

Who will speak for me?®



Center for Children's Advocacy . Annual Report 2019

# Impact

This was a year of tremendous challenge and achievement.

Vulnerable Connecticut children were frightened by increasingly hateful rhetoric that targeted their communities, and confronted multiple barriers to well-being and opportunity.

You helped us fight back and improve conditions for children and youth in our poorest communities, and provide safety for many who were at risk.

Because of you:

- 1,036 low-income children and youth received legal services to improve healthy development and educational success
- 97% of the school-age children we represented graduated from high school or continued in school

Alongside our individual cases, we pursued systemic reforms that increased our impact exponentially, improving conditions and opportunities for thousands more throughout the state.

Your support helped us develop new approaches to reach more children and youth. Together, we:

- implemented innovative community reentry legal services in four cities
- trained and supported 53 pro bono attorneys to help immigrant children, and help youth who have grown up in foster care
- expanded youth-led advocacy by hiring, for the first time, a youth organizer to help youth organize to reduce homelessness

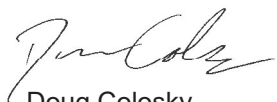
As this annual report shows, your support has helped so many children in so many ways. We could not do this important work without you.

Thank you for being there for Connecticut's children.

**Please click here to help now.  
Thank you, so much.**



Martha Stone  
Executive Director



Doug Colosky  
Board Chair



## Homelessness

Homeless youth desperately need legal help to enforce their rights to housing, education, and other essential services, but they do not have the resources to retain an attorney.

CCA reaches homeless youth through its innovative Mobile Legal Office, providing legal support, advice and help with emergency clothing, food and hygiene supplies.

### Gloria's Story

17 year-old Gloria left her parents' house to escape abuse.

A friend's family agreed to let her stay with them, but when Gloria reached out to a local agency for help, the agency called police and the friend's family told Gloria she would have to leave.

Gloria went to stay with a friend in another town, but was missing school because the district would not provide a bus. The Center for Children's Advocacy intervened and represented Gloria with the school and DCF to enforce her legal rights as a homeless youth.

As a result of CCA's advocacy, Gloria got transportation to school. Her CCA attorney also helped her enroll for health insurance, and her friend's family agreed to let her remain with them long term.

### Systemic Change

CCA wrote and secured passage of new legislation, Public Act 19-179: An Act Concerning Homeless Students' Access to Education. The new law improves homeless children's access to education by ensuring that Connecticut law includes all of the educational rights and protections that homeless children have under federal law.

## Immigrant Children

Arrival in the United States can be life-saving for traumatized children, but it can also present problems such as language challenges, educational difficulties and, for undocumented children, fear of deportation.

The Center provides holistic legal representation for immigrant children, and is Connecticut's primary source of free legal representation in matters regarding Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), which allows children to remain safely in the U.S. CCA's SIJS pro bono program has more than 50 attorneys from private law firms who volunteer to represent children who are eligible for SIJS.

### David and Mariana's Story

Fourteen year-old David and 5 year-old Mariana were left parentless in El Salvador when their father abandoned them and their mother died. They had no extended family who could care for them.

David took his little sister and made the dangerous journey to the United States, traveling with strangers to reach their adult sister in Connecticut.

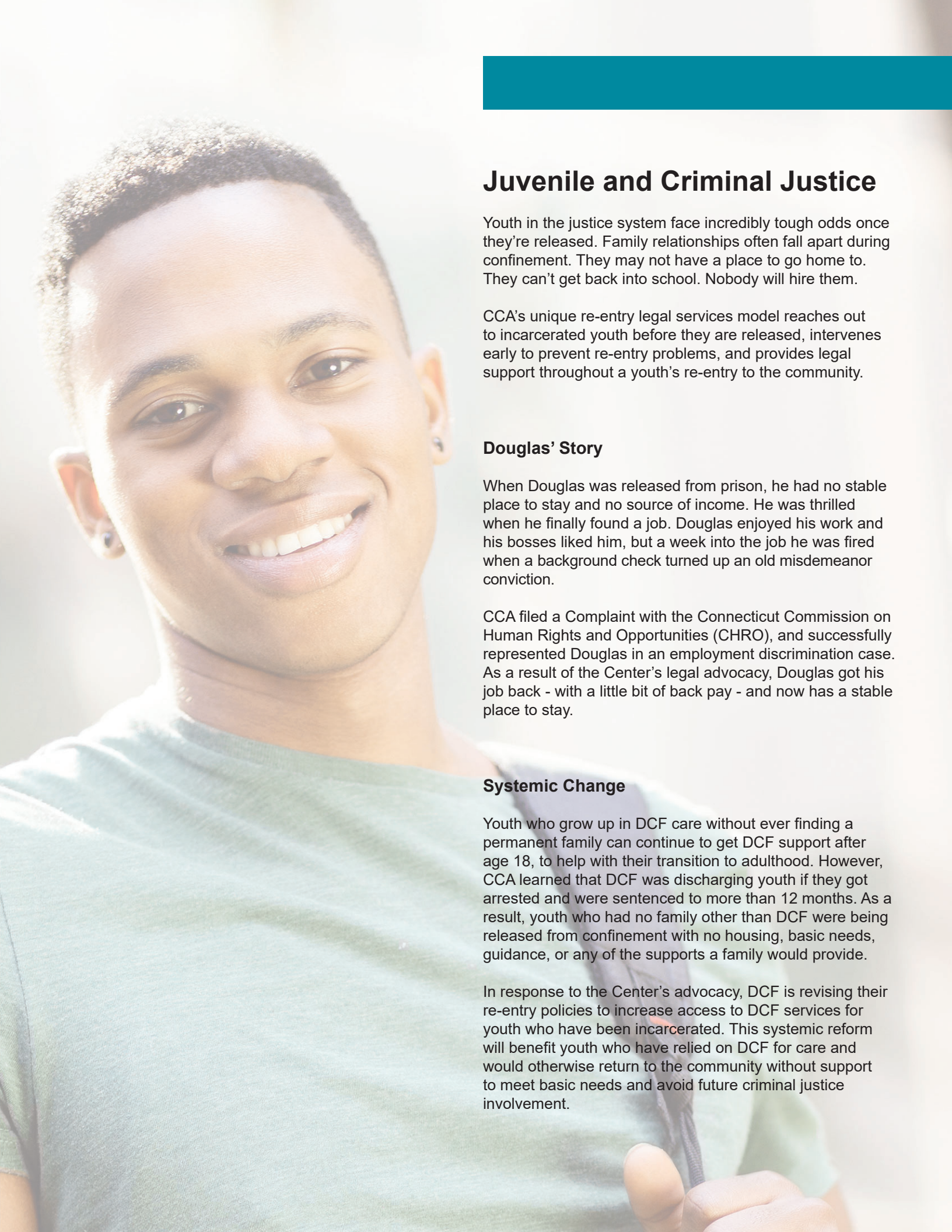
CCA represented the children in Probate Court so their sister could be appointed guardian, and secured court findings so the children could obtain SIJS. They are living with their sister, attending school and finally starting to feel safe and protected.

### Systemic Change

Working with Disability Rights Advocates, CCA continues to represent Make The Road Connecticut in ongoing negotiations with the Bridgeport Board of Education to address systemic problems with interpretation and translation services for parents and guardians of English Language Learner students who receive special education services.

Bridgeport has addressed many of CCA's complaints, providing broader access to language services for this vulnerable population.





## Juvenile and Criminal Justice

Youth in the justice system face incredibly tough odds once they're released. Family relationships often fall apart during confinement. They may not have a place to go home to. They can't get back into school. Nobody will hire them.

CCA's unique re-entry legal services model reaches out to incarcerated youth before they are released, intervenes early to prevent re-entry problems, and provides legal support throughout a youth's re-entry to the community.

### Douglas' Story

When Douglas was released from prison, he had no stable place to stay and no source of income. He was thrilled when he finally found a job. Douglas enjoyed his work and his bosses liked him, but a week into the job he was fired when a background check turned up an old misdemeanor conviction.

CCA filed a Complaint with the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO), and successfully represented Douglas in an employment discrimination case. As a result of the Center's legal advocacy, Douglas got his job back - with a little bit of back pay - and now has a stable place to stay.

### Systemic Change

Youth who grow up in DCF care without ever finding a permanent family can continue to get DCF support after age 18, to help with their transition to adulthood. However, CCA learned that DCF was discharging youth if they got arrested and were sentenced to more than 12 months. As a result, youth who had no family other than DCF were being released from confinement with no housing, basic needs, guidance, or any of the supports a family would provide.

In response to the Center's advocacy, DCF is revising their re-entry policies to increase access to DCF services for youth who have been incarcerated. This systemic reform will benefit youth who have relied on DCF for care and would otherwise return to the community without support to meet basic needs and avoid future criminal justice involvement.

A young woman with dark, curly hair is sitting on the floor, hugging her knees. She is wearing a grey hoodie and blue jeans. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The image is partially obscured by text on the left side.

## Health Equity

Social and environmental conditions significantly affect health outcomes, and low-income children and youth are more likely to be exposed to health-harming conditions.

CCA's Medical Legal Partnership works with health care providers to address conditions that harm a child's health. CCA attorneys have offices at hospitals and health care sites in New Haven, New Britain and Hartford, and provide legal training to providers throughout the state.

### Rosa's Story

Rosa had a complicated, untreated mental health condition, and her physical health was declining. Rosa's health care providers recommended intensive residential mental health treatment, but the State refused Medicaid coverage until CCA got involved.

CCA represented Rosa and persuaded the State to provide coverage for her treatment. Rosa was placed in a residential treatment program, where her mental and physical health have significantly improved.

### Systemic Change

Youth under 18 could not get HIV-preventive medication without parental consent. The medication, PrEP, reduces the risk of HIV from sex by more than 90%, and health care providers strongly supported the removal of legal barriers. CCA worked with health care providers and teen advocates to lead a successful legislative campaign. Public Act 19-109 is life-saving legislation that allows youth to access PrEP before they are burdened with a life-long HIV diagnosis.

The Center's advocacy for children with chronic health conditions resulted in a U.S. Department of Justice investigation into CCA's complaint regarding KinderCare's refusal to admit children with Type 1 diabetes. The settlement agreement requires KinderCare to provide training to staff regarding care for children with diabetes, and to stop excluding children with diabetes from its child care programs. The case has national impact, as the settlement agreement applies to 1,800 KinderCare facilities across the country.



## Educational Equity

Low-income children with learning disabilities and special emotional needs often fall through the cracks in the education system, placing them at enormous risk of school failure and school dropout.

CCA partners with agencies in some of Connecticut's poorest communities to reach children not receiving the educational services they are legally entitled to. The Center also provides a legal clinic in Harding High School in Bridgeport to reach adolescents who need legal supports to help them stay in school.

### Henry's Story

At age 9, Henry had ADHD, depression, and difficulty regulating his emotions. The school did not have a special education plan in place and responded to Henry's behavior by removing him from the classroom and sending him home.

Henry's school experience was so negative that he talked about hurting himself and had to be hospitalized. Because there was no plan to keep Henry safe, his mother dropped out of her GED classes to attend school with Henry. CCA represented the family and got Henry placed in a small classroom that helps him emotionally regulate. He is in a therapeutic after-school program, attends school on his own, and is making a lot of progress.

### Systemic Change

When parents of preschool children with special needs asked Norwalk Public Schools for the special education services their children were legally entitled to, Norwalk required the parents to gather and complete lengthy documents before the school system would assess the children's needs.

CCA filed a complaint with the State Department of Education (SDE) about Norwalk's practices, and as a result of the SDE ruling, Norwalk will no longer delay special education services to children with special needs. The preschoolers who missed special education supports will receive services to make up for the time lost.

## Racial Justice

Racial justice underlies all of CCA's work.

Data show racial and ethnic inequities are pervasive in health, education, child protection and juvenile justice. CCA analyzes systemic problems with a racial justice lens, and spearheads advocacy to directly target racial injustice.

### Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Reduction

Members of the Center's RED Reduction Committees are decision-makers from local and state education, juvenile justice, judicial and law enforcement systems, who work together to analyze data, implement and test system changes to reduce RED in juvenile justice involvement and school discipline.

CCA continued work with the national Center for Children's Law and Policy to lead RED Committees in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury, and developed a new RED Reduction Committee in Hamden. This year, one system reform provided a detailed school re-entry protocol to prevent recidivism for youth returning to Hartford from a juvenile justice facility. CCA continued work with the national Center for Children's Law and Policy to lead RED Committees in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury, and developed a new RED Reduction Committee in Hamden.

### Bullying and Discrimination

A survey of Connecticut Muslim students found that almost half felt treated negatively and unfairly in school because of their religion. In response, the Center collaborated with CAIR-Connecticut (Council on American Islamic Relations) to present a Facebook Live training on bullying and discrimination to teach parents and youth how to advocate for an appropriate response from the school system. The video has received over 1,700 views.

### Sheff School Desegregation Case

CCA attorney Martha Stone continued as lead co-counsel in *Sheff v. O'Neill*, Connecticut's educational equity case. Along with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the ACLU, and the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, the Center is defending Sheff desegregation remedies challenged in the new federal lawsuit, *Robinson v. Wentzell*, that would erode the gains made and return Greater Hartford to a separate and unequal school system.

### Restorative Justice

CCA continued its work to replace juvenile justice facilities' overly punitive responses to misbehavior with restorative justice practices that help youth build interpersonal and communication skills that can help avoid future justice system involvement.

Through collaboration with the Department of Corrections, the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division, and the Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk University, ground-breaking restorative justice practices were introduced at Manson Youth Institution (MYI), Bridgeport Juvenile Detention Center and Hartford Juvenile Detention Center.

Initial data from MYI show a dramatic improvement in youth behavior following the introduction of restorative practices: after three months, 73% of participating youth showed improved behavior.



## Abuse and Neglect

CCA provides holistic legal representation to abused and neglected children to ensure that DCF provides stability and a caring adult. The Center enforces children's legal rights in areas impacted by traumatic experiences – education, physical and mental health care and access to family.

CCA's attorney trainings and technical assistance help statewide attorneys provide outstanding legal representation to children in DCF care.

### Jason's story

When Jason was six, a neighbor called DCF with concerns that Jason's mother was abusing drugs and selling drugs from their apartment.

DCF's investigation confirmed the neighbor's report. They removed Jason from his mother's home and placed him in foster care. Just months later, Jason's mother passed away, and his foster parents planned to adopt him.

Jason's childhood trauma began to cause behavioral issues, and his foster parents were not sure they could meet his needs. The adoption was at risk of disrupting.

As Jason's attorney, the Center worked with DCF to ensure therapeutic behavioral supports were put in place to help Jason at home and at school. He developed a close bond with his foster family and was happy to be adopted this year. Despite tragic loss, Jason found his forever home.

### Systemic Change

Youth can remain in DCF care after age 18, but if DCF believes a youth is not complying with requirements, they can terminate care.

Youth have the right to appeal, but DCF does not provide them with legal representation at the hearing; DCF is represented by their own attorneys.

CCA's new 800 Pro Bono Project recruited and trained pro bono attorneys to represent youth, helping them maintain housing and educational opportunities through age 23.

## Speak Up

### The fight for justice must be led by youth who have direct experience with injustice.

Youth leadership is critical for systemic reform.

The Center's Speak Up initiatives draw on CCA's legal expertise and connections with statewide decision-makers to support youth advocacy for systemic change.

The Center received a special grant this year to hire a community organizer who works with CCA attorneys to build youth leadership and power to advocate for systemic change.

### Reforming Police Interactions with Youth

The Center provides legal rights and advocacy trainings, and systemic advocacy supports, for low-income youth who are working together for reform that improves the lives of those from marginalized communities.

This year, CCA trained and supported a group of teen girls from Hartford who organized to improve the way police officers interact with youth. The group met with Hartford Police Department leaders to advocate for improved understanding of the reasons youth experience police as intimidating, and how past trauma can cause teens to react in ways that could escalate an interaction.

In response to the Speak Up group's advocacy, the Police Training Academy incorporated training on adolescent brain development into their curriculum.

## Ending Youth Homelessness

CCA's youth organizers are a group of 15-20 Hartford youth working to force systemic changes to reduce homelessness.

The group began the year with training in communications, power, organizing and legal rights, researching youth homelessness to develop an upcoming advocacy campaign. Many of the youth have experienced housing instability and other challenges, and CCA's attorneys are available to intervene to resolve the group's own legal challenges.

## Juvenile Justice Reform

CCA's Youth Justice Leaders are young people from across the state who have experienced deep involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Supported by training from CCA, Youth Justice Leaders participate in systemic reform work of the Connecticut Legislature's Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee. In partnership with youth advocates from other organizations, Youth Justice Leaders and CCA held a forum at the Legislative Office Building called *Youth in Adult Prison – Ending the Practice*. Youth shared their experiences in the adult criminal justice system to educate legislators and policy-makers, providing powerful reasons for Connecticut to stop the practice.





**You made  
great things  
happen this year**

**Provided legal support to 1,036 children and youth in 61 Connecticut cities and towns.**

**Helped families of 192 children maintain or restore utility service.**

**Supported 150 children by providing legal advice and information to doctors, social workers and other providers.**

**Presented over 100 legal trainings across the state to increase the knowledge of professionals, parents and youth about the legal rights of children.**

**Trained 85 youth incarcerated at Manson Youth Institution about reentry legal rights, to improve successful return to school and community.**

## You made great things happen.

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## Financial Information

July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019

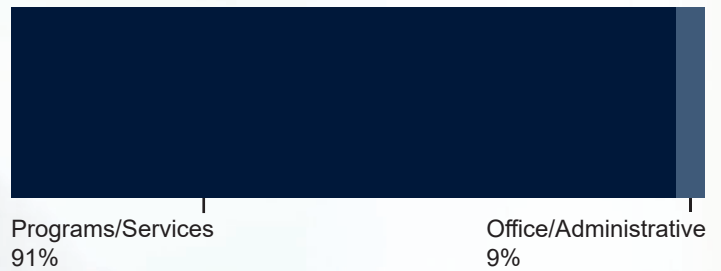
### Income

Grants/Contributions	1,656,732
Fees/Contracts	597,065
Other	29,158
Total	2,282,955



### Expenses

Programs/Services	2,073,622
Office/Administrative	209,333
Total	2,282,855



## Thank you for making this important work possible



July 2018

Settled lawsuit addressing inadequate education of expelled students

Trained all new Connecticut child protection attorneys

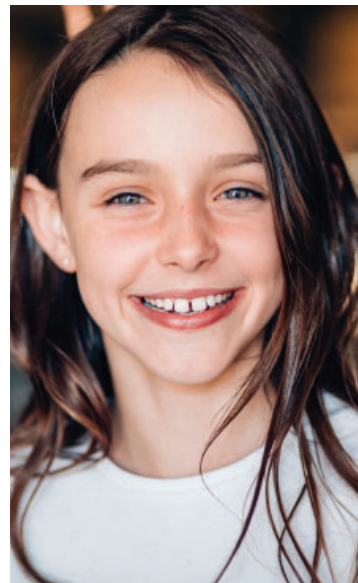
Began implementation of restorative justice system in secure juvenile detention centers in Hartford and Bridgeport



September 2018

Won ADA settlement with KinderCare to ensure access to childcare programs for children with diabetes

Began reentry legal trainings for youth in Manson Youth Institution



November 2018

Won Fairfield Community Foundation's inaugural Community Impact Award

Conducted legal rights training for medical students, residents, and care coordinators

August 2018

Received grant from Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for services for young people transitioning back to the community

Presented statewide webinar to pediatric emergency personnel on legal issues of adolescent health and confidentiality



October 2018

Filed lawsuit against Norwalk Public Schools over special education deficits

Appointed to Executive Committee of the state's Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee



December 2018

Began new Truancy Prevention Project with Juvenile Review Board



## Thank you for making this important work possible



January 2019

Lead attorneys in *Sheff vs. O'Neill* celebrated 30 year anniversary of Hartford school desegregation case

Hartford Courant published CCA Op-Ed "Why Aren't We Prioritizing the Children?"

Began Racial and Ethnic Disparities Reduction Project in Hamden



March 2019

Filed amicus brief to address right to legal representation on child abuse appeals

Spearheaded bill to extend health insurance to 17,000 undocumented immigrant children

Connecticut Law Tribune "Giant Slayer" awarded to CCA attorney Bonnie Roswig

Hired CCA's first youth organizer to marshal and develop youth voice



May 2019

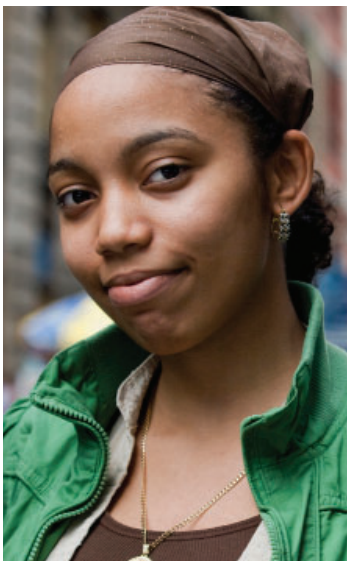
Hosted forum on Implicit Bias with Chief Justice Robinson and Justice Kahn

Presented at statewide conference of Connecticut Hospital Association on impact of poor housing conditions on children's health

February 2019

Initiated new pilot project to address needs of youth aging out of foster care

Conducted trainings to providers on legal rights of homeless youth



April 2019

Hosted forum to introduce new DCF Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes; and Beth Bye, new Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood

Convened statewide Medical Legal Partnership summit for attorneys and health personnel



June 2019

Governor Lamont signed CCA-sponsored bills to provide access to HIV preventive medication (PrEP) for minors, and to preserve educational rights for homeless youth



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CCA at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Hartford  
CCA at Burgdorf Bank of America Health Center, Hartford  
Teen Legal Clinic at Harding High School, Bridgeport  
Immigration Clinic at Norwalk High School, Norwalk  
Mobile Legal Office

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