

Who Will Speak for Me?®



Center for Children's Advocacy  
Annual Report 2014

## Vision and action: leading the way

Dear Friends of the Center,

The wisdom of some words is universal, their impact resonating year after year in situations seemingly unrelated.

Describing the process of writing, E. L. Doctorow said it is “like driving a car at night. You can see only as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.”

The road we travel as advocates for the most vulnerable children in our state is not always easy to navigate. There are bumps and roadblocks, switchbacks and detours. We cannot foresee the obstacles that will arise, but our vision - like Doctorow’s headlights - remains clear. The Center for Children’s Advocacy exists to protect Connecticut’s most at-risk children. Our devotion and commitment does not waiver, no matter how difficult the road.

Your action - your generous support - makes positive change possible.

Our recent work has created the launch of the state’s first mobile legal services van to reach children and teens in their own communities; has resulted in passage of legislation that betters the lives of thousands of the poorest and most at-risk children; has reduced the disproportionate school exclusion of children of color; has created the state’s first oversight of alternative school programs.

We are so very appreciative of all you do for the children the Center represents. Thank you, from the children, from our staff and our Board. We could not travel this road without you.

*Martha Stone*

Martha Stone  
Executive Director

*Doug Colosky*

Doug Colosky  
Board Chair



## Accepting the challenge

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Is it hyperbole to say we save a life?

A child who suffers from abuse or neglect or abandonment begins life with emotional and physical pain that is difficult to dissipate.

Our attorneys are dedicated and persistent. We stick with every child we represent, from the first day we meet through secure family placement, from initial school meetings through high school graduation, from access to healthcare through critical long-term supports.

How many chances do we get to save the life of a child?  
Just one. We accept that challenge.



Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. – Mark Twain

## **Our unwavering dedication ...**

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### **We represented over 800 individual children throughout Connecticut ...**

Elena is in a wheelchair at school. The school refused to get involved when a group of boys repeatedly told Elena she'd be better off dead and threatened to kill her.

Elena is only one example. We provided legal services to children from 44 cities and towns, on issues including access to educational services, child guardianship, abuse and neglect, substandard housing, access to health and mental health care, services for disabled children, eligibility for income supports, school discipline.

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### **We fought to help thousands of Bridgeport school children ...**

Bridgeport children who were struggling in early grades never got assessments for educational issues or emotional struggles. Parents kept coming to us for support and we continued to find that the school was not paying attention.

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### **Our litigation in Sheff vs. O'Neill continues to support Hartford school children ...**

Hartford school children deserve the chance to attend quality, integrated schools. But the majority of the city's 23,400 public school students are still in segregated schools, many of which are underperforming.

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### **We guided juvenile justice reforms to ensure equal treatment ...**

Youth of color have been treated more harshly by Connecticut's juvenile justice system. There are racial and ethnic disparities at many points, including arrests and time spent in detention.

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### **We led the effort to reform Connecticut's Alternative Schools ...**

Connecticut's alternative schools still operate without standards or state oversight. Buildings are crumbling, teachers often not certified, class hours not mandated. Youth who attend are likely to drop out and never finish high school.



**achieved remarkable outcomes.**

**and we got amazing results.**

We demanded that the school system move Elena to a program where she would be physically and emotionally safe. Meetings were challenging, but we prevailed. Elena feels welcome and protected in her new classroom.



**and we won a State Department of Education Complaint that assures help for all Bridgeport children.**

The Center filed a complaint with the State Department of Education regarding Bridgeport's failure to identify children with special education needs. State investigators ordered Bridgeport to take corrective action, a tremendous victory for all Bridgeport school children.



**and our work created 42 Magnet Schools, including five new ones this year.**

We have the passion and we have the perseverance. We will continue our push and are committed to seeing this through - until all Hartford school children can access quality, integrated schools.



**and reforms in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury have reduced racial and ethnic disparities.**

Our work with school systems, police departments, the Connecticut Judicial Branch and the Department of Children and Families has reduced disparities for youth of color. School-based arrests have significantly decreased and we have reduced the longer lengths of time that youth of color waited for residential treatment.



**and we turned the tide, creating state investigation of programs and working toward mandatory standards.**

We improved conditions in alternative schools in Bridgeport, New Haven and Hartford, securing more full-time certified teachers and important support services. Schools are in safer buildings and safer neighborhoods. We worked with the State Department of Education to develop steps now in place to assess every program in the state and mandate common standards.



## We orchestrated a new beginning.

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### Nigel was hungry and frightened.

When DCF removed Nigel from his mother's home in 2008, he was filthy, hungry and terrified. His mother was dangerously neglectful, violent in her interactions with Nigel, and addicted to alcohol and drugs. Nigel's father, never a part of Nigel's life, was a violent member of a local gang.

By the time he was seven, Nigel had been moved around to 12 different places:

- 3 foster homes
- 2 "Safe Homes"
- 3 inpatient psychiatric hospital stays
- 2 sub-acute hospital stays
- 2 more inpatient psychiatric stays

He suffered sexual abuse, domestic violence and severe corporal punishment. And some of that happened in his foster homes.

Finally, with the help of an attorney from the Center for Children's Advocacy, Nigel was placed with a family that was licensed as a therapeutic foster home. They gave him love and stability. They had older children who adored him. And they carefully had him tested to discover the kinds of supports he so badly needed.

In August, this kind, loving, and supportive family adopted Nigel. His PTSD and ADHD are managed with medication. Emotional outbursts are less frequent, and special education support in school has been a great success.

Nigel constantly talks about how much he loves his new family and how happy he is that they will be together forever. His new stability, emotional and behavioral progress are a tribute to his remarkable resilience.

We are very happy to know that we played a role in finding Nigel his "forever" family.



## Our vision and action led to huge legislative successes.



### Preventing detention of children of color

A new law written by the Center creates a pilot mediation program to keep kids involved in family violence cases out of the juvenile justice system.

Public Act 14-217, Section 85



### Closing the education gap in foster care and detention

A new 'Raise the Grade' law written by the Center requires that every child's educational records be shared with DCF, foster parents and children's attorneys. Youth in state facilities will get immediate attention to enforce their educational rights.

Public Act 14-99



### Helping abused and neglected children access pre-school

A new law written by the Center creates access to pre-school for children in DCF care. This is an important step in closing Connecticut's achievement gap and guiding foster children toward a secure future.

Public Act 14-217, Sections 132-133



### Providing support for kids who are homeless and alone

New funding, advocated for by the Center, adjusts state expenditures for outreach centers, shelters and transitional housing. This support is key for the safety of youth who are homeless.

File Number 524



### Protecting immigrant children

A new law written by the Center codifies federal language on Special Immigrant Juvenile Status to protect children who are dependent on the court.

Public Act 14-104, Sections 8-9

For details about the Center's new legislative successes, go to [kidscounsel.org/legislative](http://kidscounsel.org/legislative)

## We advocated and we won.

### Jess was suicidal. The school ignored that.

Jess goes to school in Bridgeport. After a challenging year, both at school and at home, she was hospitalized for threatening to take her own life.



Jess's mother asked Bridgeport Schools to schedule a meeting to figure out the best support for Jess when she came back to school. The school had no records from this meeting, nor from a second a few months later.

Jess's mother shared clinical summaries that detailed psychiatric impairments, but Bridgeport denied Jess an evaluation. They said she was not eligible because she was passing all subjects. Jess's report card showed three Fs and her teacher noted her danger of failing the academic year - very different from the school's claim.

Jess continued to have frequent hospitalizations and multiple absences, to fail in her classes and not get support.

The school did nothing until the Center for Children's Advocacy intervened.

At Jess's most recent PPT, Bridgeport arranged her evaluation and found her eligible for special education. As a result of the Center's legal advocacy, Jess was placed in a therapeutic program where she has perfect attendance and has made tremendous progress.

### Anh and Lin were abandoned.

Sisters Anh and Lin lost their mother to cancer. Their father brought them to the U.S. to start a new life, settling in Hartford near family.

Within a year, the girls were abandoned by their father, left in the care of an aunt and uncle who were awarded guardianship by the court. But Lin had a medical issue and no insurance; and neither sister had legal status in the United States.

Despite their recent arrival, both girls were earning honors at school. Anh wants to be a surgeon, Lin a veterinarian.

Their aunt and uncle didn't know what to do, not realizing that legal advocacy could help.

A social worker at school referred the girls to the Center for Children's Advocacy. The Center filed with probate court for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) and obtained findings that allowed the girls to apply for legal status.

The Center's legislative victories this year include a new law that provides this protection for other immigrant children, like Anh and Lin, who are victims of abuse, neglect or abandonment.





## We launched new initiatives.



### Training law enforcement to reduce youth arrests

This year, we put a project in place to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile arrests and lower the high recidivism rate at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School.

Our new law enforcement training project is a collaboration with the Connecticut Mental Health Juvenile Justice Action Network and the Youth Law Enforcement Corporation of the Pennsylvania Minority Contact Action Network.

Our work with youth and police officers helps each group understand the trauma, mental health issues and response of youth of color to styles of police intervention. The trainings, which use an innovative approach that includes facilitated interaction with youth and police officers, are scheduled to take place at a local community-based program and at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School.

### Bringing legal support directly to youth who are homeless and alone

We continue to expand our innovative model of legal representation that places attorneys at community sites that serve poor children and youth.

The Center's new mobile legal office – a customized van – is starting up its schedule this fall with visits to Hartford locations frequented by youth who are homeless and alone.

Legal advocacy can resolve some of the problems that homeless kids are facing. We can help them stay in school, get medical or mental health care, find a place to sleep or eat, and a place to be safe.

Our new mobile office is just the second of its kind in the United States, bringing legal services directly to kids who are in critical need.



Watch our website at [kidscounsel.org](http://kidscounsel.org) for locations, schedules and pictures. The van design will be revealed early in December!

## We made the news . . . local, state and national.

Hartford Courant OpEd – June 10

### **Information Key to Saving At-Risk Infants**

Most children who die from abuse are killed by a caregiver, most often the father or the mother's boyfriend. The greatest predictor of child homicide is a family history of abuse or neglect. We need full-scale, in-depth, publicly available investigative reports for every unexpected child death, in time to prevent the next death. –Alexandra Dufresne

Hartford Courant Editorial – June 13

### **Honors for Hartford Magnet Schools Keep Coming**

Sheff plaintiffs will continue their push until every Hartford child who wants an integrated education has the opportunity, said attorney Martha Stone, a member of the top-notch Sheff legal team.

CT Mirror OpEd – April 17

**The Nation is Shocked** that Connecticut's Department of Children and Families has sent an abused girl in its care, a girl facing no criminal charges, to an adult prison. I wish that I could be shocked, too. This move is another example of a clear pattern of bad decisions regarding girls in state care. –Martha Stone

CT Post – March 29

### **State Wants Accountability from Alternative Schools**

There are hundreds of alternative education programs around the state, but education officials aren't sure if the programs are clearing the path to a high school diploma or becoming dumping grounds that lead to more dropouts. "We need to re-engage students... (and need) some uniformity amongst each site," said Leon Smith, attorney with the Center for Children's Advocacy.

U.S. Attorney's Office – May 29

### **Settlement Ensures Equal Access to Summer Camp**

Bonnie Roswig, Center for Children's Advocacy Medical-Legal Partnership, focuses on protecting the rights of disabled children as mandated by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

Much more at [kidscounsel.org/news](http://kidscounsel.org/news)

CT Mirror OpEd – March 19

### **Teaching to an Empty Seat**

Suspensions, expulsions and arrests in schools are disproportionately imposed on children of color. Last year, there were nearly 2,000 suspensions of children under age 7. Exclusionary discipline continues despite a body of research that shows that children who are suspended are more likely to drop out of school and become involved with the juvenile justice system. –Kathryn Meyer and Leon Smith

WNPR – January 27

### **Bridgeport Failed to Identify Students in Need of Special Education**

The State Department of Education has determined that Bridgeport Public Schools violated their obligation to students under the Individuals with Disabilities Act. The Center for Children's Advocacy filed a complaint on behalf of Bridgeport students.

Public News Service – November 14

### **Program Successfully Tackles Youth Incarceration**

Black and Latino youth have a greater chance of being funneled into the juvenile justice system than white youth who commit the same offenses. A new committee in New Haven has joined similar groups in Hartford and Bridgeport to address the issue according to Leon Smith, director of the Alternative Schools Project at Connecticut's Center for Children's Advocacy.

CT Law Tribune – June 17

### **Legal Clinic Gives Voice to Homeless Teens**

Stacey Violante Cote helps the homeless. Not by running a shelter or dishing up meals in a soup kitchen, but by serving up legal advice and representation. Violante Cote, director of the Teen Legal Advocacy Project at the Center for Children's Advocacy, calls homeless teens the "invisible population."

CT Post – May 13

### **Students Get Legal Help at High School Clinic**

While many urban schools host medical clinics, bringing doctors' services to schools where children in need can easily access them, Bridgeport's Harding High School has the only school-based legal clinic in the state and is one of just a handful in the country. The clinic's attorney, Edwin Colon of the Center for Children's Advocacy, has no shortage of work. Legal issues range from abuse and abandonment to homelessness and legal status.

## We were recognized as leaders throughout the state.

All of the Center's attorneys have been tapped to serve on state and local committees responsible for protecting the poorest and most vulnerable children and youth.

### **Our advocacy and expertise assures that the welfare of Connecticut's children is of primary concern.**

Edwin Colon

- Bridgeport Mayor's Task Force on Unaccompanied Minors

Stacey Violante Cote

- Chair, Reaching Home Campaign Homeless Youth Workgroup

Alexandra Dufresne

- Connecticut Child Fatality Review Panel
- Private-Public Child Abuse Prevention Partnership

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- City of Hartford Safety Net Cabinet
- Medical Assistance Program, Quality Improvement Subcommittee
- Child Protection Teams  
St. Francis Hospital & Medical Center  
Burdorf Bank of America Health Center

Leon Smith

- Disproportionate Minority Contact Committee  
Bridgeport, Waterbury, New Haven

Martha Stone

- Steering Committee, Regional Advisory Group, DCF Region IV
- Connecticut Legislature CT Kids Report Card Leadership Committee
- Diversion Review Committee, CT Judicial Branch
- Executive Implementation Team, Joint DCF/CSSD Juvenile Justice Plan
- Connecticut Legislature Juvenile Jurisdiction Policy and Operations Coordinating Council

Zoe Stout

- Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative

### **Recent Awards**

Edwin Colon was named a Connecticut Law Tribune New Leader in the Law.

Martha Stone received the NAACP Wilber G. Smith Excellence in Civil Rights Advocacy Award.





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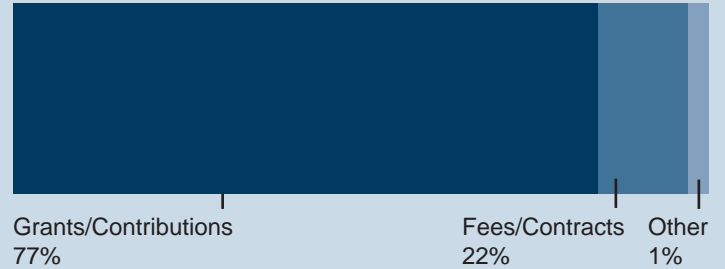
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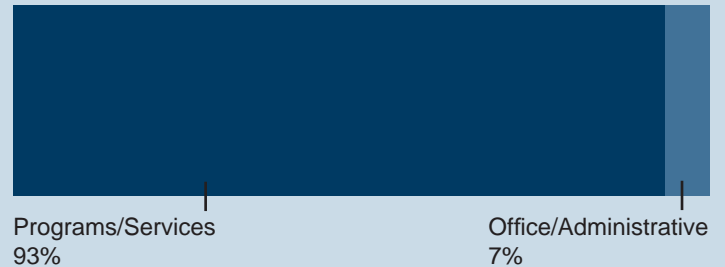
### Income

Grants/Contributions	1,487,505
Fees/Contracts	428,314
Other	11,302
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,927,120</b>



### Expense

Programs/Services	1,642,835
Office/Administrative	127,019
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,769,854</b>



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