

# STAMFORD MAGAZINE



Honoring the nonprofit and philanthropic work of our community heroes.

November 29, 6:30pm at King School, Stamford

## HEROES AMONG US

**They shed light where there is darkness, offer hope where there is need.**

October 29, 2018

Jill Johnson

### MEET OUR 2018 LIGHT A FIRE HONOREES

It's that time of year again—a time when we stoke the flames in our fireplaces to warm our bones and honor those who give back to warm our hearts. There will be no toastier place in November than Moffly Media's Light a Fire awards, to be held on Thursday, November 29, at the King School ([lightafireawards.com](http://lightafireawards.com) for tickets). Read these interviews with the honorees and you'll understand why. From a father who lost his son and has since saved countless families from the same pain to a teen determined to get 100,000 meals into the mouths of the hungry around the globe, our honorees believe one person can change the world. And they are changing it—for the better—every day.

New this year is our partnership with the Fairfield County's Community Foundation, an organization that promotes philanthropy as a means to create lasting change by advising donors, providing training and resources for area nonprofits, and unifying communities through targeted initiatives and programs. Every year a portion of our proceeds from the event has gone to support FCCF's mission. This year we invited FCCF to highlight two organizations that are closing the opportunity gap for the underserved of Fairfield County. The honorees, All Our Kin and the Center for Children's Advocacy, will each receive a \$2,500 grant from FCCF.

Our other honorees were chosen by our readers who noticed and nominated the most admirable among us. Your thoughtful letters are fuel for the best kind of fire there is. - *Peter Malkin*

### Q&A WITH MARTHA STONE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY 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, health and safety. We also advocate for systemic reforms and help parents, attorneys, counselors, social workers, educators, medical practitioners 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."