

# Children's Champion Newsletter

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## 2009 Toy Drive Helps DC's Children



Children's Law Center's 2009 Adopt-A-Family Holiday Toy Drive provided toys, clothes and gifts to more than 700 of DC's poorest children and families to ensure they have a happy holiday. Our toy drive provided children of all ages - including teens living in group homes without a nurturing adult presence - with a brighter season.

More than 3,500 presents were donated to children who had very little, sometimes not even a warm coat for winter. Gifts included clothes for school, gift cards for groceries and toys from their wishlists. Our attorneys

and staff braved the record-breaking snow to deliver their clients' gifts in time for the holiday. For one day out of the year, our clients just enjoyed being kids as they gleefully ripped open mp3 players, bicycles, footballs, dollhouses and other presents.

Individual and corporate donors, including many of the city's law firms, generously contributed to support CLC's work. Latham & Watkins (pictured above) "adopted" 60 children and donated \$100 per child to ensure funding for legal services throughout the year. Other corporate donations came from McKenna Long & Aldridge, Hunton & Williams, DLA Piper, The World Bank and Fannie Mae, among others. DC Council Member Michael Brown also got into the spirit, providing some of DC's most at-risk children with gifts to brighten their holiday.

Ms. B, a client whom CLC represents in a special education case, wrote in appreciation of her family's holiday gifts,

*"You offer us your counsel to address our concerns. You provide us with tickets to watch the baseball game to uplift our spirits. You purchase food for us on Thanksgiving to strengthen our health. Now, you give us these boxes full of amazing gifts to treat us at Christmas-time. What else [is there] to ask for? We are deeply grateful."*

View more Adopt-A-Family Holiday Toy Drive pictures [here](#).

[Make a contribution](#) to support DC's children all year long.

## CLC on WAMU 88.5FM



Executive Director Judith Sandalow spoke on WAMU 88.5FM in reaction to the second anniversary of the tragic Jacks-Fogle case.

Listen to the January 4, 2010 broadcast [here](#).

Read Judith's comments as aired below:

Two years ago this Saturday, our community made a horrifying discovery - the decomposing bodies of four girls found in their mother's home.

As we learned about Banita Jacks' life - and the shocking details of her daughters' deaths - we asked, "How did this happen?"

That was the right question at the time.

Two years later, we should ask a different question: "What can we do now to protect our most at-risk children?"

We know who these children are. They are the homeless children whose families are on the waiting list at city-run shelters. They are the hungry children unable to pay attention in school because their parents had to pay the rent instead of buy groceries. They are the neglected children whose parents battle mental illness and drug addiction without access to the supportive services to overcome these diseases.

They are the 45,000 poor children in the District who rely on government support for their most basic needs - food, shelter and medicine.

The biggest risk to poor children's well-being would be to cut the services that help bring some stability to their difficult lives.

By itself, money isn't the solution. But without it, there is no hope for reforming the safety net services that failed the Jacks-Fogle family.

Yet cuts to these services are a very real possibility. Right now, the Mayor is developing a budget for the coming year. Because of the recession, however, there are more children who need help but fewer dollars to pay for the cost of running the District. Mayor Fenty must raise revenue or cut expenses - or both.

## Spotlight: Judith Sandalow Celebrates 10th Year at CLC

This year, Executive Director Judith Sandalow celebrates a significant milestone - her 10<sup>th</sup> year leading Children's Law Center. In the past decade, Judith has applied both her personal experience as an adoptive mother of two special needs boys and her legal expertise as an advocate for all of DC's children to propel CLC to new heights.

Under her leadership, CLC has grown from three attorneys representing 50 clients to 70 staff members serving 1,200 clients every year. She has spearheaded programs to ensure safe homes, a meaningful education and healthier lives for the District's children and families. Because of her vision and guidance, our lawyers provide exceptional legal representation for their clients and have a profound impact on their lives.

"I would not have been able to bring CLC to where it is today without the help of the phenomenal attorneys and staff who work side by side with me every day," says Judith. "Their dedication and passion strengthen my resolve to improve the community we all share."

Judith is recognized for her exceptional work and has received a number of awards in appreciation of her tireless efforts, exemplary leadership and dedication to serving the children of the District - including the Meyer Foundation's Exponent Award.

We look forward to her continued influence and leadership in our community during her next decade as CLC's Executive Director.



## CLC Supports Identity Protection Bill



Children's Law Center recently testified before the DC Council Committee on Human Services in support of the *Foster Care Youth Identity Protection Amendment Act of 2009*. The bill requires the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) to obtain credit reports on behalf of older youth in foster care.

Children in foster care are frequently the victims of identity theft because relatives or someone else with knowledge of their names and social security numbers illegally use their information.

It is only when a youth ages out of foster care at 21 and seeks to apply for a credit card, rent an apartment, buy a car or get a loan that they learn someone has stolen their identity. Unfortunately, many of these youth are ill-equipped to fix this problem on their own.

Children's Law Center's experiences make clear the value of this bill. One client, Johnisha, was a 20-year-old who had been in foster care for five years and was about to age out of the system. At the urging of her CLC attorney, CFSA obtained Johnisha's credit report. The report showed an outstanding charge of \$3,500 that occurred when Johnisha was just 13 years old. Someone had illegally opened a public utility account in her name. Once discovered, her attorney was able to contact the creditor and have the charge removed.

Without CLC's intervention, Johnisha would have left foster care with a serious blemish on her credit report, jeopardizing her financial future. This bill will ensure that all youth like Johnisha will leave foster care with their credit intact and be better prepared for the financial responsibilities that await them.

Learn about [other ways we help DC's children](#).

## CLC on WAMU 88.5FM (continued)

As the Executive Director of Children's Law Center, an organization devoted to the well-being of DC's children, I have seen the willingness of our donors to give generously because they know that we will use their money to protect children.

I have watched my colleagues forego high salaries to work with at-risk children. And I have witnessed the parents, grandparents and foster parents of our poorest children spend their last dime to provide for their young charges.

I believe in the generosity of District residents. And so should our elected officials.

As a community, if we want to put our most vulnerable children first, we must accept the reality that this means raising revenue and making tough budget cuts in other parts of the government.

Just a little bit more from each of us could make a big difference.

Our elected officials need to hear that they will gain, not lose, votes in November if they raise revenue, even some taxes, in order to help out-of-work families pay the rent and to keep children from living on the street.

They need to hear that we will understand if they delay or reduce some nice, but non-essential government services - like installing granite curbs - in order to continue to assist low-income grandparents who step in to keep their grandchildren out of foster care.

The answer to what each of us can do?

Email or call the mayor and your council member. Tell them that you want to live in a city that protects children - and that you want a District budget that puts children first.

## Upcoming Events

### Pro Bono Training Feb. 23, 2010

Please join us to learn about adoption, guardianship and custody law and practice with presentations by experienced attorneys from Children's Law Center and a "View from the Bench" by Magistrate Judge Janet Albert, DC Superior Court.

#### When:

Tuesday, February 23, 2010  
1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
(Check-in will begin at 12:45 p.m.)

#### Where:

Latham & Watkins LLP  
555 11th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Please RSVP to Melanie Jaskolka  
(202) 467-4900 ext. 586  
mjaskolka@childrenslawcenter.org

## Pro Bono Opportunity: Guardian Ad Litem in Custody Cases

Children's needs are often forgotten in contentious custody battles that result from domestic violence or acrimonious divorce. Children often need an impartial adult to advocate for their best interests. In many of these situations, Children's Law Center attorneys and our pro bono partners act as guardians ad litem, providing a voice for children in the District who are caught in the middle of complex custody cases.



Guardians ad litem are appointed when a judge determines that he or she does not have enough information to decide what is in the best interest of the child. This is particularly true in contested custody cases in which parents offer opposing information and, at times, accusations. In these situations, the judge may turn to Children's Law Center to provide an attorney to represent the child and provide more reliable information.

"Unlike children in the abuse and neglect system, children are not entitled to an attorney in custody disputes," says Lise Adams, project director at CLC. "This can create a tenuous situation in which the child's best interest is not heard above the arguments of the parents. Our experienced in-house lawyers and cadre of pro bono attorneys provide these children with critical representation in high-conflict custody cases."

Attorneys throughout the city generously volunteer their time to serve as GALs, but because there is an acute need in the District, CLC always welcomes new faces. These are opportunities for attorneys not only to provide their services and expertise to our neediest residents, but also to hone their litigation skills and work on issues to which they would otherwise not be exposed. These types of cases are particularly interesting for lawyers seeking family law and trial experience. Children's Law Center provides extensive training and ongoing support to all attorneys that take our pro bono cases, helping them to navigate the case, prepare motions and know what to expect in the courtroom.

Click [here](#) to learn more about becoming a pro bono attorney.

Read more about CLC's pro bono program in the [February issue of Washington Lawyer](#).

## Special Thanks



Many thanks to **Neiman Marcus Mazza Gallerie** and their InCircle shoppers for supporting DC's children! A December event offered shoppers the chance to win a Tumi suitcase filled with goodies. One lucky shopper, Jimmy Moshovitis, was the big winner of the night, taking home three of the suitcases. All proceeds benefited Children's Law Center.

"Children's Law Center is one of the reasons Neiman Marcus enjoys working with local charities," says Liberty Jones of Neiman Marcus. "They help local children have happy, healthy lives."

You too can help - [support CLC today!](#)

Pictured above left to right: Liberty Jones, Neiman Marcus; Jimmy Moshovitis, InCircle shopper; Judith Sandalow, CLC

## CLC Feature

Children's Law Center and one of our pro bono attorneys from McDermott Will & Emery were featured in the February issue of *Washington Lawyer* chronicling a recent adoption.



[Read it here.](#)

## DONATE TODAY

*Children's Law Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.*

*All gifts are fully tax-deductible.*

*We use your money wisely - 88¢ of every dollar donated directly supports legal services for DC's neediest children.*

## Our Vision for The District's Children

**Children's Law Center envisions a future for the District of Columbia in which all children have safe homes, a meaningful education and healthy minds and bodies.**



Visit us online at [www.childrenslawcenter.org](http://www.childrenslawcenter.org)