

Who Will Speak For Me?

Center for Children's Advocacy – Annual Report 2007



Your Support Means So Much to So Many Children

Homeless youth languish in shelters without adequate care. Abused children seek care and comfort and need appropriate foster families. Poor children have limited access to healthcare and suffer needless delays in securing mental health services.

Celebrating Ten Years!

Just ten years ago, with \$2000, one attorney, and a small office over a boiler room, the Center for Children's Advocacy began to speak for Connecticut's poorest, most needy children.

Abused and neglected children needed a voice, a legal advocate, and the services that would allow them to look forward to supportive care and healthy living options.

Connecticut cities continue to be among the poorest in the country, and low-income children continue to fall through the cracks of state support systems.

These children continue to need our help.

In the past year, we provided individual legal representation for vulnerable, underserved children; worked systemically to resolve issues affecting thousands of children throughout the state; and trained Connecticut attorneys and child advocates to provide effective representation for children who desperately need advocacy and legal help.

We expanded our services from Greater Hartford to Bridgeport and New Haven, cities that also have extremely high rates of child poverty.

This report highlights some of our most recent, important accomplishments.

The Center for Children's Advocacy is a private, nonprofit, public interest legal organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of the legal rights of poor children who are dependent upon a variety of Connecticut systems: judicial, child welfare, health, mental health, education, and juvenile justice.

The Center is funded primarily by grants and contributions.

Our mission is to provide holistic legal services to children in their own communities, and to improve the quality of legal representation for children through interdisciplinary models and training programs.

You take the time to help me figure out what I can and cannot do to be with my family again. I never really had anyone try to help me the way you do.

– young teen living in a group home



Medical Legal Partnership Project

The Medical Legal Partnership Project (MLPP) provides legal representation to children whose poverty and living situations negatively affect their health.

Two of our attorneys have offices on-site at Connecticut Children's Medical Center and St. Francis Hospital. In addition, our attorneys provide legal consultation on-site at Burgdorf/Bank of America Health Center, Charter Oak Health Center, and Community Health Services, allowing the Project to offer medical-legal advocacy to nearly 100% of poor children who receive medical care in Hartford.

In the past year, our MLPP:

- Provided legal representation and consultation for over 100 children in our on-site offices at CCMC, St. Francis, and other community health facilities, which enabled these children to gain access to appropriate levels of health care.
- Conducted over 90 training sessions for medical and mental health professionals in areas that affect children's health outcomes.
- Published a monthly newsletter for physicians and health care providers on legal issues that impact poor and minority children.
- Facilitated a monthly Interdisciplinary Team of MLPP attorneys, pediatricians, psychiatrists, law students, and pediatric residents, focusing on individual cases needing a multi-disciplinary approach.

When the MLPP first met Joseph, he had a newly-diagnosed heart condition and had been transferred to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at Connecticut Children's Medical Center (CCMC).

Prior to this sudden illness, Joseph had been diagnosed with both Bipolar Disorder II and ADHD, for which he was receiving ongoing psychiatric consultation and medication management at the Institute of Living, which services the mental health needs of children affiliated with CCMC.

The nature of Joseph's heart condition increased the risk of significant cardiac effects in response to his medications.

Prior to the discovery of his heart condition, Joseph was being treated for his mental illness with a combination of antipsychotic medication and mood stabilizers. Since the cardiac diagnosis, he could no longer take his antipsychotic medication, which had helped reduce his physical agitation and aggression.

Because of Joseph's unique combination of psychiatric and medical needs, it was imperative that he be placed in a highly structured and

intensive therapeutic educational setting.

The family's local school district could not provide an appropriate setting.

The Medical Legal Partnership Project worked with the family's local school board, physicians, the Department of Children and Families, and Health Insurance (HUSKY) to secure an appropriate placement for Joseph.

Last summer, Joseph was approved for admission at The Cumberland Hospital in Virginia. The Cumberland Hospital is one of only a handful of institutions in the United States that specializes in working with medically complex adolescents with physical, behavioral and/or emotional disturbances.

Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic

The Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic (TLAC) helps youth resolve the legal issues that often prevent them from staying in school.

Our offices are on-site at Hartford Public High School and Harding High School in Bridgeport. TLAC attorneys provide legal representation to help students resolve issues such as homelessness, access to state benefits, mental health services, teen dating violence or special education.

In the past year, our TLAC:

- Developed the Homeless Youth Rights Project to provide legal support and trainings to abused and neglected youth living in shelters and group homes throughout the state; secured school enrollment for every youth as a result of our legal intervention.
- Filed a Complaint with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, on behalf of English Language Learners, to improve educational services in Hartford Public Schools.
- Provided individual legal representation and trainings to teens at Hartford Public High School to ensure their rights were protected.
- Expanded the TLAC to Bridgeport's Harding High School and distributed our teen legal rights materials to high schools and health clinics in Fairfield County.



Kristie was an abused and neglected teenager who now lives in foster care. She has limited English language skills, and is psychologically frail, having engaged in past suicide attempts.

Despite these overwhelming challenges, Kristie is motivated to learn and do well in school. She is looking toward the future, and wants to graduate from high school and go to college to become a social worker.

A school-based psychologist recommended specific supports that might help Kristie keep up in school and feel more comfortable in the school environment.

The school district claimed that it was not obligated to provide support services for Kristie, since she did not require special education services. In fact, the school held a meeting with Kristie and suggested that she withdraw from school and enter an adult education program.

Kristie did not want to drop out of high school.

CCA represented Kristie on this issue and advocated for the creation of an educational

program that would help her with English and provide access to the general curriculum. CCA informed the school district that Kristie's right to these supports was guaranteed by federal civil rights law.

After many correspondences and conferences with the school district, the district agreed to change its position. With Kristie's input, CCA worked with the school district to create a program that gives Kristie the support she needs and the opportunity to work hard and achieve her academic goals.

Kristie has thrived with her individualized program. By the end of the past school year, she dramatically improved her English skills and passed all of her classes.

*You do what others don't.
You bring our rights to the
table and you were right
by my side to get things
done.*

– young client of Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic

Truancy Court Prevention Project

The Truancy Court Prevention Project (TCPP) is a collaborative partnership between Center for Children's Advocacy, the Village for Families and Children, the Capitol Region Education Council, and the Connecticut Judicial Department.

The TCPP offers intense support to help at-risk students stay in school.

In the past year, our TCPP:

- Served at-risk ninth grade students at Hartford Public High School through holistic legal representation, significantly reducing the number of absences.
- Expanded the Project to Quirk Middle School to reach at-risk eighth graders, reduced participating TCPP students' absences by 85%, improved student achievement, and increased students' participation in community activities.
- Published a report entitled "Truancy: A Closer Look: The Link between Unmet Educational Needs and Truancy."



Sam is a 15 year old boy whose mother died a year ago. He now lives with his sister.

Following his mother's death, Sam often skipped school.

He had no motivation to succeed academically, and had problems controlling his anger. Sam got into a fist fight with another student, and was given a ten day suspension.

CCA recruited Sam for the Truancy Court Prevention Project. We helped Sam with special education issues, securing the necessary hours and instruction that would help him be successful in school. We also advised him on issues relating to guardianship and juvenile justice involvement.

These legal advocacy services, as well as the dedicated case management services of the TCPP case manager, helped Sam improve his attendance.

In the year before Sam's involvement with the TCPP, he had 16 unexcused absences from school. Once he became part of the TCPP, Sam's number of absences dropped to zero.

With the help of the TCPP, Sam passed all his classes last year. He plans to graduate from high school and attend college.

I learned a lot about myself over the course of this year, and I know I can succeed. I would like to thank the TCPP for helping me.

– Sam, at TCPP graduation ceremony

TeamChild Juvenile Justice Project

The TeamChild Juvenile Justice Project provides individual legal representation to youth in the juvenile justice system to ensure access to appropriate educational and mental health services to divert these youth from institutional placements. The Project's systemic advocacy focuses on the development of community-based alternatives to incarceration for youth.

In the past year, our TeamChild Juvenile Justice Project:

- Provided legal representation to over 60 youth involved in the juvenile justice system, securing their access to appropriate special education placements and services.
- Co-Chaired the Connecticut Legislature's Families with Service Needs Advisory Board, which overhauled the system of processing status offenders and secured appropriate diversionary services for them.
- Assured implementation of community-based mental health initiatives required as a result of the Settlement Agreement in our class action lawsuit, *Emily J.*, which resulted in a 70% reduction of youth moving into out-of-home care.



Edgar is 14 years old and lives in Hartford with his mother. He attends school at the Hartford Transitional Learning Academy (HTLA), where he was placed after years of difficulty in a regular classroom setting.

Edgar's Special Education teacher found that he functions at only a second or third grade level. He cannot read basic words, has very low-level language skills, and has problems processing directions. Now in eighth grade, Edgar is unable to benefit from the academic atmosphere of HTLA and has disrupted his classroom numerous times.

Currently in Juvenile Detention for fighting in school, Edgar needed a legal advocate to help secure an appropriate educational setting for him.

CCA provided legal representation to Edgar, and secured placement for him at a small, therapeutic school where he will receive special education services that will meet his needs, vocational training that will help toward his future, and medical and mental health oversight to alleviate his behavioral problems.

Without a legal advocate and a change in his placement, Edgar is likely to repeat the behavioral problems that caused his current confinement. He also would have been likely to face prolonged incarceration.

Without careful oversight, Hartford statistics predict that Edgar would drop out of school and be unable to support himself.

CCA's coordination of Edgar's care and education will allow him to gain the skills he will need to achieve a secure future.

Child Abuse Project

The Child Abuse Project provides legal representation to the most vulnerable abused and neglected children. CCA attorneys use the Center's educational and social work consultants and the Interdisciplinary Case Review Teams to help identify a child's health, mental health and academic needs, and advocate for high quality, individualized services for the child.

In the past year, our Child Abuse Project:

- Represented over 90 individual children and youth, securing services to help assure their health and safety.
- Provided educational advocacy for children grades K-2 who were at risk of abuse and neglect due to behavioral health needs or learning disabilities.
- Conducted a statewide pre-service and in-service training program, under contract with the Connecticut Child Protection Commission, to educate every attorney who represents abused and neglected children.



Four year old Evie and 9 month old JoJo were removed from their parents' home due to ongoing domestic violence.

The children were immediately separated by DCF. The baby, JoJo, was placed in a foster home with three other children. Evie was placed in a DCF-licensed emergency safe home.

Despite the temporary nature of the safe home, Evie spent months waiting for a more suitable placement.



The children, whose family is from Africa, did not yet speak

English. Evie communicated with safe home staff using pictures and gestures.

CCA filed a motion on behalf of Evie and JoJo, asking that they be placed together in a culturally competent foster home. We also asked DCF to begin immediate recruitment efforts in the local community to license a new, appropriate foster home.

Under court order, and within a relatively short time, DCF licensed a new home for the

children. The new foster parents spoke the children's language and shared their family's customs. Evie and JoJo thrived in the home.

The foster parents kept in regular communication with the children's mother, offering her support and providing updates on Evie and JoJo's welfare.

Several months later, the children were returned to their mother. The foster parents still baby sit and spend time with the Evie and JoJo while their mother is working.

With all my heart, I say thank you for all the things you have done to help me.

– young girl living in foster care

KidsCounsel Program

KidsCounsel is the Center's training and resource program for attorneys and advocates who represent children.

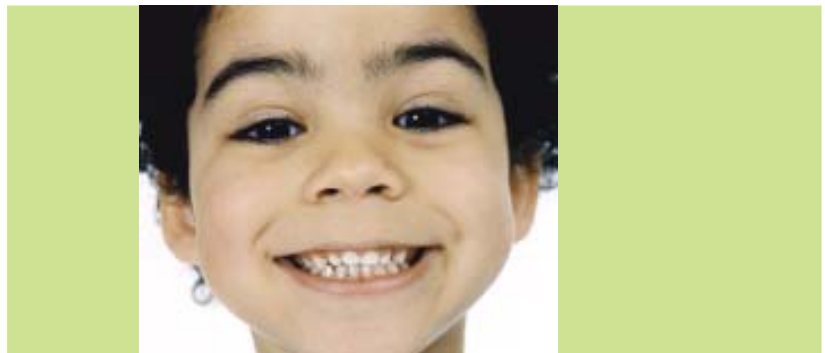
In the past year, KidsCounsel:

- Provided over 80 trainings to professionals, parents, and youth, to improve children's access to quality care.
- Published KidsCounsel newsletters, articles, and legal rights materials for attorneys, advocates, and children in the care of the Department of Children and Families (DCF).
- Maintained a ListServ providing current information on child welfare, including articles and resources.
- Overhauled our website, www.kidscounsel.org, improving the ability of attorneys to access recent case law, child welfare policy, placement resources and training opportunities.

Honors and Awards

In the past year, CCA was awarded the following honors:

- CCA Executive Director Martha Stone was given the 2006 Champion of Children Award by the Village for Families and Children. This annual award is given to an individual whose work has had a profound impact on the lives of families and children in Connecticut.
- Bank of America recognized CCA Executive Director Martha Stone with its "Local Hero Award" at its third annual Neighborhood Excellence Initiative awards. This award is given to individuals dedicated to rebuilding, revitalizing and improving the Hartford Community. It came with a \$5,000 stipend which Attorney Stone designated for CCA.
- The Center's Truancy Court Prevention Project was named a *Model Truancy Prevention Program* by the American Bar Association Criminal Justice Section's Juvenile Justice, Prosecution Function and Defense Function/Service Committees.



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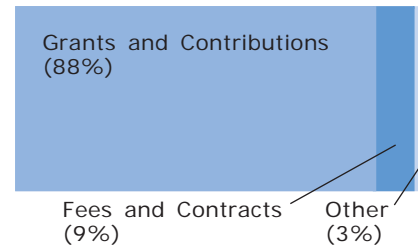
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July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007

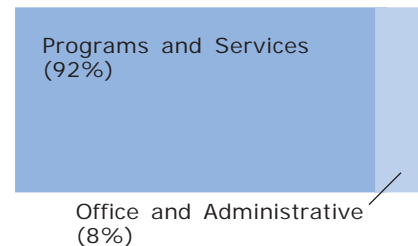
Income

Grants/Contributions	882,274
Fees/Contracts	87,436
Other	27,673
Total Income	997,383



Expense

Programs/Services	879,930
Office/Administrative	73,006
Total Expense	952,936



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