

# NEWS FROM OUR HOUSE

## FALL 2019

The Children's **LAW** Center of Connecticut • Protecting Children & Strengthening Families



The Children's  
**LAW**  
Center

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### Meet a Summer Intern: Matthew Rossi

This summer, I had the incredible opportunity to serve as an intern for the Children's Law Center of Connecticut (CLC). After completing my internship and working with all of the wonderful members of the staff, I am so grateful for my time spent at the CLC and all of the many things I learned over the course of my intern experience.

One of my favorite things about my time with the CLC was how much variety and diversity there was in the work we did every day. No two cases or phone calls were exactly alike. Through working with the Lawline program, which offers free family law advice, I learned a tremendous amount about custody, visitation, child support, guardianship, and adoption among many other issues. Most critically, I saw how our Lawline makes a world of difference for so many people who otherwise would not have the capability to navigate the complex legal system of the family courts, especially those seeking to protect children from situations of abuse and neglect. While many calls were about similar topics broadly, each one was about a unique family in a unique situation, and thus required a unique solution. Working with the Lawline taught me not only how to rely on the CLC's training, but also how to think on my feet, and how to communicate complex and abstract legal processes in simply understood terms.

During my time at the CLC, I also had the opportunity to shadow several of our attorneys in court and observe their work as part of our Representation program. Much like the calls to our Lawline, every representation case is unique in its own way. Throughout the summer, I observed cases in the Superior Courts of Hartford, New Britain, and Danbury. Each court also had its own procedures and processes. By seeing each aspect of our cases, from our initial appointment to Family Relations Office mediation to the signing of final agreements, I gained a newfound appreciation for all of the hard work that goes into these high-conflict cases, both by our attorneys and all of the other court personnel. As Guardians *ad litem*, the CLC's attorneys have the difficult job of representing the best interest of the children in their cases, and they always do so with the utmost care and dedication.



2019 Summer Intern Matthew Rossi

The same care and dedication are seen in all of the CLC's programs, from the Families in Transition mediation program that works to resolve cases outside of the court system to the many trainings the CLC hosts for professionals in the field. In June, I had the opportunity to attend a Strengthening Families protective factors training with several of the other interns as well as attorneys from our organization and other firms. The training was thought-provoking and informative, and hearing the many experiences of the lawyers and mental health professionals was eye-opening.

Most of all, working at the CLC gave me so much respect for the wide network of people dedicated to improving the lives of children. From attorneys to social workers to doctors to teachers, there are so many people who are involved in this field and do not get the credit that they should for doing such crucial work. Yet I could also see how vulnerable kids can fall through the cracks, and realized it will take continuing work and support by everyone in order to strengthen this network even further. As I now enter my third year of college and consider attending law school after graduation, I will never forget the work I was able to do and the difference I was able to make as an intern with the CLC.

## Bringing Families Back Together

Every child deserves the opportunity to develop a healthy and secure relationship with both parents. When children can enjoy balanced interpersonal relationships with the people closest to them, they flourish. However, in some situations that is not possible for every child. With CLC's intervention comes the assurance that each parent will be given the tools to create a bond with their child.

Mia and Rachel were just 6 months old and 2 years old when their father, Edgar, was incarcerated. This prevented the girls from having any meaningful relationship with him: they grew up largely without a father figure, leaving their mother, Aileen struggling to fill both roles.



When Edgar was released from prison, he desperately wanted to be part of his daughters' lives again. Mia and Rachel were now 6 and 8 years old and had only known a life without their dad, but Edgar was determined to rebuild his relationship with them. Unfortunately, Edgar was still battling with substance abuse issues, leading Aileen to refuse Edgar access to the girls. Aileen and Edgar's opinions differed so drastically as to what was best for the girls that they were at constant odds with one another, placing the girls in a potentially volatile environment. Many months passed and Edgar grew distraught about whether he would ever be able to have a relationship with his girls again. Because Mia and Rachel were caught in the middle of their parents' conflict, the Court appointed a CLC attorney to serve as the girls' Guardian *ad litem* (GAL), a person who looks out for the child.

CLC's attorney, together with our staff social worker, gathered information about the girls and their family in order to help develop an effective parenting plan and provide appropriate referrals to the girls and their parents. Although Edgar's affection for Rachel and Mia was evident, CLC's team recommended that Edgar work on addressing his substance abuse issues if he were serious about having the girls back in his life. With CLC's help, Edgar entered a substance abuse treatment program to help him take the necessary steps and reach his goal of reformation. Despite Edgar's efforts, Aileen was still considerably distrustful of his character and the negative impact he might have on the girls. This resulted in significant levels of conflict between the Edgar and Aileen that prevented any possibility of compromise. CLC knew that Aileen and Edgar needed to learn how to communicate more effectively with one another in order to minimize their conflict. The elimination of negative communication between these parents meant that there would be more room for each to better hear the other and develop a more stable and happier environment for Mia and Rachel.

Both parents had a long way to go but they worked hard and listened to CLC's recommendations in order to help Mia and Rachel have both of them present in their lives. Edgar began having very limited supervised visits with the girls that gradually turned into two hours of unsupervised access a few times a week. Eventually, with CLC's help, Aileen and Edgar agreed that Edgar would enjoy time with the girls every other weekend and on Wednesday nights the girls would have a special treat of "Dinner at Dad's."

On the final day at the courthouse, Mia and Rachel ran up to their dad and showered him with hugs and kisses. It was easy to see just how profound the impact of their dad's reinvolvement in their lives had been. With tears in his eyes and a big hug, Edgar thanked the CLC attorney assigned to his case. Aileen, too, knew how much this meant to the girls and thanked CLC for making this reconciliation with their dad possible.

Edgar and Aileen will still have to work at managing a co-parenting relationship but they feel confident knowing that CLC has given them the necessary tools to effectively communicate with one another and limit as much conflict in the girls' lives as possible. While CLC's attorney remains available to Mia and Rachel should they need him, their parents are committed to co-parenting in a way that supports what is best for the girls. Since the last court appearance, this case has remained closed—and it is due largely to the dedication and hard work of Aileen and Edgar, and to the incredible CLC staff who work tirelessly to ensure that the benefit of having both parents in a child's life is attainable.

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## Thank You from CLC

Thank you to Shipman & Goodman for generously printing our Program book and for proving us quality service for many years. We are truly grateful for your time and collaboration!

2019 Annual Gala  
November 21 | Delamar West  
Hartford  
Get Your Tickets Today at  
<http://www.clcct.org/events>

We appreciate the generosity of DKA, Dornenburg Kallenbach Advertising, for providing design needs for our Gala Save-the-Date, Invitation & Program Book. For 3 years, DKA has donated its time and extraordinary talent.



## Greetings and Goodbyes at CLC

Earlier this year, we said goodbye to Marketing & Development Associate Danielle Murray. We will miss her and wish Danielle all the best as she embarks on a new journey in her life.

CLC welcomes aboard Jenna Trott to the CLC team as a Marketing & Development Associate.



Jenna recently graduated from the University of Connecticut. She earned her degree in English with a minor in Sociology and concentrations in both Marketing and Creative Writing. Jenna is looking forward to using the skills she acquired while working with the university's non-profit organization, The UConn Foundation, here at CLC.

When she's not working, Jenna can be found writing poetry or taking her puppy, Misum on long walks.

## Spotlight News

In 2018, The Children's Law Center adopted a new mission: to promote the best possible outcomes for children and families in transition or crisis by providing access to legal services and support they could not otherwise afford and by advancing collaborative, non-adversarial options for resolving conflicts outside the court system.

Our mission now enables CLC to provide legal representation services for children of parents who are not eligible for our existing services due to their level of income, yet they cannot otherwise afford needed legal services and support. Accordingly, on a very limited basis, CLC is beginning to offer this critically lacking service for moderate income families, on a sliding scale, enabling us to reach additional families to promote the best possible outcomes for children involved in their parents' family court disputes.

Thank you to Attorney David A. McGrath and the team at Loudon Katz & McGrath in West Hartford for donating your time and expertise to the Children's Law Center!

It is a rare occurrence that the Children's Law Center has the opportunity to participate when a parent appeals a family court decision. As guardian *ad litem*, we are limited to getting the parties' briefs and attending oral argument. However, an appeal that was filed this year presented a unique situation: a CLC attorney was appointed as guardian *ad litem* for the child and another CLC attorney acted as attorney for the guardian *ad litem*. This unusual situation not only allowed us take a position in the appeal but required us to do so.

Enter Attorney McGrath. The facts of the case were complicated and messy. With 13 days of trial and multiple motions filed throughout the life of the case, the record was difficult to decipher. Attorney McGrath, along with his team at Loudon Katz & McGrath, meticulously combed through the transcripts and worked tirelessly to draft a thorough and effective brief.

The voluminous record was distilled into concise arguments that both clarified the current law that should have been applied to the case and protected the role of the guardian *ad litem* in family court cases.

Dave, we are so grateful for your brain. And your heart!



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## Featured Events

### BLUE STATE COFFEE



BLUE STATE COFFEE®

Now through December 31st, Blue State Coffee is donating a portion of its sales to CLC! Buy a coffee, take a token, and support CLC.

777 Main Street, Hartford CT

### WINE, MUSIC & FASHION!



WEDS. NOVEMBER 6, 5-8 PM

Purchase high-end clothing for men & women and Morneault's will donate 20% of sales to CLC!

242 Trumbull Street, Hartford CT