

BEAUTY & THE BEAST
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NURTURING COMPASSION & EMPATHY

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THE 200
OUTSTANDING
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Q&A WITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY

Martha Stone

FAIRFIELD COUNTY'S COMMUNITY FOUNDATION COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD

What is the Center for Children's Advocacy's mission?

Our mission is to protect low-income children and fight for their rights, including rights to services from the juvenile justice, education, child welfare and healthcare systems. Our legal services help kids by reducing problems that are interfering with school achievement and health. We also advocate for systemic reforms and help parents, doctors and other professionals learn about children's rights and how to advocate for kids.

Fairfield County Community Foundation is based on the values of diversity, equity and collaboration. How does CCA's mission fit these values?

Our advocacy is based on the belief that all children should have equal opportunities to succeed. In Bridgeport we've brought together schools, police, the juvenile court and community organizations to reduce the number of youths of color who enter the juvenile justice system, and we're collaborating with parents to improve education for kids learning English. We also teach about the rights of kids with disabilities to participate in after-school programs and camps.



What do you see as CCA's biggest accomplishments?

Our juvenile justice reforms stopped the state from locking up runaways and truants like they were criminals and made sure the kids get help with what's causing their behavior. We've also changed the way the system decides what to do with kids and reduced

the number of youths sent to juvenile detention. We've brought restorative justice into secure juvenile facilities to teach youth how to avoid problem behavior.

We led the overhaul of alternative school programs across the state and helped Bridgeport schools reduce the number of kids arrested for

minor behavior problems. We also got a law passed that bans out-of-school suspensions of preschoolers through second graders, so those kids can stay in school with the right support.

We've developed a band of pro bono attorneys to help undocumented kids who are eligible to remain in the country. Together we've represented over one hundred abandoned and abused undocumented kids.

Ninety-five percent of the kids we represent stay in school.

What does the future hold?

We'd like to bring our mobile legal van to Stamford to serve that area. In January we'll start training pro bono attorneys to represent youth aging out of foster care who are not ready to be independent. In Norwalk, we're collaborating on a project that supports immigrant children as they strive for academic success and hope to roll this program out to other districts.

FCCF President Juanita James says: "We salute the longstanding work of CCA. The Center's combination of legal advocacy and community partnerships has turned around the lives of hundreds of vulnerable youth. The staff is relentless in pursuing positive outcomes for their clients." 