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# Who Will Speak For Me?™

Center for **Children's** Advocacy  
Annual Report 2008



**1** our second decade

**2** voices of the youth

**3** a year of successes

**4** programs & projects

**5** important cases

**6** our generous donors

**7** financial information

**This year has been pivotal in the growth of the Center for Children's Advocacy.**

In the past year, the Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA) provided direct legal representation and consultation for over 400 children, and our systemic work improved conditions for thousands of children. Training seminars reached hundreds of youth, attorneys, child advocates and pediatric providers throughout the state.

Among the highlights, we are proud to share with you:

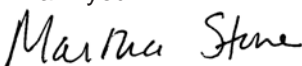
- Our Teen Legal Clinic expanded into Fairfield County to advocate for youth whose legal issues challenge school attendance
- Refugees and immigrants who are recent arrivals to Hartford are receiving educational and healthcare advocacy from our newly-formed New Arrivals Project
- We produced and distributed new self-advocacy materials to educate youth living in shelters and group placements about their legal rights
- Hartford school children are looking forward to increased educational opportunities as a result of a new settlement agreement in *Sheff v. O'Neill*
- New staff support these important initiatives

Your ongoing support means so much to so many children and families in Connecticut. Our accomplishments are possible only because you support us. Please read more on the following pages about the very important work we have accomplished this year.

As we move into our second decade, our strategic focus on systemic advocacy is expanding to allow the Center to impact the lives of so many more children.

Our success is your success. You have made this work possible and improved the lives of the most vulnerable of Connecticut's children.

Thank you.



Martha Stone  
Executive Director

1



**our second decade**



## 2

**voices of the youth**  
our impact on their lives

**Giovannie Mendez** is eloquent and emotional in his description of the support and advocacy he has received from CCA Teen Legal Clinic Director Stacey Violante Cote.

Stacey began to represent Gio when he was 15 years old. Gio was in danger. Homeless and frightened, with no family to turn to for support and no place to sleep each night, Gio was trying hard to get to classes at Hartford Public High School.

*"I don't know what I would have done without Stacey's support. She has made everything possible: school, foster care, my new family, and my opportunity to succeed. She cares about me. I owe her everything."*



Gio is currently in his third year of college and working full time in a Hartford-area group home for homeless teenagers. He is a success by anyone's measure.

**José Flores** and his brothers were removed from their parents' home by DCF when they were very young. Each of the children was placed in a separate location, some outside Connecticut, and they were scared and alone.

Facing enormous emotional and legal challenges, José needed support and stability. Martha Stone, CCA's Executive Director, represented José. Her advocacy secured nearby placements for José's brothers so they could visit with each other, and she helped resolve many of the difficulties in José's young life.



José is now a college student with many successes in his life. *"I would still be struggling if not for Martha. She gave me the chance to work hard and overcome so many of the issues and obstacles my family faced. Martha gets the credit for helping me reunite with my family and look optimistically toward the future."*

**New Legal Rights Materials Distributed to Teens Homeless Youth who Live in Shelters Need Access to Information and Services.**

CCA recently produced and distributed a new legal rights book and dvd for youth who live in shelters, group homes or residential treatment facilities.

Self-advocacy skills are very important for youth who live in group placements. The new materials enable us to be more effective in providing information about access to the services necessary for youth to get the educational, healthcare, and legal support they need.

**Presented at National Conference**

CCA recently shared the success of these legal rights materials at the National Association of Counsel for Children conference in Savannah, Georgia, with child protection attorneys throughout the country.

**New Arrivals Project Helps Refugees & Immigrants Hartford Welcomes more Refugees than any other City in Connecticut.**

CCA was awarded a prestigious Robert Wood Johnson grant to establish the Immigrants and Refugees: New Arrivals Advocacy Project. The new project helps vulnerable refugee and immigrant families access education and healthcare services for their children.

**New Teen Legal Clinic Offices in Fairfield County Support for Teens to Stay in School**

Located at Harding High School in Bridgeport and at RYASAP, a community development agency serving the Greater Bridgeport region, our new offices allow us to help more youth whose legal issues may prevent them from staying in school.

**New Legislation helps Truants and Runaways Community Based Services to Avoid Detention**

With CCA's significant involvement, new FWSN (Families with Service Needs) legislation provides community-based services to help disaffected youth get back on track.

Prior to passage of the new legislation, many of these youth were placed in juvenile detention. New diversionary programs establish community-based services to keep these youth, who have not committed any crime, out of juvenile detention facilities.

3



**a year of successes**



3

a year of successes

### ***Sheff v. O'Neill***

#### **Significant New Court-Approved Settlement**

*Sheff v. O'Neill* was filed in 1989 when Milo Sheff, our first named plaintiff, was ten years old. Milo is almost thirty.

When the Connecticut Supreme Court rendered its landmark *Sheff* decision in 1996, it stressed the urgency in addressing the issue of educational inequality: **“Every passing day denies children their constitutional right to a substantially equal educational opportunity.** Every passing day shortchanges these children in their ability to learn to contribute to their own well-being and to that of this state and nation...”

Despite this admonition, CCA plaintiffs, with other counsel, have returned to court no less than four times since 1996, using *Sheff* as a catalyst to encourage the state and legislature to address educational disparities that face thousands of Hartford students who remain in segregated and unequal schools.

In 2003, a four year agreement stipulated that thirty percent of Hartford students would experience reduced isolation through educational opportunities at magnet schools, school choice, and interdistrict cooperative programs. When plaintiffs, represented by CCA and others, went back to court in 2007, fewer than eight percent of Hartford students were in reduced-isolation settings. After a full trial, the parties negotiated a new Agreement which secured necessary legislative action and judicial approval in June.

#### **Terms of New Settlement Agreement**

For the first time, the Agreement includes a system that is driven by the *demand* of minority students for integrated education. The new Agreement:

- moves toward a system in which every student has the right to intergrated education
- ensures that opportunities for integrated education increase steadily over time. At a minimum, forty percent of Hartford students will experience an integrated educational setting.
- requires a Comprehensive Management Plan, with specific goals and measurability
- creates a Regional School Choice Office to support collaboration between the State and stakeholders to implement *Sheff* programming.

The full Settlement Agreement is available at [www.kidscounsel.org/legalresources.education](http://www.kidscounsel.org/legalresources.education)

**Teen  
Legal  
Advocacy**

**Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic**  
On-site school legal clinics address the legal aspects of problems that result in poor school attendance.

**Medical  
Legal  
Partnership**

**Medical Legal Partnership Project**  
A multidisciplinary approach to improving child health, with office locations at hospitals throughout Greater Hartford.

**Immigrants  
& Refugees  
New Arrivals  
Advocacy**

**Immigrants & Refugees  
New Arrivals Advocacy Project**  
A partnership to improve the health and educational access of immigrant and refugee children.

**Tuancy  
Court  
Prevention**

**Tuancy Court Prevention Project**  
Legal representation and coordination of support services for youth who are at risk of entering the juvenile justice system.

**TeamChild  
Juvenile  
Justice**

**TeamChild Juvenile Justice Project**  
Legal representation to improve educational and other outcomes for children involved in the juvenile justice system.

**Child Abuse  
& Neglect**

**Child Abuse Project**  
Legal representation for Connecticut's most vulnerable abused and neglected children.

**KidsCounsel  
Training**

**KidsCounsel Training Program**  
Training and resources for all Connecticut attorneys who represent children allowing impact on legal representation beyond staff capacity.

**Systemic  
Advocacy**

**Systemic Advocacy**  
Class action representation and systemic involvement to improve policy and services, broadening our reach to help thousands of children.

4



**our programs & projects**

The Center remains committed to protecting the legal rights of children who fall through the cracks of the child welfare, health, education and juvenile justice systems.

Individual representation of children who need our help, legal training for professionals, self-advocacy training for youth, and systemic advocacy and class action litigation allow us to impact the lives of as many children as we can reach.



5

**important cases**

## **Educational Issues for Refugee Children** **School enrollment can challenge new arrivals . . .**

A Liberian refugee family resettled in Hartford last winter. Twin daughters Sasha and Mary began attending high school in Hartford and found themselves victims of bullying at school.

Hoping to enroll the girls in a safer and more academically competitive environment, the family entered Hartford's magnet school lottery at the end of the school year and were fortunate to be accepted.

When the girls arrived on the first day of school this September, they were told they had been dropped from the admission list. Their parents had failed to respond to written notices mailed home over the summer and the school assumed that the girls no longer wanted to attend. In fact, language and cultural barriers had prevented the parents from understanding the prerequisites for enrollment.

CCA's new immigrant and refugee advocacy project is a collaboration with Hartford-based resettlement agencies. When the Refugee Assistance Center learned about the girls' entrance denial, they contacted the Center for Children's Advocacy so we could advocate for Sasha and Mary to be admitted to the magnet school. The school had not understood that they might have to communicate enrollment prerequisites in a way the family would understand.

CCA worked with the district to help them understand the language and cultural challenges faced by new refugee families. Now successfully enrolled in the magnet school, the girls have found the students to be more respectful of their differences and are thriving in a more appropriate educational environment.

## **Immigrants and refugees face many challenges . . .**

Praise for magnet school education is one of many reasons that CCA's Immigrants and Refugees: New Arrivals Advocacy Project (IRNAAP) is partnering with other organizations to help this vulnerable population.

Working with the Refugee Assistance Center and Capitol Region Education Council, CCA is providing workshops for the Liberian and Somali-Bantu community to teach refugees about the application process and the advantages of attending a magnet school.

IRNAAP also partners with healthcare providers in the Hartford area to help new arrival families gain access to medical care.



## **Access to Housing and Appropriate Health Care** **Krystal was sick and her family was homeless . . .**

Two-year-old Krystal was not growing or gaining weight as her older siblings had. Krystal's mother was getting more concerned and brought her to the emergency room at the local hospital, where she was admitted and diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis.

Krystal's mother, a single parent, had to be at work every day to pay her rent and feed her family. Now, she also had to maintain cell phone service so she could receive important calls from the hospital at any time.

The need for phone service stretched an already tight budget, and Krystal's mother could not keep up with rent payments. The family was evicted from their apartment and had no secure place to live.

The family was homeless, and when Krystal was ready to be discharged, the hospital called the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

DCF wanted to remove Krystal from her mother's custody, and place her in a foster home or emergency group shelter. Medical professionals were frightened by this suggestion; Krystal was very bonded to her mother and removal from her mother's care could only worsen Krystal's condition.

Krystal's mother could care for her daughter's complex medical needs. She just needed some help with housing issues to keep the family together.

Hospital staff contacted the Center's Medical Legal Partnership Project. We were able to negotiate a government housing subsidy for Krystal's family, which included an emergency security deposit. The family quickly found a secure apartment.

DCF agreed that the child could remain with her mother, and she was released from the hospital to her mother's loving care.

5



**important cases**



5

important cases

### Homeless Youth

#### Tyrone's mother was in prison . . .

Tyrone, age 14, had been living in untenable conditions in a temporary shelter for four months. His mother, a single parent, was in prison, and DCF was unable to find a foster home or group home to take Tyrone.

Tyrone's DCF social worker was unresponsive to his requests for help. Tyrone needed access to health care and could not get it; shelter staff treated him without care or concern for his well-being; he was shuffled from one school to another, with no opportunity for stability.

A social worker at Tyrone's high school was concerned that Tyrone was about to run away and drop out of school. She referred Tyrone to the Center's Teen Legal Clinic.

DCF shelter stays are emergency placements, intended to last only up to 45 days. CCA legal staff began to work directly with DCF's Central Office to remind them that Tyrone was still in a shelter, four months after his arrival.

We monitored DCF's efforts to find an appropriate placement for Tyrone and provided assistance on matters including conditions at the shelter, access to healthcare, and Tyrone's legal right to educational stability. We advocated with the Court to resolve these issues.

Tyrone is now in a secure placement with a foster family. He is attending his regular school and has access to medical care as needed.

#### . . . there are many youth who need our help.

CCA proposed legislation to address the problem of overstays in youth emergency placements on a statewide level. We wrote a bill which would limit the length of stay for youth in such placements, providing court oversight when overstays occurred. We created a statewide task force to address the problem.

Tyrone testified at the legislative hearing, *"It wasn't my fault that I had to live in a shelter, and I don't understand why people were treating me that way. I wish that I would have been treated like a normal person who has feelings."*

Although the legislation has not yet passed, it is working as an important tool to raise awareness of the plight of youth like Tyrone and the need for further systemic reform.

# 6



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Ruth Pulda, dear friend and long-time member of the Center for Children's Advocacy's Board of Directors, passed away on June 9, 2008. Thank you to all who have made contributions in Ruth's memory. We miss her friendship, dedication, enthusiasm, intelligence and insight – every day.

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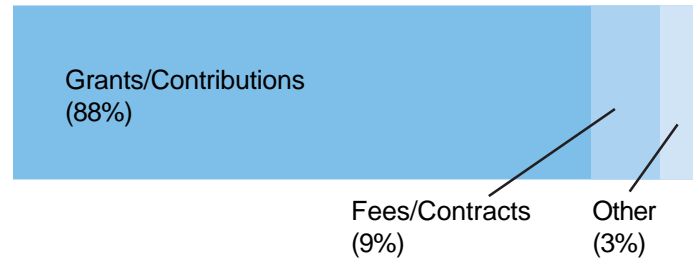
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**audited financial information**

July 1, 2007 - June 30, 2008

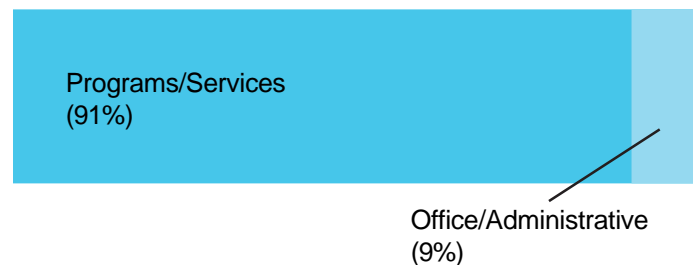
**Income**

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| Grants/Contributions                                  | 1,243,487        |
| Fees/Contracts  | 118,389          |
| Other   | 45,470           |
| <b>Total Funds Received</b>                           | <b>1,407,346</b> |
| Grants/Contributions<br>restricted for 08-09 Programs | (236,438)        |
| <b>Total Income</b>                                   | <b>1,170,908</b> |



**Expense**

|                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Programs/Services     | 995,700          |
| Office/Administrative | 105,101          |
| <b>Total Expense</b>  | <b>1,100,801</b> |



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- Abused and neglected children
- Children who are homeless
- Families who live in poverty
- Teens with unaddressed mental health issues
- Kids who have no access to healthcare
- Families without adequate food and shelter
- Children who cannot speak English
- Refugee youth with education and healthcare needs
- Kids who are bullied and afraid to go to school
- Teens who need to live on their own because of abuse
- Immigrant families who cannot get healthcare
- Young mothers without access to education
- Kids who have questions about foster care
- Teens living in shelters or group homes
- Youth in detention who want to go back to school
- Foster children who have not seen their siblings
- Gay and lesbian youth who are abused or harrassed
- Teens who suffer violent relationships
- Babies born to addicted mothers
- Children living with domestic violence

Read more about our programs and projects at  
[www.kidscounsel.org/programs.htm](http://www.kidscounsel.org/programs.htm)



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