

## Children's Champion Newsletter

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### Holiday Hope Drive Wrap-Up



In its biggest year yet, Children's Law Center's Holiday Hope Drive was able to provide 722 children with gifts, clothing and grocery gifts cards this holiday season. The Holiday Hope Drive is an annual program run by CLC that pairs Santas with our neediest clients. Each child receives two items from their wish list, a full outfit of clothing and a grocery gift card for a holiday meal. None of the children who received gifts through this program would have been able to celebrate the holidays without the generosity of our supporters.

More than 750 volunteer Santas donated over \$140,000 in gifts, gift cards and cash contributions to these disadvantaged families. Individual and corporate donors participated including Hunton & Williams, Jordan Burt, Latham & Watkins, McKenna Long & Aldridge and Richards Kibbe & Orbe. DC Council Member Michael Brown (pictured) donated gifts to the program and even helped wrap presents. "I am happy to work with Children's Law Center not only during the holidays but year-round to help the most vulnerable children in the District," he said.

Throughout December, more than 3,500 gifts filled CLC's offices. One Santa even donated a big-screen television that was delivered to one of our clients homes. This client called her attorney to thank her profusely for what she called the "best Christmas ever." Another attorney received a whole chorus of thank-yous from one of her client families; the parents called to express their thanks, and then one by one each of the children grabbed the phone to say hello and thank you to their real-life Santa.

For many of the families who are helped through the Holiday Hope Drive, the gifts keep giving long after the holiday season is over. One low-income grandmother caring for four of her grandchildren on her own was overjoyed by the bountiful gifts their family received and exclaimed to her attorney, "There are even enough gifts here for their birthdays!" The generosity of volunteer Santas through the Holiday Hope Drive allows hundreds of CLC clients to start the year off without additional worries, a gift that is priceless to families who are already stretched too thin.



### Children's Law Center Celebrates 15 Years!

Willie couldn't read when he entered 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Today, he is in college. Five year-old Tasha spent two days alone without food while her mother went on a drug spree. Today, Tasha's adoptive parents proudly report that she is graduating high school and wants to be a social worker. Krystal was failing 2<sup>nd</sup> grade because her asthma, exacerbated by mice and roach infestation, sent her to the emergency room every few days. Today, she is an A student and her family lives in a clean apartment.

Willie, Tasha and Krystal are thriving because lawyers from Children's Law Center used their expertise in adoption, child welfare, special education, health care and housing conditions law to give them the family, health and the education they needed to succeed.

Children's Law Center is best known for the impact we make on individual children's lives - one at a time through tenacious legal advocacy. This year, we celebrate CLC's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

For 15 years our lawyers have gone to court. Our investigators have hit the streets. Our policy team has made the rounds of the DC Council. Our dedicated Board of Directors has provided oversight and counsel.

## Lawyers for Children Campaign Update

Children's Law Center's first-ever *Lawyers for Children* campaign recruited 200 new advocates for children and raised funds for DC's littlest residents.

Members of the campaign will have first priority to participate in forum discussions, events and bi-monthly phone briefings on family law and policy issues throughout the year.



CLC's Advisory Board championed the campaign which raised more than \$60,000 - enough to support an attorney who will help 50 children. This much needed support will go a long way to assist our children throughout the year.

Law firm partners, associates and even non-lawyers joined the campaign to benefit the District's children.

"I am proud to lead the Advisory Board members who are great advocates at their firms," says Advisory Board Chair and Jones Day's Carmen McLean. "I couldn't have imagined such an enthusiastic response in just our first year of the campaign."

We are grateful to the many friends and firms who contributed to the campaign and spread the word about Children's Law Center. Special thanks to the following law firms and corporations for supporting *Lawyers for Children*: Arnold & Porter, Bryan Cave, Clifford Chance, Covington & Burling, Fish & Richardson, Hogan Lovells, Hunton & Williams, Jones Day, Latham & Watkins, McDermott Will & Emery, McKenna Long & Aldridge, Patton Boggs, Podesta Group, Sidley Austin, Skadden and Williams & Connolly.

Children's Law Center is a first rate public interest organization," says Arnold & Porter partner Bill Baer. "I am a long-time supporter of their important work for the District's poor children and proudly encouraged my colleagues to do the same."

## Spotlight: 10 Year-Old Damel



Damel is a fourth grader full of laughter. He enjoys video games, basketball, football and his favorite, wrestling. He is the oldest of three boys although he's often overshadowed because he is the quiet one. His contagious smile and calm demeanor belie the challenges he has already faced.

Damel was first introduced to his CLC attorney when he and his brothers were placed in different foster homes. The boys were taken from their mother because she was not able to properly care for them.

Damel was far behind his peers at school, but because he was well-behaved his academic deficits had gone unnoticed. In fact, his former school had enrolled him in the same grade two years in a row and nobody noticed. Damel began to lose interest and act out in class. His CLC attorney arranged an assessment of his academic challenges and worked to find stable housing.

The assessments revealed that Damel needed special education services to catch up. His CLC attorney found a new school for him that provides the services he needs. He now receives fifteen hours of specialized instruction and tutoring twice  
(Continued on next page)

## Children's Law Center Celebrates 15 Years! (Continued)

For 15 years we've made a difference for literally thousands of children through many new laws. Together, the Guardianship Act of 2001, the 2006 Grandparent Caregiver Program, the 2007 Safe and Stable Homes for Children and Youth Act and the 2010 Adoption Reform Act have allowed thousands of children to find safety and stability in the arms of loving families - avoiding foster care or exiting quickly.

For 15 years hundreds of lawyers from major firms have represented families pro bono. Caring Washingtonians have shared their expertise, from designing our logo to negotiating our first lease. Generous donors have invested in our good work.

For 15 years, CLC has been transforming the lives of District children.

As we look forward to the future, we recommit our 75 person staff and more than 300 pro bono attorneys to continuing to impact children one at a time - more than 1,200 every year. We promise to share our gift of expertise and experience not only with our clients, but with the policy-makers and advocates who share our dream.

We recommit to leveraging the talent, commitment and generosity of our staff and supporters to create a city where Willie, Tasha and Krystal can thrive with a solid foundation of family, health and education - the building blocks for a healthy future.

## Upcoming Training:

### Guardianship Training

Thursday, March 17

9:30-12:00

Sidley Austin LLP

1501 K Street, NW

RSVP to [Melanie Jaskolka](#)

## Spotlight: 10 Year-Old Damel (Continued)

weekly because of his attorney's advocacy. Damel's new school is just blocks from his foster home, making his new transition even easier.

Damel's CLC attorney also fought to reunite the boys under one roof, successfully locating a loving foster family who loves all three boys unconditionally. The boys see their birth mother for weekly visits, and the entire family participates in counseling together. Through these sessions, their mother is learning to improve her parenting skills. It is the attorney's goal to help the boys return home to their mother.

Damel has learned to adjust to change particularly well for a ten year-old. He is happy at his new school and he is learning for the first time. Damel is certain he can beat anyone at video games, sports and of course wrestling. And now he has a chance to compete at school too.

*For confidentiality purposes, Damel's identity has been changed.*

## Pro Bono Corner: Guardianship

*A young mother from Ward 8 has struggled after losing her job and being hospitalized for severe depression. When she became unable to care for her 10-year-old son, Raymond, who has special needs, Child and Family Services Agency intervened. Raymond was placed in foster care with his maternal grandmother, Rose, who provides a stable home and supervises Raymond's visits with his mother. Contemplating the future for herself, Raymond, and her daughter (Raymond's mother), Rose is presented with the options of adopting Raymond, or becoming his legal guardian.\**



This situation is familiar to many families in the District. Adoption would provide permanency, but it would also mean the Court would have to terminate the rights of the parents. That's a dramatic step, especially when the child still has a positive relationship with mom or dad, despite their inability to provide daily care. Guardianship can be an excellent alternative. The guardian provides a permanent home for the child, makes important decisions regarding the child's health and education, and may be eligible for a subsidy that makes the arrangement financially possible. Recognizing the need to make guardianship a viable option, Children's Law Center has been on the frontlines championing legislation to expand the pool of individuals eligible for guardianship and ensure that guardians can obtain needed financial support. In turn, guardianship saves the District substantial resources by letting these children exit the foster care system. As guardianship law in DC has transformed and guardianship has become an increasingly important permanency option, Children's Law Center and its pro bono partners have provided legal representation for caregivers considering how best to provide a stable home and bright future for a child.

Children's Law Center will provide training for pro bono attorneys wanting to learn how to represent caregivers in guardianship cases.

[Click here for more information.](#)

*\*The facts have been changed to protect the identity of the family.*



Children's Law Center works to give every child in the District of Columbia a solid foundation of family, health and education by providing free legal services and advocating for citywide changes.

[www.childrenslawcenter.org](http://www.childrenslawcenter.org)

# DONATE TODAY!

## Happy Valentine's Day!

Wishing you a day filled with love and laughter.



With your support last year we provided 1,227 children with loving families, the comfort of home and many reasons to smile.

**Thank you for taking our clients into your hearts all year-round.**

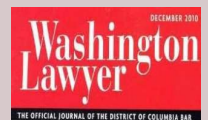
Art by ten year-old CLC client.

## CLC in the News

[Holiday Hope Drive on Washingtonian.com](#)

WASHINGTONIAN.COM

[Advisory Board in Washington Lawyer](#)



[CLC attorneys in Washington Parent](#)



[Judith Sandalow featured in Yale Law Review](#)

