



The Children's Law Center envisions a future for the District of Columbia in which every child has a safe home, a meaningful education and a healthy mind and body.

Introducing...

The Children's Champion

*E- Newsletter of the
Children's Law Center
FEBRUARY 2009*

The Children's Champion is CLC's new online e-newsletter with up-to-date news from the Children's Law Center.

Judith on NPR:
Are DC's children safe?



Executive Director Judith Sandalow spoke on WAMU's NPR Wednesday, February 11, 2009.

Listen to today's NPR broadcast: [Judith on NPR 2/11/2009](#)

Read Judith's comments as heard on NPR:

It has been a year since the decomposing bodies of four young girls were discovered in a District of Columbia home. The media ran dozens of news stories. There was a shared sense of public tragedy and outrage. Rallies were held. The DC Council sponsored hearings, the federal court issued orders and the mayor promised immediate action.

One year later, are the children of the District safer?

Tragically, the answer to this question is no. Why? Because the single greatest risk to children's safety is not a faulty child abuse hotline. It is poverty. And the District's children are poorer than in any state in the union. One third of all DC children live in poverty. Half of those children live in families with an income of less than \$11,000 to support four people.

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Pro bono firms come through for DC's children



Last year, more than 300 pro bono attorneys from 73 area law firms donated 20,327 hours of legal services to provide hundreds of DC's children with safe homes and loving families. Attorneys from the DC area donated their time and skills at no cost, representing DC's neediest children and families.

The Children's Law Center is profoundly grateful to our devoted pro bono partners. Without their help, the Children's Law Center would never be able to address the overwhelming and growing needs of DC's poorest children.

Through the Children's Law Center, pro bono attorneys represent foster parents, grandparents and other relatives who wish to adopt or obtain guardianship of children in the child welfare system. They also serve as guardians ad litem to children in complex custody cases.

Top 10 pro bono firms in 2008:

1. McDermott, Will & Emery
2. Van Ness Feldman
3. Jones Day
4. Howrey
5. Latham & Watkins
6. Kirkland & Ellis
7. Ross, Dixon & Bell (now Troutman Sanders LLP)
8. Hunton & Williams
9. Blank Rome
10. Milbank Tweed

Note: Listed in order of number of hours donated

Volunteer Santas go above and beyond for children this holiday season



Wishes were granted for 702 children this past holiday season, thanks to the overwhelming help of volunteer Santas in the 2008 Toy Drive.

Even in a tough economy, our generous volunteers went above and beyond. The 2008 Toy Drive resulted in \$150,121 worth of donated clothes, toys and groceries to the District's most at-risk children ... a significant increase over last year!

Volunteers enlisted their families, co-workers and friends to contribute to CLC's clients and their families. Our volunteer Santas donated bicycles to ride, warm clothes to wear, toys for toddlers and teens and grocery cards for holiday meals - making dreams

come true for DC's neediest children.

The generosity did not end there. Volunteers gathered at the CLC office for a wrapping party, sending gifts on their way with an extra touch of love. Volunteer Linda Donovan is pictured above after wrapping an enormous bean-bag chair for a young CLC client who had been asking Santa for one for years.

Many thanks to all of our volunteer Santas and their helpers for making the holidays a season to remember.

Spotlight: Chrissy Smith Guardian ad litem Project Director



Chrissy Smith found her place and true calling at the Children's Law Center, bringing many years of legal experience to CLC.

Chrissy, mother of a child with Down Syndrome,

Poverty robs children of health, educational success and is the greatest risk to their lives. According to the most recent data, almost half of the children who died came from our poorest wards - wards 7 and 8. The statistic is hardly surprising given that poor children are almost twice as likely to be born prematurely or with other health problems, and violent crime is six times more frequent in their neighborhoods.

While stories about the Jacks girls' deaths focused on failed child abuse investigations, they ignored the bigger story - the pervasive role that poverty played in ending their lives. Fifty percent of DC's substantiated child abuse and neglect cases come from the poorest 20% of DC's neighborhoods.

The risk to poor children begins before they are born. Poor mothers are almost three times less likely to receive prenatal care than middle-class mothers. By the time they are four years old, poor children are developmentally 18 months behind their peers. It is no surprise, then, that poor children are three and a half times more likely to drop out of high school or be expelled.

By the time poor children become adults, poverty becomes more dangerous and more costly. Childhood poverty increases adult crime as much as forty percent. Poor children have much worse health than their peers and grow up to have much worse health as adults, dying earlier than they should and costing our health care system billions. Even those poor children who escape the worst impact of poverty grow up to earn far less than they would have if they had grown up middle class.

Lifting children out of poverty saves lives *and* makes good business sense. Child poverty costs the United States \$500 billion a year in reduced earnings, increased health costs and increased crime.

The total cost of childhood poverty - more than \$500 billion - is enough to bail out Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, AIG, General Motors, Chrysler, and Citigroup. Child poverty takes more out of

says she knew she was meant to be at CLC after her very first case hit close to home. Chrissy represented Eugene, a young boy with special needs whose mother has bipolar disorder. Chrissy still recalls the influence this case has had on her and says it is amazing what she has learned from her own client.

Later, the tables were turned when her client actually became the teacher. Chrissy said she "learned to push for change and never back down - the fight is always won if you are persistent and never give up."

Eugene's mother won battles against the school system and remained her son's "fiercest advocate." Eugene's case has been closed for some time, but Chrissy still remains in close contact with her former client.

Chrissy will celebrate her fourth anniversary at CLC this year and says she loves what she does because CLC's attorneys make a difference in children's lives. The great work environment, people and sense of community, she says, is yet another bonus to her work helping DC's kids.

America's gross domestic product than has the recession thus far - and as we know, it takes lives.

Fixing our local child welfare system is very important - and will save lives. But we should not confuse this with making the District's children safe. To do that, we must end the poverty that put the Jacks children at such risk.

The mayor and the Council will face tough budget decisions in the coming weeks and months. They must protect the District's children. If they don't, thousands of poor children in the District will continue to be one step away from tragedy every day.

Car seats needed for CLC clients



CLC's Health Access Project expands to a new location



Children's
National Medical Center
WASHINGTON DC

CLC's Health Access Project now has an office at Children's National Medical Center's community clinic on Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ave, SE. The Health Access Project provides legal assistance to those families who utilize CNMC's community pediatric health centers located throughout the city.

This medical/legal collaborative allows CLC to become part of the medical team, sometimes even joining the pediatrician in the examining room. CLC's attorneys help families address legal barriers to their children's health.

The legal matters that CLC sees most often relate to education or special education issues, denial of public benefits, poor housing conditions, or lack of access to healthcare.

CLC's Health Access Project staff are co-located at the main hospital on Michigan Avenue and at CNMC's community clinics in Adams Morgan, on Good Hope Road, SE and at our newest location on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE.

The Children's Law Center needs new or gently-used car seats to transport clients. We are happily accepting donations of the following car seats:

- Rear-facing car seat for infants
- Car seat for toddlers
- Child Booster seat

All car seats must be under warranty and come with user manual. Please contact Mary Laurin Brunson at mbrunson@childrenslawcenter.org or (202) 467-4900 Ext. 542 if you are interested in contributing.

WWPR announces CLC as pro bono client



Washington Women in Public Relations has selected the Children's Law Center as their 2009-2011 pro bono client. WWPR will provide marketing and public relations services for CLC.

"By providing our services, we are able to elevate the visibility of the organization in order to help the Children's Law Center make an even bigger difference for DC's children," says Lauren Lawson, WWPR President.

The Children's Law Center looks forward to WWPR's assistance in raising awareness about the problems facing the District's at-risk children.

Children's Law Center is the largest legal services provider in the District ... helping more than 1,000 children each year.

Children's Law Center advocates for abused, neglected and low-income children with special education and health needs.

Children's Law Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. therefore all gifts are fully tax deductible.

For more information or to make a donation please visit www.childrenslawcenter.org.

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The Children's Law Center | 616 H Street, NW Suite 300 | Washington | DC | 20001