

Reforming Justice for Connecticut's Most Vulnerable Youth

Deep End Diversion Project Reducing Arrests inside the Juvenile Justice System

Most restorative justice initiatives are in schools or at the front end of the juvenile justice system. The Center's Deep End Diversion Project, funded by the Open Society Foundation, is a restorative justice initiative that includes circles and conferencing for youth in juvenile justice residential facilities.

When a youth in a residential facility continues to have behavior problems, he can be arrested again, even though his behavior may stem from issues the facility is designed to treat.

Diversion programs respond to behavior without arrest and help youth develop skills to manage behavior and relationships. The program grew from the Center's Racial and Ethnic Disparity Committees, which found that high numbers of arrests in juvenile justice congregate care facilities contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in Connecticut's juvenile justice system.

Speak Up Project Teaching Girls to Advocate for Important Supports

The Center's Speak Up Project developed a curriculum to help girls involved with the juvenile justice or child welfare systems learn about their legal rights and gain self advocacy skills to secure supports that are critical to their safety and success.

Youth must be strong advocates for themselves as they take their place back in the community. Each ten-week cycle results in an advocacy project that the girls initiate and present to an official who is part of the state's child welfare or juvenile justice system.

Juvenile Re-entry Assistance Project Helping Youth Return to their Communities

It is often difficult for justice-involved youth to get back into school, find work and a safe place to live. The Center works with youth re-entering their communities to procure critical education and support services and reduce further involvement with the system.

CCA attorneys work on behalf of youth discharged from the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, Manson Youth Correctional Institution and detention facilities throughout the state.

In partnership with the Housing Authority of the City of Hartford, the Center's Juvenile Re-entry Assistance Program (JRAP) represents youth to reduce barriers to housing, jobs and education, providing them with opportunities for a second chance.

Racial Justice Project Reducing Disparities to Protect Youth of Color

The Center is leading and/or participating in many statewide systemic efforts and committees, including:

- Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC)
- Detention Review Committee
- Manson Correctional Institution community re-entry work
- Racial and Ethnic Disparities Committees in Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, New Haven

Partnerships with state organizations and national juvenile justice leaders have reduced school-based arrests, lowered recidivism for youth offenders, improved relationships between youth and police, reduced school suspensions, reduced disparities in the time youth of color wait for residential treatment, and reduced court referrals.

Police/Youth Project

The Center works in partnership with the Judicial Department's Court Support Services Division, the Department of Children and Families, and community facilitators to help defuse police/youth interactions that could escalate into arrest. Each workshop co-mingles police officers and youth, with a focus on bias and stereotypes, and the impact of mental health challenges and trauma on youth behavior.

Youth participants are on parole or probation, or incarcerated at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School; police are from Connecticut's major cities. Results to date: youth express more positive perceptions of law enforcement; officers report better understanding of adolescent development, mental health challenges and the impact of psychological trauma on youth behavior.



Legislative Success and Systemic Reform Improving Supports for Children and Youth

Recent Legal Efforts

Sheff v O'Neill

As co-counsel for the plaintiffs in Sheff v. O'Neill, the Center continues to represent Hartford school children to provide equal educational opportunity to children of color.

Bridgeport Public Schools

The Center's Complaints, filed with the State Department of Education, resulted in direction to Bridgeport Schools to identify and provide appropriate education and support services for children with disabilities.

New Visions Alternative Program

The Center's Complaint, filed with the State Department of Education, resulted in direction to Hartford Schools to improve educational and support services at alternative schools for children and youth with disabilities.

Alicia B.

Filed in Federal Court by the Center for Children's Advocacy, National Center for Youth Law (California), and K&L Gates law firm (New York), the complaint alleged that Connecticut does not fulfill its constitutional obligation to provide an adequate education for the hundreds of students who are expelled from Connecticut's public schools each year. Expelled students lack appropriate alternative education, and this disproportionately impacts students of color. Named school systems are working to improve educational support for expelled students.

CT Technical High School System

Center for Children's Advocacy and Greater Hartford Legal Aid filed a complaint against the Connecticut Technical High School System alleging that admissions policies discriminate against students with disabilities.

Recent Legislative Efforts

Public Act 17-25

An Act Concerning "Sexting" by a Child

Revises existing statute to ensure that *all* children under eighteen years of age are charged with a misdemeanor for sexting behavior rather than a felony for child pornography.

Public Act 16-147

Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee

Implements recommendations of the JJPOC which include closing CJTS and Pueblo, limiting criteria for entry into detention, and enhancing educational supports for juvenile justice youth.

Public Act 16-123

An Act Concerning Youth Advisory Councils and Foster Families

Requires youth advisory councils at congregate care facilities, requires DCF to provide foster family profiles to foster children and solicit feedback from children about their experiences in care.

Public Act 15-183

An Act Concerning the Juvenile Justice System

Creates a statutory presumption that a child will have all shackles and mechanical restraints removed before entering a juvenile courtroom; removes certain Class B felonies from automatic transfer to adult court, raises the minimum age for transfer from 14 to 15; extends the JJPOC legislative task force on juvenile justice policy issues.

Public Act 15-96

An Act Prohibiting Out-Of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Very Young Children

Prohibits most out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for students enrolled in a preschool program or in kindergarten through grade two.

Public Act 15-225

An Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism

Requires schools to track and publish chronic absenteeism data, directs coordinated interventions for students, requires SDE to help develop prevention and intervention plans for districts.

Public Act 15-133

An Act to Establish Definitions and Standards for Alternative Education Programs

Directs the establishment of standards for the state's alternative education programs.

Center for
Children's
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Protecting and defending Connecticut's most vulnerable children

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860-570-5327 or 203-335-0719

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