# THE CHILDREN'S, LAW CENTER

Annual Report

**OUR 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.

### **Dear Friends**,

As another successful year has come to pass, we find ourselves in awe of the unwavering support you continue to show us. Because of your commitment and generosity, we are able to help protect the best interests of indigent children in Connecticut, moving their turbulent family circumstances in a positive direction.

This annual report highlights the incredible work CLC was able to do in 2019, achievements that are just as much yours as they are our own:

- We served 1,955 children through our programs.
- In 78% of our cases, the presence of chronic conflict decreased

President, Board ol

• 73% of our Families in Transition mediation participants reported that they would return to FIT before returning to family court

• 72% of callers to the Children's Law Line found CLC's advice to be "helpful" or "very helpful"



# **THANK YOU**

and for being a part of the Children's LAW Center family

## **In 2019...**

We served **588** children in **365** families through our **Legal Representaion Program.** 

In **78%** of cases, conflict decreased

83% of CLC's cases remained closed with no re-emerging issues

In **71%** of cases, family environment improved after CLC involvement The cases we handle are among the most difficult and contentious that the courts see, and many are exacerbated by conditions of violence, addiction, abuse, neglect, mental illness, incarceration or other chronic challenges. The centerpiece of CLC's services is our Legal Representation Program

We play a unique role in Connecticut's legal aid community as the only agency devoted to indigent children in Family Court, focusing on protecting the interests of children whose parents are involved in high-conflict family court disputes. The Children's Law Center was appointed as Guardian *ad litem* to represent two girls: eight-year-old Paige and six-year-old Emma. When the girls were just four and two-years-old, their parents, Jason and Alexa, separated due to Jason's history of substance abuse and criminal offenses. Shortly after, Jason was arrested and incarcerated for two years. Upon his release from prison, Alexa allowed Jason to see Paige and Emma under her supervision, but when Jason began coming to his visitations intoxicated, Alexa refused visitation. Jason then disappeared without warning for two years and upon his return, contacted Alexa and asked to resume his parenting access. Jason had used those two years to work on himself and told Alexa that he was now sober but she was distrustful of his sobriety and refused to allow Jason to see Paige and Emma.

When Jason filed a motion requesting that he see his children every other weekend, the court appointed The Children's Law Center to represent the minor children. CLC's attorney and social worker worked with Jason on ways he could maintain his sobriety as well providing him tools to decrease negative communication with Alexa. CLC's goal was to help Jason and Alexa establish a healthier co-parenting relationship with one another for the benefit of their children.

With improved communication and CLC's help, trust began to form between Jason and Alexa. Jason's relationships with Paige and Emma began to mend, allowing CLC to focus on reunification of the children with their father. With CLC's intervention came the slow but steady process of repairing the broken relationship. It was a long road for the family but with CLC providing the necessary tools to Jason and Alexa to effectively communicate and co-parent, a parenting agreement was reached. Since then, the case has remained closed and Paige and Emma enjoy spending weekends at their dads; they are overjoyed to have both parents back in their lives.



### **In 2019...** The Children's Law Center served 1,335 children through 863 calls.

72% of callers surveyed said that they found the Law Line either "Helpful" or "Very Helpful."

requirements.

The labyrinth of agencies, courts and laws are often overwhelming and unmanageable even for 

advocate, and simply impenetrable for the average parent. Our Children's Law Line is an easily accessible legal resource that can assist callers on a variety of topics including custody, visitation and children's rights. Services like our Law Line are desperately needed by those who want to help a child, but who are at the mercy of a complex system. All calls placed to our Law Line are free, answered by a trained professional, and open to everyone as a public service without A respondant said: screening or income

"Thank you! Wow! You have changed everything. I don't know what I would do if I didn't call."



## **In 2019...**

# We served **32** children in **24** families through FIT.

Our Families in Transition (FIT) Program provides mediation and positive co-parenting services to low and middle income level parents who are embroiled in high-conflict family court disputes. CLC provides a gender-balanced team of mediators consisting of an attorney and a mental health professional, both of whom are trained mediators and familiar with the family court process. Our FIT program helps each party voice concerns and understand the concerns of the other parent. We give parents the tools necessary to communicate more effectively with one another, in turn decreasing their conflict level and creating a healthier, more stable environment for their children.

### THANK YOU To the volunteer professionals whose invaluable donation of time

makes FIT possible!

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A parent participating in FIT mediation commented: "Working with my mediation team in the FIT program has been a very positive experience. Divorce is a difficult process and they help to make it very amicable and fair. Also, with the payment being on a sliding scale it is affordable."

# **OUR COMMUNITY**



**Rakich-Kelly** Executive Director

Artila Lubonia

Staff Attorney

Deb Shulansky

Director of

Development



**Margaret Bozek** Staff Attorney

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Kathryn Phillips

Staff Attorney

Nicole Silva

Staff Social

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**David Coughlin** *Staff Attorney* 

Aisha Roche

Staff Attorney

Jenna Trott

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Tonia Tubaya Professional Assistant

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Sidnev Horowitz Kate Kowalyshyn **Howard Krieger Robin Landeau** Karen LaRose Robert Madden **Nicholas Maglio** Kata Maluzewski Jeff Mickelson **Kathleen Nevins Ben Shapiro Corey Somerville Martin Wheeler** 

### Interns

Kaylin Benitez **Daman Brar Audra Inglis** 

Matthew Rossi Alex Tomcho **Kayleigh Vocca** Wiktoria Zduniak

### **Volunteer Trainers**

**Robert Madden, LCSW, JD** "The Maginalized Parent: Neuroscience for Lawyers"

**Connecticut Children's Medical Center - Center for Care Coordination:** "Protective Factors Training"

Dr. Stephen Humphrey & Dr. Lisa Cippola: "The Language of Children"

In 2019, we said farewell to: Jodie Comer Oshana, Staff Attorney, & Danielle Murray, Development Associate

### 2019 Board of Directors

From left:

Melissa Arkus James Russell Cara Hardacker Scott Esposito Pam Magnano, *Secretary* Dan Brody Patricia Pheanious Jonathan Fink, *Treasurer* Laura Post, *Vice President* Justine Rakich-Kelly, *Executive Director* Tim Buckley, *President* Elizabeth Thayer Patrick Proctor

In 2019, we said farewell with grateful thanks to...

Jovanni Valentini

Thank you, Jovanni for your support of CLC!



### Meet Our 2019-2020 Roisman Fellow



Each year a recipient is selected for the competitive **Roisman Fellowship**. It is designated to give law students the opportunity to get hands-on legal experience at The Children's Law Center. In 2019 we said farewell to **Onya Brown** and welcomed **Olivia Benson!** 

### Read more about Olivia's experience with CLC below:

My undergraduate studies focused largely on psychology and I was fortunate to work in two research labs: the Early Detection of Autism Laboratory and the Child and Adolescent Anxiety Laboratory. One summer I participated in an internship at the Child Mind Institute assisting in an intensive therapy program for children with selective mutism. I also partnered with the UConn Health Child Trauma Clinic in order to carry out my honors research thesis, during which I studied the benefits of drama therapy for adolescents who had experienced trauma. These experiences inspired me to explore family law in law school.

Receiving the Roisman Fellowship in Family Law at the Children's Law Center has been an incredible opportunity to use the skills I learned studying psychology, while also honing new legal skills. The Children's Law Center staff is knowledgeable, experienced, and supportive. I was given the freedom to treat cases truly as my own without ever feeling lost. The numerous opportunities to conduct client intake meetings, do home and school visits, attend short calendar and represent my clients in front of a judge have been absolutely invaluable. The Fellowship has allowed me to narrow the gap between what we learn in school and the practical nature of how the law works outside of the classroom.

As an evening student, I have two more years before I graduate law school. In that time, I plan to explore more areas of the law and continue to use and hone the skills I've learned. I am undecided on the exact area of law I wish to practice, but I hope to always give back to the families and children in need through pro bono work.

### **Blue State Coffee**

Blue State Coffee allocates a percentage of its sales each year to **benefit local non-profits.** The Children's Law Center was fortunate to have been one of 8 non-profits chosen by **Hartford's Blue State Coffee** to receive a donation and we are so







### **Congrats Justine!**

In 2019, Justine was the recipient of two awards: **The Charles J. Parker Legal Services Award**, presented to a member of the CT Bar who has demonstrated a dedication to the delivery of legal services to the disadvantaged in CT, and the **Greater Hartford Family Advocacy Center Works of Compassion Award**.

### **Legislative Breakfast**

Thank you, **Representative John** Hampton, for hosting The Children's Law Center's Legislative Breakfast. We would also like to thank all the **legislators & legislative staff** who stopped by to learn more about The Children's Law Center and what we do!





### Morneault's Wine, Music & Fashion!

We had a blast at Morneault's Stackpole Moore Tryon's event! Together we raised nearly \$2,000 to help continue CLC's important work and we couldn't have done it without you!

### The Children's Law Center Annual Meeting

We are thrilled to be able to celebrate **26 years** of success! We are grateful to all of our supporters who came to **celebrate** with us!





1st Annual CT Street Legends Car Show

Cars, food and prizes, oh my! **The Connecticut Street Legends** know how to host a great car show. **Thank you** for helping raise funds for the Children's Law Center!

### More 2019 Highlights May Cares Colf

### Max Cares Golf Tournament

It's always a great time when we help our friends at Max Cares Foundation who do so much for CLC and the community.

### **Birdies for Charity**

We participated in the 2019 Birdies for Charity program in partnership with the Travelers Championship. Together we raised over \$13,000!

BK & Co.

Thank you to BK & Co. for helping to support CLC!

### **Hog River Trivia Night**

Craft beer, food trucks and trivia; giving has never been more fun! Thank you to our trivia host, Geoff Pusko, for making the night extra special.

### **Moose Riders**

Thank you to the East Hartford Moose Riders for hosting a bike show to benefit CLC.

Thank you to everyone who attended our 2019 Gala!

We are so grateful to everyone who helped to make The Children's Law Center's 2019 Gala extraordinary.

With your help, 2019 was a record setting year. Nearly **300** guests gathered at Delamar West Hartford, raising **\$130,000** to support our programs.

We'd like to **thank all** of our Gala Sponsors, your committment to our work is greatly appreciated. We would also like to offer a special thanks to our Champion Sponsor: **Hartford Evergreen Masonic Lodge #88**; your continued support of our community helps to make this event possible.

Finally, thank you to our esteemed emcee, **Renee DiNino**, for making our 2019 Gala memorable!



# **THANK YOU!**



### **Special Thanks to:**

Gala Committee:

Gala Volunteers:

Margaret Bozek Ed Bryan Lena DiGenti Garlinck Dumont Stephanie Esposito Cara Hardacker Karen Herbert Paddi LeShane Pam Magnano Carol McCabe Heather McRoberts Kelly A. Scott Deb Shulansky Nicole Silva Jenna Trott

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Liz Reynolds *Event Liasion* 

Justine Rakich-Kelly Executive Director



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### **In-Kind Gifts**

A.C. Petersen Farms Adventure Park at Storrs Amici Italian Grill Artichoke Basille's Pizza Artisan West Hartford The Art of Yum Avery's Beverages Ms. Barbara Panico Ms. Jane and Mr. Norm Barstow Becker's Diamonds & Fine Jewelry BK & Co. Blue State Coffee, Hartford Board & Brush **Bob's Discount Furniture** Boston Red Sox **Bottle Stop Wine & Spirits** Atty. Margaret Bozek Bridgewater Chocolate Atty. Dan A. Brody Atty. Ed Bryan Cafe Sofia Mr. Anthony & Mr. Logan Carducci The Children's Museum The Coffee Trade Compass Group USA Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo **Connecticut Science Center Copper Beech Institute** Ms Donna Cox Delamar West Hartford **Deepwater Seafood** The Flbow Room **Elements Massage Engine Room** Mr. Scott & Ms. Stephanie Esposito **Executive Valet Parking** Farmington Miniature Golf & Ice Cream Parlor Farmington Valley Arts Center

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Ihank You for

### REVENUE

\$1,206,129 Grants & Foundations | \$619,115 Legal Representation | \$260,413 Event Income | \$166,057 Individual & Corporate Contributions | \$41,305 Rebuilding Families | \$9,626

### **EXPENSES**

\$1,143,392

Program Expenses |\$883,517 Fundraising|\$182,897 Management & General|\$76,978

# OOKING FORWARD.

### **Join Our Community**

Want to be a part of the CLC family? Follow us on Facebook and Instagram and be sure to keep an eye on www.clcct.org/events for more information!

### **Help Us Celebrate!**

2020 is CLC's 27th Anniversary. Join the celebration at our Annual Gala! Tickets and auction items will be posted on www.clcct.org/gala-2020

### **Support Our Cause**

To find out more information on CLC's mission and ways you can get involved visit www.clcct.org/get-involved



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