judge **granted SSI benefits to Niko, and the family can now count on a monthly stipend.** The fight for benefits finally over, Niko's needs have the full attention of his mother.



**Baby Anya was born to a drug addicted mother who was unable to care for her.**

DCF placed Anya in foster care, even though she had two loving grandmothers, both willing to take her.

Center for Children's Advocacy attorney Sarah Eagan was an aggressive advocate for Anya. She brought the custody issue to trial and **secured DCF's agreement to place Anya with her grandmother.**

Sarah was also successful in securing childcare support for Anya's grandmother, even though DCF typically will pay only if a child is placed in licensed foster care. Through aggressive court action, Sarah challenged DCF to develop a reunification plan for the family once Anya's mother demonstrated success with the support services she was receiving.

Anya and her mother, Maribel, were successfully reunified this spring, and the DCF case is slated to close. The family is working together to help Maribel continue to attend her support meetings.

Many children with loving, extended families, are often placed with strangers. Connecticut law does not provide for **financial support for relatives who care for abused or neglected children**, and this practice must change. The effort to keep a family together is key to long-term relationships and positive outcomes, and the state must support this option, both practically and financially. Placing a child with relatives can greatly ease the trauma a child suffers when removed from home.

On October 1, 2011, legislation written by the Center for Children's Advocacy went into effect, requiring DCF to take steps increase the number of children placed in relative foster care. The Center continues to **work systemically to encourage DCF to make family placement a priority.**

**Our clients speak from their hearts –**



**I'm a child that's been with DCF for most of my life. I had been moving from home to home and never really had a true family.**

I never had anyone who really cared for me. I was very sad for a very long time.

**No one should have to go through these things.** I know DCF's intentions aren't to make things worse, but DCF isn't a regular family; it's an entire company. The fact I was in DCF just made me angry.

**My attorney's name is Martha Stone.** She has been in my life for over 7 years. She has been by my side advocating for me to become successful and get things I needed - foster homes, better schools, get my DCF worker to respond to me.

**She has been the one person who has been there in my life.** She has been like home base. **She would never let me forget what my true dreams are...**as in finishing high school, going to college and being a respiratory therapist.

**She helps me stand up for how I feel.**

*Blanca, age 15*



I had come to Connecticut because my family in Jamaica, **my mom and my grandmother, couldn't care for me anymore.** I didn't know my father - he left after I was born.

I had my Aunt and a cousin in Connecticut so I decided I would come here to better my life. I was dreaming of finishing school to make my mom and my grandmother proud.

**My lawyer, Stacey Violante Cote, helped me because I was on my own** and I didn't know how to go forward. **I didn't know there were laws that could help me.**

I cried in my first meeting with Stacey. I didn't know what to expect. But when Stacey got the court orders we needed, I felt relieved.

When it came time to apply for college, I was told I couldn't fill out the forms because I didn't have my parents' information. **Stacey advocated for me at my school and got me what I needed to finish the financial forms. I was accepted into college** and was even given scholarships for my good grades.

**Stacey was at my high school graduation and it made me feel like I always have her support.**

*Jenille, age 19*

## Children In Prostitution Referred to DCF

CT MIRROR  
Jonathan Stankiewicz, March 11, 2011

Dozens of minors . . . involved in sex trafficking say their first contact with authority is the police. **"Law enforcement is the most likely entity to come into contact with these victims and DCF is best suited to help them,"** said Stacey Violante Cote, attorney at the Center for Children's Advocacy. Police must be required to report to DCF immediately when they arrest a minor for prostitution.

## Fighting to Stop DCF from Out of State Placements

HARTFORD COURANT  
Josh Kovner, January 16, 2011

State child protection officials are sending an increasing number of troubled children to out-of-state facilities, racking up high costs and raising concerns among advocates about the emotional consequences of cutting kids off from guardians and siblings. **Martha Stone**, a children's lawyer and advocate . . . **has won . . . emergency court orders to get children out of outside treatment centers and back to Connecticut . . .** The irony is that whenever Stone . . . gets involved, a treatment spot seems to pop up within a few months. . . after DCF said no openings for a child would materialize "for the foreseeable future."

## Prisons Try to Span Learning Gap

NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT  
Gail Braccidiferno, August 4, 2011

Child advocates contend there is a direct cause-effect link to the fact that the vast majority of detained youth and adults in prison were once struggling public school students who did not get the educational support they needed to succeed. Connecticut is a microcosm of a nationwide problem, said law professor Joseph Tulman, an expert on the school-to-prison pipeline. **"There is not much public outrage for juvenile justice kids. People don't speak out for them,"** said Martha Stone, executive director of the Center for Children's Advocacy. **Securing appropriate special education for juvenile justice youth is one of the Center's priorities.**

## National Center for Medical Legal Partnership Announces Advisory Council

[www.medical-legalpartnership.org](http://www.medical-legalpartnership.org)

**Attorney Jay Sicklick, Director of the Connecticut Center for Children's Advocacy's Medical Legal Partnership Project, was named to . . . the first national MLP Network Advisory Council,** comprised of twelve leaders from across the country. The Council will guide the National Center to strengthen work between physicians and attorneys to improve the health of vulnerable populations in our poorest cities. "It's an honor to be selected," said Sicklick. **"Families who live in poverty must have access to appropriate healthcare and we can help with intervention and support."**

## Stamford Eyes Alternatives to Student Suspensions

THE DAILY STAMFORD  
Felicia Hunter, March 21, 2011

**Kathryn Meyer, attorney with the Center for Children's Advocacy, has had two 5-year-old clients who were suspended from school this year.** One was suspended in the first month of school; police were called for the second, who had pulled another child's clothing. Kids are being arrested for minor offenses, putting them on the path into the juvenile justice system . . . Peer mediation, mentoring and rewarding positive actions promote better behavior and are alternatives to suspension.

## State Intervenes in Schools' Treatment of Students with Disabilities

CT MIRROR  
Jacqueline Rabe, August 26, 2011

**Our impact is recognized nationally, statewide and locally.**

Complete articles, additional media coverage and broadcasts of the Center's seminar series are online at [kidscounsel.org](http://kidscounsel.org).

Concluding that Hartford Public Schools have failed to appropriately serve students with disabilities, the state Department of Education has ordered the city to evaluate students more quickly. **"The system has failed on a systemic basis... (and) violated federal disability law,"** wrote a consultant. Her report was prompted by a **complaint filed by Hannah Benton, attorney with the Center for Children's Advocacy,** who acted on behalf of eleven students waiting more than a year for services. Benton applauded the state's action.

## Why Aren't There Enough Foster Homes?

NEW HAVEN ADVOCATE  
Betsy Yagla, January 5, 2011

Foster parents are given a monthly stipend to care for abused or neglected children. The DCF, taxed with overseeing children in state custody, has been under court supervision for 20 years and is far short of its goal to add 850 foster homes to its roster over two years. **"Foster homes are the linchpin,"** says Martha Stone (of the) **Center for Children's Advocacy.** "We see kids in hospitals, in residential facilities and being sent out of state. . . (DCF Comm. Katz) **must . . . focus on this problem."**

## Connecticut Magazine Names "40 Under 40" New Generation of Leaders

CONNECTICUT MAGAZINE  
Charles Monagan, Valerie Schroth and Dale Salm, March 2011

. . . a new generation of leaders (with) the determination to steer an unswerving course . . . **Sarah Eagan is watching out for the poorest and most vulnerable children in Connecticut. (She) is the director of the Center for Children's Advocacy's Child Abuse Project,** working to secure support . . . for children who have been abused or neglected. She helps children removed from their homes find stable, supportive foster homes and has developed the training program for all Connecticut attorneys who represent children. She helped write legislation that gives foster children the right to remain in the school they've been attending, often their sole source of stability.

## Ads Anger Sheff Lawyer

CT MIRROR  
Robert Frahm, April 29, 2011

**Martha Stone, a lawyer for plaintiffs in the Sheff vs. O'Neill desegregation case,** says a Hartford ad campaign undermines the court-ordered plan to reduce the racial isolation of city students. The campaign urges parents not to gamble on a lottery for seats in suburban or regional magnet schools key to the desegregation effort. **"It's outrageous to see the Hartford school system try to discourage parents and kids from exercising their constitutional right to an equal educational opportunity."**

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### Center for Children's Advocacy Featured in Connecticut Public Broadcasting Documentary

### Education vs. Incarceration The Real Cost of Failing Our Kids



CPTV (April 2011): For the first time in recent history, five states now spend more money on incarceration than education. Connecticut is one of those states. It costs approximately \$12,000 per year to keep a student in school in Connecticut. It costs more than \$31,000 a year to keep an individual in prison.

Education vs. Incarceration: The Real Cost of Failing Our Kids, examines this alarming trend. This important documentary features interviews with Martha Stone, Executive Director of the Center for Children's Advocacy. To view, please go to [www.kidscounsel.org/educationvsincarceration](http://www.kidscounsel.org/educationvsincarceration).

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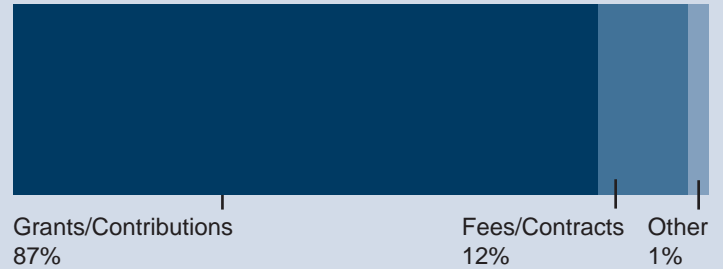
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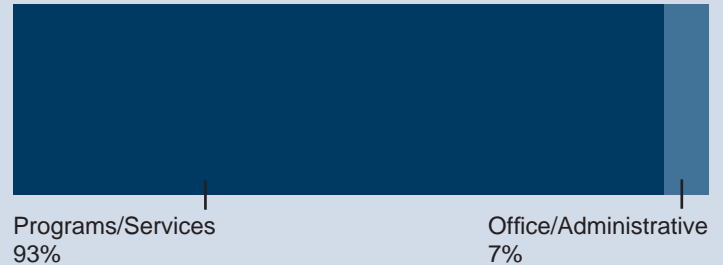
**Income**

Grants/Contributions	1,302,980
Fees/Contracts	189,347
Other	9,955
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,502,282</b>



**Expense**

Programs/Services	1,296,721
Office/Administrative	92,882
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,389,603</b>





## Center for Children's Advocacy

Fighting for the legal rights of Connecticut's most vulnerable children

[www.kidscounsel.org](http://www.kidscounsel.org)

65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

860-570-5327



### Sunshine in February

On February 10, 2011, the Center for Children's Advocacy held its first Fairfield County fundraiser. From left: Martha Stone, Executive Director of the Center for Children's Advocacy, presented the Center's annual Champion of Children Award to Shari Shapiro, Executive Director, Kids in Crisis, Greenwich; Emily Tow Jackson, Executive Director, The Tow Foundation, New Canaan; and Leonard Tow, Founder, The Tow Foundation, New Canaan. Held at Trump Parc, Stamford, and catered by Stamford's new Fairway Market, the evening was a huge success.



### Spring for Kids

On April 29, 2011, the Center for Children's Advocacy held its annual Hartford fundraiser. 2011 Champion of Children Award recipients, from left: Ann Taylor, Senior VP and General Counsel, Connecticut Children's Medical Center; State Senator Toni Harp; Bill Carbone, Executive Director, Connecticut Judicial Department Court Services Division (with Kathryn Carbone); State Representative Toni E. Walker. Hundreds turned out to celebrate the Center's success, mingle with friends and associates, and honor the award recipients. Teen clients of the Center were on hand as ambassadors for the evening.