



The Children's Law Center of Connecticut

Award Winning Children's Author to Write Book About Children's Law Center

Bruce Clements, President of the Children's Law Center Board of Directors, is writing a novel for young people based on the organization's work. He promises that the manuscript will be at his publisher in New York (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux) on March 15th, and if all goes as expected, the book will appear in the spring of 2005. All profits from sales of the book will come to the Law Center.

It will be his eleventh book for young people. In addition to his duties as President of the Board, Bruce received this year's "Connecticut Children's Author of the Year" award.

"Good fiction is always basically true," he says.

"The people you're writing about get to be more real to you than many of the real people you know. What they do and say has to be true to who they are and the world they live in. Five of his eleven books for young people are historical novels. One, "I Tell A Lie Ever So Often," was a nominee for the National Book Award.

The CLC novel, the working title of which is "What I Want," poses special problems and possibilities. Bruce has been connected with CLC for most of the ten years of its existence, so he is in touch with the culture and history of our work. The Law Centers three attorneys, Justine, Otto, and now Randa, make sure he's getting the
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Director's Corner: Creating a Lasting Peace



These letters give me an opportunity to tell you about our programs and the great work that the staff does. But I wonder if I can possibly impart to you the gravity of the cases that we deal with – the pain, the anger and the helplessness that our little (and sometimes not so little) clients feel.

Every day, we deal with angry parents hurting each other and, while they may not mean to, hurting their children. These moms and dads are suffering – from mental illness, addiction, ill health, indigence, ignorance and stupidity. It's hard for us, as outsiders, to understand how moms and dads can act this way and not realize the harm that they are causing their children. We can't feel what they feel or suffer what they suffer. We are on the outside looking in and seeing things from a different perspective.

Most of all, in all that we do, this is the most valuable: we give parents a view from our perspective, which is really their children's perspective. Sometimes, it makes angry parents even angrier and we lock our doors and check our peep holes before allowing someone in the office. But sometimes, when the time is right and we've built up a relationship with the parent, they see – they *finally* see - what they've been doing and, with our help and the help of others, they begin to change.

In each of our programs, Representation, Law Line and Families in Transition Mediation, the goal is to help families make lives better for their children. We help them to protect their own children from danger. We teach parents to recognize harmful behaviors in themselves and change them. Most importantly, we try to keep each parents' focus on their children's needs and desires.

An author recently asked the attorneys in the office what our highest goal is in representing kids. It was interesting to note that, although we had been asked individually, our answers were the same . . . PEACE.

Host a Benefit Tag Sale



Looking for a creative way to teach your own kids about helping others who are less fortunate?

Plan a tag sale this summer and donate the proceeds to the Children's Law Center.

Eighty-five percent of our organization's budget comes from philanthropic sources, and donations from individuals are a significant portion of that income.

It's a great way to donate to an organization you care about and teach your children at the same time. Get them involved by hanging posters to advertise the event, helping to sort through their old toys, and helping set up the day of the sale.

Fresh Faces at CLC

The Children's Law Center is pleased to introduce to you to the new faces you'll see in our Hartford office.

Joan Sinisgalli became actively involved with the Law Center when she saw our listing in the Chronicle of Philanthropy's holiday insert to the Hartford Courant. Joan responded to our need for daytime office volunteers and over the past several weeks has been tremendously helpful in organizing our office and assisting with a variety of administrative projects. Sue Rakich has also been helpful in organizing our files and systems as a daytime office volunteer.

Our newest student interns, Tiffany Asbury and Tahari Austin, are both from Saint Joseph College. Tahari Austin is from Windsor and currently a senior studying History and English. Tahari is interested in pursuing a career in law. At the Children's Law Center she hopes to learn more about the legal system and the unique field of representation of children. Tiffany recently declared her major in Child and Family Studies. She is considering pursuing the combined MSW and JD program.

Foundations Support Law Center

Funds Help to Grow Legal Pro-

The Children's Law Center has recently been awarded grants from Lincoln Financial Group, the Fisher Foundation, and the Greater Hartford Jaycees Foundation, who distributes funds raised from the Buick Championship golf tournament through its Children's Fund, grants, and scholarships. Each of the awards will be used to support the Legal Representation Program, the core service of our organization.

The Legal Representation Program provides legal advocates for indigent children who are involved in high conflict custody and visitation cases. In addition to the condition of indigence cases must all include allegations of domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, child abuse/neglect or other chronic conflict.

"Because of the support of these foundations our organization is realizing major programmatic goals"

— Shannon Wegele,
Director of Development

Although the program is not yet statewide, there is no other organization in Connecticut that duplicates this service. For this reason, the Children's Law Center is committed to expanding the program into new judicial districts and adding the necessary staff to support the additional caseload. In March, Randa Hojaiban will begin as the organization's new staff attorney and social worker.

In 2003 the Board and staff invested significant time evaluating its current programs and developing a long range strategic plan that sets specific goals of how to improve or expand the organization's services. Executive Director, Justine Rakich-Kelly says of the process, "I think it was one of the smartest investments we ever made. Now we are able to use that document as a road map for the organization, and better articulate our vision to potential funders."

"It is an exciting time for the Children's Law Center. Because of the support of these foundations our organization is realizing major programmatic goals," said Shannon Wegele, Director of Development.

Author Writes of Law Center's Work

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legal and procedural matters right. The attorneys in the novel are not those three, but they derive much of their life from them. Erika, the fourteen year old girl whose story is told in the novel, is fictional, but the problems she faces and the ways in which she benefits from, and sometimes spars with, the staff are firmly grounded in our experience.

"It's a story, first and last," Bruce says. "The setting is crucial, but it's Erika's life, Erika's problems and work and loves, what she does to save herself, that I hope will make people, whatever their age, want to start and finish it."

Law Center Supported With Many Unique Donations

Once again we were touched by the generosity of a child. We were recently visited by Nicole W. of Granby who was looking for a new home for the stuffed toys that she had outgrown. They are now available for kids to play with in our waiting area. Thank you Nicole!

Special thanks also goes out to **Tuesdays with Sebastian**, the classical music duo of Christa Rakich and Peter Sykes. Based in Boston, Tuesdays with Sebastian is dedicated to playing the complete keyboard works of J.S. Bach by performing 34 concerts in the Greater Boston area that take place on select Tuesday evenings. Proceeds from the ticket sales are donated to designated area charities. Although the Children's Law Center has no operations in Massachusetts we were fortunate to be the recipient of a January concert that raised \$600. For more information about this unique concert series and the musicians visit www.tuesdayswithsebastian.info.

Lastly we'd like to recognize two area businesses that granted our wish for a new copy machine. **Gentiva Health Services** of Farmington and **Camp Dresser & McKee, Inc.** of Wethersfield donated the machines. Their gesture has dramatically improved the efficiency of our office. We can't thank them enough.

Law Center Mourns Tragic Loss of Kendall Family

On December 13, 2003 the Children's Law Center was saddened to learn of the tragic deaths of Ramona, Kayla, and Alexis Kendall. Kayla (age 16) and Alexis (age 13) lived with their mother, Ramona Kendal (age 45), in an apartment in East Hartford.

Ramona and her husband Michael Kendall were in the process of getting divorced, which included accusations of domestic violence against Mr. Kendall. Because of financial circumstances they had continued to live in the same apartment, however a judge had given Mr. Kendall a deadline of 10 a.m. December 13 to leave the premises.

In those early morning hours Ramona, Kayla, and Alexis were murdered with single gunshot wounds to the head. Their apartment was then set on fire. All other residents of the building were able to escape.

Michael Kendall was the primary suspect for the crime. His history of violence and a prior arrest of arson made him a logical choice. Kendall evaded area police for several weeks, but in January was arrested in Hartford with the help of a private citizen. If convicted of capital felony murder he may face the death penalty.

"In my twelve years of practicing law I think this was my most difficult time. A tragedy like this reverberates through the entire community," said Justine Rakich-Kelly, Executive Director. She added, "Let's not forget, the death of an innocent child by the hands of her father was the impetus for starting the Children's Law Center. Personally, it is a crime I will never understand."

Questions about Family Law or Children's Rights?

Call The Children's Law Line

1-888-LAW-DOOR

The Children's Law Center of Connecticut

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“Protecting the legal interests of children”

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Our Wish List

If you are able to donate any of the items listed below please let us know. You can call us at (860) 232-9993.

- ♥ Tickets or gift certificates for movies, sporting events, or other activities and outings that can be given to clients. Gifts and activities help attorneys establish a rapport and trust with children.
- ♥ In-kind printing services
- ♥ First-aid kit for office
- ♥ New/gently used digital camera
- ♥ New/gently used laptop computers for attorneys
- ♥ Electronic postage scale
- ♥ General office supplies such as copier paper, pens, post-its.