

When you see
something
that is not right,
not fair, not just,
you have to
speak up.
You have to
say something;
you have to
do something.
John Lewis

Who will speak for me?
Center for Children's Advocacy
Annual Report 2020



Dear Friends,

This year has presented challenges we have never seen before.

It has exacerbated existing divides, magnified inequities, exposed and amplified bigotry and racism.

The COVID pandemic continues to have a tremendously disproportionate impact on communities of color.

Education became inaccessible for children with special needs or those whose families had limited internet access; family income declined when parents lost their jobs; medical care was challenging for those who are undocumented; slowdowns and closures in the DCF and juvenile justice systems increased youth homelessness; and the end of the eviction moratorium will have enormous implications for those unable to pay months of back rent.

Almost every child and youth we work with has seen opportunities cut off and lives threatened by institutional racism and unjust policies. We know we can do more, help more, change more, and protect more. That is the job we signed up for, and is the reason the Center exists.

We will continue to insist that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard. They turn to us, and you make this work possible.


Martha Stone
Executive Director


Claude Mayo
Board Chair

CCA remained open during the pandemic, and organized a comprehensive emergency response to critical needs.

COVID continues to have a disproportionate impact on low-income families and communities of color.

CCA attorneys continued legal representation and maintained contact with the children and youth they represented, visiting online at the outset of the pandemic and resuming in-person outdoor visits as soon as it was viable.

CCA Attorneys Used the Media to Call Attention to Significant Pandemic Issues

- We Must Do Better for Invisible Kids
Stacy Schleif, CT Mirror Viewpoints
May 24, 2020
- Regional Approaches to Education Disparities Work
Martha Stone, Op-Ed Hartford Courant
May 11, 2020
- Expand HUSKY Health Insurance to Undocumented Children and Families
Jay Sicklick, Op-Ed Hartford Courant
May 2, 2020
- Food Security, Educational Access, Income Support and Healthcare Access
Jay Sicklick, Op-Ed Hartford Courant
March 12, 2020

Read CCA press at cca-ct.org/news

Webinars for Professionals and Families

To assure that those who work with children could identify critical COVID-related issues and resources, the Center held many online legal trainings, including:

- Invisible Kids During COVID: abuse, neglect, and the frightening absence of mandated reporters
- Probation Officer trainings: educational access for justice system-involved youth during COVID closures
- Community Resource Collaborative training: educational rights during school closure
- Medical Provider training: using the law to help with housing stability and utility security

Legal Rights and Access Videos

Working together with youth we represent and those who are members of our Youth Voice groups, the Center produced legal rights videos on COVID-related issues for youth who feared eviction, lacked adequate food, struggled to pay utility bills, and needed information to secure their electronic stimulus checks.

The videos are available on speakupteens.org and on the Center's youtube channel.

Medical, Mental Health, and Educational Access

CCA pressed hard throughout the year for Connecticut to extend healthcare access to undocumented children. The pandemic made many situations even more critical:

- Immigration Coalition pressed for expansion of healthcare access to undocumented families
- Deputy Director Jay Sicklick was appointed to the state's new work group on Maternity, Postpartum and Well-Baby Care during COVID
- Comprehensive online COVID Resources added to CCA website
- Communication with State Department of Education to improve school guidance for special needs students
- Advocacy with Connecticut Judicial Department and Department of Corrections to improve educational and mental health programming for justice-involved youth

CCA remained at the forefront of the fight for Racial Equity and Social Justice.

The Center for Children's Advocacy is dedicated to fighting the injustice of discrimination.

Institutional bias and endemic racism are pervasive, and CCA redoubled efforts to transform the institutions that systematically inflict discrimination and degradation against individuals of color.

Protecting the Rights of Youth of Color

Connecticut youth of color are subjected to policies and practices that result in educational disparities and juvenile justice involvement. Through legislative advocacy, administrative advocacy, litigation and collaborative work with communities and agencies, the Center identified and reformed policies and practices that result in racial inequity.



CCA Attorneys Used the Media to Fight Discrimination

- *Walking While Black or Brown is Not a Crime*
Samuel Rivera, OpEd Hartford Courant
June 26, 2020
- *Don't Leave Bridgeport Children Behind*
Kathryn Meyer, CT Mirror Viewpoints
May 28, 2020

Read CCA press at cca-ct.org/news

Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Reduction

The Center leads the state's Racial and Ethnic Disparities Reduction Committees in Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Norwalk, New Haven, and Hamden. RED committees continued work to change state and local policies to address inequities in education, school discipline, access to behavioral health services, and treatment in the juvenile justice system. Teams from state and local education, juvenile justice, judicial, child welfare, and law enforcement systems worked together to overcome inequities exacerbated by the pandemic.

Restorative Justice

Kia Levey, coordinator of the Center's Restorative Justice Project, conducted staff trainings and coaching sessions at Bridgeport Juvenile Detention Center, Hartford Juvenile Detention Center, Boys and Girls Village, CT Junior Republic, and Manson Youth Institution to reinforce positive, productive encounters for youth in residential care.

Racial Profiling Prohibition Law

Attorney Samuel Rivera continued the Center's work to amend the Alvin Penn law, Connecticut's Racial Profiling Prohibition legislation, urging inclusion of data on pedestrian stops to help prevent harassment of youth by police.

Internal Response

CCA created an internal Committee to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in staff hiring, appointments, and office culture.



July 2019

- New PrEP law allowing minors to access life-saving HIV prophylaxis became effective. Attorneys Jay Sicklick and Alice Rosenthal were instrumental in the passage of this new legislation.
- Attorneys Kathryn Meyer and Samuel Rivera partnered with the Council on American-Islamic Relations to conduct training for the Muslim community on bullying and school discrimination.

September 2019

- Attorneys Alice Rosenthal and Jay Sicklick presented at the National Medical-Legal Partnership Conference:
 - Legislative Change and the New PrEP Law, with partners Krystn Wagner, MD, Julia Rosenberg, MD, and Advocate Sam Smith.
 - Clinical Collaboration and Training on Education Law and Advocacy in a Clinical Setting with partners Ada Fenick, MD, and Advocate Tishawanda Everett.

November 2019

- Attorney Patricia Marealle trained volunteer attorneys to provide representation for undocumented youth in Special Immigrant Juvenile Status filings, to help more youth.
- Attorney Alice Rosenthal partnered with the Yale Gender Program to organize a Name and Gender Marker Change Clinic for transgender youth.
- Attorney Marisa Halm held Know Your Rights trainings for youth involved with the Department of Corrections.

August 2019

- Attorneys Stacy Schleif and Martha Stone held three days of trainings for Connecticut's new child protection attorneys to assure quality representation for abused and neglected children.
- Attorney Stacey Violante Cote oversaw implementation of the successful 100 Day Challenge to End Youth Homelessness.

October 2019

- Attorney Bonnie Roswig coordinated Hartford's Utility Clinic to provide low-income families with budget counseling, and arranged for families to meet with utility companies to establish payment arrangements that allowed them to maintain heat and electricity.
- Attorney Stacy Schleif conducted legal training to teach pro bono attorneys how to represent youth who are at risk of homelessness if they are discharged from DCF care at age 18.

December 2019

- Attorney Marisa Halm organized a panel presentation on Advocacy for Youth and Young Adults Reentering the community from Confinement.
- Attorney Bonnie Roswig's advocacy played a lead role in sweeping reforms ordered by the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority to increase the number of low-income families receiving hardship protection and prevent utility shutoffs.



January 2020

- Attorney Martha Stone was instrumental in achieving a milestone agreement in *Sheff v. O'Neill*, increasing seats in diverse educational settings, developing a long term plan to ensure voluntary school choice, and securing necessary support for Hartford-area magnet schools.
- Attorney Samuel Rivera provided School-to-Prison Pipeline training to Waterbury's Local Interagency Service Team (LIST) to reduce systemic racial and ethnic disparities.

March 2020

- CCA's Medical-Legal Partnership celebrated its 20th anniversary.
- Attorney Marisa Halm fought to improve educational and mental health services for DOC youth.
- CCA Youth Organizer Lourdes Fonseca helped Youth SPEAKS members testify before the legislature's Public Health Committee regarding homeless youth's access to their identity documents.

May 2020

- Attorney Stacy Schleif presented a virtual argument before the Connecticut Supreme Court to allow post-termination of parental rights visitation between children and their birth parents.
- CCA held COVID-related legal advocacy trainings on educational services, access to benefits, medical and mental health supports.
- Attorney Jay Sicklick was appointed to Connecticut's Medical Assistance Program Oversight Workgroup for COVID-related Maternity, Postpartum and Well-Baby Care.

February 2020

- Attorney Marisa Halm assisted in drafting Education Subcommittee Recommendations for the state Legislature's Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee.
- Attorney Patricia Marealle held a Know Your Rights trainings series for parents of English Language Learner (ELL) students.
- Attorney Jay Sicklick won the CT Law Tribune *Distinguished Leader* award and Attorney Stacy Schleif won the CT Law Tribune *New Leaders in the Law* award.

April 2020

- CCA attorneys worked together to present a webinar on critical resources and supports during the COVID pandemic.
- Attorneys Jay Sicklick and Patricia Marealle advocated with Governor Lamont's office to encourage COVID-related health coverage for undocumented youth.
- CCA staff created a COVID Resources and Access webpage to provide up-to-date information for professionals and youth.

June 2020

- Attorney Bonnie Roswig worked with the US Justice Department to secure two major Agreements that require compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act:
 - All Tender Care childcare facilities must provide care for children with Epilepsy.
 - Four Connecticut school districts must provide oversight of Continuous Glucose Monitors worn by children with Diabetes.
- CCA presented Invisible Kids, a webinar on abuse, neglect, and the absence of mandated reporters during COVID shutdowns.

Racial Justice

Equity and inclusion underlie the Center's work, and inequalities are pervasive in the systems that serve Connecticut's children.

Lucas' Story

Lucas was skipping classes and hanging out with kids who got in trouble. His grades were bad, and his father, who speaks mostly Spanish, was raising Lucas alone. He was extremely concerned about his son's future, and found it difficult to understand the issues at school. A friend suggested that he call CCA for help.

At age 16, Lucas was still in ninth grade and could barely read. He had struggled academically for years, but had never been evaluated for special education. CCA attorney Samuel Rivera encouraged the school to do an evaluation, which uncovered long-standing learning deficits that required substantial support.

With services in place as a result of CCA's advocacy, Lucas' academic abilities improved and he began to be more interested in school.

A few months later, Lucas got into trouble with kids in a nearby town. Schools have discretion on the discipline they impose, and administrators admitted they were looking for a way to expel Lucas. "We don't want a kid like him in our school," they told Attorney Rivera.

Because the offense was minor and outside of school property, CCA was able to persuade the hearing officer to recommend against expulsion, and Lucas stayed in school.

There were no further incidents and Lucas settled into school and his community. His reading improved, and Attorney Rivera stays in touch to assure that Lucas has appropriate educational supports.

Systemic Wins

Educational improvement creates opportunity for low-income children. As lead counsel in *Sheff v. O'Neill*, Connecticut's educational equity case, CCA Executive Director Martha Stone negotiated a milestone agreement adding more than 1,000 new magnet school seats and improving the school choice system in the Hartford region.

State Settles School Desegregation Case
CT Mirror, January 10, 2020

Read CCA press at cca-ct.org/news



Youth Voice

Many supports were put on hold by the pandemic. When access diminished, it became more important than ever for youth to speak up for themselves to secure necessary services.

Tanya's Story

Tanya was homeless until CCA Attorney Adam Yagaloff and Lourdes Fonseca, facilitator of the Center's Youth SPEAKS group, helped her connect with Journey Home, a Hartford organization focused on ending homelessness. They helped Tanya find an apartment in Hartford, where she is living with her two young children.

Susan Stein, CCA's Development Director, worked with Cigna employees who wanted to help. They donated furniture, bedding, and kitchen supplies, and helped make Tanya's new apartment a comfortable home.

Tanya is now working three part time jobs to support her family: she is an advisor to CCA's Youth SPEAKS group, has a position with the Youth Action Council, and works as a Journey Home advisor to the Youth Council on Homelessness.

Systemic Gains

Youth Voice drives systemic change. The Center's Speak Up groups continued to meet online weekly to drive positive change in the systems that support vulnerable youth.

Youth SPEAKS meetings are run by CCA Youth Organizer Lourdes Fonseca. Weekly meetings are dynamic discussions covering issues of homelessness and joblessness. Youth work together to make the system function to resolve insecurities and help those most vulnerable find safety and basic independence.

The Connecticut legislature's Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee evaluates policies related to the juvenile justice system. The Committee's Youth Advisory Group (youth who had experience with the juvenile justice system), is co-facilitated by CCA Attorney Kathryn Meyer. Weekly advocacy meetings improve the system for others, on issues including safety while incarcerated, appropriate hygiene services, quality of education, and access to phone calls so those incarcerated have the emotional support of family and friends. Due to CCA's advocacy, the state permitted two phone calls each day during the pandemic, and the group is advocating for the policy change to continue.



Homelessness

CCA continued efforts to ensure successful outcomes for school-aged youth who are experiencing homelessness.

Calvin's Story

Calvin was released from detention in April, in the midst of Connecticut's COVID peak. He was hugely relieved to be out of a facility where the pandemic would easily spread, but had no home to return to and found himself on the streets.

Calvin had meals at a New Haven soup kitchen, and was sleeping in dirty hallways. He has no close family, except for an aunt in Florida.

Calvin had seen information about CCA's community re-entry help when he was incarcerated. He met with his counselor and asked if CCA could help him.

Community re-entry is extremely difficult, especially for those without family support. Calvin needed a safe place to sleep, access to food, medical and mental health services. He needed stability, and the support of someone he could depend on.

CCA informed Calvin of his legal rights, helped him open a bank account, get food benefits, and his stimulus check. CCA staff linked him with a Youth Navigator at 211 to speed the process of finding shelter and an apartment. He feels safe in his community, and is looking for a construction job so he can support himself.

Systemic Gains

CCA attorney Stacey Violante Cote worked with the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, the National League of Cities, and statewide partners to create a pilot project in the Stamford Judicial District to address the intersection of juvenile justice and youth homelessness. The group is working to craft effective programs to keep youth in stable housing.

Attorneys Adam Yagaloff and Stacy Schleif helped teens who were homeless get settled into secure apartments and collect the basic items they needed. Their legal representation helped the process move more quickly, avoiding the constant fear of not having a safe place to sleep.



Immigrant Justice

Undocumented youth live day to day, especially now, fearing what could happen.

Marco's Story

Marco lived on his own in Norwalk, in a tiny and filthy rented space, without a toilet or shower. He came to the US a year ago, escaping gang violence in his native Guatemala.

When COVID struck, closing Marco's high school and eliminating his job at a local restaurant, Marco was already working with the Center's Immigrant Justice attorney, Patricia Marealle, to secure Special Immigrant Juvenile Status – a special status for children and youth who have been abused, neglected or abandoned by their parents, and cannot return to their home country.

Without a job, Marco had no money to pay for his cellphone, and without his cellphone, he had no access to the internet to continue his online high school classes.

The Center's emergency fund covered Marco's phone costs, allowing him to continue his education, and a generous donor provided basics, like bedding and clothing. CCA helped Marco complete an application for safe housing, and Marco moved to an apartment with his cousin.

Attorney Marealle checks in with Marco often while his immigration case is pending. His housing is clean and secure, and Marco looks forward to finishing high school and finding full time employment.

Systemic Gains

Safety allows hope for a successful future. The Center secured Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for over 40 youth this year, allowing them to apply for permanent status.

CCA attorney Patricia Marealle worked with Make the Road, a Bridgeport organization that helps immigrants find independence and success in their communities. CCA and Make the Road are creating and distributing Know Your Rights materials about students' access to bilingual education and supports.

Attorney Marealle trained 20 more pro bono attorneys this year to help represent statewide youth who need support to file for legal status.



Juvenile and Criminal Justice

Since March, education and mental health services for incarcerated youth have been limited and inconsistent. Trauma and anxiety were higher than ever, but mental health support and appropriate schooling were often unavailable.

Victor's Story

Victor was referred to the Center for Children's Advocacy by Hartford's Community Partners in Action re-entry program for people returning to the community from confinement.

Victor had been incarcerated for low-level crimes. He already had a high school diploma, but his record would impede his search for employment and safe housing.

CCA staff worked to assure that Victor's transition back to the community would be successful. Attorney Marisa Halm helped Victor understand how his record would impact his job search. Paralegal Tiffany Minakhom coordinated access to basic household and clothing needs. Youth Organizer Lourdes Fonseca encouraged Victor to join the Center's Youth Voice group, advisors to the state's Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee, where he helped facilitate a virtual community forum to discuss issues of equity for youth of color: juvenile justice, healthcare, education and safety.

The Center's support allowed Victor to get his feet back under him, navigating the transition to stable housing, getting the basic resources needed to survive, and enabling his access to healthcare and mental health services.

Victor's involvement with the Center's Youth Voice group led to employment at an organization that works with the community to improve the lives of children and youth at risk of education inequities or system involvement.

Systemic Gains

CCA learned that DCF was discharging youth from care if they were sentenced to prison for more than 12 months. They received no support during their confinement, and were released from confinement without a place to live, access to basic needs, guidance on reapplying for supports, or information on how to successfully navigate their return to the community.

In response to a Complaint filed by CCA Attorney Stacy Schleif and the advocacy of Attorneys Schleif and Halm, DCF revised its practices regarding these exclusionary policies to ensure that dual-system involved youth have access to DCF supports necessary to avoid recidivism and succeed when they return to the community.



Health Equity

Healthcare is a fundamental right, yet so many in our state struggle without access to adequate care.

Essie's Story

Essie was diagnosed with PTSD, depression and a severe eating disorder. She cycled through numerous inpatient and outpatient psychiatric services, and was finally admitted to Yale New Haven Hospital for refusing to eat.

Hospital staff gave Essie a feeding tube and provided her with daily, intensive therapy. After two months, Essie was ready for discharge, but they had nowhere for her to go.

The hospital staff called CCA's Medical Legal Partnership attorney, Alice Rosenthal, to help find a hospital-based residential treatment placement for Essie. The Department of Social Services initially refused to cover the cost of the placement because the facility was out of state, but Attorney Rosenthal appealed, and DSS determined it was "medically necessary."

When Essie was ready for discharge to a step-down facility, CCA advocated with her school district to fund residential treatment. Upon threat of a formal legal complaint, the school district agreed, and Essie moved to an appropriate school-based residential treatment center. After years of bouncing from one facility to another with no hope of recovery, Essie and her family finally have hope that she will overcome her eating disorder and have a healthy future.

Systemic Gains

Disability rights are a large focus of the Center's work. Bonnie Roswig, Director of the Center's Disability Rights Project, had two systemic health wins this year that profoundly changed the face of access for children with disabilities.

A US Justice Department Decision directed all Tender Care daycare facilities to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and accommodate children with epilepsy. The decision has national implications for children who regularly suffered discrimination because of their health status.

Working with co-counsel, Attorney Roswig also prevailed in US Justice Department Settlement Agreements with Glastonbury, East Lyme, Stamford and Wethersfield that compel schools to provide oversight for children with diabetes who wear a glucose monitor.



Educational Equity

Aliyah's Story

Aliyah is six years old and lives in Bridgeport with her mother. At school, she was often angry, disrupting the classroom. School staff never asked why Aliyah was angry, and never scheduled an assessment to determine the support she needed. Instead, they began making 911 emergency calls.

Aliyah has lived through a lot of trauma. Before first grade, she witnessed her cousin shot outside their apartment. She saw two people shot at the corner store when she was playing outside. She lived almost every day – until her father moved out – with domestic violence between her parents.

Aliyah was afraid to leave her mother because she worried that something would happen to her. Not surprisingly, she was constantly agitated and unregulated.

CCA Attorney Kathryn Meyer worked with the school to have Aliyah tested. She prevailed with the school to have them provide behavioral supports so Aliyah could remain in her neighborhood school, and provide educational supports to help her learn.

Systemic Gains

When COVID closed the schools, districts began to distribute tablets to students in our most impoverished cities. However, without internet access, online education remained out of reach for many. Children lost valuable hours of instruction, falling further behind. Attorney Kathryn Meyer wrote an Opinion Piece published by the CT Mirror, *Don't Leave Bridgeport Children Behind*, focusing on the disparities revealed by school closure.

Attorney Meyer helped lead the state's Education Workgroup, a coalition convened by the Office of the Child Advocate to challenge the inequities of distance learning and fight for district and state accountability to ensure children's needs are met upon return to school. The group continues its advocacy to remediate academic and social-emotional damage caused by closures.

CCA filed a complaint with the State Department of Education (SDE) on behalf of preschool children in Norwalk who had special education needs but experienced significant delays in services because Norwalk required proof of residency prior to beginning the assessment and planning process. SDE investigated and ordered Norwalk to provide educational services to compensate for time lost, and to forward referrals of all 2017-2018 preschool students to review eligibility for compensatory education. Norwalk Public Schools will no longer require families to prove residency before the special education process begins.



Abuse and Neglect

With no clear end to COVID closures and slowdowns, vulnerable children are largely out of sight, living with parents who are stressed by job losses and lack of critical resources.

Asia's Story

Asia was in DCF care all her life, and at age 14 gave birth to her son, Jonah. Off and on, they lived with Jonah's father, but there was violence in the household, and no stability to their life.

At age 5, the Department of Children and Families removed Jonah from his mother's care. They placed him in foster care with his aunt and uncle, who provided a safe and loving home and enrolled Jonah in school for the first time.

CCA attorney Stacy Schleif advocated to have Jonah tested for special education needs. Supports were put in place, but when COVID closed the schools, Jonah never saw his first grade teacher; his school work was only online materials. His special education teacher arranged a weekly online visit, but Jonah needed more contact and guidance. Attorney Schleif held online meetings with the school and worked out a plan for the special education teacher to check in with Jonah a few times each week.

Attorney Schleif worked with Jonah's aunt and uncle and arranged virtual visits with Jonah's mother that reinforced their close bond. She worked with the Court to secure guardianship for Jonah's aunt and uncle, allowing Asia to maintain her parental rights and look forward to a continuing relationship with her son as she continues to work toward her own stability.

Systemic Gains

At age 18, discharged from DCF care without family to turn to, youth struggle to find stability. They need jobs, housing, medical and mental health care. CCA continues to work with the Department of Children and Families, and trained 23 attorneys last year to provide pro bono representation to help youth stay in care and establish the supports they need before they are completely on their own.

The Center for Children's Advocacy trains all of the child protection attorneys contracted with the state. CCA Attorneys Stacy Schleif and Martha Stone trained 20 new Connecticut child protection attorneys this year, providing the legal training and technical assistance that help assure adequate representation.



Spring for Kids 2020

The Center's annual Spring for Kids fundraiser went virtual this year and raised over \$85,000.

Thank you to our 2020 Champion of Children Honorees:



Sandy Cruz-Serrano
Deputy Director
Connecticut Regional Education Council (CREC)



State Representative Jeff Currey
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We are grateful to our loyal sponsors and the generous donors who helped make this year's event a great success:

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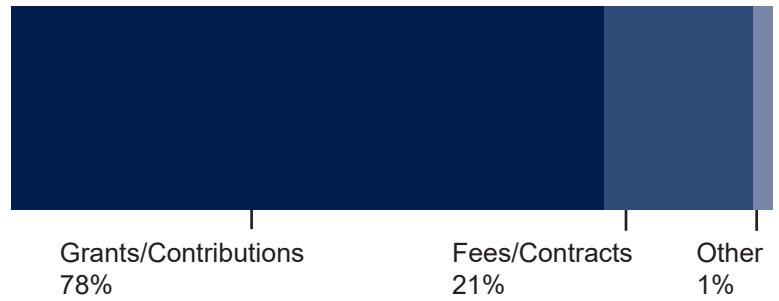
Watch the recorded event at cca-ct.org/springforkids2020.



Financial Report

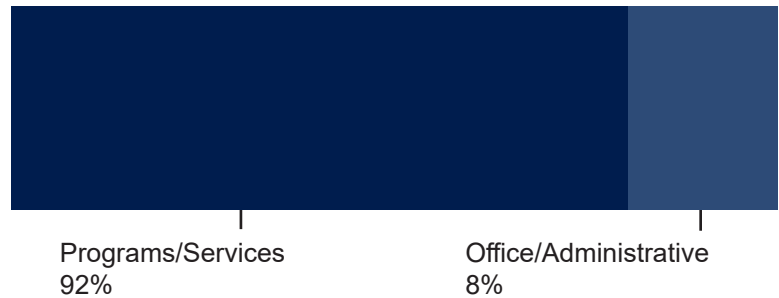
Income

Grants/Contributions	1,878,960
Fees/Contracts	508,681
Other	14,416
Total	2,402,057



Expenses

Programs/Services	2,179,395
Office/Administrative	195,299
Total	2,374,693



Thank you for making this work possible.

Contributions received July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

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