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## THE CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER OF CONNECTICUT

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## Resolving Conflicts, Rebuilding Relationships

Lisa is an 11-year-old girl who is miserable. She lives with her mother and has limited contact with her father. She loves her Dad but he exhibits behavior that is alarming. He is quick to anger and tends to perseverate on minute issues, like what the mom packs Lisa for lunch. He's not focusing on the important things – like moving out of his efficiency apartment and into someplace where Lisa can visit him. His volatility is concerning to us and to the Judge. Every time we go to court, he loses it – virtually – he paces and rants in front of his camera until the judge asks the clerk to mute him.

Here's the thing: Lisa wants to live with her Dad. She hates being at her Mom's. She can manipulate her Dad to do just about anything she wants. Her Mom is definitely more strict. As you may know, our job isn't necessarily to

do what the child wants but to recommend what's best for her.

We went to Mom's home for a visit. Mom is engaged and living with her fiancé and his daughter. Lisa and her soon-to-be stepsister share a room – or that's what we thought. Our visit to the home is so telling. Mom's fiancé has pictures of his family all over the house – and not one of Lisa. The bedroom clearly belongs to the stepsister – there is nothing belonging to Lisa. Lisa is a visitor in her own home. By contrast, in Dad's home, as small as it is, everything is about Lisa. She is the center of his world. At Mom's, she's an afterthought.

We addressed this contrast with Mom – to highlight Lisa's perception – but Mom just couldn't see it and wanted me off the case.

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# Resolving Conflicts, Rebuilding Relationships

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We discussed with Dad the shortcomings of his home and suggested he engage in therapy to better regulate his emotions. He wanted me off the case, too.

Early on, I was hoping they'd take me off the case – that one of them would make the motion. They didn't. As time went on, things became clearer to us. Because of the court delays, there were months until trial and Lisa really struggled until, at one point, she started cutting.

Upon our recommendation, Lisa was enrolled in therapy. As guarded as Lisa was, she and her therapist started to develop a relationship. Dad brought her to therapy religiously. The therapist was brutally honest with both parents about their role in Lisa's undoing. Mom called to inform us that she was switching therapists to a

place closer to her because the therapist we identified was not convenient. We made it very clear, in no uncertain terms, that Lisa's therapist should not be changed and we would bring the matter to court if pressed.

As time went on, Dad started therapy and even did a psychiatric evaluation to help identify his challenges. He moved into a two-bedroom home. He wavered between accusing us of not caring about Lisa to trusting us. When trial came and he had accomplished everything he could to be a good provider for his daughter, we knew what our recommendation would be. I could see his face as I was testifying and I think he was a bit shocked as I described the crumbling relationship between Lisa and her Mom. I don't think he believed that we understood what was happening. The court

ordered a new parenting, with Dad being the primary parent.

Of course, Mom was devastated and still a bit in denial. However, Lisa was ecstatic. As time went on, Mom was able to adjust her priorities so that, in the limited time when she was with Lisa, she was "with Lisa." Mom and her fiancé turned a small playroom into a bedroom for Lisa. Slowly, Mom is making the adjustments to show Lisa that she is truly loved by both of her parents. A few weeks ago, Lisa's Dad called asking if he could bring Lisa by the office. We just thought, "Now what?" This case is supposed to be settled. It turned out that Lisa just wanted to thank us and let us know how happy she is. Now, I get to thank all of you for supporting our work. Because of you, kids like Lisa are living happier lives. ♥

## My Journey to The Children's LAW Center

by Staff Attorney Alex Puzone

Heading into my final semester of law school, I still had no idea where my future legal career would begin. I was hoping my final semester worth of classes would be the difference to push me on a path. I knew I wanted to work with kids but I had yet to figure out if it was on the education, juvenile, or family side of the law. It wasn't until my professor invited a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) from The Children's Law Center to come speak to our class that I realized the family side was where I wanted to be. I could not sit still as I listened to what a day in the life of a GAL was like, and to me, being directly involved, impacting the lives of many children was how I wanted to start my legal career. After the class was over, and through the help of my professor, a former CLC Staff Attorney, I was able to interview at CLC and land a job when I graduated.

Now, after two months of working for CLC, I am not looking back. Whether it has been in the virtual courtroom, talking to parents, or visiting with kids, I have enjoyed my journey thus far. I have learned exponentially about being a GAL and about the legal profession in general. However, what I am most astonished about is how welcomed I am by everyone in our office, as well as other attorneys and judges. The mentoring and guidance I have received from CLC has been more than I could have imagined, and I'm excited to learn and continue to grow. I know there will be many twists and turns in my life, but I am thrilled to have been given the opportunity to start my legal career as a GAL at The Children's Law Center! ♥



## Staff Hellos & Goodbyes

### HELLO TO:

**VICTORIA HOTHAM**  
Professional Assistant



**NILDA NEGRON-TORRES**  
Staff Attorney



**ALEX PUZONE**  
Staff Attorney



### GOODBYE TO:

**BRENDAN HOLT**  
Staff Attorney



# CLC welcomes new slate of officers to its Board of Directors

The Children's Law Center of Connecticut's work is supported by a well-informed, experienced Board of Directors with an array of professions and skills.

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President

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## Changes in the Board:

Welcome to  
**RASHANI SWABY**

Farewell and thanks to  
**SCOTT ESPOSITO**  
**JAMES RUSSELL**

Thank you to **Tim Buckley** for his three years of service as Board President.

## Rashani Swaby joins CLC Board of Directors

Rashani Swaby is a Human Resources Leader at Pratt and Whitney, a Raytheon Technologies Company, where she is currently responsible for global organizational effectiveness, culture and change management. This includes developing and reinforcing strategies and processes that deliver solutions and experiences that drive people and business success. Regardless of her role, Rashani aims to provide an employee experience where people are informed, inspired and engaged at every step of their Pratt & Whitney career, no matter where or how they work. She believes organizations like The Children's Law Center help her fulfill that passion and purpose in her community. Drawn to organizations that positively impact children and families, Rashani has worked with local schools and the Hartford community to provide school supplies to those in need and serves on the Board of Directors for Our Piece of the Pie. Born and raised in Hartford, Rashani is a mother of two boys and enjoys traveling, crafting, and DIYing with her husband. ❤️



## Thank you for making our 2021 Gala a success!

Thanks to you, our sponsors, bidders, supporters, and volunteers, The Children's LAW Center Gala was a heart-warming success! Through your generous contributions, we are able to help create safer, more stable environments for children whose parents are in chronic conflict. You make it possible! ❤️



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# Meet our Roisman Fellow – Emily Karr



Emily Karr is this year's Roisman Fellow. Originally from New Jersey, Emily moved to Connecticut to pursue a degree in Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Connecticut. While there, she participated as a research assistant for the Center for Health and Human Development, where she co-authored several

papers on outgroup bullying behaviors in children as well as sexting attitudes in teens.

During this time, Emily completed an internship with the Department of Children and Families that sparked her love of children's advocacy and desire to go to law school. Emily started at UConn School of Law in 2019 and will graduate this May. During her time there, she interned in the Attorney General's

Office in the Child Protection Department and the Center for Children's Advocacy. After graduation, she hopes to clerk at the Connecticut Superior Court or to take a job working on behalf of children.

When she's not working at the CLC or doing work for law school, you can find Emily taking a hike out in the woods or cheering on UConn sports. Emily was in marching band all throughout high school and college, and can play four different instruments. Her favorite experiences were serving as the drum major for the University of Connecticut Marching Band and traveling to the NCAA women's basketball Final 4 as part of the university pep band.

"I've loved my time at CLC. Everyone has been extremely kind and helpful, and it's great to see the intersection between law and social work. I'm a 'people lawyer', I'm not someone who would sit at a desk all day, I like to have a relationship with my clients and see what their lives are really like. I like CLC because it gives me the ability to be hands-on and really feel like the work I'm doing is making an impact." ♥

## Birdies for Charity far exceeded our goal! THANK YOU!

Because of your generous support, and the support of Travelers and Webster Bank through the Birdies for Charity program.



## Wine, Women & Fashion event was a great success!



Thank you to BK&Co. for hosting this event!

### Ways to Support CLC

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