
The Children's Law Center of Connecticut

A Decade of Progress



Report to the Community
2002

Annual message

Dear Friends of the Children's Law Center,

Poor kids whose futures are in the hands of juvenile courts always have attorneys. Poor kids whose futures are in the hands of family courts almost never do. The damage this difference causes is clear, not only to the staff and supporters of your Children's Law Center, but to a growing number of lawyers, legislators, judges, and even warring parents and guardians.

We take some of the credit for that.

Ten years.

Another ten, even if we grow three times as strong and smart as we are now, won't be enough to put true balance into the system. But to judge from the first ten years, we know what we need to do. So long as our friends back us with money and ideas and enthusiasm and time, it's safe to say that the kids caught in the wars of adults will have a better chance at justice and opportunity when we turn twenty.

To those who have helped us get this far, thanks.

Bruce Clements, Board President

Justine Rakich-Kelly, Executive Director

Staff 2002

Justine Rakich-Kelly, Executive Director
Otto H. Iglesias, Staff Attorney
Judith Hyde, Director of Development
Karen Renfro, Hub
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Board of Directors 2002

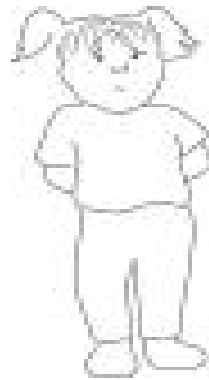
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Our mission

CLC seeks to protect the interests of poor children in court and to advocate policies which advance their well-being and best interests.

Our services

- ? Legal representation and advocacy for individual children in family court
- ? Information, advice and referrals through the Children's LawLine (1-888-LAW DOOR)
- ? Conflict resolution through mediation for parents in high-conflict family court cases
- ? Professional education through seminars, mentoring, and publications
- ? Promotion of changes in legal systems and processes to establish the rights of children



Court Representation Program in 2002

Court jurisdiction	Number of children	Number of cases
Hartford	124	84
Rockville	8	6
Putnam	13	8
Total	145	98

One child's story

My client Matthew's grades were falling. He ignored his friends and gave up sports and music. He was losing weight. He was angry. Matt lived with his father; his parents were going through a bitter custody dispute.

Everyone thought that he should spend as much time as he could with both parents – the basic premise being that a child deserves the love and affection of both parents. As time went on, Matt's problems got worse. Toward the end of each week, Matt's behavior would deteriorate. He would start getting sick to his stomach with worry over the coming weekend. He explained to me that he just couldn't stand being forced to spend so much time with his mother. During every visit, she grilled him about what he wanted, what was going on in Dad's home, and blaming Dad for everything bad that was happening. If Matt dared to disagree, their conversations deteriorated into screaming matches, and then silence.

Following the wishes of my client, I made a motion to have the visitation order vacated. At the hearing, his therapist testified about the effect the forced visits were having on him. The court granted my motion and freed Matthew from being forced to visit his mother.

This might seem a terrible story with a sad outcome, but what occurred afterwards is the best news. Matthew called his mom to have dinner, which they did. His mother tried not to ask questions and just have a good time. Matt asked to spend Thanksgiving with her, and did. Now he sees his mom every week – but on his own terms. She has learned how her behavior was hurtful to Matt. His grades and his behavior have improved. Matt's father says, "I have my son back again. He's happy and he's doing really well."

Justine Rakich-Kelly

The Children's LawLine

In the first year of the Children's LawLine, we took 146 calls.
In 2002, we received 1439 new calls touching on the lives of 1949 children.
Adding the 244 repeat calls from previous callers, that comes to 1683 calls.

Callers in 2002 included

738 mothers
244 fathers
98 grandparents
33 children
37 professionals
289 unknown

Gender of the children involved was

877 males
994 females
78 unknown

Ethnicity of the children was

1131 white
292 black
215 hispanic
175 biracial
19 asian
29 other
78 unknown

Issues raised by callers were

41% custody
11% visitation
8% Dept of Children & Families
5% education
4% child support
3% guardianship
2% grandparents' rights
2% divorce
1% paternity
1% emancipation
<1% restraining order
<1% adoption
14% other
7% unknown

When you're dealing with your child, you get emotional.

I've called 8 times and was never made to feel like "Oh God. She's calling again."

People were willing to take the time, every time I called.

You made me feel like someone is out there on my side.

It's been a godsend!

*Ms. M.M.
March 2003*

Moving on. . .

Dear Friends,

This is it. My last annual report before I retire. The first one in 1993-4 was on a single folded sheet of blue paper. It reported expenses of \$20,000 and the pro bono representation of seven children by attorneys **Debra Ruel, Deborah Mason, Marianne Lassman Fisher** and **John McGrath**.

I am struck by the way this quote from my first letter still works today:

“The visionaries of the Children’s Law Center are hoping for and working toward the time when: children’s safety will come before parents’ rights... when all children in contested custody and visitation cases will have lawyers appointed as soon as any court official or a parent’s attorney realizes the case fits the criteria...when all children in such cases will have benefit of a lawyer/mental health team to represent their best interests...when children will have a lawyer advocate even when parents go unrepresented due to lack of money.”

The letter concludes with my promise to devote all my energy and imagination to overcoming the obstacles to justice and compassion for children in Connecticut’s courts. Although the goal was lofty, I did keep at it.

How did we visionaries do it? How did a small grass roots organization survive and grow and become what it is today—a legal services organization with a staff of five in a six-room office with an annual budget of a quarter of a million dollars?

The secret was asking the right people for help.

????Who will help me put together a conference on children’s rights? I will, said **Judge Charles Gill**.

????Who will be my legal partner? I will, said **Debra Ruel**.

????Who will help us get some money? I will, said **Pam West**.

????Who will give us a place to do business? We will, said **Leo** and **Teri Santucci**.

????Who will help craft legislation? I will, said **Judge Frederica Brenneman**.

????Who will answer the phones and set up the office? I will, said **Carol Geyer**.

????Who will be our managing attorney? I will, said **Garrett Tuller**.

????Who will be our Board muse? I will, said **Bruce Clements** — and while I’m at it, I will also wear my wife’s black gown and jewelry and paint my toenails red for the Funky Fashion Show.

????Who will be our emcee? I will, said **Nancy Wyman**.

- ? Who will get us computerized and online? I will, said **Murphy Sewall.**
- ? Who will teach us labor laws? I will, said **Anne Walker.**
- ? Who will do logos and greeting cards for CLC? I will, said **Susan Martenson.**
- ? Who can bring in a speaker of national prominence? I can, said **Elaine Kahaner.**
- ? Who will present our case to the CT Bar Foundation? We will, said **Anne Walker, Debra Ruel, Jeanine Dumont and Bruce Clements.**
- ? Who will act the Judge's part in a fund raiser? I will, said **Barbara Ruhe.**
- ? Who will help us with advocacy? I will, said **Bob Madden.**
- ? Who will raise more money for CLC? We will, said **Amy Brenneman, her mother, and the Connecticut Women's Council.**
- ? Who will get us started on program evaluation? We will, said **Stu Kermes and Joan Greene.**
- ? Who can open up our services to Spanish-speaking clients? I can, said **Otto H. Iglesias.**
- ? Who can hold things together when the going gets rough? I can, said **Karen Renfro.**
- ? Who will hold my hand, from the first CLC day to my last? I will, said **Donna Bronwell.**
- ? Who can lead CLC in the next decade? I can, said **Justine Rakich-Kelly.**

And this does not begin to cover all the people who gave their time, their skills and their heartfelt support as CLC Board members, volunteers, interns and collaborators over these ten years.

With its present excellent staff, attentive Board, and years of experience, the Children's Law Center will continue to speak out clearly for children.

With love and appreciation to every single person who made the vision real,

Judy Hyde



Financial Overview

One mark of a nonprofit organization's success is how well its constituents support it and how much it must spend to generate that support.

REVENUE

Program Grants	94,940
Program revenue	44,122
Contributions	44,672
Carry over	35,056
Event	8,300
United Way	4,237
Interest	702
Other	4,402

\$236,431

Revenue 1993-94	\$33,228
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EXPENSES

Programs	203,753
Management and fund raising	28,758

\$232,652

Expenses 1993-94	\$20,860
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Our wonderful donors -- 2002

(asterisks indicate donors who are listed in our first annual report)

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