



Coming Together Again

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



The mission of The Children's **LAW** Center is 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.

Through its programs and services the Children's **LAW** Center strives to create safe, stable environments for children whose parents are in chronic conflict.

A Letter from Our Executive Director & Board President

Dear Friends,

2021 will be remembered as the year we were challenged in ways we could never have predicted and yet we managed to persevere and rally to help the families we serve.

We were a year into a pandemic we never expected would last or affect our work, our clients, and ourselves so deeply and for so long. The virus affected the physical and emotional well-being of so many of us. It took its toll on families, especially those already emotionally and financially challenged. Some lost family members and friends. Others lost jobs, businesses, and dreams they spent years building. Our indigent client families, in general, suffered more than most.

Children especially lost so much: time with family, friends, and teachers, time experiencing school with classmates and key milestones like graduations, proms, and celebrations. Many were set back a year or more because of their loss of learning, while experiencing more stress and isolation at home.

At CLC, our ability to help the children and families we serve was challenged and tested as well. Many were left in limbo, stuck in the middle of protracted divorces and custody cases, as courts closed and backlogs took months to resolve. We managed to navigate our way around closed offices and courtrooms. Appearances and hearings held via Teams became the norm. Keeping in touch and on schedule with families, and with each other was ever-changing and challenging, as in-person visits were strictly off limits. Yet, we persevered and over time realized we could still support our families in transition – and families in crisis – despite the obstacles and extra challenges the pandemic created.



This annual report contains the stories of 2021 at CLC. Getting through it took incredible patience, ingenuity, dependability, and kindness. The obstacles we faced brought our staff, board, clients, colleagues, community, and donors together, through new and powerful ways of supporting one another. We were able to achieve remarkable results by finding resilience and reasons for hope.

As we've moved into 2022, and the pandemic's impact has diminished, we are increasingly getting back to "normal" practices, in-person court appearances and in-person client visits. But we will carry with us the lessons of adaptability and resilience we learned in the last two years.

Because of your generous and unwavering support, we are able to help parents provide safer, more stable environments for their children, now and in the future. We are truly grateful to each and every one of you for coming together again — and again — for our organization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justine Rakich-Kelly'.

Justine Rakich-Kelly
Executive Director



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Post'.

Laura Post
President, Board of Directors





— In 2021 —

FAMILIES IN
TRANSITION MEDIATION

29
Cases

44
Kids

LEGAL
REPRESENTATION

499
Cases

LAWLINE

702
Calls

977
Kids

86%
of callers found our
advice helpful or
very helpful

61%
said their situation
had improved

750
Kids

78%
of cases ended
in an agreement,
avoiding a
high-conflict trial

94%
of cases where the
judge's orders
substantively
reflected the CLC
recommendations

COMMENTS FROM
CALLERS:

*"The advice I was given
was spot on."*

*"You guys called me
back quickly and gave
me great advice."*

*"Because of your advice,
I was able to see my child
every weekend."*

*"The service you provide
is amazing."*

COMMENTS FROM
JUDGES:

*"How are you all holding up?
I know the Court has leaned
pretty heavily on CLC lately."*

*"The group of qualified
attorneys willing to do this
work just keeps getting
smaller and smaller."*

*"You guys do such great
work. And it's often
thankless work, I know."*

*"CLC is in such a unique
position, with the
relationships you have, to
help the families get other
services they could never
afford on their own."*



A Case of Coming Together Again

Jake is one of the coolest 8-year-olds you'll ever meet. Not just because of his punk pop outfits or the shaggy black bangs covering one of his bright blue eyes but also because of his pure charisma and confidence, at least at the start.

We first met Jake at his home with his mother and stepmother and it was a great meeting. Jake was eager to tell us about his hobbies and favorite toys. We hadn't even broached the subject of family court when Jake volunteered that his number one wish was to be able to go to his father and paternal grandparents' house again.

Jake had only been seeing his father supervised at his uncle's home for four hours on Sundays. At the time of our appointment, the father had done a year of work to successfully address the issues that had resulted in this limited parenting time. It seemed appropriate to start to make some changes that would slowly allow Jake to resume a substantive relationship with his father.





After some negotiation, the mother agreed that the child could see his father at the grandparents' home, as long as we were there to observe the whole visit. We agreed. It was a lovely visit on a Sunday afternoon and his extended family had been invited to a picnic for the day. Jake was showered with attention and he enjoyed every minute of it.

That same week, a referral was made to DCF by Jake's therapist. She reported that Jake expressed being afraid and he didn't want to go back to the grandparents' home because the father was using drugs when he was there.

We explained to the DCF worker that this was not possible because we were at the visit. We had walked in with our client and walked out with our client. The DCF case was soon closed.

When we met with Jake to discuss these recent developments, the charisma and confidence that he displayed at our first meeting was gone. Jake began to insist that he didn't love his father and that his mother's wife was his "other parent now". When we inquired further about activities we knew he enjoyed with his father, Jake began to cry. It was apparent that he was desperately trying to convince us of what his mothers wanted him to tell us — but he just couldn't pull it off.

The father eventually won a court order for his parenting time to take place at his home with the grandparents and supervised by family members other than just the uncle. The CLC attorney would routinely perform unannounced visits during the father's parenting time to make sure that things were going well.

The last time the CLC attorney stopped in was a Sunday afternoon in July. She could hear a party in the backyard and walked around back to observe without being seen. Jake was having the time of his life playing with his dad, uncle, cousins, and grandparents. After a few minutes, the CLC attorney went further into the backyard and, upon

seeing her, Jake's face fell and he ran into the house. When he finally came back out, he had changed his clothes and sat in a chair staring at the ground. He had been "caught" doing something he shouldn't be doing — having fun with his father. That day in July was the last day that Jake would see his dad until November, at which time he and his father started therapeutic visitation services. Because those therapeutic sessions were going well, the mother then stopped bringing the child to those meetings, too.

This case went to trial and the CLC attorney testified about what she had observed from the first time she met Jake until the last. The testimony was clear that the mother and her wife were engaging in behaviors designed to alienate the child from his father. The Court, following the recommendations of the CLC attorney, ordered sole custody with the father and professionally supervised visits with the mother. It was a drastic recommendation and nobody could predict how the child and his mother would react.

The court ordered that the CLC attorney must assist the father with informing the child of the change at school. She went to the school with the court order but Jake wasn't there. It was a frightening moment. However, Jake was located safe and sound and the police escorted the mother, her wife, and the child to the police station. Jake walked quietly to his father's

car, clinging to a stuffed animal. When the car door opened, Jake could not hold back his smile. His relief was palpable.

But the case could not end there. Jake needed his mother.

Over the course of several months, the CLC social worker identified a therapist for Jake, as well as a visitation supervisor. The mother engaged in therapy and began to understand how harmful her behaviors were. Family therapy began, allowing for the parents and their spouses to participate together

to discuss their fears and begin the process of developing a co-parenting relationship. Jake started to see his mother unsupervised and will soon start overnight visits with her. It has taken a lot of time and patience for this family to begin to trust — especially for the father to trust the mother. But they put the time and effort into the process, solely focused on their son. We're happy to report that Jake is well on his way to loving and being loved by all the adults in his life.





Justine Rakich-Kelly
Executive Director



Margaret Bozek
Staff Attorney



David Coughlin
Staff Attorney



Randa Hojaiban
Deputy Director



Brendan Holt
Staff Attorney



Victoria Hotham
Professional Assistant



Nilda Negron-Torres
Staff Attorney



Alexander Puzone
Staff Attorney



Aisha Roche
Staff Attorney



Monique Ryan
Staff Attorney



Deb Shulansky
Director of Development



Nicole Silva
Staff Social Worker



Jenna Trott
Development & Marketing Associate



Tonia Tubaya
Professional Assistant

In 2021, we said farewell to:
Brendan Holt, Jenna Trott & Tonia Tubaya

And welcomed:
Victoria Hotham, Nilda Negron-Torres & Alexander Puzone

INTERNS

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New Slate of Officers, October 2021

Laura Post, President
Pamela Magnano, Vice President
Jonathan Fink, Treasurer
Cara Hardacker, Secretary

Changes to the Board in 2021

Welcome to Rashani Swaby
Farewell and thanks to Scott Esposito
and James Russell

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



Thank you for making our Gala a success!





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Kelly A. Scott, Co-Chairs

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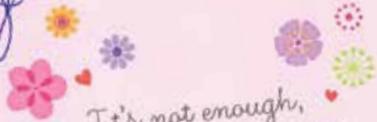
Letters from our Supporters

Justine Rakich-Kelly
The Children's LAW Center of Connecticut
32 Arbor Street, 2nd Floor
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Attorney Rakich-Kelly:

Please accept this donation for all those children who find themselves in need of a lawyer, an advocate, a friend or just someone who is on their side. My personal thanks to those who toil daily in Hartford. They make my job so much more meaningful.

Justine!



It's not enough,
but it's a start.

Thank you for everything
you did for Jay &
our family.

You went above & beyond
and we are so appreciative!

◀ “Justine, thank you for everything you did for our grandson Jay and our family. You went above and beyond and we are so appreciative!”

– from a client's
grandparents

▲ “Dear Attorney Rakich-Kelly, Please accept this donation for all those children who find themselves in need of a lawyer, an advocate, a friend or just someone who is on their side. My personal thanks to those who toil daily in Hartford. They make my job so much more meaningful.”

– from a Connecticut
Superior Court Judge



Thank you to our generous supporters!

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Peggy Boissoneau in honor of
Kathleen Monaco
Mark and Michelle Boxer in honor of
the Sarah Boxer and Dave Cadario's
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Jennifer Keyo in memory of
Atty. Charles and Ms. Giardina Henry

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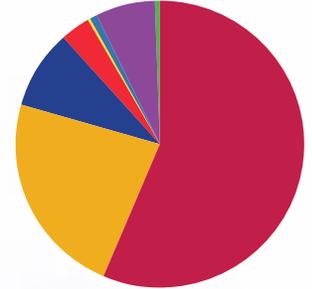


Financials

REVENUE

\$1,262,893

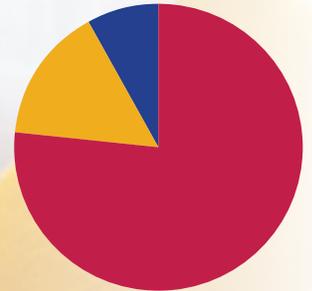
- Grants & Foundations \$714,383
- Legal Representation - Fees \$290,729
- Event Income \$113,591
- Investments \$86,510
- Individual & Corporate Contributions \$41,423
- Rebuilding Families \$9,936
- Collaborative \$4,000



EXPENSES

\$1,167,814

- Program Expenses \$896,607
- Fundraising \$177,545
- Management & General \$93,662





The Children's **LAW** Center, Inc.

30 Arbor Street, Suite 208

Hartford, CT 06106

www.clcct.org