



Who Will Speak For Me?®

Center for Children's Advocacy
Annual Report 2015

It was a very good year.

Some of the very important things the Center for Children's Advocacy did this year:

We drafted seven new laws

Stopped out of school suspension and expulsion of very young students

Achieved passage of **sibling visitation law** for children in DCF care

Wrote law that coordinates **intervention for children who are chronically absent**

Reduced shackling of children in juvenile court

Established standards for children in alternative education programs

Won passage of law requiring hospitals to educate new parents about **infant safe sleep**

Required review of policies, procedures that **protect young children from unexpected death**

We brought services directly to children most at risk

Our **Mobile Legal Office visited community sites** for teens who need help to stay safe

Our attorneys in major hospitals **got children access to critical healthcare**

Our **legal clinic in Harding High School** helped students **stay in school**

We led the charge to fix state systems

Trained Connecticut's child protection attorneys to **assure quality representation**

Filed second **complaint against Bridgeport Schools** to compel attention to children with disabilities

Prevented heat and electricity shutoffs for families who live in poverty

Initiated new Racial Justice Project to protect youth of color

Trained police and youth to promote cultural awareness and reduce unnecessary arrest



Child Abuse

Nelson

We met Nelson last March when he was four years old.

With Nelson watching, his father smashed the car with a tire iron. He threatened to smash Nelson's mother too, and a neighbor called police. The police called DCF.

There were many concerns about Nelson's parents – domestic violence, mental health, substance abuse. Nelson's father is a convicted sex offender. DCF had already terminated his mother's parental rights for older children. One had serious injuries.

DCF removed Nelson from his home and put him in foster care with a family he did not know. But, Nelson's grandmother wanted to raise him. She has a secure, appropriate home. She loves Nelson.

The Center for Children's Advocacy filed a motion to secure Nelson's placement with his grandmother. We helped her schedule assessments to diagnose Nelson's developmental delays. We helped her enroll Nelson in an appropriate pre-school program. Nelson is thriving in his grandmother's safe and loving care.

WE PUSHED AND CHANGED THE SYSTEM WE FOUGHT AND CHANGED THE LAW

It's not just young children who suffer. Many teens in residential facilities or lock-up are challenged by terrible histories of abuse and neglect.

Our work this year helped older youth learn to speak up for themselves to get needed support. The Center's SpeakUp Project brought legal advocacy trainings to youth in facilities statewide.

Our relationships with state agencies give us the power to effect change for children at risk throughout the state. We trained every new Connecticut child welfare attorney to ensure they provide the best, most effective legal representation available.

We use our legislative expertise to write law that has enormous, positive, lasting impact. This year, we wrote new legislation that allows children in state care to visit siblings who live in different homes.

MY FOCUS IS ON THE CHILDREN WHO NEED OUR HELP. Zoe Stout, Sr. Staff Attorney
Child Abuse Project



Health

Charlotte

School was over and Charlotte was excited to go back to summer camp.

It had been a difficult year. In addition to Down Syndrome, Charlotte was recently diagnosed with diabetes. Her doctors were pleased by how well she was doing at home and at school.

Charlotte and her parents were devastated when the summer camp she attended refused to take her back.

It is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act to refuse a child because of a medical condition. Diabetes is no exception and lawyers from the Center for Children's Advocacy intervened on Charlotte's behalf.

We contacted the Justice Department when the camp refused our request to admit Charlotte. Together, we explained the requirements of the law. The camp reversed their decision and instituted training for their staff. The best news came from Charlotte's mom: "She had tons of fun! Thank you for your help."

WE PUSHED AND CHANGED THE SYSTEM WE FOUGHT AND CHANGED THE LAW

Schools, camps, after school programs and colleges often deny or make access difficult for children and youth with disabilities. We worked with federal and community agencies on ADA requirements and legal standards that must be followed, and helped hundreds of children get access.

Early identification of mental health issues is critical to a child's future success. As a result of the Center's work, the Department of Social Services agreed to take action to increase the number of providers who perform and are reimbursed for mental health screenings for children insured by Medicaid.

Healthcare, mental health care, social and academic success have enormous impact on a child's future. The Center's legal advocacy continues to guide families and agencies to achieve that opportunity for every child.

EVERY CHILD DESERVES A FAIR CHANCE TO SUCCEED. Bonnie Roswig, Sr. Staff Attorney
Medical Legal Partnership Project



Education

aliza

Aliza turned 16 just days after she witnessed her brother's death in the violence that plagues our cities. She re-lives her brother's shooting many times each day. She is always afraid.

Aliza has had mental health issues since she was a young child. School records show that Aliza's mother consistently requested testing for special education since struggles and failure in middle school. The school never listened.

When Aliza saw one of the boys who assaulted her brother, she attacked him. Her fury was uncontrollable.

The school started expulsion proceedings. The education system and community mental health system had failed Aliza all her life. Now things were even worse.

The Center for Children's Advocacy compelled the school to have Aliza tested for services. We stopped the expulsion so Aliza can attend a therapeutic school that will help with mental and behavioral health issues and with Aliza's educational needs.

Aliza's mother is raising three children alone. Our legal support helped the family secure a safer place to live.

WE PUSHED TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM WE FOUGHT TO CHANGE THE LAW

We wrote new law that bans out of school suspension or expulsion of our youngest students. We wrote law that requires schools to track chronic absenteeism and follow up with students who have trouble getting to school.

Despite the Complaint we filed and won with the State Department of Education two years ago, children in Bridgeport schools continued to have devastating experiences due to lack of attention and appropriate support.

We recently filed a second Complaint with the State against Bridgeport Public Schools to compel Bridgeport to identify and support children with academic and mental health issues who need special education services.

INJUSTICE IS INTOLERABLE. IT DEMANDS OUR ADVOCACY.

Edwin Colon, Staff Attorney
Teen Legal Advocacy Project



Racial Justice

jadon

At the end of the school year, Jadon was arrested for fighting. The boys who attacked him were white. They were not arrested.

Jadon struggled when police tried to arrest him and the confrontation escalated. He landed in lock-up at Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) and has three more months until he's released.

To address situations like Jadon's, the Center conducted trainings at CJTS this year between youth who were committed and police from Connecticut's largest cities. Better understanding and improved interactions between police and youth of color are key to preventing avoidable escalation and unnecessary arrest.

At the conclusion of the workshops, one youth said, "Now I kind of see where they are coming from. I am less afraid and I wouldn't just run." A police official said, "At the end of the day we want the kids to do well. This helps us see where they're coming from."

WE PUSHED TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM WE FOUGHT TO CHANGE THE LAW

We have reduced racial inequities in many ways for many years. We continue to litigate and negotiate Sheff, Connecticut's educational equity case, to improve opportunities for Hartford's segregated students. This year, 42 magnet schools serve over 47% of Hartford's children.

We brought youth from New Haven's New Horizons alternative school to the legislature to testify in support of law we wrote to require state standards for alternative education programs. Their moving testimony helped pass law that gives alternative school students, who are largely students of color, additional protections.

We met with the Norwalk Youth Council for Justice to combat school suspension, expulsion and push-out. With the Center's help, the Youth Council is reviewing district data to develop an agenda of concrete actions and advocacy to shape and sharpen state legislation and policy in the coming year.

WE MUST ADDRESS RACIAL DISPARITIES FOR THE KIDS WE REPRESENT.

Leon Smith, Director
Racial Justice Project



Juvenile Justice

Tomás

We first met Tomás when he was 15 years old. He was expelled from school for threatening a student who had been bullying him - pushing him in the halls, making fun of his speech difficulties, and generally making Tomás angry and miserable.

Tomás had been struggling for many years. School records showed repeated early exposure to sexual abuse and severe violence, but there was no evidence that the school responded to these circumstances.

Tomás had already been involved with the state's juvenile justice system. Our job was to enforce his legal rights, get him the supports he needed to stay in school and avoid re-involvement in the juvenile justice system.

The Center for Children's Advocacy demanded that the school conduct a thorough evaluation to understand the challenges Tomás faced and develop a support plan.

The evaluations noted learning and speech disabilities, depression and bipolar disorder. Using this important information, our attorneys got the expulsion dismissed.

We got Tomás the mental health support and special education services he'd needed for many years. With our help, Tomás started a special education program and, for the first time, is realizing academic success.

**WE PUSHED TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM
WE FOUGHT TO CHANGE THE LAW**

Our work this year has reduced arrests for low level offenses and increased referrals to Juvenile Review Boards in Connecticut's largest cities.

We developed protocols for police departments to help divert youth and families away from the juvenile justice system and into community support programs.

Working with our juvenile justice partners, we wrote law that directs removal of a child's shackles and mechanical restraints before entering a juvenile courtroom. A child must be presumed innocent before the court.

Juvenile incarceration increases future involvement with the adult criminal justice system. Our work helped hundreds of teens stay safely in the community and get the support they need for future success.

WHO WILL HELP THESE KIDS IF WE DO NOT?

Marisa Mascolo Halm, Director
TeamChild Juvenile Justice Project



Teen Rights

Crissa

Crissa was worried. She didn't know what would happen when she couldn't sleep on her friend's couch anymore.

She had been on her own for almost five months, somehow getting to school most days. But on the days Crissa had to sleep at her aunt's apartment 10 miles from school, she had no way to get back.

No one at school knew that Crissa didn't have a place to live. She was embarrassed, but she wanted a future and knew she had to stay in school.

A community agency in Hartford invited the Center's attorneys to talk to a group of teens about issues they faced and their legal right to support. Crissa heard our talk and realized we could help.

The law says that schools must provide transportation, but Crissa hadn't known to ask.

Crissa's resilience is remarkable and she is determined to graduate. With the Center's legal help, she is not missing school. With our guidance, Crissa is applying for financial aid so she can go on to college.

**WE PUSHED TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM
WE FOUGHT TO CHANGE THE LAW**

Attorneys in our new Mobile Legal Office helped teens find a safe place to sleep, get transportation to school, access healthcare and mental health care, and the support needed to stay in school and be safe and secure.

In our poorest communities, Mobile Office attorneys have helped dozens of teens and trained agency staff to show youth how to get the legal support they need.



HOMELESSNESS IS INVISIBLE. WE ARE ON THE ROAD TO HELP.

Stacey Violante Cote, Director
Teen Legal Advocacy

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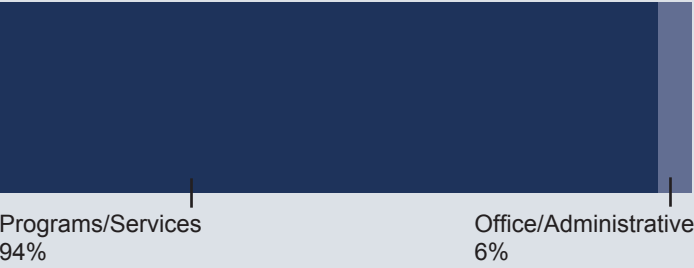
Center for Children’s Advocacy

Financial Information July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015

Income	
Grants/Contributions	1,437,479
Fees/Contracts	411,455
Other	105,884
Total	1,954,818



Expense	
Programs/Services	1,801,660
Office/Administrative	118,042
Total	1,919,702



THANK YOU FOR HELPING US MAKE CHILDREN'S LIVES BETTER.

Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer
Director, Speak Up Initiatives

TOGETHER, WE ARE CHANGING STATE SYSTEMS. THANK YOU.

Alexandra Dufresne
Staff Attorney, Child Abuse Project

Some of the very good things you made happen

83%

decrease in the number of New Haven youth referred to court for non-criminal violations such as skipping school or missing an appointment

23,000

Bridgeport students will have access to screening and evaluations for special education

375

low income children and families got legal help to keep their heat and electricity on

255

teens received legal rights and advocacy training to keep them safe

997

young children will get support in school instead of being suspended for behavior problems

92%

of Hartford youth served by the Homeless Youth Project graduated from high school or remained in school

WE MAKE A CRITICAL DIFFERENCE FOR THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN. Jay Sicklick, Deputy Director;
Director, Medical-Legal Partnership

256,000

Medicaid-insured children have access to mental health screenings at annual well-care visits

460

children from 31 towns got services and supports to improve their health

4,350

alternative school students will receive an education substantially equivalent to that of students in regular public schools

42

magnet schools are serving 47% of Hartford's minority students.

A 2015 report by The Civil Rights Project at UCLA, "Connecticut School Integration - Moving Forward as the Northeast Retreats," finds that due to the Sheff case, Connecticut "is the only state in the Northeast that is going in a positive direction and it has created voluntary processes that have clearly reduced severe segregation in a time devoid of national leadership."

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE KIDS. ALLOF IT. Martha Stone
Founder and Executive Director

Center for Children's Advocacy Projects

Child Abuse Project

Our attorneys provide individual legal representation for children who are victims of abuse or neglect. We go to group homes and residential facilities to teach youth about their legal rights. We advocate for reforms to the state's child protection system, and train new child welfare attorneys to provide quality representation.

Medical-Legal Partnership Project

Our attorneys have offices inside health care sites in Hartford, New Britain and New Haven. We partner with doctors to address social and environmental factors that have negative impact on children's health, and advocate for systemic reforms to increase poor children's access to health care.

Racial Justice Project

Our attorneys address systemic policies and practices that result in racial disparities in educational achievement, health and juvenile justice involvement. Our work includes representation of the plaintiffs in the Sheff v. O'Neill educational equity lawsuit. We lead Disproportionate Minority Contact committees in four cities to implement systemic change and reduce the overrepresentation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system.

TeamChild Juvenile Justice Project

Our attorneys help children who are in the state's juvenile justice system or at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system. We help youth access educational and mental health services to prevent future involvement, and advocate for reforms to the state's juvenile justice and education systems.

Teen Legal Advocacy Project

Our attorneys work with teens to resolve critical issues and prevent school dropout and homelessness. We oversee a statewide group that is redesigning the system of services for homeless youth, increasing access to education, health-care and basic needs services. We bring our Mobile Legal Office to community sites to help teens get the support they need to be safe and stay in school.

Speak Up Initiatives

Our attorneys empower youth to advocate for themselves and have a voice in the development of state and local policy and systems. We hold workshops for youth living in group homes and residential treatment facilities, and develop materials to educate youth about their legal rights. We help them develop advocacy strategies to work with policy makers on youth-led social change.

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**Center for Children's Advocacy**

Fighting for the legal rights of
Connecticut's most vulnerable children

kidscounsel.org
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