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*Who Will Speak For Me?*<sup>®</sup>

Center for Children's Advocacy  
Annual Report 2012

Dear Friend,

Five year old Akeem was removed from his parents' care when an investigation showed that his younger brother's burns and bruises were caused by repeated beatings from their father.

The state was able to find a foster home for Akeem's brother, but they put Akeem in group care with many older children. He had no consistent caregiver, no dependable parent figure, no one to hold him or love him or provide the warmth and attention a five year old needs.

Our advocacy for Akeem pressured DCF to find a stable foster placement. Our systemic work resulted in DCF's dramatic reduction in placements of young children in group facilities. No young child should ever experience the fear and emptiness of a sudden move to a dormitory existence.

Your generous support has improved the lives of so many abused and neglected children. You have supported our fight for the legal rights of individual children who are desperate for help, and you've supported our work on systemic issues that affect the lives of thousands of children throughout the state each year.

You make our work possible and allow us to fight for the children who desperately need help.

*Martha Stone*  
Martha Stone  
Executive Director

*Mario Borelli*  
Mario Borelli  
Board Chair



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## Setting the standard for excellence.

### Secured permanent living situations for hundreds of abused and neglected children

Our attorneys represented over 150 abused children in court this year, securing a family-like setting and access to effective education and health care. For thousands of children statewide, our leadership and advocacy:

- Reduced the number of children DCF placed out of state by 41% and reduced the number of children under age 12 living in group care by 44%
- Wrote and secured passage of legislation that requires DCF to ensure transition planning for disabled youth aging out of the child welfare system

### Supported homeless teens

Runaway and homeless youth are often silent and invisible victims. Our leadership:

- Raised the profile of unaccompanied homeless youth (chaired the Connecticut Team for Runaway and Homeless Youth)
- Secured passage of legislation we wrote increasing teen's access to protective orders from the courts

### Improved educational outcomes

Our focus on vulnerable children who have undiagnosed learning disabilities or were pushed into substandard schools secured new educational plans to support academic success. Our legal advocacy:

- Reformed Stamford Public Schools' alternative education program and stopped "push-out" of students
- Secured corrective action from the State Department of Education that directs Hartford schools to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Led to over 5,000 Hartford youth in 26 magnet schools, providing an equal educational opportunity as a result of the Center's lead counsel role in *Sheff v. O'Neill*

### Improved children's health

Over 350 children received better access to healthcare and support through legal representation by CCA attorneys on site in hospitals and healthcare facilities. Our leadership:

- Created a statewide task force to ensure that Medicaid-insured children get federally mandated mental health screenings
- Trained pediatric providers to recognize the need and advocate for children's disability benefits
- Maintained unparalleled success in securing children's disability benefits in administrative proceedings

### Reduced truancy and juvenile justice involvement

The Center's Truancy Court Prevention Project in schools in Hartford and Bridgeport helped over 75 youth get education and mental health supports needed to stay in school. Together with the Center for Children's Law and Policy, we spearheaded a successful effort to reduce disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system:

- Reduced Hartford's school-based arrest rate by 78%
- Secured an agreement from Bridgeport schools and police to follow protocols that reduce arrests of children with behavioral health issues; Hartford has committed to do the same
- Led the state's probation office to adopt new graduated sanctions/incentive policy to reduce the disproportionate number of youth of color held in detention

### Enhanced knowledge and skills of child protection attorneys, youth, parents, child welfare and medical professionals

Our training program improved legal representation, health and mental health care for thousands of children and youth. This year, our attorneys:

- Led 18 hospital-based trainings for medical providers
- Taught legal rights and advocacy to youth in group homes, shelters and detention centers so they could speak up for themselves
- Conducted KidsCounsel seminars on critical topics such as Child Maltreatment and Brain Development, and Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

### Recognized as a critical voice in development of systemic reforms that address the failures of state systems set up to protect children

Our attorneys were invited or appointed to 38 working groups and taskforces statewide, playing a major role in systemic solutions for the most vulnerable children. Three of our attorneys received statewide recognition:

- Jay Sicklick, director of the Center's Medical Legal Partnership, was named a "Health Care Hero" by the Hartford Business Journal
- The Connecticut Team for Runaway and Homeless Youth, chaired by attorney Stacey Violante Cote, received the "Thinking Change" award from the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness
- Sarah Eagan, director of the Center's Child Abuse Project, was recognized as one of Connecticut Magazines "Forty Under Forty" upcoming leaders

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## Fighting with unparalleled expertise.

**Melia has a long history of sexual abuse** and physical neglect by her family. We're not sure how old Melia was when the abuse began, but the Department of Children and Families removed her from her parents' home when she was 13 years old. Sarah Eagan, director of the Center's Child Abuse Project, was appointed as Melia's attorney.

Melia is now 18 and school plays an important part in her life; she wants to become a nurse. But just before her birthday, Melia's foster family told her she'd have to leave once she turned 18.

Age 18 can be a difficult navigation for youth in foster care and it's imperative to understand the DCF services that may continue to provide support. With the Center's help, Melia secured a living arrangement several towns away from her former foster family's home, in a DCF supervised apartment she shares with two other teens.

With just one year left until graduation, Melia wanted to continue going to the high school she'd been attending. She had good and stable relationships with teachers and staff and was looking forward to her graduation in 2013.

Sarah Eagan's advocacy ensured that Melia can remain enrolled at her school and get transportation back and forth to finish her last year. She has plans to attend a Certified Nursing Assistant Program after high school and we will continue to help her stay in a DCF independent living program until she completes her post-secondary education and is ready to support herself and live on her own.

### Helping hundreds like Melia

Our experience with children like Melia who have to move from one DCF placement to another helps so many children throughout the state. The successful passage of the Educational Stability Statute, written by the Center for Children's Advocacy and passed in 2010, allows foster children to stay in the school that is best for them: the current school, the school in the new town, or one that they



had attended before. In the past year, we have continued to work with DCF to assure that this law is implemented statewide.

In 2012, the Center wrote and secured passage of Public Act 12-53, legislation that requires DCF to complete an independent living plan for each adolescent in their care. The plan must address the

teen's individual needs and ensure that they can complete their education or vocational training, have secure housing, and can access medical and mental health care, community supports, and any benefits they are entitled to receive.

**Six year old Josiah had just been arrested at school** for a fight in the cafeteria; he was awaiting an expulsion hearing when he was referred to the Center for Children's Advocacy. Josiah's records showed ongoing academic failure and diagnoses of depression and intermittent explosive disorder, but he was never referred for evaluation.

In one school year, Josiah had over 60 absences and 50 days of outside suspension - half a year of education lost. Teachers noted "severe behavior problems" and reports showed significantly below grade level performance.

Despite the legal obligation to refer Josiah for special education evaluation, the school had done nothing until the Center got involved. Reviewing the records with Josiah's mother and school administrators, CCA Attorney Hannah Benton was able to get his expulsion stayed. Diagnostic



evaluations were completed and showed a language-based learning disability that made it impossible for Josiah to succeed in his classes.

Placement in a therapeutic program has changed Josiah's academic career dramatically. The classroom structure offers behavioral redirection, and he has work that is presented in a way he comprehends.

Josiah got As and Bs on his report card last year and the school social worker describes him as a role model for other students. There have been no more altercations and no more suspensions.

### Helping hundreds like Josiah

The Center's recent report, "Blindspot: The Impact of Missed Early Warning Signs on Children's Mental Health," documents the direct link between undiagnosed and unaddressed mental health issues, academic failure and entry into the state's juvenile justice system.

Federal law requires pediatric providers to conduct mental health screenings during well-care visits to identify children at risk. However, most pediatric providers do not do this because they don't receive reimbursement. As a result of our recent findings, we introduced a statewide policy initiative to improve the standard of care for children insured through Medicaid (HUSKY) and worked with the Connecticut Department of Social Services to convene a task force scheduled to review current regulations and make recommendations regarding screening and treatment.

"Blind Spot" includes findings and recommendations, and is available on the publications page of our website at [www.kidscounsel.org](http://www.kidscounsel.org). Collaborative early intervention is key for academic success and long term positive outcomes.

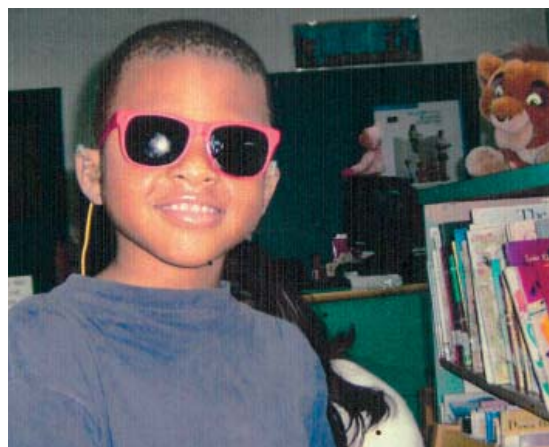
## Achieving extraordinary results.



Judge Timothy Keeney, Cameron, adoptive mother Angie Hinkel

"We have so much respect for our attorney, Martha Stone. She really cares, she takes the time, she comes to see us, she is incredible and wonderful to work with. She always had Cameron's best interests at heart and did everything she could to make this work. We are so happy to have adopted Cameron and make him part of our family."

Angie Hinkel, Cameron's adoptive mother



De'Andre W.

"Our attorney, Bonnie Roswig, helped me so much with De'Andre. She got him into another school, in a program through Oak Hill School for the Blind. The environment is so much better, no more phone calls every day to come take him home. It was a nightmare before. He's Special Ed and they had no idea how to deal. He started his new school in August. He's blind and non-verbal, and they understand what he needs. We can't thank Bonnie enough."

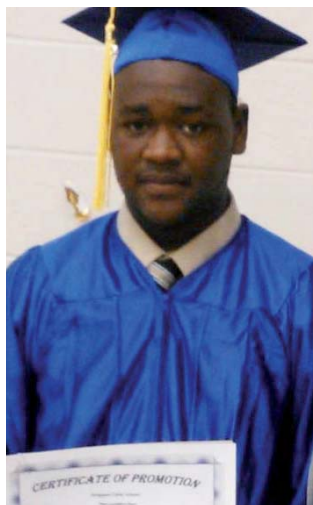
Victoria McKenzie, De'Andre's mother



Theresa D.

"My lawyer, Sarah Eagan, has been there for me all the time since I was 13. There's no way I would have come out of this so well if I didn't have her help. I'm still in school, I have a place to live, and I'm going to graduate this year. Sarah really saved me and I am so thankful."

Theresa D.



K.L.

K.L. won the Most Improved Student award, after a school counselor suggested earlier in the year that he speak with attorney Kathryn Meyer. "This is the first time I felt like the school has really listened to me."

K.L.'s mother



Makeila B., Attorney Stacey Violante Cote

"I didn't know there were laws that could help me. I didn't know I could stay in the U.S. My lawyer, Stacey Violante Cote, told me about my legal rights. With her help, I won my case and can proceed to the next step to become a legal resident. Before this, I would not be able to get to my goal of a career in a medical field, but now I can."

Makeila B.

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## Shining the light on failures to protect our most vulnerable children.

### Education

#### School Reform Misses Interdistrict Opportunities

HARTFORD COURANT COMMENTARY  
**Martha Stone**  
**Center for Children's Advocacy**  
May 25, 2012

Legislators, educators and the governor ignored the stark evidence that Sheff magnet schools run by the Capitol Region Education Council and Hartford Public Schools have closed the achievement gap for urban students. Also missing in their dialogue was recognition of urban students' achievements in suburban schools through the Open Choice program. Advances made by sending urban students to suburban schools and interdistrict magnets and drawing suburban students to magnets outside their districts, surely points to the broader solution — regionalization of the schools around Hartford and across the state. Other troubled systems would clearly benefit from solutions being applied in Hartford.

#### State Leaders: Vulnerable Children Need Help

CTMIRROR OP-ED  
**Edwin Colon and Kathryn Meyer**  
**Center for Children's Advocacy**  
March 2, 2012

The State Department of Education (SDE) does not provide oversight to alternative schools or programs. Many operate without the accountability required of traditional schools and no one in our state knows how many of these schools exist. Students are often moved without parental consent, and some alternative schools become "dumping grounds," accelerating the flow of students dropping out of school. Although often illegal, many students and families don't know how to protect their educational rights.

#### Chronic Absenteeism on Education Dept's Radar

CTMIRROR  
Jacqueline Rabe Thomas  
May 17, 2012

At its next meeting, the State Board of Education will likely consider adopting a statewide policy on what counts as an excused and unexcused absence. The intent, state officials said, is to ensure that districts are identifying chronic absenteeism early and taking action before too much class is missed. Child advocates have been pushing for this for years, and last year the legislature approved a bill that requires a uniform standard.

"It is impossible for SDE to accurately measure the impact of "lost" school days statewide, put in place appropriate and needed interventions, and hold districts accountable without adhering to a uniform definition statewide," said **Martha Stone, of the Center for Children's Advocacy.**

### Discriminatory Profiling

#### Racial Profiling Forum Looks at Consequences

NEW HAVEN REGISTER  
Mark Zaretsky  
April 26, 2012

**Hannah Benton, of the Center for Children's Advocacy,** talked about the different expectations that law enforcement and those in schools sometimes have of students of different backgrounds. One black child she has worked with is "an excellent speller," she said. But he was charged with third-degree assault for having an altercation with another student that many people might simply write off as horsing around. "(He) is not viewed as an excellent speller or future college graduate," she said. "He's viewed as a potential criminal."

### Juvenile Justice

#### Reduce School Based Arrest for Non-Violent Offenses

WNPR  
Diane Orsen  
March 28, 2012

A bill aimed at reducing the numbers of Connecticut students arrested at school passed a legislative committee this week. Supporters say too many kids are being arrested for low-level, non-violent offenses.

Data show that nearly 20% of cases that ended up in juvenile court during the first six months of the current academic year began when kids were arrested at school. "41% of those were for breach of peace or disorderly conduct," said **Hannah Benton, Center for Children's Advocacy.** "Once students are involved in the juvenile justice system, it's difficult to get out."

### Children's Health Outcomes

#### Medical Legal Partnership Helps Low Income Children Access Health Care

NEW BRITAIN HERALD  
Scott Whipple  
February 15, 2012

Hospital of Central Connecticut physicians work with the **Center for Children's Advocacy Medical Legal Partnership** to provide legal services for at risk children. Together, they improve health care access and reduce adverse social factors for low-income families. Asthmatic children benefit from the program's ability to promote improvement in substandard living conditions, reducing asthma triggers. **Bonnie Roswig, senior staff attorney** for the Partnership, said this on-site legal representation "de-mystifies the legal process. It helps low-income families navigate complex legal issues to improve the health of their children."

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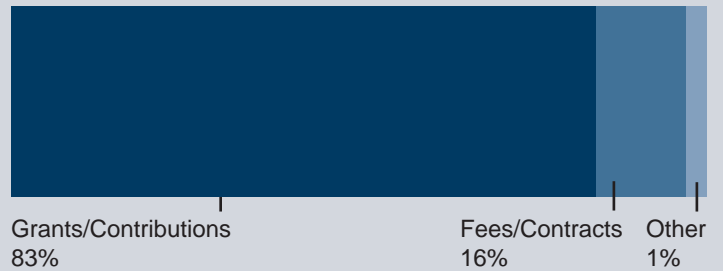
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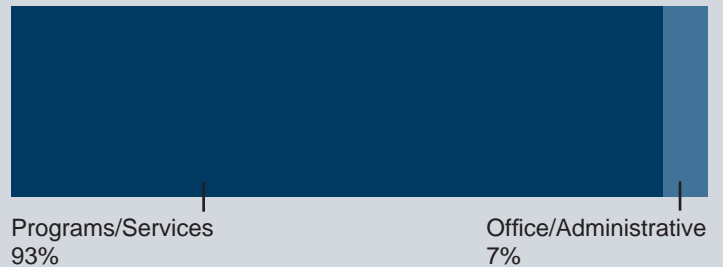
**Income**

Grants/Contributions	1,148,971
Fees/Contracts	221,947
Other	11,786
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,382,704</b>



**Expense**

Programs/Services	1,253,200
Office/Administrative	93,568
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,346,768</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

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## Center for Children's Advocacy 2012 Champion of Children Award Recipients



### Sunshine in February

On February 29, 2012, the Center held its second annual Sunshine in February Champion of Children awards event at Trump Parc in Stamford. Sheila Perrin, President and Co-Founder of the Perrin Family Foundation, was honored for the Foundation's dedication to changing the lives of youth who critically need help, giving them the confidence to solve problems and effectively manage their lives. Joseph Gaudette, Bridgeport Chief of Police, was honored for his commitment to help city youth overcome the disadvantages of their environment, and his enthusiastic support of programs that enable them to look forward to a secure and productive future. Two of the Center's clients presented the awards: far left - Sonia P., and far right - Randolph H.



### Spring for Kids

The Center's annual Spring for Kids awards event was held on May 15, 2012 at the Mark Twain House and Museum in Hartford. This year's Champion of Children award recipients, from left: Patricia Baker, Executive Director of the Connecticut Health Foundation, for her ongoing commitment to improving access to health-care for Connecticut's most vulnerable children; the Connecticut Public Broadcasting team whose vision produced Education vs. Incarceration - The Real Cost of Failing Our Kids: Jerry Franklin, President and CEO; Cathy Jackman, Producer; Marie MacDonald, Account Manager; Jennifer Boyd, Executive Producer. This important documentary, featuring interviews with CCA executive director Martha Stone, continues to be screened across the state and is linked through the Center's website at [www.kidscounsel.org](http://www.kidscounsel.org).