

The Children's Law Center

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Executive Director Report: Growth spurts

ATTY. JUSTINE RAKICH-KELLY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When my oldest child was born one of the first things I learned about was growth spurts. There was no satisfying my son's appetite. He ate endless amounts of food and before I knew it he'd doubled his weight and grew out of all his clothes. My pediatrician set my mind at ease, calling it a natural part of the process. As a new parent I found it exciting, and, at times, exasperating.

The Children's Law Center is the midst of its own growth spurt.

As a supporter of ours you already know that expanding our Legal Representation Program is one of our highest priority goals. Every year the program helps more and more kids ensnared in high conflict custody and visitation cases.

An increase in support from the Connecticut Bar Foundation/IOLTA is funding our expansion into the Waterbury area this fall. On page 2 of this newsletter, you will see that we have hired a new full-time attorney, Nancy Strini.

We also added Dori Bessette to our staff this spring. Dori is a Marriage and Family Therapist. Her expertise will more deeply integrate a mental health component into our work, which is a critical component of creating lasting change in children's lives.

As if that weren't enough, there is even more growth in store for our organization.

This year, the General Assembly included \$150,000 in the State Budget for the Children's Law Center. We are currently discussing the best use of these additional resources. We will add a new judicial district this fall, and are considering the addition of up to two more districts shortly thereafter.

To put that in perspective, today the program serves 44 towns and cities. By Fall we will add at least 8 additional towns. Two more districts would bring the total up to 80 towns.

The Staff and the Board of Directors are approaching this growth with their eyes wide open, and we expect the road ahead will have its bumps. That's okay. After all, it is all part of the natural growing process – exciting, and, at times exasperating.

Area Foundations Renew Commitment to Legal Representation Program

CT BAR, SBM AND AMERICAN SAVINGS
FOUNDATIONS ARE BEDROCK OF SUPPORT
FOR CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER

We are pleased to announce that the SBM Foundation and the American Savings Foundation have awarded grants to support the



Legal Representation Program. The American Savings Foundation award of \$49,000 will support the program's services to the New Britain Judicial District, which is now half of the organization's caseload.

The SBM Foundation's grant of \$15,000 is supporting the program's service to communities east of the river.

Area Foundations, continued page 2

Executive Director Named to Governor's Commission

Justine Rakich-Kelly, Executive Director of the Children's Law Center has been appointed to Governor Jodi Rell's Commission on Judicial Reform.

Rakich-Kelly says of her appointment, "I am honored to have been chosen and look forward to my service. I also believe that this is further evidence that the Children's Law Center has emerged as one of the state's prominent voices in the area of family law."

Staff Expands to Serve Growing Numbers of Children

FOURTH STAFF ATTORNEY AND MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL ADDED

In September **Attorney Nancy Strini** will become our newest Staff Attorney.



Atty. Nancy Strini

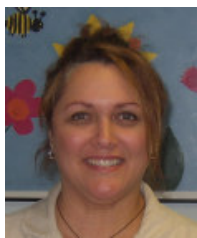
Nancy interned at the Children's Law Center while attending Quinnipiac University School of Law. She has continued to stay active with the organization as a volunteer mediator in the Families in Transition Program.

Prior to enrolling in law school, Strini worked as a senior executive at Readers

Digest.

Like all of our organization's legal staff most of her time will be dedicated to the Legal Representation Program, but she will also support the Children's Law Line, Families in Transition Program and the Advocacy Program.

The Children's Law Center realized one of its a long-held goals when it finally added a mental health professional to the staff this spring. We are proud to introduce you to **Dori Bessette**, our Marriage and Family Therapist.



Dori Bessette, MFT

Dori has a critical role in the organization. She works in partnership with the Staff Attorneys to collect collateral information and put into place needed services for our young clients.

Dori got her Masters degree from St. Joseph College and has experience in crisis stabilization and intervention. She

says of her work, "I am excited to be working with such a dedicated team of professionals who share my passion in advocating for children."

Mea Culpa! Mea Culpa!

CORRECTIONS TO THE 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

Paddi LeShane's name was accidentally omitted from the list of committee volunteers who planned our fall event celebrating the publication of *What Erika Wants*. Paddi worked diligently on the event and was an invaluable source of support.

Christa Rakich's name was omitted from the list of donors appearing in the 2005 Annual Report. Christa is a classical musician. She recently performed a series of concerts in the Boston area. The proceeds of those concerts benefitted non-profit organizations, including the Children's Law Center.

Our heartfelt apologies to Paddi and Christa, both of whom have been long time supporters of the Children's Law Center.

Continued from page 1

Area Foundations

With a substantial increase in support from the CT Bar Foundation (IOLTA) the Legal Program will be expanding its reach in the fall. Currently the program serves 44 towns and cities. According to Justine Rakich-Kelly, "It's important that as we expand we do so at a sustainable rate. I am confident that we are doing just that."

By design, the program serves a moderate number of children, but makes a profound difference in their lives. The children of Connecticut are better off because of the support of foundations like SBM, American Savings, and the Connecticut Bar Foundation

The American Savings Foundation has also placed one of its scholarship students with the Children's Law Center for the third consecutive year. Kyle Nelson, a junior at UConn, is conducting a follow up survey of callers of the Children's Law Line. He will also help with the outcome measures of the Legal Representation Program.



United Way
Community Campaign

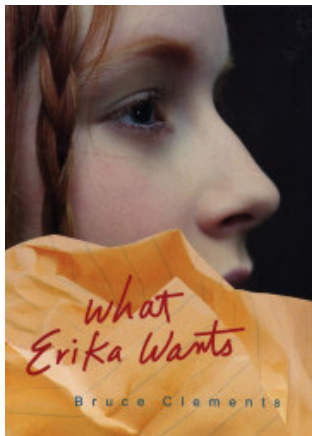
The United Way is a valuable source of support for the Children's Law Center.

Last year, our organization received \$5,000 from individuals who donated to their workplace campaigns. The United Way also provides critical funding to our Legal Representation Program's services in the Hartford Area.

Your workplace's United Way campaign will begin before you know it. We hope that you will continue to support the worthy organizations in the Hartford area by participating.

Norwich Free Academy Assigns 9th Grade *What Erika Wants*

TOGETHER ATTORNEYS AND STUDENTS EXPLORE ISSUES SURROUNDING
PARENTAL CONFLICT AND FAMILY LAW



On the morning of March 15, 2006, Justine Rakich-Kelly accompanied award-winning author of *What Erika Wants* Bruce Clements as he visited with ninth grade students at Norwich Free Academy. Earlier in the semester, NFA's ninth grade students were assigned Clements' *What Erika Wants* as required reading.

Upon arrival at Norwich Free Academy, Justine and Bruce gave the students a brief presentation. Bruce described for the inquisitive ninth graders, the relationship he had developed with each of the characters he portrayed in the novel, while Justine described what it's like to work in Connecticut's family court system.

Following the presentation, Justine and Bruce divided the students into small groups to do creative writing exercises.

The visit by Bruce and Justine sparked student interest in family law. As a follow up, on May 11th two Norwich Free Academy students came to the Children's Law Center. The students were given a tour, and filmed a brief segment on the Children's Law Center, which is to be submitted to **Fox 61 Student News** for possible broadcast at a later date. In May, Children's Law Center attorneys Justine Rakich-Kelly, Randa Hojaiban and Otto Iglesias traveled to Norwich Free Academy to present a mock trial for nearly 100 ninth grade students. This interactive exercise helped spark students' interest in the law, and provided them with a first hand look at the trial process.

The connection established between the Children's Law Center and Norwich Free Academy has been extremely beneficial to both parties. Increasing youth awareness of how Connecticut's family court system operates is the first step in ensuring the system's future success.

Families in Transition

The Children's Law Center is committed to protecting children from the harm that high conflict parenting disputes cause. The Families in Transition program, or FIT, is one of several programs that help us to achieve that goal.

Mediation is a way to work out a fair, legally enforceable settlement, while keeping a family disagreement from becoming a bitter, endless, and expensive war. In mediation, the parents control every decision affecting the family while the mediator simply helps them examine their situation in terms of their needs and interests.

What also makes the FIT program unique is that the mediators work in teams. For every couple that comes to the program, we provide a male and female team consisting of an attorney and a mental health professional, both of whom are knowledgeable about the family court process.

Those interested in participating in FIT, referring a family, or getting more information about becoming a volunteer mediator call 1-888-LAW-DOOR (1-888-529-3667).

Special Thanks to Attys. Barrett & Dembo

Children's Law Center Submits Amicus Brief in *Fish v. Fish*

A very special thank you to our good friends, Atty. Campbell Barrett (Budlong & Barrett) and Atty. Steven Dembo (Berman, Bourns, Aaron & Dembo).

Steve and Campbell are long time supporters of the Children's Law Center and have once again contributed considerable time and brainpower drafting our most recent *Amicus* brief in the matter of *Fish v. Fish*.

Children's Law Line Now Accessible to Hearing Impaired

VOLUNTEER SOLICITS DONATION OF TTY-TTD

With a recent addition of a TTY/TTD device, our legal help -line is now accessible to the hearing impaired. A TTY/TTD machine can range in price from \$300 to \$600; however, through the diligent work of Tracy Knight, one of our spring interns, she was able to acquire a donated device.

The device is simple to execute. An unrepresented person who is hearing impaired can dial our toll free number (888) LAW-DOOR and be connected instantly to a live person trained in family law or for more complex technical questions be connected to an attorney. General questions can be typed and answered right away. For detailed questions we would need to gather confidential information from the caller first before we are able to answer any legal questions.

1-888-LAW-DOOR
1-888-529-3667



Development of Legal Practice Book Nears End

The Children's Law Center is nearly completed writing a legal practice book about the representation of children in family court.

The Connecticut Bar Association will publish the book, and the release date is projected to be early 2007.

There are few attorneys who specialize in the representation of children. We hope that this book will help to attract more. More seasoned family lawyers will also find the book helpful because it will show what is unique about representing children, and clarify the difference between a GAL and an AMC.

Writing the book has been a collaborative process that includes staff, Board members, family lawyers, judges, and mental health professionals.

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PROTECTING THE INTEREST OF CHILDREN IN FAMILY COURT